

# Guide to Proper File Naming

Naming your files properly before uploading them to the Web is crucial for a number of reasons. By following the requirements listed below you will avoid a number of potential errors caused by the various operating systems and browsers. The most relevant reasons for adopting proper file naming conventions are:

- A recognizable file name will ensure search engines will locate the file
- A short file name will be properly displayed and backed up by the server
- A file name without special characters and spaces will be displayed and interpreted correctly by all browsers.

## File Names Should be Meaningful

Meaningful file names tend to be ranked higher by search engines. For example, by assigning the PAHO acronym to files at the beginning of the name we are ensuring higher ranking. PAHO is a brand, a recognizable name which has prestige among search engines. When dealing with files related to a specific health topic it will be useful to assign this topic to the file name, for example: paho-malaria-final.doc.

## File Names Should be Short and in Lowercase

The maximum length for a file path is 255 characters. This full path of a file name includes the drive letter, colon, backslash, directories, sub-directories, filename, and extension; therefore, the amount of characters left for the file name is limited depending on where in the server structure it lies. We suggest using maximum of 25 characters for the file name. A good practice is to use an acronym associated with the project, a date if necessary and any other meaningful acronym. For example: paho-hss-mr-07-21-2011.pdf or 160223-malaria-conf-cha-keynote-600px.jpg.

The reason for lower case is that some servers convert to lowercase automatically; some servers do not care about case, but it's best to err on the side of caution.

## File Names Should not Contain Special Characters

Avoid using special characters above all else. The following characters \ / : \* ? " < > | [ ] & \$ , . are considered special characters and are all used for specific tasks in an electronic environment; therefore, never use them as part of your file name. Also to be avoided in file names is the use of non-English language letters such as á, í, ñ, è, and ò.

Also, it's preferable to use hyphens instead of underscores, periods, or spaces. Underscores are sometimes misinterpreted by newer browser versions; periods already have a specific function in a file name, which is to tell the computer program where the file-name extension begins; and spaces are frequently translated in a Web environment into "%20" and can sometimes generate an error when links are generated.

Another very important reason to assign unique names to their files is that files uploaded to the web server go into a common folder and are not write-protected; therefore, files with generic names such as agenda, introduction, presentation, or fact-sheet have a very high probability of being overwritten.