File Naming Conventions

Convention 1: Making file names short and clear
Convention 2: Avoiding repetition and redundancy in file names
Convention 3: How to delimit words
Convention 4: How to use numbers in file names
Convention 5: How to use dates
Convention 6: Using personal names in file names
Convention 7: Words to avoid using at the start of file names
Convention 8: How to order the elements of a file name
Convention 9: Recurring events - Including dates and descriptions
Convention 10: How to name correspondence records
Convention 11: Applying version numbers and draft status

Convention 1: File names should be short, but clear.

File names need to be kept as short as clarity and usability permits. It needs to be kept in mind that clarity is never served by the use of initials, non-standard abbreviations, codes or obscure and impenetrable acronyms that most users will not understand.

Remember too, that in the electronic domain, folder structures tend to contain more folders than that which occur in the paper domain. This can, unless care is exercised, generate an unhelpful complexity within the folder structure itself whereby long pathways are built up through the file scheme resulting in the inadvertent generation of lengthy names.

It is the case that long file names invariably imply long file paths and long URLs always increase the probability of error. Such 'paths' or 'URLs' are 1. more difficult to remember and 2. more difficult to transmit in emails.

For example - email programs, have the ability to automatically turn a Web address into a link. When a Web address has a space however, the program thinks the address has stopped and, as a result, the link effectively 'breaks'

File Naming Conventions - Convention 1

Example:

	Right:	Wrong:
File name:	StaffStudentCtteeRemit.doc	The_staff_and_student_committee_remit.doc
		The staff and student committee remit.doc

Explanation: Some words will add length to a file name without contributing towards its meaning. Words such as "the", "a", and "and" can always be removed from a file name provided the name still remains meaningful within the context of the file directory.

Sometimes words will have standard abbreviations and, where this is the case, use the standard abbreviation. For example "cttee" is a standard abbreviation for "committee".

Convention 2: Always avoid repetition and redundancy in file names and file paths.

Redundancy and repetition always increases the length of file names and file paths, and this is incompatible with the requirement for clarity. A record's name should not therefore contain information that is already present in the folder in which it is filed.

File Naming Conventions - Convention 2

Example:

	Right:	Wrong:
File name:	/…/Council/20051212Minutes.doc	/…/Council/20051212CouncilMinutes.doc
	/…/Procedures/Appeals.doc	/…/Procedures/AppealsProcedures.doc

Explanation: In the first example the folder is called "Council" so it is not necessary to include the word "Council" in the file name because all the records in that folder are Council records.

In the second example the folder is called "Procedures" so it is not necessary to include the word "Procedures" in the file name because all the records in that folder are procedure records.

Convention 3: Always use capital letters to delimit words, never spaces or underscores.

The avoidance of spaces and underscores in file names is important. Some software packages have difficulty recognizing file names with spaces and this can be a particular problem when publishing files to external web sites. For example have you ever noticed the characters " %20 " in a URL? This results when a browser or server converts the space in a URL into a code that is more widely understood by computers.

Again, using underscores and hyphens in your file names increases the length of the name and hence is incompatible with the need to keep file names short and clear.

Where capitalized common acronyms are used in file names, the acronym needs to appear in capitals but the first letter of the following word also needs to be capitalized.

<div align="center">File Naming Conventions - Convention 3</div>

Example:

	Right:	Wrong:
File name:	RiskManagement.doc	Risk_management.doc
	RAEInstructions.html	Risk management.doc
		RAE_instructions.html
		Research Assessment Exercise instructions.html
Explanation:	Removing the space or underscore reduces the length of the file name, and by using capital letters to distinguish the beginning of different words the file name is shorter but still clearly recognizable.	

Convention 4: When including a number in a file name always give it a two-digit number, unless it is a year or another number with more than two digits.

The file directory always displays file names in alphanumeric order. To maintain the numeric order in cases where file names include numbers it is very important to include the zero for numbers 0-9. An advantage of this is that it assists us in more easily retrieving the most recent record number.

<div align="center">File Naming Conventions - Convention 4</div>

Example:

	Right:	Wrong:
File name:	FOIAPolicyV01	FOIAPolicyV1
	FOIAPolicyV02	FOIAPolicyV10
	FOIAPolicyV03	FOIAPolicyV11
	FOIAPolicyV04	FOIAPolicyV2
	FOIAPolicyV05	FOIAPolicyV3
	FOIAPolicyV06	FOIAPolicyV4
	FOIAPolicyV07	FOIAPolicyV5
	FOIAPolicyV08	FOIAPolicyV6
	FOIAPolicyV09	FOIAPolicyV7
	FOIAPolicyV10	FOIAPolicyV8
	FOIAPolicyV11	FOIAPolicyV9

Explanation: The example shows the successive versions of a Freedom of Information Policy document. By including two-digit numbers the latest version will always appear at the bottom of the list.

Convention 5: If using a date in a file name always state the date in a 'back to front' format , and *always* use four digit years, two digit months and two digit days: eg: YYYYMMDD or YYYYMM or YYYY or YYYY-YYYY.

The 'back to front' format means the chronological order of the records is maintained in the file directory, and this assists us when trying to retrieve the latest dated record.

File Naming Conventions - Convention 5

Example:

	Right:	Wrong:
File name:	20050324Agenda.doc	1Feb2006Agenda.doc
	20050324Minutes.doc	1Feb2006Minutes.doc
	20050324PaperA.doc	24March2005Agenda.doc
	20060201Agenda.doc	24March2005Minutes.doc
	20060201Minutes.doc	24March2005PaperA.doc

Explanation: The example shows the minutes and papers of a committee. By stating the year 'back to front' the minutes and papers from the most recent meeting appear at the bottom of the directory list.

Convention 6: When including a personal name in a file name always give the surname first followed by the initials.

When a record is a piece of correspondence it may be appropriate to include within the file name the name of an individual, It will not however be appropriate to name records after the record owner or creator. (ie do not name records after yourself) When it is appropriate to include a personal name it should be given as the surname name followed by the initials.

<div align="center">File Naming Conventions - Convention 6</div>

Example:

	Right:	Wrong:
File name:	SmithJB20051212.doc	JoeBSmith20051212.doc

Explanation:This is a letter to Mr Joe B Smith. By putting the surname first the file directory will display the file in the S's. (ie where you would expect to find a letter to Mr Smith)

Convention 7: Avoid using words like 'draft', 'letter' or 'memo' at the start of file names.

Using such words at the start of file names, means all such records will appear together in the file directory, and this will make it much more difficult to retrieve the records you're looking for.

File Naming Conventions - Convention 7

Example:

	Right:	Wrong:
File name:	/…/Publicity/	/…/Publicity/
	AdvertisingV01Draft.doc	DraftAdvertising.doc
	AdvertisingV05Final.doc	DraftBudgetReport2004-
	BudgetReport2003-	2005.doc
	2004V20Final.doc	FinalAdvertising.doc
	BudgetReport2004-	FinalBudgetReport2003-
	2005V15Draft.doc	2004.doc
	GrantP20040312.doc	LetterJBSmith.doc
	RaggeT20040412.doc	LetterPGrant.doc
	RichmondV20050729.doc	MemoVRichmond.doc
	SmithJB20031205.doc	MemoTRagge.doc

Explanation: An electronic file directory lists files in alphanumeric order. What this means is that all records with file names starting "Draft" will be listed together and this will not be generally helpful when retrieving files.

In this example the assumption is made that it will nearly always be more useful to find the draft budget report next to the previous year's budget, rather than next to an unrelated draft record.

Convention 8: Order the elements in a file name in the most appropriate way to retrieve the record.

The elements to be included in a file name should be ordered according to the way in which the record will be retrieved during the course of day to day business, how this is implemented will invariably depend on the way you work.

For example, if the records are usually retrieved according to their date then the date element should appear first. If, on the other hand, the records are retrieved according to their description, then the description element should be listed first.

File Naming Conventions - Convention 8

Example:

	Right:	Wrong:
File name:	/…/StaffStudentCttee/	/…/StaffStudentCttee/
	20040630Agenda.doc	Agenda 1Feb2005.doc
	20040630Minutes.doc	Agenda 20Jan2005.doc
	20050120Agenda.doc	Agenda 30June2004.doc
	20050120Minutes.doc	Minutes 1Feb2005.doc
	20050201Agenda.doc	Minutes 20Jan2005.doc
	20050201Minutes.doc	Minutes 30June2004.doc
	20050201PaperA.doc	PaperA 1Feb2005.doc
	20050201PaperB.doc	PaperB 1Feb2005.doc
	/…/Events/	/…/Events/
	AlumniSocietyParty20051201.doc	20051201AlumniSocietyParty.do
	FellowshipAward20051206.doc	c 20051206FellowshipAward.doc
	SenateDinner20051212.doc	20051212SenateDinner.doc

Explanation: The first example shows minutes and agenda of a Staff Student Committee. The minutes and papers of the meetings are likely to be retrieved on the basis of the date of the meeting, hence it is best to have the date at the start of the file name. If not then all of the Agendas will come at the top of the directory list, followed by all of the minutes, and then by all of the papers.

The second example shows the file names of the files in the Events folder. Events are likely to be retrieved by the name of the event rather than the date of the event, hence more useful to have that element first.

Convention 9: The names of records relating to recurring events need to include the date and description of the event, unless the inclusion of either of these elements would constitute repetition or redundancy. (see convention 2)

The names of records relating to recurring events (For example, minutes and papers of meetings, regular reports, event management and budget planning documents) need to include the date and the event name/description in order for the record to be identified and retrieved. When deciding the order of the elements (date or event) consider convention 8.

The event description can be the title of the event or the subject of the event. Whatever the description used always ensure that it is short, clear and easily recognizable.

<div align="center">File Naming Conventions - Convention 9</div>

Example:

	Right:	Wrong:
File name:	/…/Statistics/	/…/Statistics/
	20050615PGAdmissionStats.doc	PGAdmissionStats20050615.doc
	20051215PGAdmissionStats.doc	PGAdmissionStats20051215.doc
	/…/Planning/	/…/Planning/
	Budget2004-2005V11.xls	2004-2005BudgetV11.xls
	Budget2005-2006V01Draft.xls	2005-2006BudgetV01Draft.xls

Explanation: The first example shows the Post Graduate Admissions Statistic reports which are created on a monthly basis. As the reports recur regularly and are retrieved by date it is appropriate for the date to be given first. But remember convention 2; it may be appropriate for the folder itself to be called 'PGAdmissionStats' and in which case the file name needs only to include the date.

The second example shows annual budget reports. Because the reports are annual and likely to be retrieved by the description rather than the date, it is more appropriate for the description element to come first. But again remember convention 2; if it is sufficient for a folder itself to be called "Planning2004-2005", then the file name only needs to include a description.

Convention 10: The file names of correspondence need to include the name of the correspondent, an indication of the subject, the date of the correspondence and whether it is incoming or outgoing correspondence, except of course where the inclusion of any of these elements would constitute repetition and/or redundancy .

Hence the file names of correspondence should include the following elements:

- Name of correspondent. (This is either the name of the person who sent you the correspondence or the name of the person to whom you sent the correspondence;
- A description of the subject, provided it is not already stated in the folder title;
- The date of the correspondence;
- If it is received correspondence, then include the standard abbreviation 'rcvd'.

When deciding the order of the elements consider convention 8, but the above order will generally be appropriate for most cases.

It is the sender's responsibility for filing correspondence. (including any attachments or enclosures) In the case of correspondence which originates from outside the University it is the prime addressee who has the responsibility for filing the correspondence. (ie. not those to whom the correspondence has been cc'd)

Guidance on managing email as a record can be found at
http://www.ncl.ed.ac.uk/rm/EmailManagement.htm.

File Naming Conventions - Convention 10

Example:

	Right:	Wrong:
File name:	/…/Complaints/	/…/Complaints/
	SmithM20051212.doc	EmailFromMikeSmith14Dec05.txt
	SmithM20051214rcvd.doc	LetterFromMarionJones11Dec05.doc
	SmithM20060103.doc	LetterToMarionJones12Dec05.doc
	JonesM20051211rcvd.txt	LetterToMikeSmith15Feb05.doc
	JonesM20051212.doc	LetterToMikeSmith03Jan06.doc
	/…/Appeals/	/…/Correspondence/
	PaineE20050715rcvd.doc	EvelynPaine15Jul05.doc
	PaineE20050820.doc	EvelynPaine20Aug05.doc
	PaineE20050905rcvd.doc	EvelynPaine5Sep05.doc

Explanation: It is will always be highly likely that correspondence will be retrieved on the basis of the name of the correspondent.

The first example shows incoming and outgoing correspondence concerning complaints. All the correspondence with Mr Mike Smith is listed together and in chronological order. It is also easy to see incoming correspondence as this is indicated by the abbreviation 'rcvd' - the same rules have been applied in respect of the correspondence with Mrs Marion Jones. Note here that it is not

necessary to include the activity description in the file name because it is already given in the folder name. (ie complaints)

The second example shows incoming and outgoing correspondence with Mrs Evelyn Paine in respect of an appeal. Again the correspondence is listed in chronological order, it is easy to see what the correspondence is about, who it is with and whether it is incoming or outgoing. And again it is not necessary to include a subject description in the file name because it is already given in the folder name. (ie Appeals) Note that in the 'wrong' column, folders should never be given very general names such as here 'correspondence'.

Convention 11: The version number of a record should be indicated in its file name by the inclusion of the letter 'V' followed by the version number and, if applicable, 'Draft' or 'Final'.

It is always important to differentiate between various drafts of a document by giving each draft its own number. If a version number is applicable, it should always appear in the file name of the record so that the most recent version can be readily identified.

File Naming Conventions - Convention 11

Example:

	Right:	Wrong:
File name:	/.../BusinessPlan/	/.../BusinessPlan/
	2004-2005V03Draft.htm	BusinessPlan0405_draftv3.htm
	2004-2005V04Final.htm	BusinessPlan0405_finalv4.htm

Explanation: The example shows two versions of the University Business Plan for 2004-2005, version 3 is the draft version and version 4 is the final version. In order for the versions to be listed in numeric order, years are given in four-digit format and the version number is given with two digits.