Identifying Thermal Paper

The National Archives seeks to preserve the information recorded on all records regardless of the material or format. Some materials pose a greater risk of information loss, particularly thermal paper popular in offices from 1969, since the text copied on this paper can disappear within a period of only a few years. To mitigate the loss of information, records created on thermal paper should be photocopied.

Example of a thermal paper document (above left) and an example of a document on thermal paper where text has disappeared (above right).

Thermal printing paper was most often used to create facsimile (fax) copies; however, not all fax paper is thermal paper. A few helpful hints for identifying thermal paper include:

- It has a smooth, shiny surface on the printed side.
- Grey or silver lines are obvious where the surface has been scratched or abraded.
However, paper that has a cactus logo on the back of it **does not** need to be copied since this logo proves the copy was produced through an electrostatic process called Electrofax and exhibits much greater long-term stability.

If in doubt, please copy.