

File Naming Guidelines

Electronic Records Management

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File Naming

Each Agency should develop file-naming conventions that are descriptive, consistent, and meaningful. Some applications and computer scripts may not recognize spaces or will process your files differently when using spaces. A best practice is to replace spaces in file names with an underline (_) or hyphen (-). Punctuation, symbols, or special characters (periods, commas, parentheses, ampersands, asterisks, etc.) should be avoided. Some of these symbols are used in operating systems to perform certain tasks, such as to identify folder levels in Microsoft products and Mac operating systems. Periods are used to identify file formats such as .jpg and .doc and should be avoided.

When Naming Files:

- Keep file names short and relevant
- File names should include only combinations of the **characters a-z**, the **numbers 0-9**, and **underscores** (_) and **hyphens** (-)
- File names should not contain spaces
- Use international standard **date notation** (YYYY-MM-DD or YYYYMMDD)
- File names should not include more than one period (.). Usually, this period is generated by the application and precedes the 3 or 4 character extension (.jpeg, .pdf, .doc, etc.)
- Do not use an overly complex naming scheme that is susceptible to human error during manual input, such as "filenameconventionjoesfinalversioneditedfinal.doc"

Folder Naming

Agencies should develop folder and subfolder naming conventions that relate the electronic records that they house to a record series on their retention schedule. Folders are often named for the major functions or activities related to the records. Subfolders are frequently named by year or month. Folder names should be easy to interpret and unique. A folder hierarchy should contain no more than eight levels. Specific requirements for folder and subfolder names are similar to file names:

- File names should include only combinations of the **characters a-z**, the **numbers 0-9**, and **underscores** (_) and **hyphens** (-)
- Use international standard **date notation** (YYYY-MM-DD or YYYYMMDD)
- Folders should not contain a period (.)

Examples: Do This Not That

If using a date, use the format **Year-Month-Day**: YYYY-MM-DD or YYYY-MM or YYYY-YYYY.

This will maintain chronological order.

This

2022-03-04_Agenda

2022-03-24_Minutes

2023-02-01_Agenda

2023-02-01_Minutes

Not This

1 Feb 2023 Agenda

24 March 2022 Agenda

24 March 2022 Minutes

February 1, 2023 Minutes

Include a leading zero for numbers 0-9.

This will maintain the numeric order in the file directory.

This

Office Procedures_v01

Office Procedures_v02

Office Procedures_v03

Not This

Office Procedures v1

Office Procedures v10

Office Procedures v2

Order the elements in a file name according to the way the file will be retrieved.

If records are retrieved according to their date, that element should appear first. If they are retrieved according to their description, that element should appear first.

When deciding the order of the elements, 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.

This

Folder/.../Committee

2024-01-20_Agenda

2024-01-20_Minutes

2024-02-01_Agenda

Not This

Folder/.../Committee

Agenda 1 Feb 2024

Agenda 20 Jan 2024

Minutes 20 Jan 2024

This

Folder/.../Events

Awards Ceremony_2006-06-30

Donor Reception_2005-10-05

Japanese Delegation Visit_2007-02

Not This

Folder/.../Events

2005-10-05 Donor Reception

2006-06-30 Awards Ceremony

2007-02 Japanese Delegation Visit

Avoid descriptive terms regarding format or version (e.g. draft, memo) at the start of file names.

This

Folder/.../Publicity/

Advertising_Draft

Advertising_Final

Budget Report_2005-2006_Final

Budget Report_2006-2007_Draft

Not This

Folder/.../Publicity/

Draft Advertising

Draft Budget Report 2006-2007

Final Advertising

Final Budget Report 2005-2006

The version number should be indicated in its file name by a “v” followed by the version number.

This

Org Chart 2025_v02

Org Chart 2025_v03

Org Chart 2025_v04

Not This

Org Chart 2025

Org Chart 2025 rev

Org Chart 2025 rev2

Questions?

If you have any questions about electronic records management, digitizing and scanning records, eye-readable exemptions, or anything else related to electronic records, please contact us:

Electronic.Records@ky.gov.

References: Sources and Further Reading

Bulletin 2015-04 Appendix B. (2016, August 15). National Archives. <https://www.archives.gov/records-mgmt/bulletins/2015/2015-04-appendix-b.html>

Tip Sheet 6 - Naming Conventions for Electronic Files and Folders. (n.d.). Ipo.info.yorku.ca.

<https://ipo.info.yorku.ca/tool-and-tips/tip-sheet-6-naming-conventions-for-electronic-files-and-folders/>

US National Archives. (2017, August 22). *Best Practices for File Naming*. Records Express.

<https://records-express.blogs.archives.gov/2017/08/22/best-practices-for-file-naming/>