

Records Management Guidance: Basic Guide to File Naming

INTRODUCTION

There are numerous methods of collaborative working, including using electronic, paper and hybrid systems. Many systems allow for scanning of paper records into an electronic system to enable wider access and to keep relevant records together. Records should be named in a way that clearly identifies them and allows colleagues to find information quickly and efficiently, even if a key member of staff leaves. Folders with unhelpful names such as 'Jim's stuff', 'Old files', and 'Miscellaneous' are to be avoided.

FILE NAMING

Naming records consistently by following set conventions can greatly help in the storage and retrieval of records. This name will be the primary way you and your colleagues locate and identify that document in the future. The name will also help you relate the document it describes to other documents. By giving a record a consistent and logical description you will make it easier to locate and to differentiate between similar records. Agreed file naming conventions also makes the creation of records simpler as colleagues do not have to consider the naming process each time.

Document names should contain enough information to give a user seeing the document out of context, separated from its parent folder, an understanding of what the document concerns and its purpose. Document names should be as descriptive as possible, while retaining meaning and consistency of approach.

A document name should be made up of the following components:

- The topic and subject matter. This component may be used in a number of files as documents relating to the same subject are created and saved.
- Document type e.g. letter, report, minutes, etc.
- Date, if appropriate - the date of an event, meeting, etc, not that of the document's creation. Starting the file name with *Year-Month-Day* can be a helpful way to sort documents by chronological order.
- Version Number - used to keep track of changes made to the document

For example, a naming convention could be *Year-Month-Day - Subject Matter - Document Type*. In practise this could look like *2010-10-09 - Board of Governors Meeting - Minutes Personal Copy*. You may find a different convention more appropriate for your records; the important thing is to apply it consistently.

It is important that file titles are clear and easily understood by everyone who might need to access them, rather than just the creator of the file. For this reason, you should avoid unnecessary abbreviations and acronyms.

You should also avoid certain non-alphanumeric characters in file names as these can be incompatible with various file management systems. This includes characters such as * : \ / < > | " ? [] ; = + & # % { } ~ £ \$, . (notably - is fine to use).

VERSION CONTROL

Documents published in shared spaces are often circulated, edited and redrafted. In order to keep track of changes and ensure everyone is working from the current version of a document, the document title could incorporate a version number. Some collaboration tools can do this work automatically and there will be no need for a manual intervention.

While there is no one single way to record the version number manually, the most common method is to add it at the end of the document title. The number can be prefixed with the letter v to identify it as a version control tool. When numbering you can use ordinal numbers to reflect major changes (i.e. 1, 2, 3, 4) and decimal numbers (i.e. 1.2, 2.5, 3.4) to reflect minor changes in documents. For example, the first draft of a document could be v0.1, whereas a revised version of the draft could be v0.2 and the final version could be v1.0. Whatever convention is used it must be agreed and publicised so that all staff are using the same method.

A major change to a document might include a significant redraft that changes the meaning or emphasis of the document, an amalgamation of amendments, an annual update of a document, a redesign of a database, or a new release of a publication. A minor change would constitute redrafting work which does not change the meaning or emphasis of the document, for example spelling corrections and stylistic adjustment. In these circumstances the ordinal number should remain the same and the decimal number should be escalated to reflect the change.

FILING STRUCTURE

Paper records are decreasing in number but are still in the workplace. All files relating to a particular topic, transaction, project or business activity should be kept together in an accessible structure. Many organisations have a file plan, or business classification scheme, that sets out a formal hierarchical structure for the organisation of information. Currently UWTSD does not have a central file plan so teams will need to create their own.

The filing scheme chosen will depend on the information created and dealt with by each team. There is rarely one 'right' way of organising files: what is important is that the structure works for the team. A good test for any team's filing system is the 'temp test', i.e. could a temporary member of staff find their way around the system and locate the information they need after a basic introduction?

It is worth noting that you may want to consider applying access restrictions in your filing structure, for example by grouping related personal or sensitive information in a folder where access is restricted to authorised members of staff.

If you have any queries regarding this, please get in touch with the records management team using the email records@uwtsd.ac.uk