File Naming

Checklist

# Before beginning a project

Check for established file naming conventions in your discipline or group.

Naming conventions should be documented so that others in your lab or department can follow the same standards.

File names should be descriptive and provide enough contextual information to be understandable.

Avoid making file names too long because various operating systems have different character number limits. In general, keep file names limited to 30-50 characters.

The most important information should go first. Computers arrange files by name. If you want to sort files by date, put the date first.

Use [ISO 8601 standard](https://www.iso.org/iso-8601-date-and-time-format.html) for date. Example: YYYYMMDD or YY-MM-DD.

To add a timestamp to your file name, use a 24-hour time format. Example: YYYYMMDDhhmmss or YY-MM-DD-hh-mm-ss

For a sequential numbering system, use leading zeros to ensure files sort in sequential order. Example; 001, 002, …010, 011.

Avoid special characters such as ~ ! @ # $ % ^ & \* ( ) ` ; : < > ? . , [ ] { } “ |

Use underscores, dashes, camel case (first letter of each section of text is capitalized) or no separation in the file name instead of spaces.

Remember, file names should be:

1. Machine readable
2. Human readable
3. Work well with default ordering

# resources

* [Self-audit checklist for research team members](https://mdandersonorg.sharepoint.com/sites/compliance/Shared%20Documents/data-management-self-audit-checklist.pdf?web=1) [Inside Page]
* [Harvard File Naming Conventions [Examples included]](https://datamanagement.hms.harvard.edu/plan-design/file-naming-conventions)
* [Data Management and Sharing Assistance](https://www3.mdanderson.org/library/services/data_management_top.html)

This handout was adapted from [“How to Name a File](https://osf.io/dpu45)” by Julie Goldman and Harvard University. [Licensed under CC BY 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)