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file ¹ (fil)

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n.

1. A container, such as a cabinet or folder, for keeping papers in order.
2. A collection of papers or published materials kept or arranged in convenient order.
3. *Computers* A collection of data or program records stored as a unit with a single name.
4.
 - a. A line of persons, animals, or things positioned one behind the other.
 - b. A line of troops or military vehicles so positioned.
5. *Games* Any of the rows of squares that run forward and backward between players on a playing board in chess or checkers.
6. *Archaic* A list or roll.

v. **filed, fil·ing, files**

v.tr.

1. To put or keep (papers, for example) in useful order for storage or reference.
2. To enter (a legal document) as an official record.
3. To send or submit (copy) to a newspaper.
4. To initiate (a lawsuit): *file a complaint; file charges.*

v.intr.

1. To march or walk in a line.
2. To put items in a file.
3. To make application; apply: *filed for a job with the state; file for a divorce.*
4. To enter one's name in a political contest: *filed for Congress.*

Idiom:

on file

In or as if in a file for easy reference: *We will keep your résumé on file.*

[From Middle English *filen*, to put documents on file, from Old French *filer*, to spin thread, to put documents on a thread, from Late Latin *filāre*, to spin, draw out in a long line, from Latin *filum*, thread; see **g^{whi}**- [in the Appendix of Indo-European roots](#).]

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file ² (fil)

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n.

1. Any of several hardened steel tools with cutting ridges for forming, smoothing, or reducing especially metallic surfaces.
2. A nail file.
3. *Chiefly British* A crafty or artful person.

tr.v. **filed, fil·ing, files**

To smooth, reduce, or remove with or as if with a file.

[Middle English, from Old English *fīl*; see **peig-** [in the Appendix of Indo-European roots](#).]



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file²

left to right: double-cut flat file, single-cut round file, and single-cut half-round file

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file³  (fīl)

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tr.v. **filed**, **fil·ing**, **files**

Archaic

To sully or defile.

[Middle English *filen*, from Old English *fȳlan*; see **p** - [in the Appendix of Indo-European roots](#).]

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fi·lé  (fē lā, fī-lā)

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n.

Powdered sassafras leaves used to thicken and season soups, stews, and gumbos.

[Louisiana French, from French, past participle of *filer*, to spin thread (from its effect when added to hot liquids), from Old French; see [FILE](#)¹.]

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Thousands of entries in the dictionary include etymologies that trace their origins back to reconstructed proto-languages. You can obtain more information about these forms in our online appendices:

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The Indo-European appendix covers nearly half of the Indo-European roots that have left their mark on English words. A more complete treatment of Indo-European roots and the English words derived from them is available in our [Dictionary of Indo-European Roots](#).

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