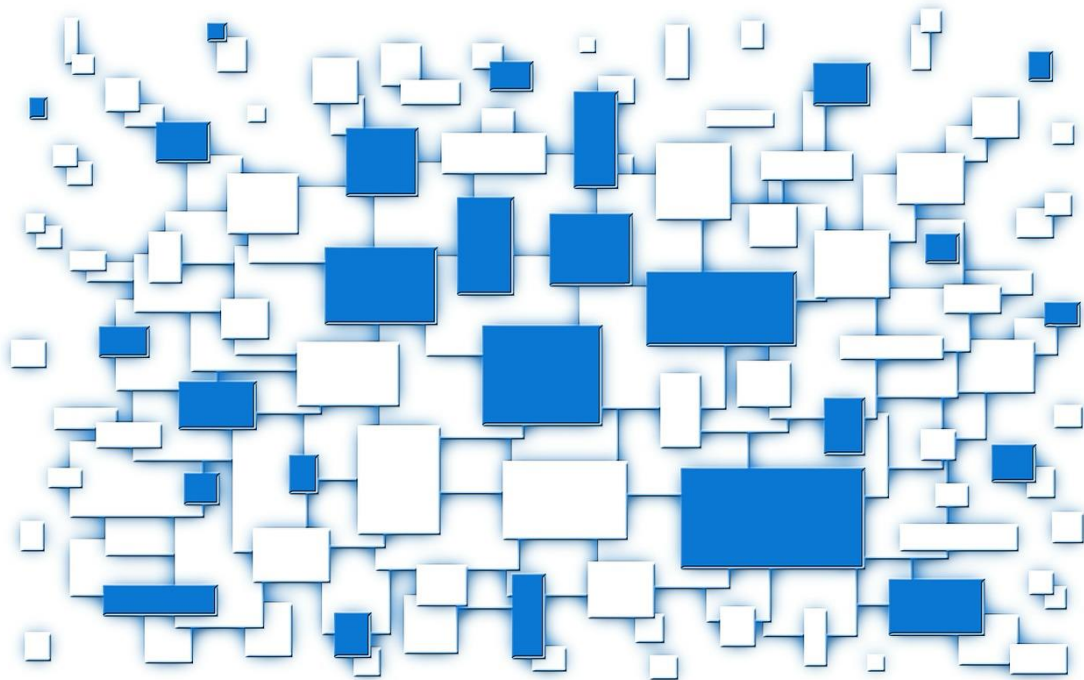# One minute guide to file organisation

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University of Bristol

Research Data Service

Consistency

Whatever you do, be consistent! Having several different systems for naming and organisation is as confusing as having none at all.

General principles for file naming

If someone else looks at your file they should be able to tell what it is from the name.

- Include basic information such as date created, version number, creator and a descriptive title
- Dates should be in YYYY-MM-DD format to allow sorting
- Avoid special characters, including spaces (other than "_" and "-") as these can cause problems when switching between operating systems

If you are using software or hardware that generates generic filenames, use a batch renaming tool to convert these to meaningful, unique filenames. Be sure to do this with a copy of your data, not the original, to avoid data loss in the event of an error. Some examples of batch renamers are:

- Windows: Ant Renamer (www.antp.be/software/renamer)
- Mac: Renamer (https://renamer.com/)
- Linux: GPRename (http://gprename.sourceforge.net)

If it is not possible to give each file a concise and descriptive filename then make sure the overarching folder provides this.

Versioning

This is essential for maintaining an audit trail in case you need to backtrack to an earlier version. Avoid tags such as "final" or "revised" as these will accumulate and lose meaning. Make a new version for every change and consider whether you need to keep all your old versions or whether some can be deleted. Note that the original raw data should always be kept.
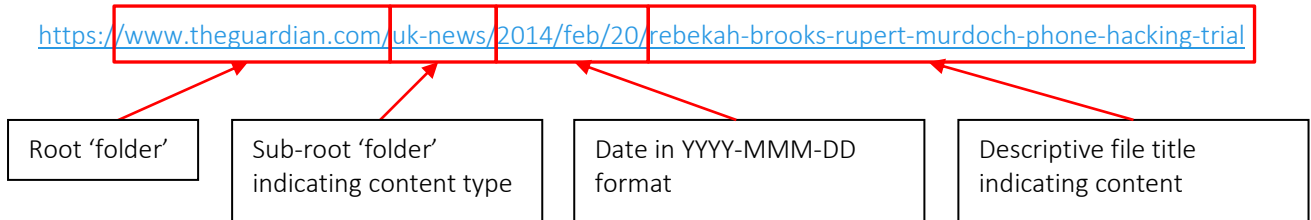
Folder organisation

As with filenames, folder names and structures should be logical and concise. The specific structure will largely depend on your own needs, but for general good practice:

- Your root or top-level folder should include the project title and a unique identifier such as the project number (to allow sorting)
- Subfolders should follow a clear and logical naming convention, for example give each experiment its own named and/or numbered folder
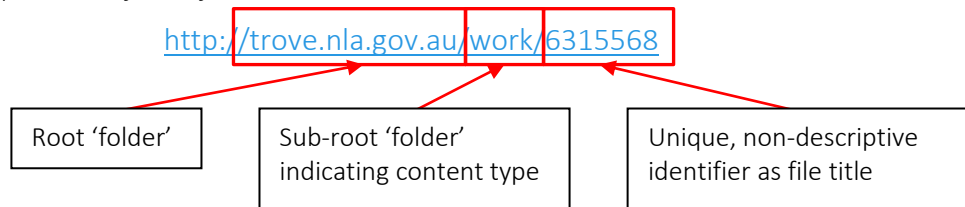
Examples

URLs can offer good examples for how a consistent naming structure can aid understanding of file and folder content.

Descriptive file title:

https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2014/feb/20/rebekah-brooks-rupert-murdoch-phone-hacking-trial

Root 'folder'	Sub-root 'folder' indicating content type	Date in YYYY-MMM-DD format	Descriptive file title indicating content

Unique non-descriptive identifier as file title

http://trove.nla.gov.au/work/6315568

Root 'folder'	Sub-root 'folder' indicating content type	Unique, non-descriptive identifier as file title

More information

- University of Bristol Research Data Service Research Data Bootcamp
- University of Edinburgh MANTRA data management course