Originals, copies and overseas use

A free reference sheet for preparing and protecting household records.

Requirements depend on the document, receiving authority, purpose and jurisdiction. Confirm them before spending money.

Know the difference

An ordinary copy is a reference copy. A certified copy is verified under a particular procedure. Notarization concerns a specified notarial act. These terms are not interchangeable, and none automatically makes a copy valid for every purpose.

Understand an apostille

An apostille authenticates the origin of a public document, including the relevant signature or seal. It does not certify the truth of the document's contents, grant immigration rights or replace a passport. Its use depends on the applicable convention and local requirements.

Ask the receiving authority

Confirm the accepted original or copy, who may certify it, any translation and authentication steps, and whether a recent issue is needed. Ask how these requirements apply to the particular document. Use the international requirements worksheet to record the answer and date.

Check the issuer and competent authority

Use the issuer's and competent authority's current instructions. Some records require an official reissued copy rather than a privately certified photocopy. Do not alter originals or separate attached certifications.

Plan for travel separately

Keep required valid travel documents available. Do not assume that a copy, notarization or apostille will be accepted at a border or during a power outage. This pack is a preparation aid, not an identity certificate.