

Signatures

A Refresher on Meaning & Best Practices

What are the characteristics of Trustworthy Records?

Reliability: One whose content can be trusted as a full and accurate representation of the transactions, activities or facts to which it attests and can be depended upon in the course of subsequent transactions or activities.

Authenticity: One that is proven to be what it purports to be and to have been created or sent by the person who purports to have created and sent it.

Integrity: One that is complete and unaltered.

Usability: One which can be located, retrieved, presented and interpreted.

Source: U.S. National Archives & Records Administration

What is a signature?

Sig • na • ture

1. The name of one as written by oneself.
2. A distinctive mark, characteristic, modus operandi, or sound effect indicating identity.
3. The act of signing one's name.
4. The part of a physician's prescription containing directions to the patient.

Source: Webster's Dictionary

What is a contract?

It encompasses documents that are called something else, like agreements, memoranda of understanding, licenses, leases, rentals, sales of used property, purchases, intergovernmental agreements, grants, educational services agreements, and donations. It also includes proposals USF submits to get contracts. It represents a legally binding agreement or promise and, upon signing, you agree to what it says, not what you think or hope it says. It may impose both legal and financial obligations, or requirements on the part of the individuals signing.

What is the primary function of a signature?

- It identifies the actor and shows the authority to act;
- It documents the terms of the action in a manner that is legally binding and cannot be repudiated;
- It creates a record traceable during investigations and admissible in court.

Source: FDA Electronic Identification/Signature Working Group Report, February 24, 1992, pg 7-8

What does my signature mean?

Your signature, like your fingerprint, is unique. No one else has one exactly like it, and only you can use it. For your own protection, you should clearly understand what you are signing, why you are signing, and what the consequences may be. Do not be rushed or pressured into signing something before you fully understand it. It is rarely possible to avoid legal obligations of an agreement, once it is signed.

Your signature on a document may mean:

- I attest** – to assure the certainty or validity of
- I certify** – to confirm formally as true, accurate or genuine, guarantee
- I assure** – to give confidence to
- I received** – to acquire, or take hold of
- I understand** – to perceive and comprehend the significance of
- I agree** – to consent, or be in accord with
- I witness** – to attest to authenticity, statement or event
- I authenticate** – to prove as authentic, undisputed origin

Do's & Don'ts on Signatures

DO	DON'T
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sign documents in ink. • Read documents before signing. • Understand the significance of what you are signing. • Understand what your signature means. • Understand whether you have the authority to sign the document. • Check the document for accuracy. • Sign your name "for" on behalf of another party only if authorized by that party. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sign someone else's name. • Sign a blank document. • Sign what you haven't read.

Why is this important?

Misrepresentation of a signature is not legal.

18 U.S.C. § 1001

A criminal statute regarding the making of any false, fictitious, or fraudulent statements or representations in connection with federal government affairs.

"Whoever knowingly and willfully makes or uses any false writing or document knowing the same to contain any false, fictitious or fraudulent statement or entry, shall be fined not more than \$10,000 or imprisoned not more than five years, or both."

Florida Statutes § 831.01 – Forgery

Whoever falsely makes, alters, forges or counterfeits a public record, or a certificate, return or attestation of any clerk or register of a court, public register, notary public, town clerk or any public officer, in relation to a matter wherein such certificate, return or attestation may be received as a legal proof; or a charter, deed, will, testament, bond, or writing obligatory, letter of attorney, policy of insurance, bill of lading, bill of exchange or promissory note, or an order, acquittance, or discharge for money or other property, or an acceptance of a bill of exchange or promissory note for the payment of money, or any receipt for money, goods or other property, or any passage ticket, pass or other evidence of transportation issued by a common carrier, with intent to injure or defraud any person, shall be guilty of a felony of the third degree, punishable as provided in s. [775.082](#), s. [775.083](#), or s. [775.084](#).