**Paths and pathnames**

**Path and pathname**

A path is a slash-separated list of directory names followed by either a directory name or a file name. A directory is the same as a system folder.  
  
E:\Data\MyStuff *(path terminating in a directory name)*

E:\Data\MyStuff\roads.shp *(path terminating in a file name)*

**NOTE: In everyday usage, path and pathname are synonymous. Pathname is sometimes spelled path name.**

**Location**

Location is a catch-all term for pathname, as in, "Browse to the location of your data," or "Enter the location of your data." 

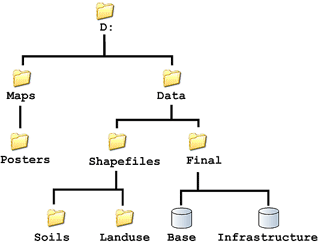
**Forward versus backward slashes**

The Windows convention is to use a backward slash (\) as the separator in a path. UNIX systems use a forward slash (/).

**Absolute and relative pathnames**

**Absolute, or full, path**

An absolute, or full, path begins with a drive letter followed by a:, such as "D:"   
  
**Relative path**

A relative path refers to a location that is relative to a current directory. Relative paths make use of two special symbols, a dot (.) and a double-dot (..), which translate into the current directory and the parent directory. Double-dots are used for moving up in the hierarchy. A single dot represents the current directory itself.   
  
In the example directory structure below, assume you used Windows Explorer to navigate to D:\Data\Shapefiles\Soils. After navigating to this directory, a relative pathname will use D:\Data\Shapefiles\Soils as the current directory (until you navigate to a new directory, at which point the new directory becomes the current directory). The current directory is sometimes referred to as the root directory.  
  
   
  
If you wanted to navigate to the Landuse directory from the current directory (Soils), you could type in the following in the Windows Explorer Address edit box:

..\Landuse

Windows Explorer would navigate to D:\Data\Shapefiles\Landuse. A few more examples using D:\Data\Shapefiles\Landuse as the current directory are the following:

.. *(D:\Data\Shapefiles)*

..\.. *(D:\Data)*

..\..\Final  *(D:\Data\Final)*

. *(D:\Data\Shapefiles\Landuse - the current directory)*

.\..\Soils *(D:\Data\Final\Soils)*

..\..\.\Final\..\Shapefiles\.\Landuse *(D:\Data\Shapefiles\Landuse)*

**Exercises:**

**Assuming your current directory is Final (in the directory tree above) write the relative and absolute paths to each of the following locations:**

Shapefiles

D:/data/shapefilesd

../shapefiles

Posters

D:/maps/posters

../../maps/posters

Base

D:/data/final/base

base

D:

../../

D:/

Landuse

../Shapefiles/landuse

D:/data/shapefiles/landuse

Data

**../**

**D:/data**