

Documentation Naming Conventions Best Practices





Documentation is all about leveraging your stored information to gain knowledge later. How you name your documents plays a great role in retrieving them whenever needed. It is for this exact reason that file names cannot be random. Imagine a scenario where each employee in your organization uses their own file name. It defeats the very purpose of documentation and knowledge sharing.

Let's explore the significance of structured naming convention and how you can use it to organize and retrieve documents efficiently.

What is a naming convention?

In simple terms, a naming convention refers to a framework used for naming your files in a specific way. This should be descriptive and consistent throughout the organization. It is always best to use a naming convention to describe the contents of the files. Your file naming convention should typically start before you begin collecting data. It helps you avoid a backlog of randomly named unstructured content that is more likely to be misplaced.

How it works

Let's say you are working on a new mobile app project with multiple versions created on different dates. The project is named "Alpha," and you have different experiments within the projects. You can name your files as follows:

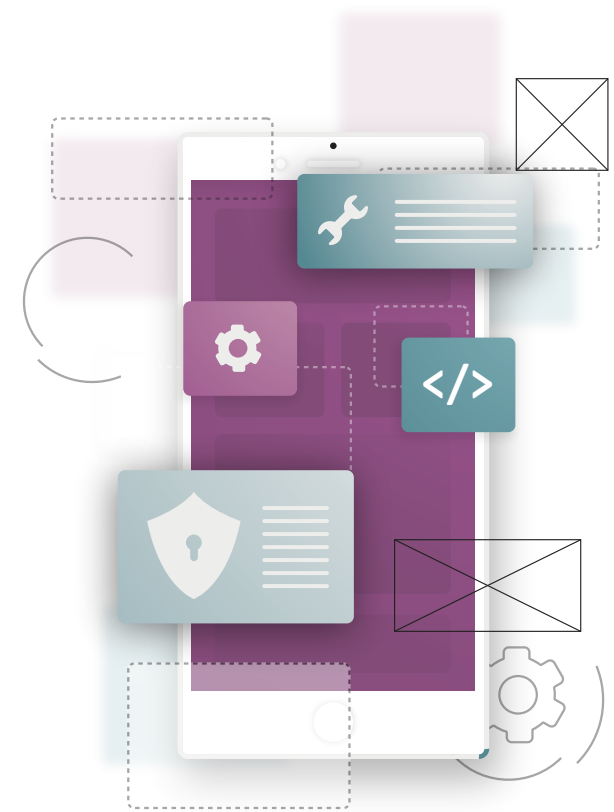
Alpha_Experiment1_Version3_03022022

Alpha_Experiment4_Version1_06022022

There is no right or wrong way here. Your name must make sense to all concerned stakeholders at first glance, and it is always better to follow a fixed template throughout the organization. In this particular case, the naming convention format is as follows:

[Projectname]_[Exp.no]_[Version no.]_[Date]

When you use a format similar to this in your organization, you will have a structured hierarchy of files that you can easily identify based on their project names, versions and creation date. With this type of naming, you can avoid the trouble of searching through piles of random files to get the information you need.



Where are naming conventions used?

You can use naming conventions for anything that involves collecting and storing large volumes of data. You can use them for filing systems, databases, programming, software development, etc.

When using a file naming convention in IT documentation, you must deploy it as soon as you start using your documentation software. This ensures naming consistency right from the beginning of your automated documentation process.



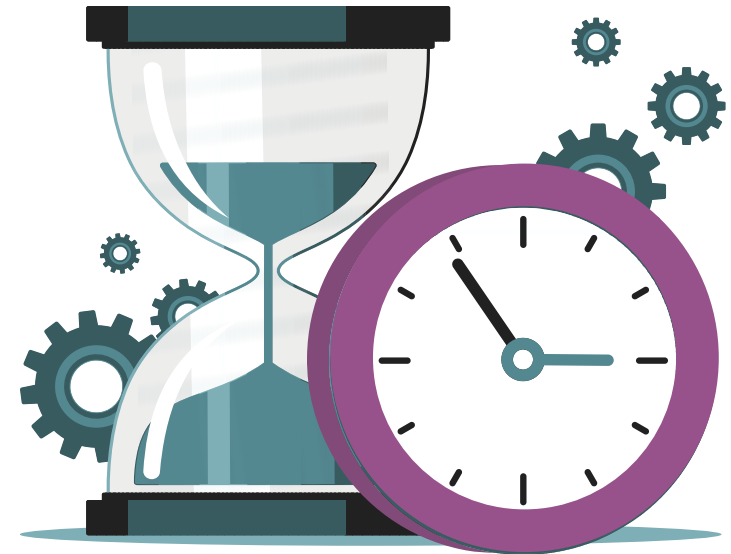
Why are naming conventions important?

The main purpose of naming conventions is to keep your work organized. Consistently organized data is easy to process and get results. Without any structure in your naming, analyzing large volumes of data could become chaotic. In addition to the time wasted searching for data, you will likely face issues with duplicate files, resource wastage, errors, etc.

What are the benefits of naming conventions?

Some of the key benefits of following a naming convention are:

- **Smooth operation:** When your data is easy to find, it is easy to extract the required knowledge and make decisions based on it. There won't be any delay in getting information, and this ensures smooth administration in your organization without any bottlenecks.
- **Better version control:** Information gets constantly updated in an organizational setting. To make sure you are using the most recent version, you need to tag it accordingly in your file name. That way, you can avoid errors caused by outdated knowledge.
- **Save time and money:** By avoiding duplication through proper naming conventions, you can save a lot of time and money. You won't have to spend time looking for lost files, and there will be no need to create new versions of already existing files.



Naming convention guidelines

While there is no right or wrong way to name a file, you can follow a specific set of naming guidelines to provide structure to your file names. Remember, your naming should be consistent throughout the organization. Also, it should be understandable to all stakeholders involved.

The following guidelines can help you implement the right naming system for your organization.

Establish a standard date format

Including dates in a filename is an excellent way to identify its creation date in one glance and to sort out different versions. When you include dates, follow a standard format for all files. It could be YYMMDD or YYYYMMDD, depending upon your preference.

Alphabetic and numerical characters only

Having a file name with just alphabetic and numerical characters is always better. You need to refrain from using special characters, such as &, @, etc. Depending on your operating system, these characters may have special meanings and functions. As a result, you risk deleting or misplacing your file when you use special characters.

Specify a version-numbering style

You also need to create a numbering style to represent different file versions. It could be as simple as adding numbers at the end of the file name. If there are more than nine versions of a file, you can add zeros before each one to ensure the correct order. For example, your file names could end with 001, 002, 003, etc.



Consistent naming convention case

As we mentioned earlier, there is no right or wrong way to name a file. However, follow a specific case style to ensure consistent naming across your organization. These cases differ based on how they combine different words into a single string. Let's take a look at some of the popular ones

Camel case (camelCase)

It involves capitalizing all words except the first and removing the space between them. For instance, you can write public domain software as publicDomainSoftware.

Pascal case (PascalCase)

It involves capitalizing all words in the name, including the first, and removing the space between them. For instance, you can write public domain software as PublicDomainSoftware.

Snake case (snake_case)

This type of naming combines words simply by replacing the space with an underscore (_). The same example used above can be written as public_domain_software.

Kebab case (kebab-case)

The kebab case is similar to the snake case, except the underscore is replaced with a dash (-). For the file name used above, the Kebab case name can be written as public-domain-software.

Define standard terms

Share your standard terms with everyone in the organization to ensure everyone is on the same page. You can avoid a lot of confusion by sharing your standard terms with your stakeholders.

Keep it short and sweet

Your file name doesn't have to be lengthy, and you don't have to describe everything in the file name. Just consider the items that you should represent in your file name. Keep it short and in an easily understandable format.

Additional considerations

When you use abbreviations, make sure it is meaningful and understandable to everyone on the team. If required, share a centrally accessible glossary through your IT documentation software. Your naming convention can fall flat if your team cannot understand the names you give. You must get your team's buy-in and train them to follow the determined naming conventions.

Naming convention best practices and advanced tips

Here are some best practices you can follow to ensure proper naming conventions across your organization.

- **Identify the files:** You can start your naming convention process by identifying the files to be named. You can group similar files and follow consistent naming. You can also have different file sets for other departments.
- **Think about your search process:** When naming files, it is also essential to consider how you search for files. Decide on the type of metadata that should appear when filtering file sets.
- **Use the organization name when needed:** If you are an MSP catering to multiple clients, you can use the organization's name in the filename. You can also use location names to differentiate branches based on different locations. However, this process is not necessary for internal IT teams.
- **Create a guideline for naming conventions:** Your naming convention should also be documented and shared with your teams. Create rules for the number of characters in the file name, metadata information, etc. Suppose you are using different metadata for different file sets. In that case, you may consider creating an Excel sheet in your documentation tool with all the information to share with the concerned stakeholders.



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