

Appendix E: File Naming Conventions Guidelines for Electronic Records at The University of Akron

In order to properly manage and maintain electronic records and to ensure that they are accessible when needed, it is recommended that each office at The University of Akron that creates or receives electronic records set up appropriate file structures with file naming conventions and be consistent in following the file schema and naming conventions. A file naming convention is defined as “a framework for naming your files in a way that describes what they contain and how they relate to other files” (Harvard Medical School “File Naming Conventions”). Some offices may find it helpful to create a working group to review the types of electronic records in their office and develop and document appropriate naming conventions. The guidelines in this document, which are based on national standards and best practices, are highly recommended when naming electronic files and folders to ensure the proper management of the University’s electronic records and to facilitate retrieval, disposition, and archiving. However, every rule may not apply to every office or every situation at the University and therefore some modifications may need to be made when applying these general guidelines to find file naming practices that work best in those specific environments or situations.

Electronic records are defined as “data or information that has been captured and fixed for storage and manipulation in an automated system that requires the use of the system to render it intelligible by a person” (SAA *Dictionary of Archives Terminology*). While the term electronic record most often refers to records created in electronic format (i.e. born digital), it can also refer to scans or digital surrogates of hard copy (i.e. analog) records. Examples of electronic records include documents, spreadsheets, databases, images, video, and audio, as well as other file types. While the examples in these guidelines focus primarily on documents, the standards outlined below apply to all file formats.

The guidelines found here were based on the following documents:

- National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) “Best Practices for File Naming” (<https://records-express.blogs.archives.gov/2017/08/22/best-practices-for-file-naming/>)
- The University of Akron Archives and Special Collections “Naming Conventions for Files and Folders in SharePoint”
- The Ohio State University “File Naming Best Practices Tip Sheet”
- North Carolina Department of Natural and Cultural Resources “Best Practices for File Naming” (<https://files.nc.gov/dncr-archives/documents/files/filenaming.pdf>)
- Harvard Medical School “File Naming Conventions” (<https://datamanagement.hms.harvard.edu/collect/file-naming-conventions>)

Since most offices utilize a network server such as SharePoint or OneDrive to store files so that they are accessible from multiple locations by various users, it is important that file names (as well as folder structures) are clear to everyone in the

department in which the file was created and will be used and makes sense to more than just the files creator, as well as for future users, including the University Records Manager and University Archivist. As a general rule of thumb, electronic file and folder names in University shared drives should be clear and concise, yet include sufficient description for the file to stand on its own, independent of where it is stored. General elements of a file name include:

- Who/what does it represent?
 - This should be the Group, College/Department, Unit, Person, Case/Project that created the file or that the file relates to or documents
 - Examples include Executive Committee, University Council, AAUP, Department Heads, School of Communications, Department of History, etc.
- What is it?
 - This should be the document type, not file format
 - Examples include Minutes, Agenda, Annual Report, Newsletter, Photographs, etc.
- When?:
 - This is the date of what is represented
 - Examples include October 21, 2019, January 2022, Fall 2021, etc.
- Example: Exec_Comm_Minutes_2019_10_21
 [Who] [What] [When]

In addition, electronic file names should adhere to the following conventions:

- Alphanumeric name with no dashes or special characters. In other words, use numbers and/or letters but not characters such as symbols (: * ? < > { } [] ; ! @ # & % \$), spaces, or periods that could result in errors or cause complications across operating platforms
- Unique names that are consistently structured
- Not tied to anything that changes over time or location
- Limit character length to no more than 25-35 characters, if possible, but do not use too many abbreviations that others will not understand
- Use underscores to separate words and in place of dashes and spaces. However, dashes are now considered acceptable due to how underscores look in a link
- Capitalize the first letter in each word for readability; otherwise use lowercase letters. For example, "File_Name_Convention_001.doc"
- Not use an overly complex or lengthy naming scheme that is susceptible to human error during manual input, such as "filenameconventionjoesfinalversioneditedfinal.doc"
- Use leading zeros to facilitate sorting in numerical order if following a numeric scheme by using consecutive numbers in this format (0001, 0002, 0003).
- Similarly, use leading zero for version notation: v01, v02 instead of v1, v2
- Use international standard date notation (YYYY_MM_DD). For instance, 2021_09_24 for September 24, 2021. Alternatively, when a day is not available use the month or term, such as 2021_09 or 2021_Fall

- Place date at end of file name for easier sorting
- Contain a file format extension. Use a period followed by a file extension (for example, .doc, .tif, .jpg, .gif, .pdf, .wav, .mpg)
- Consistency is truly key: spelling, abbreviations, order, date format/placement