

Information about the audio file

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Introduction

Welcome to this audio podcast from the Archives and Records Management Department of Simon Fraser University.

The purpose of this podcast is to answer frequently asked questions from records creators around the university about records management. Every employee of the University is responsible for creating records in the course of their work, and we want to answer your questions quickly so that you know all you need to know to create great records that can be used today, tomorrow, and maybe even 50 years in the future.

[music of SFU Pipe Band playing bagpipes during the 1969 SFU Convocation ceremony]

Episode Introduction

This is episode three: how to name digital files.

In this episode we'll look at the basics of naming conventions. We'll discuss what should be put in every file title, and what should NEVER be put in a file title.

In this podcast, I'll talk about something that you probably do everyday - you turn on your computer, create a file, and then name the file. Everyone does this all the time.

If you create a Word document, the computer demands that you name the file as soon as you press "Save". Same thing with Excel and Powerpoint, any adobe product. In fact, in order to save almost any digital file, you have to name it.

That right there tells you that the file name is important to the computer. The computer needs that information in order to find the file again. And you need the file name, too. With a good file name, you can browse files more quickly, and the search function will work better, as well.



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During this podcast, I'll introduce you to the idea of naming conventions. A naming convention is a consistent way to name your digital files.

After this short podcast, you will be able to name your own digital files better - knowing both what you should NOT do - as well as what you should include - with every file name that you create.

For naming conventions, there are two big buckets of things to know:

- 1) Things to NOT do
- 2) Things you can or should do

First we are talking about the 3 things that you should NOT do when you name a file.

1. DON'T use periods or slashes or symbols in a file name.

No "at" sign or hash tag, percentage, or blank or spaces. If you put these in a file name, it can cause problems for the computer and it can make it hard or impossible to find the file later. Keep file names strictly alphanumeric. Think about the main keys on your computer keyboard and use those.

Basically, keep out anything that you've been trained to put into a password to make it more secure. If it's a weird character, it doesn't belong in the file name.

2. Don't put personal information into a file name.

Student ID numbers don't belong in a file name. Also say No to personal names.

If you can't avoid using personal information, keep things as restricted as possible. Two initials for a name, for example.

(It's OK to use position titles, but abbreviate them)

3. Don't make a mess of dates.

There are lots of different ways to write out the digits for today's date, month, and year. Does the month go first, or the date? Should you use a two-digit year, or a four-digit year?

For your naming convention, keep it simple. Use the international standard for how to write dates:

It goes like this: Start with the YEAR.

That's a 4 digit year, so "2016".

THEN a two-digit MONTH. For September, use "09".

THEN comes a two-digit DAY of the month. So, "15" for the 15th of the month.

That makes "2016-09-15" the way to write September 15, 2016.

If this is confusing, search for "ISO date standard" and you'll find plenty of examples on the internet.

That cover three things that you should NOT do when you are naming a file.

- Don't use weird characters.
- Don't put personal information in a file name.

- And don't make a mess of the dates.

Next, here are three things that you SHOULD do when you are naming a file.

1. DO call the file what it is.

Is it a report or a chart? Is it minutes to a meeting? What's the committee's name? Is it the final version of this document?

When you name a file, capture what the document is about as best as you can.

2. DO keep things short.

Despite all the advances in technology, you should still really be aiming for a file name that's about 25 characters. Longer than that, and you run into issues when you open the file on some systems, or when you publish the document to the web.

Think of a file name as valuable real estate. What you name it matters, so make it count.

DO use abbreviations for anything that you create frequently. In your office, agree on abbreviations that everyone will use. Or, if you need help, contact the archives for our abbreviation standard.

3. Do put a date in the file name.

A full date. Year-month-day. For a draft, you might choose the date that you created the file. Or for a final document, you'll probably want the date that it was finalized and approved.

Your digital file name should include a meaningful date.

To recap our naming conventions rules, we covered 3 things to NOT do and 3 things to ALWAYS do when you name a digital file.

We struck out the weird characters that mess up the computer. We removed personal information. We made better use of the real estate by using abbreviations and keeping things short. We made sure to include a relevant date. And we used the international standard on dates so that no one is confused about which date we mean. And above all, we called the file what it is, giving it the best and shortest name possible so that other people in your group can find it.

Credits

That brings us to the end of episode three on how to name digital files.

This podcast has been brought to you by the Archives and Records Management Department of Simon Fraser University. If you have suggestions for other topics to cover in future podcasts, please contact archives at archives@sfu.ca

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