

Reliability and Integrity of Case Files

Measure

6

Definition: The percentage of files that can be retrieved within established time standards, and that meet established standards for completeness and accuracy of contents.

Purpose: A reliable and accurate case file system is fundamental to the effectiveness of day-to-day court operations and fairness of judicial decisions. The maintenance of case records directly affects the timeliness and integrity of case processing. This measure provides information regarding (a) how long it takes to locate a file, (b) whether the file's contents and case summary information match up, and (c) the organization and completeness of the file.

Retrieving Files

Method: Randomly identify equal numbers (but at least 50) of pending case files, closed-on-site case files, and closed-off-site case files in each case type being evaluated. Record how long it takes to find each case file. Closed, On-site Criminal-Felony cases are shown as an example.

File Location Data Collection Form

	Random case #'s	Time required to locate				
		0-15 minutes	16-30 minutes	31-60 minutes	61+ minutes	Not found
Case Type: Criminal-Felony	SC-F-136	x				
	SC-F-468		x			
	SC-F-771		x			
Sample size: 50		∨	∨	∨	∨	∨
File Type (check one)		∨	∨	∨	∨	∨
<input type="checkbox"/> Pending	SC-F-863			x		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Closed, On-site	SC-F-979	x				
<input type="checkbox"/> Closed, Off-site						
	Total files	40	6	2	2	0

Add the number of files in each column. To compute the percentages, divide each column total by the grand total number of files in the sample. In this example, a total of 40 files were located in 0-15 minutes out of the grand total of 50 files retrieved. The percentage is 40 divided by 50, or 80 percent.

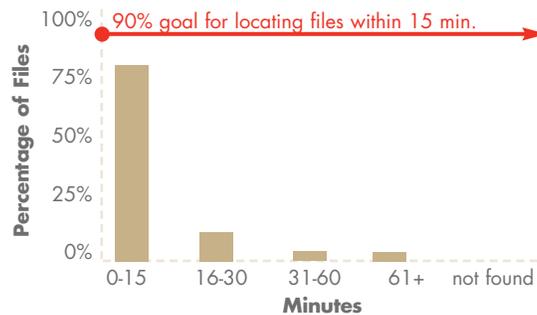


Retrieving Files – Interpretation

In this example, the court determines that 100 percent of the Closed, On-site Criminal-Felony case files were located, and 80 percent were located within the court's time standard of 15 minutes. Court staff and management need to evaluate why the remaining files could not be located within this time frame, and determine if this result suggests changes that should be made in the court's records management practices.

Courts should establish a high standard for being able to locate their case files, e.g., 98 percent or more. A similar high standard should be defined for locating the files within the 15-minute time frame, e.g., 90 percent or more of pending and closed on-site files. The court should define a standard for locating off-site files as well, e.g., 90 percent of the off-site files within one working day.

Percentage of Files Retrieved



Content Reliability

A second element of this measure examines the extent of correspondence between the case file summary and the file contents. The content and format of the case file summary (variously referred to as the case docket, case file register, register of actions, etc.) vary across jurisdictions, but this summary document generally includes at least a complete record of the documents filed with the court for each case. The question this element answers is whether the summary of documents accurately reflects all the documents filed with the court that are supposed to be in the file and, conversely, whether the documents in the file are accurately recorded on the summary of documents.



Method: For each case file in the Pending, Closed-On-site, and Closed-Off-site samples examined in the first element of Measure 6, review the case file summary and the case file contents. For each case file, record the answers to the following questions on a data collection form:

- Does every document-related entry on the case file summary have a corresponding document in the case file?
- Is every document in the case file listed as an entry on the case file summary system?

Add the number of Xs in each column. Calculate the percentage of cases for which "Yes" was answered to both questions.

Content Reliability Data Collection Form

Case Type: **Criminal-Felony**

Sample size: **50**

File Type (check one)
 Pending
 Closed, On-site
 Closed, Off-site

Random case #'s	Each entry has a document?		Each document has an entry?		Total
	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES/YES
SC-F-136	X		X		X
SC-F-468	X		X		X
SC-F-771	X			X	
SC-F-863		X	X		
SC-F-979	X		X		X
Total files	38	12	44	6	35

In this example, of the grand total of 50 files examined, a total of 38 files have an entry for each document in the file and a total of 44 files have a document for each entry. Thus, not all entries have documents and not all documents have entries. Only 35 of the 50 files examined meet the Yes/Yes condition. To compute the percentage, divide the total Yes/Yes (35) by the grand total of files examined (50). The result is 70 percent.



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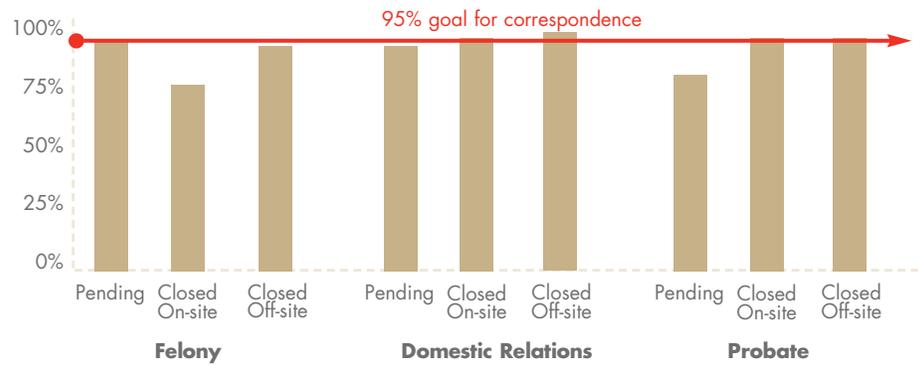
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Content Reliability – Analysis and Interpretation

In this example, the court has set a content reliability standard of 95 percent correspondence between the summary list of documents and the documents themselves in all case types, regardless of their status (pending, closed) or the file location (on-site, off-site). In this court, pending files are kept on site, and closed files are kept on site for 12 months, and then moved off site. Felony-Pending case files are currently meeting the court's standard. The Closed, On-site files are not quite meeting the standard. The same is true for the Closed, Off-site files. This could indicate that closed files, which have been checked out to court customers for review and copying of documents since being closed, are becoming incomplete due to loss of documents somewhere in the file review and document copying process.

Correspondence between case file summary and contents



Data can also be analyzed over time (e.g., annually) to see if performance is consistent, improving, or declining. In the example below, the court met its standard in 1998, experienced a sharp decline, then recovered and maintained its standard. The precise reasons for variation in performance (e.g., changes in personnel, technology, procedures, facilities, workflow) need to be determined by court staff and management to determine if corrective action is necessary.

Correspondence between case file summary and contents



File Organization and Completeness

A third element of Measure 6 considers whether the file contents are organized and formatted according to established practice in the jurisdiction. It also explores the completeness of the file—whether key documents filed with the court are contained in the case file. The Content Reliability element outlined above examines correspondence between the file contents and case file summary. It does not, however, explicitly investigate whether key documents are missing from both the file and summary.

Method: The specific criteria for judging the organization and completeness of case files may vary across courts. The first step is to identify 5 to 7 criteria that are appropriate for the specific court and case type. For example, have specific documents (e.g., complaint, answer, motion, judgment) been found missing in the past? If so, the presence of such previously missing documents should be included as criteria for the measure. Other criteria might include whether the documents filed with the court have been submitted and processed correctly (e.g., correctly captioned) and ordered according to the jurisdiction’s specifications for case files (e.g., confidential documents properly identified and sealed).

Once the criteria are defined by the court for each case type, examine each of the files in the sample of cases selected, record whether the files meet the criteria, and summarize the findings on a data collection form.

File Organization and Completeness Data Collection Form	Random case #'s	Organization			Completeness		
		Confidential Documents	Date/Time Stamp	Correct Caption	Complaint	Proof of Service	Order/Judgment
	SC-F-136	X	X	X	X		X
	SC-F-468	X	X	X	X	X	
Case Type: Criminal-Felony	SC-F-771	X	X		X	X	X
Sample size: 50		∨	∨	∨	∨	∨	∨
File Type (check one)		∨	∨	∨	∨	∨	∨
<input type="checkbox"/> Pending							
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Closed, On-site	SC-F-863	X	X		X		X
<input type="checkbox"/> Closed, Off-site	SC-F-979	X	X	X	X	X	X
	Total files	50	50	47	50	40	44

In this example, of the grand total of 50 files examined, a total of 50 files contain correctly identified and sealed Confidential Documents. A total of 50 files have documents with a correct Date/Time Stamp; a total of 47 files have documents with a Correct Caption, and so on. To compute the percentages, divide the total files in each column by the grand total of files examined (50). For Confidential Documents, the percentage is 50 divided by 50, or 100 percent. For Correct Caption files, 47 divided by 50 is 94 percent.

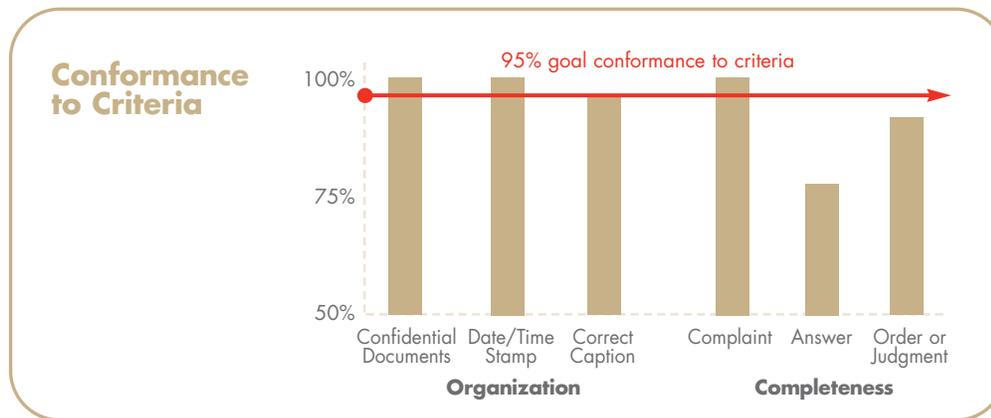


Analysis and Interpretation

Shown here are the hypothetical results of one court's examination of files for six court-specific criteria for Closed, Civil-Contract case files.

Interpreting the results of this measure depends on the nature of the specific criteria and the importance of each criterion to the court's records management system.

The nature of the criteria will suggest corrective actions (e.g., clarification/communication regarding filing requirements to parties or attorneys, or new staff procedures to address the specific deficiency). The initial measurement also serves as a baseline for setting intermediate and long-term targets of performance.



Terms You Need to Know

Closed cases: Cases that have been disposed of by the court, regardless of the manner of disposition.

Off-site case files: Case files that are stored in a building or facility other than the site of the court division responsible for those files.

On-site case files: Case files that are stored in the same building as the court division responsible for those files.

Pending cases: Cases that are awaiting disposition by the court.

Random Sample: A sample chosen that minimizes bias in the selection process. A random sample of case files could be generated by a computer, or by picking one file on a random basis, and choosing additional files at evenly spaced intervals (choosing every tenth file on the shelves, in ascending order) until the desired total number of files is obtained. Systematic random samples require the taking of every n th case, i.e., if the total number of civil cases in a court was 3,000 and the sample size was to be 300 cases, select every tenth case ($3,000 \div 300 = 10$).

