

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Best practices when naming your files, so they will be useful to you and others



BEST PRACTICES FOR FILE NAMING

Context

Provides content-specific or descriptive information

Short+

Keep file names short but meaningful

No Generics

Avoid using generic data file names that may conflict when moved from one location to another

Consistency

Choose a naming convention and ensure that the rules are followed systematically

Documentation

Document your system but don't rely on file names as your sole source of documentation

POTENTIAL ELEMENTS IN FILE NAMES

- Project or grant name and/or number
- Date of creation: (useful for version control), e.g., YYYYMMDD
- Name of creator/investigator: last name first followed by initials of first name
- Name of research team/department associated with the data
- Description of content/subject descriptor
- Data collection method (instrument, site, etc.)
- Version number

SOME SPECIFIC CONSIDERATIONS

- Dashes or underscores can be used to differentiate between words
- Avoid special characters and spaces such as: & * % \$] { ! @ /
- If numbering files for a specific order, use leading zeros: e.g., 001, 002, 003, etc. will order files up to 999
- Consider how scalable your data file naming policy needs to be: e.g., don't limit your project number to two digits, or you can only have ninety nine projects
- Capitals in file names affect ordering – be consistent. Not all systems/software are case-sensitive and recognize capitals; assume that TANGO, Tango, and tango are the same
- Version control – which files have been updated by other files, etc