# STANDARD NAMING CONVENTIONS FOR ELECTRONIC RECORDS

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## Standard naming conventions for electronic records

When we save new electronic records we are asked to give them a title. This is the title which will be listed in the file directory. Naming records consistently and according to agreed conventions facilitates the storage and retrieval of records. Colleagues are therefore asked to follow the standard naming conventions set out in this document.

**Rules**

1. Keep file names short, but meaningful.

2. Avoid unnecessary repetition and redundancy in file names and file paths.

3. Use capital letters to differentiate between words, not spaces or underscores.

4. When including a number in a file name always give it as a two-digit number, i.e. 01-99, unless it is a year.

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

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

7. Avoid using common words such as 'draft' or 'letter' at the start of file names.

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

9. The file names of records relating to recurring events should include the date and a description of the event, except where the inclusion of any of either of these elements would be incompatible with rule 2.

10. The file names of correspondence should 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 where the inclusion of any of these elements would be incompatible with rule 2.

11. The file name of an email attachment should include the name of the correspondent, an indication of the subject, the date of the correspondence, whether it is incoming or outgoing correspondence, 'attch', and the attachment number, except where the inclusion of any of these elements would be incompatible with rule 2.

12. The version number of a record should be indicated in its file name by the inclusion of 'V' followed by a two digit number and, where applicable, 'Draft'.

Each of these rules is explained in further detail with explained examples in the remainder of this document.

**Anne Thompson**
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**Rule 1: Keep file names short, but meaningful**

1. File names should be kept as short as possible whilst also being meaningful. Long file names mean long file paths and long URLs which increase the likelihood of error, are more difficult to remember and recognise, and are more difficult to transmit in emails as they often 'break'. However, avoid using initials, abbreviations and codes that are not commonly understood.

| **Rule 1 Example** | | |
|---|---|---|
| **File name:** | ✓<br>SausageMashCtteeRemit.doc | ✘<br>The_sausage_and_mash_committee_remit.doc |
| **Explanation:** | Some words add length to a file name but do not contribute towards the meaning, for example words like "the", "a", and "and". Where the remaining file name is still meaningful within the context of the file directory these elements can be removed. Sometimes words have standard abbreviations, e.g. "cttee" is a standard abbreviation for "committee"; where this is the case the standard abbreviation can be used. | |

**Rule 2: Avoid unnecessary repetition and redundancy in file names and file paths.**

2. Avoid redundancy in file names and file paths. Unnecessary repetition increases the length of file names and file paths, which is incompatible with rule 1.

| **Rule 2 Example** | | |
|---|---|---|
| **File name:** | ✓<br>/…/Court/20041030Minutes.doc<br><br>/…/Procedures/Appeals.doc | ✘<br>/…/Court/20041030CourtMinutes.doc<br><br>/…/Procedures/AppealsProcedures.doc |
| **Explanation:** | In the first example the folder is called "Court" so it is not necessary to include the word "Court" in the file name because all the records in that folder are Court records.<br><br>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. | |

**Rule 3: Use capital letters to differentiate between words, not spaces or underscores.**

3. Avoid using spaces and underscores in file names. Some software packages have difficulty recognising file names with spaces, this can be a particular difficulty for files when they are published on an external website, so it is best to avoid using spaces. Using underscores in your file names increases the length, which is incompatible with rule 1.

| **Rule 3 Example** | | |
|---|---|---|
| **File name:** | ✓<br>RiskManagement.doc | ✘<br>Risk_management.doc<br>Risk management.doc |
| **Explanation:** | Removing the space or underscore reduces the length of the file name, but by using capital letters to differentiate between the words the file name is still readily recognisable. | |

**Rule 4: When including a number in a file name always give it as a two-digit number, unless it is a year.**

4. The file directory displays file names in alphanumeric order. To maintain the numeric order when file names include numbers it is important to include the zero for numbers 0-9. This helps to retrieve the latest record number.

| **Rule 4 Example** | | |
|---|---|---|
| **File name:** | ✓<br>OfficeProceduresV01<br>OfficeProceduresV02<br>OfficeProceduresV03<br>OfficeProceduresV04<br>OfficeProceduresV05<br>OfficeProceduresV06<br>OfficeProceduresV07<br>OfficeProceduresV08<br>OfficeProceduresV09<br>OfficeProceduresV10<br>OfficeProceduresV11<br><br>(Ordered alphanumerically as the files would be in the directory list) | ✘<br>OfficeProceduresV1<br>OfficeProceduresV10<br>OfficeProceduresV11<br>OfficeProceduresV2<br>OfficeProceduresV3<br>OfficeProceduresV4<br>OfficeProceduresV5<br>OfficeProceduresV6<br>OfficeProceduresV7<br>OfficeProceduresV8<br>OfficeProceduresV9<br><br>(Ordered alphanumerically as the files would be in the directory list) |
| **Explanation:** | This example shows the successive versions of an office procedures document. If two-digit numbers are used the latest version will always be at the bottom of the list. | |

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

5. Dates should always be presented 'back to front', that is with the year first (always given as a four digit number), followed by the month (always given as a two digit number), and the day (always given as a two digit number). Giving the dates back to front means that the chronological order of the records is maintained when the file names are listed in the file directory. This helps when trying to retrieve the latest dated record.

| **Rule 5 Example** | | |
|---|---|---|
| **File name:** | ✓<br>20040324Agenda.doc<br>20040324Minutes.doc<br>20040324PaperA.doc<br>20050201Agenda.doc<br>20050201Minutes.doc<br><br>(Ordered alphanumerically as the files would be in the directory list) | ✘<br>1Feb2005Agenda.doc<br>1Feb2005Minutes.doc<br>24March2004Agenda.doc<br>24March2004Minutes.doc<br>24March2004PaperA.doc<br><br>(Ordered alphanumerically as the files would be in the directory list) |
| **Explanation:** | This 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. | |

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

6. It may be appropriate to include within a file name the name of an individual, usually when the record is a piece of correspondence. However, it will not usually be appropriate to name records after the record owner or creator, i.e. avoid naming records after yourself. When it is appropriate to include a personal name it should be given as surname first followed by initials as it is most likely that the record will be retrieved according to the surname of the individual.

| **Rule 6 Example** | | |
|---|---|---|
| **File name:** | ✓<br>BrownSR20041201.doc | ✘<br>SamRBrown20041201.doc |
| **Explanation:** | This is a letter to Mr Samuel R Brown. By putting the surname first the file directory will display this file next to the b's, which is where you would expect to find a letter to Mr Brown. | |

**Rule 7: Avoid using common words such as 'draft' or 'letter' at the start of file names.**

7. Avoid using common words such as 'draft' or 'letter' at the start of file names, or all of those records will appear together in the file directory, making it more difficult to retrieve the records you are looking for.

| **Rule 7 Example** | | |
|---|---|---|
| **File name:** | ✓<br>/…/Publicity/<br>AdvertisingV01Draft.doc<br>AdvertisingV05Final.doc<br>BudgetReport2002-2003V20Final.doc<br>BudgetReport2003-2004V15Draft.doc<br>GrantS20040312.doc<br>OfficeProceduresV10Draft.doc<br>ThomasA20031205.doc<br><br>(Ordered alphanumerically as the files would be in the directory list) | ✘<br>/…/Publicity/<br>DraftAdvertising.doc<br>DraftBudgetReport2003-2004.doc<br>DraftOfficeProcedures.doc<br>FinalAdvertising.doc<br>FinalBudgetReport2002-2003.doc<br>LetterAThomas.doc<br>LetterSGrant.doc<br><br>(Ordered alphanumerically as the files would be in the directory list) |
| **Explanation:** | The file directory will list files in alphanumeric order. This means that all records with file names starting "Draft" will be listed together. When retrieving files it will be more useful to find the draft budget report next to the previous year's budget, rather than next to an unrelated draft record. | |

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

8. The elements to be included in a file name should be ordered according to the way in which the record will be retrieved. If the records are retrieved according to their date, the date element should appear first. If the records are retrieved according to their description, the description element should appear first.

| **Rule 8 Example** | | |
|---|---|---|
| **File name:** | ✓<br>/…/SausageCttee/<br>20040630Agenda.doc<br>20040630Minutes.doc<br>20050120Agenda.doc<br>20050120Minutes.doc<br>20050201Agenda.doc<br>20050201Minutes.doc<br><br>/…/Events/<br>GardenParty20040630.doc<br>ProcurementAward20040905.doc<br>WeddingDinner20030304.doc<br><br>(Ordered alphabetically as the files would be in the directory list) | ✘<br>/…/SausageCttee/<br>Agenda1Feb2005.doc<br>Agenda20Jan2005.doc<br>Agenda30June2004.doc<br>Minutes1Feb2005.doc<br>Minutes20Jan2005.doc<br>Minutes30June2004.doc<br><br>/…/Events/<br>20030304WeddingDinner.doc<br>20040630GardenParty.doc<br>20040905ProcurementAward.doc<br><br>(Ordered alphabetically as the files would be in the directory list) |

| | |
|---|---|
| **Explanation:** | The first example shows minutes and agenda of the Sausage Committee. Minutes and papers of a meeting are likely to be retrieved on the basis of the date of the meeting, it is therefore best to have the date at the start of the file name, otherwise all the Agendas will come at the top of the directory list, followed by all of the minutes, and then by the papers.<br><br>The second example shows the file names of the files in the Events folder. Because events are likely to be retrieved by the name of the event rather than the date of the event, it is most useful to have that element first. |

**Rule 9: The file names of records relating to recurring events should include the date and a description of the event, except where the inclusion of either of these elements would be incompatible with rule 2.**

9. The file names of records relating to recurring events (e.g. meeting minutes and papers, weekly, monthly or annual reports, event management and budget planning documents) should include both the date and the event name or event description so that the record can be identified and retrieved.

10. When deciding the order of the elements consider rule 8. 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, but regularly recurring.

| **Rule 9 Example** | | |
|---|---|---|
| | ✓ | ✘ |
| **File name:** | /…/Website/<br>20040301WebStats.doc<br>20040401WebStats.doc<br><br>/…/Planning/<br>Budget2003-2004V10.xls<br>Budget2004-2005V01Draft.xls<br><br>(Ordered alphanumerically as the files would be in the directory list) | /…/Website/<br>WebStats20040301.doc<br>WebStats20040401.doc<br><br>/…/Planning/<br>2003-2004BudgetV10.xls<br>2004-2005BudgetV01Draft.xls<br><br>(Ordered alphanumerically as the files would be in the directory list) |
| **Explanation:** | The first example shows the website statistic reports which are created on a monthly basis. Because the reports recur frequently and are retrieved by date it is most appropriate that the date is given first. Also remember rule 2; in some cases it may be appropriate for the folder to be called “WebStats”, in which case the file names only need to include the date. For another example see the first rule 8 example.<br><br>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 likely that it will be most appropriate for the description element to come first. Also remember rule 2; in some cases it may be appropriate for the folder to be called “Planning2003-2004”, in which case the file names only need to include a description. For another example see the second rule 8 example. | |

**Rule 10: The file names of correspondence should 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 where the inclusion of any of these elements would be incompatible with rule 2.**

11. The file names of correspondence should include the following elements so that the record can be easily identified and retrieved:
    - Name of correspondent, that is the either the name of the person who sent you the letter/email/memo or the name of the person to whom you sent the letter/email/memo
    - Subject description, where it is not given in the folder title
    - Date of letter/email/memo
    - If incoming correspondence, include 'rcvd'

12. When deciding the order of the elements consider rule 8. It will usually be appropriate to order the elements in the same order in which they are listed above, as it is likely that correspondence will be retrieved on the basis of the correspondent. Also consider rule 2; a description of the subject may already be given in the folder name.

13. The sender is responsible for filing correspondence and any attachments or enclosures, except when the correspondence originates from outside the University, when the first named recipient is responsible for filing the correspondence and any attachments or enclosures.

| **Rule 10 Example** | | |
|---|---|---|
| | ✓ | ✘ |
| **File name:** | /…/Complaints/<br>BloggsJ20031205.doc<br>BloggsJ20040105rcvd.doc<br>BloggsJ20040220.doc<br>ThomasH20030610rcvd.txt<br>ThomasH20030710.doc<br><br>/…/<br>EvansWAppeal20040715rcvd.doc<br>EvansWAppeal20040820.doc<br>EvansWAppeal20040905rcvd.doc<br><br>(Ordered alphanumerically as the files would be in the directory list) | /…/Complaints/<br>EmailFromHelenThomas10Jun03.txt<br>LetterFromJoeBloggs5Jan04.doc<br>LetterToHelenThomas10Jul03.doc<br>LetterToJoeBloggs20Feb04.doc<br>LetterToJoeBloggs5Dec03.doc<br><br>/…/Correspondence/<br>WilliamEvans15Jul04.doc<br>WilliamEvans20Aug04.doc<br>WilliamEvans5Sep04.doc<br><br>(Ordered alphanumerically as the files would be in the directory list) |

| | |
|---|---|
| **Explanation:** | The first example shows some incoming and outgoing correspondence concerning complaints. All the correspondence with Mr Joe Bloggs appears together in chronological order and it is easy to pick out the incoming correspondence because it is indicated by 'rcvd'. The same is true of the correspondence with Miss Helen Thomas. In this example it is not necessary to include an indication of the subject in the file name because it is given in the folder name.<br><br>The second example shows some incoming and outgoing correspondence with Mr William Evans regarding an appeal. All 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 correspondence. In reality it is likely that it will not necessary to include an indication of the subject matter in the file name because the folder title would be likely to be 'Appeals'. It is not recommended to give folders very general names such as 'correspondence'. |

**Rule 11: The file name of an email attachment should include the name of the correspondent, an indication of the subject, the date of the correspondence, whether it is incoming or outgoing correspondence, 'attch', and the attachment number, except where the inclusion of any of these elements would be incompatible with rule 2.**

14. When saving an email that has an attachment, the email and the attachment should be saved separately but the file names should provide a link.

15. The file names of attachments should include the following elements so that the context of the record is maintained and so that the record can be easily identified and retrieved:
    - Name of correspondent
    - Subject description
    - Date of letter/email/memo
    - If incoming correspondence, include 'rcvd'
    - 'attch'
    - [2 digit number] of [2 digit number].

16. When deciding the order of the elements consider rule 8. It will usually be appropriate to order the elements in the same order in which they are listed above, as it is likely that the attachment will be retrieved according to the correspondent. Also consider rule 2; a description of the subject may already be given in the folder name.

17. The sender is responsible for filing correspondence and any attachments, except when the correspondence originates from outside the University, when the first named recipient is responsible for filing the correspondence and any attachments.

| **Rule 11 Example** | | |
|---|---|---|
| **File name:** | ✓<br>/…/Complaints/<br>BloggsJ20031205.txt<br>BloggsJ20031205attch01of02.pdf<br>BloggsJ20031205attch02of02.pdf<br>BloggsJ20040105rcvd.doc<br>BloggsJ20040220.doc<br>ThomasH20030610rcvd.txt<br>ThomasH20030610rcvdattch01of01.doc<br>ThomasH20030710.doc<br><br>(Ordered alphanumerically as the files would be in the directory list) | ✘<br>/…/Complaints/<br>AttachmentFromHThomas10Jun03.doc<br>Attachment1SentToJBloggs.pdf<br>Attachment2SentToJBloggs.pdf<br>EmailFromHelenThomas10Jun03.txt<br>EmailToJoeBloggs5Dec03.txt<br>LetterFromJoeBloggs5Jan04.doc<br>LetterToHelenThomas10Jul03.doc<br>LetterToJoeBloggs20Feb04.doc<br><br>(Ordered alphanumerically as the files would be in the directory list) |
| **Explanation:** | This example shows the incoming and outgoing correspondence concerning complaints. The email sent to Mr Joe Bloggs on 5 December 2003 included two attachments. The attachments are listed below the email and are numbered so that it is easy to see that there were two attachments and both of them are listed. This folder also includes an email from Miss Helen Thomas on 10 June 2003, which included one attachment. | |

**Rule 12: The version number of a record should be indicated in its file name by the inclusion of 'V' followed by a two digit number and, where applicable, 'Draft' or 'Final'.**

18. Some records go through a number of versions, for example they start out as working drafts, become consultation drafts and finish with a final draft, which may then be reviewed and updated at a later date. It is important to be able to differentiate between these various drafts by giving them each their own number.

19. Where a version number is applicable, it should always appear in the file name of the record so that the most recent version can be easily identified and retrieved.

| **Rule 12 Example** | | |
|---|---|---|
| **File name:** | ✓<br>IEAM2003-2004V03Draft.htm<br>IEAM2003-2004V04Final.htm<br><br>OrgHier2002V02.xls<br>OrgHier2002V03.xls<br>OrgHier2002V04.xls | ✘<br>Iemodel0304_draftv3.htm<br>Iemodle0304_finalv4htm<br><br>Org_Hier_2002_v2.xls<br>Org_Hier_2002_v3.xls<br>Org_Hier_2002_v4.xls |

| | |
|---|---|
| **Explanation:** | The first example shows two versions of the income and expenditure attribution model for 2003-2004, version 3 is a draft version and version 4 is the final version. The common abbreviation for the model is used. The covering years are given in four-digit format. The version number is given with two digits so that the versions will appear in numeric order.<br><br>The second example shows a number of versions of the organisational hierarchy for 2002. In this case none of the versions are marked as draft or final because the nature of the record means that 'draft' and 'final' are not applicable. |

Based on office standards produced by an MIS development unit, July 2002, and published by JISC infoNet at: http://www.jiscinfonet.ac.uk/InfoKits/infokit-related-files/example-rm-applied, and on *Good practice in managing electronic documents using Office 97 on a local area network* published by The National Archives at: http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/electronicrecords/advice/default.htm#toolkits.