# **Case for Naming Conventions**

## Benefits

* Naming files/folders in a consistent, logical, and predictable way helps information be located, identified, and retrieved by yourself or colleagues, as quickly and easily as possible.
* The simple rules apply equally to electronic and physical files and folders. They provide assurance that the correct item is retrieved and cannot be confused with other documents.
* The file name describes, at a glance, what the document is about, making it easier to browse files more effectively and efficiently.

## To get the best results, naming conventions should:

* Ensure the elements in a file name are ordered, unique, and consistent in such a way as to help the quick retrieval of the file, while offering flexibility so departments can decide most relevant order for their files.
* Indicate what is significant/what the file contains, what is searched for, who is the audience.
* Be adopted from the point of creation of a document. It is not proposed to retrospectively review the naming conventions that are currently in place unless a strong business reason exists.
* Make sure documents can be identified on their own - not dependent on the folder they are saved in. It is recommended that the file name and path is included in the footer of a document.

## Key Rules

* Keep file names short, meaningful, and easily understandable to others, avoiding unnecessary repetition and redundancy in file names and paths.
* Order the elements in a file name in the most appropriate way to retrieve the record.
* Use agreed upon abbreviations and codes; avoid obscure acronyms and vague, unhelpful terms such as “miscellaneous” or “general” or “my files”, as well as common words such as ‘draft’ or ‘letter’ at the start of file names unless doing so will make it easier to retrieve the record.
* Use capital letters to delimit words, as the preferred option, although underscores (\_) or hyphens (-) may add clarity, they make the file name longer.
* Use alphanumeric characters i.e., letters (A-Z) and numbers (0-9), using at least two-digit numbers to ensure correct numerical order (e.g., 01, 02), while dates should always follow same format: YYYYMMDD e.g., 20170425.
* Avoid using invalid characters in file names such as \*? \ / : # % ~ { }.
* The file names of records relating to recurring events should include the date and a description of the event.
* The version number of a record should be indicated in its file name by the inclusion of ‘V’ followed by the version number. (e.g., v01, v03 etc.) however, versioning is enabled automatically in systems such as Office 365 and One Drive for Business, making it unnecessary to duplicate this information in the file name itself.

## Examples

1. **Keep file names short and meaningful.**

File names should be kept as short as possible while also being meaningful. Long names mean long file paths, which increases the likelihood of difficulty remembering location and recognizing file.

Avoid using initials, abbreviations and codes that are not commonly understood; this is particularly important for records which have to be kept for a long period of time as the meaning of the acronym may not be known over time.

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|  | **Recommended** | **Incorrect** |
| **File name** | CaseforNamingConventions.doc | The\_Case\_for\_Naming\_Conventions.doc |
| **Justification** | Some words *add* length to a file name but do not contribute towards the meaning, (e.g., “the”, “a”, “and”) where the remaining words are meaningful within the context of the file directory these elements can be removed. Sometimes words have standard abbreviations, e.g., “SOP” is standard for “Standard Operating Procedure”. | |

1. **Avoid unnecessary repetition and redundancy in file names and file paths.**

Avoid redundancy in file names and file paths. Unnecessary repetition increases the length of file names and paths.

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|  | **Recommended** | **Incorrect** |
| **File name** | /.../Meetings/20240130Notes.doc  /.../Training/Onboarding.doc | /.../Meeting/20240130MeetingNotes.doc  /.../Training/OnboardingTraining.doc |
| **Justification** | **Ex. 1:** The folder is called “Meetings” so it is not necessary to include the word “Meeting” in the file name, as all the records in that folder are Meeting Notes.  **Ex. 2:** The folder is called “Training”, so it is not necessary to include the word “Training” in the file name because all the records in that folder are training records. | |

1. **Use capital letters to delimit words, not spaces or underscores.**

Avoid using spaces and underscores in file names. Some search functions have difficulty recognizing file names with spaces; or are more case sensitive and will ignore those items. Underscores and hyphens in your file names increase the length.

Where capitalized acronyms are used in file names, the acronym should appear in capitals and the first letter of the following word should also be capitalized.

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|  | **Recommended** | **Incorrect** |
| **File name** | NamingConvention.doc HWRFInstructions.html  HardwareReceiptForm.doc | Naming\_Convention.doc  HWRF\_instructions.html  Hardware Receipt Form.doc |
| **Justification** | Removing the space or underscore reduces the length of the file name but by using capital letters to differentiate between the words, the file name is still readily recognizable. | |

1. **When including a number in a file name, use a two-digit number format unless it is a year or another number with more than two digits.**

File directories display file names in alphanumeric order. To maintain this order when file names include numbers, it is important to include the zero for numbers 0-9, helping to retrieve the latest record number.

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|  | **Recommended** | **Incorrect** |
| **File name** | HardwareReceiptFormv01 HardwareReceiptFormv02 HardwareReceiptFormv10 | HardwareReceiptFormv1 HardwareReceiptFormv10 HardwareReceiptFormv2 |
| **Justification** | This example shows the successive versions of a document. This includes the versions created as the document was developed from the initial document (V01) through to the latest approved document (V10) [ subsequent minor revisions would be v1.1]. | |

1. **If using a date in the file name, always state the date ‘back to front’, and use four-digit years, two-digit months and two-digit days: YYYYMMDD or YYYYMM or YYYY or YYYY-YYYY**

Always present dates ‘back to front’, with the year first (four-digit number), followed by the month (two-digit number), and the day (two-digit number).

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|  | **Recommended** | **Incorrect** |
| **File name** | 20130324Agenda.doc  20130324Minutes.doc  20130324AP13-53-01Exceptions  20130201Agenda.doc 20130201Minutes.doc | 1Feb2013Agenda.doc  1Feb2013Minutes.doc  24March2013Agenda.doc  24March2013Minutes.doc 24March2013AP13/53/01 |
| **Justification** | If dates are listed back to front, the chronological order of the records is maintained when the file names are listed in the file directory. This helps when trying to retrieve the latest dated record. | |

1. **Avoid using common words such as ‘draft’ or ‘letter’ at the start of file names**

Avoid using common words such as ‘draft’ or ‘letter’ at the start of file names, or all of those records will appear together in the file directory, making it more difficult to retrieve the records you are looking for. You may only ignore this rule if starting file names with these sorts of words aids the retrieval of the records.

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|  | **Recommended** | **Incorrect** |
| **File name** | /…/Training/  RequetsV01Draft.doc RequestsV05Final.doc HardwareReport2012-2013V20Final.doc HardwareReport2012-2013V15Draft.doc HotelingS20120312.doc  OfficeProceduresV10Draft.doc | /…/Training/  DraftRequests.doc  DraftBudgetReport2012-2013.doc  DraftOfficeProcedures.doc  FinalAdvertising.doc  FinalBudgetReport2012-2013.doc  LetterAThomas.doc  LetterSGrant.doc |
| **Justification** | The file directory will list files in alphanumeric order. This means that all records with file names starting “Draft” will be listed together. When retrieving files, it will be more useful to find the draft budget report next to the previous year’s budget rather than next to an unrelated draft record. | |

1. **Order the elements in a file name in the most appropriate way to retrieve the record**

The elements to be included in a file name should be ordered according to the way in which the record will be retrieved during the course of everyday business.

For example, if the records are retrieved according to their date, the date element should appear first. If the records are retrieved according to their description, the description element should appear first.

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|  | **Recommended** | **Incorrect** |
| **File name** | /…/HardwarePolicyCttee/ 20120630Agenda.doc 20120630Minutes.doc 20130120Agenda.doc 20130120Minutes.doc 20130201Agenda.doc 20130201Minutes.doc  /…/Events/  Staff Barbecue20110630.doc TimesHigherAwards20120905.doc Chancellor’sDinner20130304.doc | /…/HardwarePolicyCttee/  Agenda1Feb2013.doc  Agenda20Jan2013.doc  Agenda30June2012.doc  Minutes1Feb2013.doc  Minutes20Jan2013.doc  Minutes30June2012.doc  /…/Events/  20130304Chancellor’sDinner.doc 20110630StaffBarbecue.doc 20120905TimesHigherAward.doc |
| **Justification** | The first example shows minutes and agenda of the Academic Policy Committee. Minutes and papers of a meeting are likely to be retrieved on the basis of the date of the meeting, it is therefore best to have the date at the start of the file name, otherwise all the Agendas will come at the top of the directory list, followed by all of the minutes, and then by the papers. The second example shows the file names of the files in the Events folder. Because events are likely to be retrieved by the name of the event rather than the date of the event, it is most useful to have that element first. | |

1. **The file names of records relating to recurring events should include the date and a description of the event, except where the inclusion of either of these elements would be incompatible with rule 2.**

The file names of records relating to recurring events (e.g., meeting minutes and papers, weekly, monthly, or annual reports, event management and budget planning documents) should include both the date and the event name or event description so that the record can be identified and retrieved.

When deciding the order of the elements consider rule 8. Date first will usually be appropriate for events that are time specific and recurring. Event first will usually be appropriate for events that are infrequent but regularly recurring.

The event description could be the title of the event or the subject of the event but whatever description you choose, ensure that it is short, to the point, and readily recognizable to you and the colleagues you work with.

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|  | **Recommended** | **Incorrect** |
| **File name** | /…/Website/ 20130301WebStats.doc 20130401WebStats.doc  /…/Planning/ Budget2012-2013V10.xls  Budget2013-2014V01Draft.xls | /…/Website/ WebStats20130301.doc WebStats20130401.doc  /…/Planning/  2012-2013BudgetV10.xls 2014-2014BudgetV01Draft.xls |
| **Justification** | The first example shows the website statistic reports which are created on a monthly basis. Because the reports recur frequently and are retrieved by date it is most appropriate that the date is given first. Also remember rule 2; in some cases, it may be appropriate for the folder to be called “sample”, in which case the file names only need to include the date. For another example, see the first rule 8 example.  The second example shows annual budget reports. Because the reports are annual and likely to be retrieved by the description rather than the date, it is likely that it will be most appropriate for the description element to come first. Also remember rule 2; in some cases, it may be appropriate for the folder to be called “Planning2012-2013”, in which case the file names only need to include a description. For another example, see the second rule 8 example. | |

1. **The version number of a record should be indicated in its file name by the inclusion of ‘V’ followed the version number and, where applicable, ‘Draft’ or ‘Final’.**

Some records go through a number of versions, for example they start out as working drafts, become consultation drafts and finish with a final draft, which may then be reviewed and updated at a later date. It is important to be able to differentiate between these various drafts by giving them each their own number. A document becomes version 1.0 when it is approved (FilenameV10).

Where a version number is applicable, it should always appear in the file name of the record so that the most recent version can be easily identified and retrieved.

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|  | **Recommended** | **Incorrect** |
| **File name** | LTAS2009-2010V03Draft.htm  LTAS2009-2010V10Final.htm  OrgHier2012V02.xls  OrgHier2012V03.xls  OrgHier2012V10.xls | LTAS2009/10\_draftv.3.htm  LTAS2009/10\_finalv1htm  Org\_Hier\_2012\_v.2.xls  Org\_Hier\_2012\_v.3.xls  Org\_Hier\_2012\_v1.xls |
| **Justification** | The first example shows two versions of the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy for 2009-2010, version 03 is a draft version and version 10 is the final version. The common abbreviation for the strategy is used. The years are given in four-digit format. The version number is given with two digits so that the versions will appear in numeric order.  The second example shows a number of versions of the organizational hierarchy for 2012. In this case none of the versions are marked as draft or final because the nature of the record means that ‘draft’ and ‘final’ are not applicable. | |

1. **Avoid using non-alphanumeric characters in file names.**

Different operating systems (e.g., Linux, OS X, Windows) have different file name requirements, in particular different characters that they do not recognize in file names.

The use of these characters can cause problems. Even if your operating system allows you to save the file you may encounter difficulties if you try to transport the file to another operating system, for example the file may not be recognized, or if you send it to someone else, they may not be able to open it. It is therefore recommended that you avoid the use of non-alphanumeric characters in file names

Avoid: \*: \ / < > | “? [ ] ; = + & £ $ , . However, hyphens (-) may be used.

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|  | **Recommended** | **Incorrect** |
| **File name** | SmithJohn20130507.txt DavidLaingCollection.rtf GuidelinesAndRegulations.pdf  Budget2012-2013 | Smith,John20130507.txt "DavidLaingCollection".rtf Guidelines&Regulations.pdf  Budget2012/13 |
| **Justification** | Most non-alphanumeric characters can be omitted without much loss of meaning, e.g., commas and quotation marks. Others can be replaced with alphanumeric characters, e.g., "&" and "+" can be replaced with "And" and "Plus". Hyphens can be used in place of forward slashes and brackets. | |