



# 7 Rules of Highly Effective File Names

## Important computer files need to be named appropriately.

**RULE 1: Avoid using special characters in a file name.** - \ / \* ? " < > | [ ] & \$ , . ; ( ) ' - \_ %

**RULE 2: Don't use underscores, extra periods, spaces, or all caps in file names.**

A more stable way of naming files is to string all words together, as in [ArchivesResearchPolicy2009.pdf](#)

**RULE 3: Err on the side of simplicity and clarity.** 25 characters per file name should be enough to accurately name an electronic file. **Also, don't use odd abbreviations or shorthand that might be unfamiliar to someone else.** Good file names will have an indication of the office of creation and/or broad subject, the date, and perhaps an abbreviation to indicate the nature of the file (i.e., LTR for letter or ABO for Archbishops Office).<sup>\*</sup> Think as if someone from the future were looking at the file name being created. Is it logical? Go from broad terms to specific terms ending with a date, as in [PriestsRoster2008.doc](#).

**RULE 4: A file name should include all descriptive information independent of where the file is kept.** Files will be moved from their original location. Ask yourself: "Would the file name make sense if it were moved to another folder or emailed to someone?" For example, if the files "Vocations\Posters\0001.jpg" and "ABO\Brochures\0001.jpg" were pulled out of their appropriate folders, they would appear to be the same file, both with the name "0001.jpg." The better file name for the file in the Vocations folder on the computer would be [VOCPoster0001.jpg](#).

**RULE 5: Dating files is important for sorting and identifying. Include dates!**

If possible, put the date of the file at the end of the name and be consistent. Use the International Standard for dates, which is either YYYY or YYYYMMDD. For example, January 5, 2008 should be typed [20080105](#). Consider creating specific year folders for records so that those due for destruction can be easily located.

**RULE 6: Include a version number in your file names to manage various drafts of a document.**

Electronic records will have multiple versions. Try including "DRAFT" in the file name along with a date and a version number, such as "v01, v02, v03, as in [VOCworkshops2009DRAFTv01.doc](#). Also avoid vague terms like "update," "old," and "new." Use "FINAL" to indicate the final version of the file, as in [VOCworkshops2009FINAL.doc](#). Earlier drafts typically can be deleted once a project is finalized.

**RULE 7: Be consistent.** This is the most important rule. File naming rules are only effective if followed!

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**There will be exceptions.** The rules above are not going to apply absolutely to every situation. They should be used as a guide within departments to develop consistent file-naming practices.

**Why is it important?** Just like paper files, computer files need to be organized so other people can find them now and in the future. Of course, many employee working files are not important outside the office and can be named at will. Efficient management of important digital records begins with accurate file naming. Naming and dating files accurately makes it much easier for departments to apply the Archdiocese's Records Retention Schedule to electronic records in the same way as paper records.

**Have questions?** Visit the Archives' webpage at <http://www.archatl.com/offices/archives/recmgmt.html>

<sup>\*</sup> Abbreviations can be found on the Office of Archives and Records' webpage under "Records Management."