

NAMING COMPUTER FILES

USING CONSISTENT FILE NAMES TO MAKE WORK EASIER

Now that cloud computing, giant hard drives, flash drives, and nearly-unlimited email storage have become the norm, it's more important than ever before to consider the naming of every computer file. The reasons you should consider consistent and simple file naming for each file include:

1. Consistent naming makes it easy to find documents later.
2. Simple naming prevents computers from malfunctioning due to bad file names.
3. Consistent **and** simple naming means that #1 and #2 will apply no matter who created the file or who is using the file.

TIPS FOR NAMING FILES CONSISTENTLY, SIMPLY, AND CORRECTLY

1. **Choose a file name that means something to you.** That might sound too obvious, but it's sometimes surprising how often students and knowledge workers use filenames like "12857.doc" or "untitled2.docx" for assignments and reports. This can cause confusion if you want to open the document later, and can also confuse anyone who might receive the file from you. In addition, when using public computer labs, having a unique file name that you can recognize as your own makes it easy to know which file is yours.
2. **Think about how you might "future-proof" your files.** If you write a paper today that you want for a portfolio next year, will you be able to find it easily? If you made a report for your job that you'll need at the end of the quarter, how will you find it? Something like "Paper1" or "Quarter Report" won't really make it easy to find something later. Instead, try something like "Water-Quality-Final-Essay-Fall-2012" or "June2013-Quarterly-Report."
3. **Include the date in a consistent way** to make it easier to find files later. There are two schools of thought on this. One is to use the year first, in a YYYY-MM-DD format. So, a quarterly report created on September 5, 2012 would read as Quarterly-report-2001-09-05.doc." Another is to write dates as MMDDYY, where this same file might be 090501-QuarterlyReport.doc." Writing the dates this way makes it quite easy to sort the documents in your folder in order to find things. It also is another form of "future-proofing"-if you work at the same job (or are going to school!) for four years, it will be much easier to search for "091312-Policies" rather than "Policies This Year" or something like that.
4. **Avoid spaces or special characters.** If you have a keen eye, you may have noticed that none of the example filenames so far use any special characters



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(like #, @, %, etc.). Sometimes, adding special characters (such as “Homework #1.rtf”) or spaces (such as “Project 1.doc”) can make your computer very angry. And by angry, I mean “refuse to open your file—so it’s actually you who might get angry! ☺ This is less of a problem now than it was 10–15 years ago, but it can still be a problem. To avoid this, simply use an underscore (“Project_1.doc”) or a hyphen (“Project-1.doc”) in order to make it easy for both you and your computer to read.

DOS AND DON’TS

Here are some example “Don’ts,” followed by the corrections that make them into “Dos!”

Don’t write file names like this

Homework #1.doc

Final-Paper.docx

99 % paper version #3.rtf

Make those files look more like this

062713-Homework-1.doc

Final-Eng123-paper-20130402.docx

050512-99-percent-paper-v3.rtf

CHECK OUT HOW AWESOME YOUR FILES CAN LOOK WHEN YOU FOLLOW THESE RULES

 062811--revisions--for--print.gdoc	Jul 7, 2011 3:52 PM
 070212a--Timesheet	Jul 2, 2012 2:47 PM
 070212b--Timesheet	Jul 2, 2012 2:46 PM
 070410--operational--faith.gdoc	Jul 5, 2010 5:16 PM
 070611--resign.gdoc	Jul 6, 2011 12:01 PM
 070711--revisions--fixed.doc.gdoc	Sep 9, 2011 12:47 PM
 070711--revisions--fixed.gdoc	Jul 7, 2011 9:27 PM
 071110--operational--faith.gdoc	Jul 11, 2010 11:21 PM
 071310--houndsonnet.gdoc	Jul 14, 2010 12:22 AM
 071310--movelikecats.gdoc	Jul 14, 2010 12:57 AM
 071310--to--dad.gdoc	Sep 7, 2010 10:26 PM
 071713--afraidofbars.gdoc	Jul 17, 2010 1:04 PM
 071812--Timesheet	Jul 18, 2012 3:31 PM
 081010--afraidofbars.gdoc	Aug 10, 2010 11:59 PM
 081111--cover--letter--bullets.doc.gdoc	Aug 11, 2011 7:20 PM
 081111--cover--letter--bullets.pdf	Aug 11, 2011 7:20 PM
 090710--afraidofbars.gdoc	Sep 7, 2010 10:08 PM
 090710--houndsonnet-v2.gdoc	Sep 7, 2010 10:31 PM
 090710--meeteachotherlikecats-v2.gdoc	Sep 7, 2010 10:33 PM
 090710--to--dad.gdoc	Sep 8, 2010 3:17 PM

FURTHER READING

For a great discussion of file naming conventions, check this link: <http://getitdone.quickanddirtytips.com/file-naming-conventions.aspx>