GOVERNANCE SERVICES

Naming conventions
for documents and folders

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Section one: Introduction

Scope and purpose

This document sets out advice and guidance for creating consistent procedures for the naming of folders and documents. Its use is primarily intended for documents and folders[1] created in MS Office in a local area network environment, but it can be used in relation to paper record-keeping systems or any other applicable system. It is desirable to retain as much consistency as possible between manual and electronic record keeping systems to ensure the continuing effective running of the University.

The increase of records created in the electronic environment has resulted in greater responsibility being placed on individuals to manage the information they create and receive. It is important that consistent names, which accurately reflect information content, are given to documents and folders at the point of creation. It is the creator who will most fully understand the content of a folder or documents and it is unlikely that anyone will return to rename an item after the original point of creation.

Most documents are created with the intention of imparting information beyond the original creator. However, inconsistent titling can make locating this information very difficult, leading to frustrating searches which wastes staff time and can hinder decision-making. Consistent titling of documents and folders can help colleagues to share information and to locate accurate information quickly.

In order to comply with Freedom of Information and Data Protection legislation it is necessary to be able to retrieve all available information, about a specific subject or individual. Consistency with regard to file and document titling cannot only improve the speed with which information can be retrieved, it also makes comprehensive and accurate searching easier, helping to ensure that all relevant records are retrieved in a search for specific information.

How to use this document

The following advice note aims to strike a balance between creating usable and meaningful titles and brevity. The guidelines should be applied consistently and comprehensively across all School and Service areas and provide a basis for developing standard naming conventions for document and folder titles. It will not be necessary for all elements detailed in this document to be included in all titles and folders but comprehensive guidance is provided to meet all eventualities which can then be adapted for departmental use.

We hope these guidelines will help you to create documents and folders in a consistent way, which will aide the management and retrieval of the University's records.

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[1] Folder is defined here as a folder in a Microsoft Windows environment. When considering guidelines for paper filing systems the equivalent should be considered to be a manual file or folder.

Section two: Guidelines

Elements of a title
In constructing a title it is necessary to decide how best to describe the informational content of the file or the individual document. The most commonly used elements in the creation of a title are listed below. It will depend on the nature of the document or folder which elements will be the most suitable for use in the title.

> **Common elements of a title:**
>
> - Subject
> - Date
> - Version number
> - Document type
> - Activity/project name
> - Organisation name
> - Place name

For large sets or series of specific types of records or documents, it may be appropriate to develop structured rules for titling. Please contact the Records Manager if you require advice on managing large sets of records.

Length of a title
Titles should contain enough information in order to properly describe the contents of the document or folder. However, keeping titles a reasonable length will help users to quickly identify and retrieve accurate information.

File paths should not be too long. Short explanative folder titles will be a lot more usable than very long titles which lead to long pathways. Although it is desirable to maintain consistency with titles used in the paper environment this has to be balanced with the nature of the electronic environment and ensuring titles are useable.

> Always balance helpful description with being concise and formal.

Order of elements in a title
The full file path of the title should move from the most general subject to the specific. However, for the title of the individual document the most useful information should be provided at the start of the title, moving from specific to general.

You should consider how the records should be arranged – alphabetically, numerically or chronologically as this will also affect the decision about what information should be placed at the start of the file.

> **Examples:**
>
> Events/Award_Ceremony/Catering_20050703
>
> Academic_Affairs_Cttee/20040630_Minutes

Redundant terms

The use of redundant terms should be avoided in order to keep titles as brief as possible.

> - Do not use conjunctions such as 'and', 'on', 'of' unless they add meaning to the description e.g. Freedom_of_Information would be okay but Research_and_Funds would not be acceptable;
>
> - do not use dates of creation in the title of electronic document as this can be obtained from document properties. Although dates should be included if necessary to understand the content of the document e.g. minutes of meetings. ('*Programme_Board_20061013_MIN.doc*' – Minute of Programme Board meeting held on 13 Oct 2006.)

Subject

Subject is the most diverse and difficult element listed for which to provide specific rules. Branches should aim to be consistent in the application of common terms and the development of a list of commonly used terms would support this.

Where possible give your files meaningful names. This assists both yourself and other members of staff in managing and retrieving files.

Always make the name of a folder or record descriptive of its content or purpose.

Always make the name of a file or record descriptive of the whole content. A title should act as a summary of the file or record's contents.

- Enter the subject term. This may be from a controlled vocabulary if available or else use natural language;
- do not use terms such as 'general' or 'miscellaneous';
- in the paper environment the use of natural language is more appropriate as there is less of a need for briefness and controlled terminology. However, excessively long titles should be avoided as this aids the readability of the title; and
- always ensure the title is:
    - specific;
    - consistent and sensible; and
    - understandable and helpful to others.

Spacing

Avoid the use of spaces in filenames. Underscores (_) and hyphens (-) are acceptable.

Example:

Faculty Advisory Board

Would become:
1. 'faculty_advisory_board'
2. 'facultyadvisoryboard'
3. 'faculty-advisory-board'

Author
Do not use the document creator's name in the title unless this information genuinely adds to a description of the content. This information can be added directly in the document or accessed in the document or folders Properties.

Do not put the name of person in the title of a folder or file. If you must refer to someone always use their job title rather than their name and always use the full title not an acronym.

Do not use – 'Jackie Timlin's meeting papers'

Do not use - 'RM Meeting Papers'

Do use - 'Records_Manager_Meeting_Papers'

Acronyms & Abbreviations
Do not use obscure abbreviations or acronyms. In general abbreviations and acronyms often become obsolete over a period of time and can often have more than one meaning. Always write the names of organisations in full and only use an abbreviation when absolutely necessary or if it is widely used over all University departments.

Example:

Cttee	Committee
FECCI	Faculty of Engineering, Computing & Creative Industries
FHLSS	Faculty of Health, Life & Social Sciences
FOI	Freedom of Information
Mins	Minutes
SFC	Scottish Funding Council

Document type
The document type should be added to a title if it is meaningful to the context of the document. There will be some document types, like presentations, that are already explicit by the directory display eg '.ppt' which makes adding 'presentation' to the title redundant.

Example:

An example of a suitable filename for the minutes from the University Records Management Group meeting in August 2005 would be:

URMG_Mins _20050108.doc
The date August 2005 relates to the date of the meeting, not the creation date.

Dates
The date element will be applicable to the description of folders or documents only in a number of circumstances. These include the date relating to the coverage of the information content and date of publication. Do not include the creation date in the title, this information can found in the document properties.

If you want to store files or folders in chronological order you must put the date reference at the beginning, using the YYYY-MM-DD convention to ensure that documents are stored in the correct order. For example, a document saved on 24 November 2006 should be saved as 20051124 followed by the document name.

In all other cases where the date is purely to give more meaning to the file or folder name place it at the most relevant point using the format DD-MM-YYYY.

- Enter the date for titles of documents in the format DD-MM-YY or YYYY-MM-DD; and
- Enter the level of detail necessary to document which is being described, for example date, date and month or date, month and year.

Versions

In order to effectively control different versions of a document it is necessary to have documented procedures. Consistent naming of different versions can be used to support version control and is useful for documents which have a number of contributors which are in various stages of development before the final version is complete.

- enter in the format v1.0, eg Estates_Strategyv1.0;
- use 1.0 for when a major change has been made, for example when a document is ready for a wider circulation;
- use second digit to indicate minor amendments, for example 1.1; and
- consider if it would be helpful for other users if this information was included in the document footer.

Emails

All the advice and guidance that apply to documents and folders also apply equally to naming emails, but there are other things that should be considered. Email titles must accurately describe their content.

- you must change the title of the email if it does not accurately reflect the content
- you may wish to add to the end of an email title to define to further i.e. '*EL to Planning 280706*'
- you don't need to include 'email' as part of the title, as the Object type icon shows it is an email.
- Save all emails with their attachments
- Save all emails as Outlook Email Format

Further Advice & Guidance

For further advice and guidance please contact the Records Manager Jackie Timlin on ext 6257 or email: j.timlin@napier.ac.uk or Frank Lopez, Information Officer on ext 6255 or email: f.lopez@napier.ac.uk.