

SECTION K: FILE MANAGEMENT

K1: FOLDER AND FILE NAMING CONVENTIONS GUIDELINES

INTRODUCTION

WHY USE NAMING CONVENTIONS?

Consistency in naming files, emails or folders is important to identify information quickly and easily. Putting time and effort into naming files consistently and logically will distinguish similar files from one another at a glance, allowing for more effective and efficient searching and retrieval of files. Titling electronic files and folders according to agreed office conventions will also make file naming easier for each employee because they will not have to 're-think' this process each time a document is created, received and/or saved. Establishing office conventions for electronic file/folder naming will also prevent files from being misfiled and "lost".

HOW SHOULD ELECTRONIC FILES AND FOLDERS BE TITLED?

Office file naming conventions should reflect efficient and consistent workplace practice; while folder structure and naming should reflect agreed upon office functions. While there is room for a certain degree of adaptation by individuals, it is important that the office-wide folder structure and file naming conventions **be agreed upon, understood and implemented by all office staff.**

In general, a file title should be:

- **Descriptive** – it says what the document is about;
- **Helpful** – it distinguishes the document from others on the same/similar topic;
- **Consistent** – it follows the convention described in this document.

File Title Elements: file names should *always* contain **two or more** of the following elements listed below:

- Date;
- Subject;
- Document Type; and/or
- Version or Status.

The logical sequence of these four elements will vary depending on the file being titled and the retrieval requirements of each office department. The most important thing to remember is: consistency is **critical**.

CONVENTIONS

ORDERING THE ELEMENTS OF A FILE NAME

The elements to be included in a file name (i.e. Date, Subject, Document Type, Version or Status) should be ordered according to the way the record will be retrieved. *For example*, if the records are retrieved according to their Date (i.e. meeting minutes) the date element should appear first. If the records are retrieved according to their Description (i.e. subject or document type) the description element should appear first.

EXAMPLE

- **Naming by Date:** **2004-06-30 Agenda.doc** [i.e. YYYY-MM-DD, Description, file extension]

- Naming by Description: **Event Donor List 2004-06-30.pdf** [i.e. Description, YYYY-MM-DD, file extension]

The key to an effective file naming strategy is **consensus** and **consistency**. Effective naming conventions should be **designed to assist people**, not cause them to change their whole way of working and so they should be tailored to best suit office requirements.

USE THE APPROPRIATE COMPUTER DRIVE FOR ALL PROJECT FILES

- If your office computer system has server support, save project files to the drive that is regularly backed up by the server. If your computer crashes you could lose *all of your work* if you haven't saved it to the drive that is regularly backed up.
 - **Important Note on Preservation:** Once your digitization project is finished, consider purchasing 1-2 external hard drives and saving copies of all of your digitized audio files to these units. Then store these 1-2 external hard drives in **different, secured, geographical locations**, such as a tribal council archives, a university archives, etc... This will also help ensure redundancy, so if something catastrophic such as flooding should destroy the original audiocassettes or server containing the digitized files, the external hard drives stored away from the flooded area should be fine.
- If your office computer system **does not** have server support, invest in 2-3 external hard drives and be sure to save your work to each drive at the end of every day. Saving all of your digitized files to each of these external hard drives will ensure redundancy so that if one hard drive fails, chances are the files saved to a different external hard drive will still be viable.
 - **Important Note on Preservation:** Again, once your digitization project is finished, consider storing 1-2 of these external hard drives in **different, secured, geographical locations**, such as a tribal council archives, a university archives, etc... As mentioned above, this will help ensure data redundancy.

ESTABLISH CLEAR FOLDER STRUCTURE

- Establishing efficient folder structure within your office computer system is as important as establishing file naming conventions. Clear folder structuring allows for the most efficient and predictable means of filing/finding a document.
- Clear folder structure also ensures that all files pertaining to the same activity or subject are filed in the same place.
- Be sure to establish folder titles which broadly reflects contents, so duplicate sub-folders are not required.
- Office computer folder structure should reflect office functions.

EXAMPLE FOLDER STRUCTURE

Band Office "X" consists of four large Departments, all of which use space on a shared drive. This is what a hierarchical folder structure *could* look like for them:

Shared Drive Level →

Band Office Departments Folder Titles

1. Administration
2. Governance
3. Lands, Planning and Resources
4. Social Sector

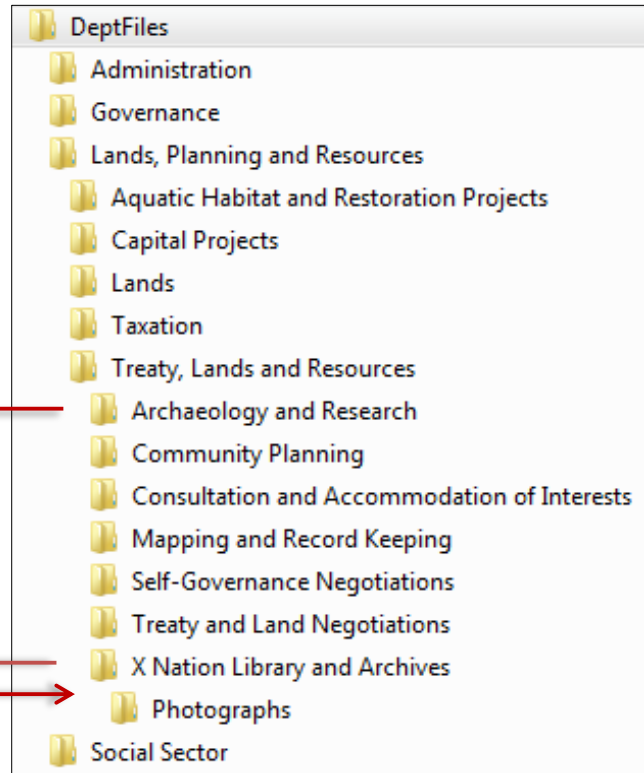
Offices *within* Departments = Primary Folder Titles

For example, the Department of Lands, Planning and Resources is made up of the following Offices:

- Aquatic Habitat and Restoration Projects
- Capital Projects
- Lands
- Taxation
- Treaty, Lands and Resources

Units within Offices = Secondary Folder Titles

Subject Sub-Folder →



Within each office, or secondary folder, would be a number of **sub-folders** and even **sub-sub folders**, *depending upon office function and work flow*. In this basic example, the sub-folder of “Photographs” is identified – the titling of a sub-folder “photographs” would indicate that the contents are often retrieved and therefore titling the sub-folder by a subject (“photographs”) would make sense for this unit.

EXAMPLE FILE PATH

G:/LPR/TLR/Archives/Photographs/YouthCultureCamp/Doe.Jane.2009-03-13.tiff							
Shared Drive	Folder Title	Primary Title	Secondary Title	Sub-Folders at this level	Sub-sub-folder Title	Document Name	File Extension
	<i>Dept.</i>	<i>Office</i>	<i>Unit</i>	determined within Unit		(eg. “Naming by Person	(eg. “.tiff” = image
	(eg. Lands, Planning & Resources Dept., aka. LPR)	(eg. Treaty, Lands and Resources, aka TLR)	(eg. Archives)	according to office requirements	(eg. Youth Culture Camp)	Convention”: last name, first name, date (YYYY-MM-DD)	File extensions are automatically applied when a file is saved)
				(eg. Photographs)			

USE SHORT, MEANINGFUL NAMES FOR FOLDERS AND FILES

Short meaningful folder names (i.e. 40 characters or less) are used to provide a clear and immediate indication of content. Folders using general terms such as “Misc.” or “Joe’s files” or “to keep” provide no explanation as to the nature of the files inside. Even a folder named “Correspondence” might sound like it works; however when this correspondence is all of a different nature (i.e. different subject, incoming, outgoing, etc...) it offers no assistance in retrieval. Likewise file names like “James correspondence” might be descriptive to the person who created the

file, however another user doesn't know if James is a last name or a first name, or if the correspondence was sent or received.

ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

A file name does not require every single word in the document title be used in order to identify it; for example, don't include words like "the" or "a" in your file name. Abbreviations and acronyms *can* also be used; however, **all staff must be aware of their meaning** otherwise their use will make finding and labeling files much more complicated.

When using acronyms, each letter should appear in capitals, as should the first letter of the following word; whereas, only the first letter of an abbreviated word should be capitalized.

EXAMPLE

- **Instead of:** FinCtteeetermofref.docx (for "Finance Committee Terms of Reference")
- **Use:** Finance Cttee TOR.docx *or* Finance Cmt TOR.docx
- **Acronym:** "TOR" for Terms of Reference (all capitals)
- **Abbreviation:** "Cttee" *or* "Cmt" for Committee (first letter of abbreviation capitalized)

Please see the **File Naming Conventions Worksheet** for an "Abbreviations and Acronyms Key" template. Feel free to use this template as a guide help identify your office's abbreviation and acronym usage – just ensure it is readily available to all staff using the same computer drive **and** keep it up to date!

NO DUPLICATION

Try not to duplicate the folder name within the file name as all the files stored within in a folder should relate to the *same subject*. For example, all files stored in a folder titled "Indigitization Project" should refer to that subject, so it is not necessary to include the word "Indigitization" within the filename.

EXAMPLE

- **Instead of:** /Indigitization Project/Indigitization Digitization Procedures 2017-06-14.doc
- **Use:** /Indigitization Project/Digitization.Procedure-2017-06-14.doc

IDENTIFYING WORDS WITHIN TITLES

- Use one space (or a period) to separate each word within a file title, and a dash to separate the numeric elements of a date (see "Date Notation" below)
- Capitalize the first letter of each word within a file title.
- Avoid using other separation marks (underscores, slashes etc.) as these can affect searching capabilities.

EXAMPLE

- **Instead of:** staff.appeal.docx *or* Staff_appeal.docx
- **Use:** Staff Appeal.docx *or* Staff.Appeal.docx

DATE NOTATION

To maintain file chronology, write the file date backwards using a hyphen to separate the year, month and day. The date format should always follow the ISO standard ISO 8601: *Data elements and interchange formats – Information interchange – Representation of dates and times* to ensure continuity, which recommends: the four digit year, followed by the two digit month, followed by the two digit day. Use a zero before any numbers 1-9 to maintain numeric ordering. Alternative date notations include:

- YYYY-MM-DD
- YYYY-MM
- YYYY
- YYYY-YYYY

EXAMPLE

- **Instead of:** Jan. 27.14_Minutes Finance Cmt.doc
- **Use:** 2014-01-27 Finance Cmttee Minutes.doc

APPLYING VERSION NUMBER AND DOCUMENT STATUS

Version control should be applied to documents which are frequently updated (such as policy, by-laws, etc.). Including a number and date on the title page (and within document footers) will reduce confusion over which document is the current version, as well as providing an audit trail for tracking changes.

A version control table on the document could also be used to keep track of what changes have been made and by whom.

Decimal increments should be used so that a distinction can be made between major and minor changes. You can also add 'DRAFT' or 'FINAL' to show the difference between working drafts and final versions. For example:

- A first draft of a policy might be titled: "Digitization.Policy.v0.1-DRAFT"; the next set of revisions to this draft could be titled "Digitization Policy.v0.2-DRAFT", etc..
- Once the document has been finalized, the numeric value of the version changes to reflect this status: "Digitization.Policy.v1.0-FINAL". Any future minor revisions to this version could then be noted in the title as such: "Digitization.Policy.v1.1-FINAL". The second final version would be v2.0-FINAL etc.

To ensure effective ordering of version numbers, always locate version naming/numbering at the end of a file name. Convention also dictates the use of a lower case "v" to indicate "version" followed by a two-digit number - again using a zero before numbers 1-9 to maintain alphanumeric ordering and assist retrieval by placing the last file first.

USE OF NON-ALPHANUMERIC CHARACTERS IN FILE NAMES

Avoid the use of non-alphanumeric characters in file names as these can affect search results and do not add much meaning. Avoid: * : \ / < > | " ? [] ; = + & £ \$, . However, hyphens (-) can be used to separate elements of file titles as specified in this document.

EXAMPLE

- | | | |
|----------------------------|---|----------------------------|
| • Instead of: | | Use: |
| • Guidelines & Regulations | → | Guidelines and Regulations |
| • Project Budget 2006/07 | → | Project Budget 2006-2007 |

USING PERSONAL NAMES

When required to include a personal name in the file title list the surname first followed by first name. This will arrange files alphabetically by surname which will make retrieval easier.

EXAMPLE

- **Instead of:** Interview with Axel James Point Sept.13.pdf

- **Use:** Point Axel James Interview 2013-09-12.pdf

COMMON WORDS USAGE

Common office language (i.e. correspondence, minutes, timeline, budget, etc...) used in file names are a useful means of identifying document type; however they should only be used at the end of a file title, and not at the start. This makes file name ordering within a folder more consistent.

EXAMPLE

- **Instead of:** Minutes FinCmt Jan.24.2014.doc
- **Use:** 2014-01-24 Finance Cmte Minutes.doc

NAMING CORRESPONDENCE RECORDS (INCLUDING EMAILS)

File names for correspondence documents should include the following elements so that the record can be easily identified and retrieved:

- name of correspondent, (i.e. the name of the person who sent the letter/email/memo or to whom you sent the letter/email/memo)
- subject description, where it is not given in the folder title
- date of letter/email/memo (and time HH:MM for string emails)
- for all incoming correspondence, include 'rcvd' at the end of the file title
- when saving emails, rename messages so they can be identified, and delete any prefixes such as RE:, FW:, etc.

EXAMPLE

- | | | |
|-------------------------|---|--------------------------------|
| • Instead of: | | Use: |
| • William Evans-15Jul04 | → | Evans W-Appeal-2004-07-15-rcvd |
| • William Evans-20Aug04 | → | Evans W-Appeal-2004-08-20 |

STANDARDS

The naming conventions identified in this document are based upon the following standards and guidelines:

- ISO 15489-1 and 2: 2001- Information and Documentation – Records Management;
- ISO 8601:2004 - Data elements and interchange formats - Information interchange - Representation of dates and time;
- Naming Conventions for Electronic Files and Folders – York University
- Naming Conventions for Electronic Records Q&As – University of Calgary
- *Standard Naming Conventions* - University of Edinburgh (U.K.);
- Naming Conventions for Electronic Documents – University of St. Andrews (U.K.);
- Standard Naming Conventions for Electronic Files, Folders and Records (Sept. 1, 1012) – University of Hertfordshire (U.K.)

These Guidelines were adapted with permission to use from the University of Hertfordshire, UK, [“Corporate Records Management Standards – Standard Naming Conventions for Electronic Files, Folders and Records”](#).