FILE-NAMING STANDARDS

# Why?

Establishing electronic file-naming standards, specifically tailored to each department’s business needs will:

1. Improve access to documents and make sure that the right documents are available at the right time to support the daily business operations of each department;
2. Facilitate more effective collaborative work between employees; and
3. Ensure that electronic files are easy to locate for records retention purposes.

In addition, consistent use of a standardized set of file-names will be cost-effective for LCC by decreasing the time needed to locate documents when responding to requests for information.

These guidelines are to be used as a basis for naming electronic documents using a sensible and as consistent an approach as possible. All employees will be expected to apply these standards consistently within their department in the regular course of business. *Exception: Employees who routinely share electronic files across departments should establish a file-naming standard for their shared files that suits all departments involved.*

# What To Do

Each department should establish file-naming standards for:

1. Files that support department core activities; and/or
2. Files that are routinely shared with others.

Your department should identify file-naming standards appropriate to its unique business needs. These standards should enable you to distinguish items with similar names and enable you to identify documents without the need to open and view them.

There are three basic elements of a file-name that should generally be included when naming a file. These elements include:

1. A **subject** that indicates the content or purpose of the file;
2. An **abbreviation of the department or project** to which the file is related; and
3. The **state of the document** (whether the file is a version or in its final state).

### Example:

*BudgetRequest-HR-V02
BudgetRequest-HRFinal*

Elements in a file name should be sorted in the most logical way to retrieve the record, which may differ from record to record but should not have a negative impact on working practice.

# How To Do It

Use the following naming conventions to help your department establish file-naming standards. These guidelines are designed to assist your department, not cause you to change your whole way of working. They should be tailored to best suit your working methods. Ultimately, what matters most is agreeing on which standards to adopt and consistently applying them.

## 1. Short Meaningful Names

**Short Filenames** are used because a long filename means a long file path or, when posting a document on the web, a long URL. This increases the risk of “broken” links from web pages and error messages when users attempt to view documents.

**Meaningful names** are used to provide a clear indication of the content. A file named “Meeting Stuff” might sound like it works, but without knowing what meeting or what “stuff” refers to it offers no assistance in retrieval.

A filename does not require every single word in the document title to be used in order to identify it. It is also possible to abbreviate words through the use of standard abbreviations. For example, “cmte” is a standard abbreviation for “committee” and can be used in all committee related areas providing it is commonly understood.

Keep in mind, abbreviations only work if everyone uses them, making up new abbreviations that only one person understands will negate the ease and efficiency of the system.

### Example:

Instead of naming a document **the\_employment\_and\_finance\_committee**It can be called: **EmpFinCmte**

When using acronyms, each letter should appear in capitals, as should the first letter of the following word. Only the first letter of an abbreviated word should be a capital.

### Example:

Instead of naming a document **empfinCmtetermsofref**It can be called: **EmpFinCmteTOR**

## 2. Separating Words

**Spaces, dashes - and\_underscores** are not universally recognized within filenames and can cause problems where files are published on the web so they should be used with caution when naming a file that will be shared online. To avoid possible issues with these files, instead of separating the words, capital letters can be used to identify the start of each word.

### Example:

Instead of naming a document **staff appeal** or **staff\_appeal**It can be called: **StaffAppeal**

If necessary, dashes can be used to separate words relating to the parts of the file-name.

### Example:

*MeetingMinutes-Facilities-V01*

## 3. Characters

**Use only alphanumeric characters (letters and numbers)** in file-naming whenever possible. Avoid using special character marks, such as ampersands, asterisks, question marks, periods, or spaces, which do not transition smoothly if the file is published to the Web.

### Example:

Instead of naming a document **Budget&Finance Report 2019 Final?**It can be called: **BudgetFinReport-2019Draft**

## 4. Numbering

**Use two-digit numbers** when including non-year numbers in the file name. Using a zero before numbers 0-9 will maintain the alphanumeric ordering, and assist retrieval by placing the latest files last. It also presents the files names in a consistent manner making it easier to visually scan the list to find the version you are looking for.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Instead of:** | **Use:** |
| ReportV1ReportV10ReportV11ReportV2ReportV3ReportV4ReportV5ReportV6ReportV7ReportV8ReportV9*(As the system sorts the files)* | ReportV01ReportV02ReportV03ReportV04ReportV05ReportV06ReportV07ReportV08ReportV09ReportV10ReportV11*(As the system sorts the files)* |

## 5. Dates

**Backwards dating** is used to sort files when it is useful to maintain the chronology of their creation within a folder. The date format should always follow the style four digit years, two digit months and two digit days. i.e. **YYYY-MM-DD = 2020-09-01 = September 1st, 2020**.

Placing the year first allows for easy sorting (and ultimately easier disposal) by date. This can be very important with items such as tracking the history of a set of correspondence or when documents relating to regular meetings held over the course of a year are stored in the same folder.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Instead of:** | **Use:** |
| 25Nov2021Minutes 14Feb2019Agenda 25Dec2018Minutes 31Oct2020Agenda4July2019Enclosure1*(As the system sorts the files)* | 2018-12-25Minutes2019-02-14Agenda2019-07-04Enclosure12020-10-31Agenda2021-11-25Minutes*(As the system sorts the files)* |

Not all dates will require the actual day to be included in the filename. Some may require just the month, the year or a date range. These should still follow the rules of backwards dating.

### Examples:

*YYYY-MM = 2021-09 = September 2021*

*YYYY = 2021*

*YYYY – YYYY = 2020-2021*

When including the academic, calendar or fiscal year designation, use the two-letter abbreviations (AY, CY or FY) followed by the last two digits of the year.

### Examples:

*ProjectNotes-ITS-Final-FY21
ProjectNotes-ITS-Final-CY20
ProjectNotes-ITS-Final-AY18*

## 6. Personal Names

**Always place the surname (last name) first**, followed by the initials of the first name when saving items that require the inclusion of a person’s name. This will arrange the files by surname which should make it easier for others looking for a file.

### Examples:

*JeonJ
JungH
KimN
KimS
KimT
MinY
ParkJ*

If necessary for clarity, the entire first name can be included.

### Example:

*JonesAlbert
JonesAlvin*

## 7. Placement of Words

Common words will always be used in file names as a useful means of identifying the file. This is not necessarily a bad thing, as it aids identification, however using words like “draft”, “agenda”, “minutes” or “enclosure” at the start of a file name will have an effect on the order in which files are sorted.

For example, placing the word “draft” at the start of the file name will group all files beginning with that word together, placing unrelated items into groups. It is far more useful to have the subject at the start of the filename so related subjects will group together.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Instead of:** | **Use:** |
| DraftFinancePlan DraftBudgetReport FinalFinancePlanFinalBudgetReport*(As the system sorts the files)* | BudgetReportDraft BudgetReportFinalFinancePlanDraftFinancePlanFinal*(As the system sorts the files)* |

Indications of the state of the document (such as “V01”for the first version or “Final”for the final version) should be placed at the end of a file-name but prior to the date (if using a date indicator) to make it easier to sort files by the project name, subject, or date.

### Example:

*AuditNotes-HHS-V04-2021-06-18*

Sources:

Northumbria University, Vice Chancellor’s Office – Legal Services – Records Management. [Guide to Electronic File Naming](https://northumbria-cdn.azureedge.net/-/media/corporate-website/documents/pdfs/about-us-corporate/legal-services-team/guide-to-electronic-file-naming.pdf?modified=20170221102316). 2008.

University of Illinois, Records and Information Management Services. [File-Naming Standards](https://uofi.app.box.com/s/woqmidvswsrya378n85a8n1c50y7aa2g). 2021.