

Naming Conventions for Electronic Documents

Corporate Information Management Unit
Provincial Archives of New Brunswick
Department of Finance and Treasury Board

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Revision History

Version	Revision Date	Author	Summary of Changes
1	<i>Last Review: February 2020</i>	CIM unit	Review of procedures
2	<i>Last Updated: November 2021</i>	CIM unit	Updated policy AD-1508 to AD-7114

Preface

The records of government are a valuable resource and an important asset that documents its business activities. Their effective management enables government to support future action and decision making, reduce costs, meet business, legal and accountability requirements, and preserve New Brunswick's documentation heritage.

The Provincial Archives' Corporate Information Management Unit is responsible for the government-wide records management program under the *Archives Act*. Provincial government organizations manage their records according to corporate standards, guidelines and policies to support the delivery of their programs and services.

The Provincial Archives of New Brunswick Corporate Information Management Unit provides central records management services and support to departments, crown corporations and agencies within the government of New Brunswick by:

- developing and authorizing retention and disposition schedules that control the period of time government records are retained as well as their final disposition through the transfer to the Provincial Archives or destructions;
- developing and establishing policy, standards and guidelines;
- providing training, technical and consultative services in the development, implementation and maintenance of programs to manage recorded information in all formats;
- maintaining and administering the centralized offsite records storage program for semi active government records;
- identifying archival and records management issues at the beginning of the information life cycle.

Departments manage recorded information by:

- applying the Classification Plan and Retention Schedules for Common Records for retention scheduling;
- establishing a file classification plan for operational records;
- developing and maintaining written policies and procedures;
- cooperating with the Provincial Archives to develop and apply retention and disposition schedules for all government records in all formats;
- taking advantage of the centralized records storage and retrieval services of the Provincial Archives Records Centre.

It is important to note that records must not be destroyed or removed from the control of the Government of New Brunswick, unless such action is authorized under the *Archives Act*

INTRODUCTION

Many departments have identified the need for consistent naming practices for electronic content, specifically documents in shared directories. Establishing naming conventions that are used consistently across an organization will improve access to information in documents stored on shared or common drives or in an electronic information management system. Although there are many methods to electronically search for documents, users still tend to browse through directory structures looking for the documents they require.

Implementing good document names can support the following objectives:

- facilitate better access to and retrieval of electronic documents;
- allow sorting of documents in logical sequence;
- help users to identify the items they are looking for easily and support the ability to recognize the content of a document from a list; and
- help keep track of versions of documents.

These guidelines can be applied for the management of records and documents in any format.

These naming conventions should be part of the organization's defined business rules for managing shared electronic workspaces and should be used in conjunction with [Electronic Information Management Directives](#), available on our website.

Intended Audience

These guidelines are recommended for use by departments and public bodies as defined in the [Archives Act](#).

Definition of terms

Electronic folder - where electronic documents are filed and organized within the Local Area Network (LAN) of the organization. The arrangement of these folders should reflect the File Classification Plan of the organization that is used for the management of its records (regardless of format).

Elements - parts of the name of a document such as the subject or title, date, file extension, etc.

Document name or title - the name that users give to new documents when they save them.

APPLICATION

There are several factors to consider when determining appropriate naming practices. The most effective solutions will depend on the context in which documents are stored. The structure of directories, folders and documents is nominally the same whether you are working on a standalone PC, a standalone server, a linked server or a controlled repository such as an electronic information management (EIM) application. However, there are subtle differences in these workspaces that may influence the way in which directories, folders or documents are named. Each type of workspace has its own capabilities for naming and for additional indexing. They also handle information about the object's metadata in a slightly different manner.

Document names can contain one or more of the following elements:

1. Subject or Title
2. Date
3. Version Number or Status (draft, final)
4. Names/Author/Creator
5. File Extension
6. Document Type
7. Business Unit/Program

In general, a title should be:

- descriptive – it says what the document is about;
- helpful – it distinguishes the document from others on the same/similar topic;
- consistent – it follows the conventions described in this document.

The conventions provided here offer practical advice on how to name documents. It is expected that each organization will adapt these conventions to meet their specific needs.

Each organization will have to set consistent standards on:

- which elements are to be used and the order;
- the use of a consistent separator;
- the use of acronyms and abbreviations.

Elements and Order:

At a minimum, each document name should have two elements, with one, the “**File Extension**”, **as mandatory**. There should be consistency in the order of the elements when more than two elements are used in the title.

The actual ordering of the elements will depend on the structure of the folders that contain the documents, as well as the retrieval requirements of the users. For example, in one folder, the naming of the document may require that the date be the first element, followed by the subject while in another folder it may be subject followed by the date.

Longer titles may be required in some instances but keeping titles short will assist users to quickly identify and retrieve information.

Separators:

A consistent symbol can be used to separate the elements or parts of the elements of the title. The most common separators are:

- the space
- the dash (-)
- the underscore (_).

Document names cannot include any of the following characters:

forward slash (/)	backslash (\)
greater than sign (>)	lesser than sign (<)

asterisk (*)	question mark (?)
quotation mark (“)	vertical bar ()
colon (:)	semi-colon (;)
equal (=)	plus (+)
parenthesis ()	number (#)
dollar (\$)	exclamation point (!)

Some EIM applications may interpret the use of the underscore or dash differently. In this case, use an alternative separator or none.

Acronyms and Abbreviations:

The use of consistent acronyms and abbreviations helps to keep the document names manageable.

Organizations should create and control a list of their commonly used acronyms and abbreviations. For a sample list of commonly understood acronyms and abbreviations, see [Appendix A](#).

Directory and Folder Structure:

The directory and folder structure should follow the naming conventions as much as possible. By their nature, the names will define the document content (e.g. Accounts payable).

When sub-folders are created, the name of each of these folders needs to be taken into account when naming the documents, ordering the elements, and, deciding whether acronyms and abbreviations are used.

Keep in mind:

- Relying on the folder structure is only useful as long as the document continues to reside in the same folder. A document may need to be renamed if it is moved or reclassified.
- The complete document path name including the folder and sub-folder if any, has a limit of the number of characters (currently 255 characters).
- A version posted to a web site may need a different name as the electronic folder structure may contain some content which needs to be reflected in the full name of the document for the web site.

Example:

Electronic Folder Structure	Web Site
/.../ Guidelines Naming Conventions Final	Guidelines for Naming Conventions for Electronic Documents

ELEMENTS IN THE NAMING CONVENTIONS

1. *Subject or Title*

1.1 Making document titles meaningful

Document titles should be concise and short but meaningful.

Consideration should be given to the document's intended audience, searching requirements and how the document may be identified when retrieved on its own without the folder, or if it ever becomes relocated or, detached from the folder (e.g. the title 2008-2009Minutes is not helpful on its own).

Simple rules are:

- ensure the title accurately reflects the contents;
- avoid using: 'and', 'or', 'a', 'the', 'of', 'le', 'la', 'les', 'des', 'et', 'ou', "à", etc. as they add length, but not meaning, to a document name;
- use only standard acronyms and abbreviations;
- avoid the use of the following symbols: * : \ / ? = + () & # \$ < > " | ; !

1.2 Making document titles meaningful - Language

It is the policy of the Government of New Brunswick to promote the use of both official languages within the New Brunswick Public Service and to encourage and enable employees to work in their official language of choice.

Employees can draft documents in their official language of choice. Documents must be fully translated once ready for broader circulation or when seeking comments and feedback from a broader audience.

Managers must encourage employees to draft documents in the official language that they are most comfortable in using. Once the documents are completed or close to be completed and circulated, they must be sent to the Translation Bureau.

There are instances when employees will not be able to draft documents in their official language of choice as outlined in the policy AD-2920.¹

Titles of unilingual documents should reflect the language they are written in.

Titles of bilingual documents should reflect both languages.

In some instances (e.g. drafts), the title may not correspond to the language of the document. If so, the abbreviations (Fr) for French and français, "En" for English, and "Ang" for "anglais" should be used in the title. This approach **should not** be used when circulating the document outside the business unit.

French accents (à, é, è, ê, ç, ö, ô, À, É, etc.) can be used in the titling of French documents when using a shared directory and folder structure. In some instances, French accents may not be permissible (e.g. EIM system); in this case, check with your departmental Records Manager for assistance.

¹ See Administration Policy AD-2920 Official Languages – Language of Work Policy and Guidelines

1.3 Delimiting words in titles

Use a capital letter to delimit words and to separate each element of the document name (e.g. DelimitingWordsTitles.doc).

Remember to be consistent if a separator is used (the space, underscore, or dash).

Approved acronyms should appear in capital letters (e.g. GNB).

1.4 Avoiding common words at the start of a document name

Avoid using common words such as 'Draft', 'Final', 'Letter' or 'Memo' at the start of the document name. All of those documents will appear together in the directory, making it more difficult to find the documents you are looking for. The preferred method is to use them at the end of the title (e.g. AvoidingCommonWords StartDocumentName Final.doc).

1.5 Ordering the elements in a document name

The order of the elements will depend on how documents are retrieved and on the structure of the folders.

Names for records relating to recurring events (e.g. meeting minutes and papers, periodic reports, event management and budget planning documents), should include both the date and the event name or event description (e.g. 20111125 NetworkMeetingAgenda).

Date first will usually be appropriate for events that are time specific and recurring (e.g. 20040301 Agenda).

Event titles will usually be first for events that are infrequent but regularly recurring (e.g. UnitedWayBreakfast 20111205).

1.6 Using numbers in titles

Always use a two-digit number if you expect the numbers to remain 99 or below. Numbers expected to be 100 or above should use 3-digit numbers.

Always include a leading zero(s) for numbers in order to have the latest document at the bottom of the directory list. Documents will then be listed alphanumerically (e.g. District 01, District 02, etc.).

1.7 Naming of correspondence documents including attachments

Document names of correspondence should include the following elements:

- name of correspondent, (i.e. the name of the person who sent the letter/e-mail/memo, or to whom you are sending the letter/e-mail/memo);
- subject description, where it is not given in the folder title;
- date of letter/e-mail/memo;
- for all incoming correspondence, include 'Rcvd'.

When saving e-mails, rename the messages so they can be identified and delete any prefixes such as

- "RE:", "FW:" for Outlook in English;
- "RE:", "TR:" for Outlook in French.

For attachments, include the same information as in the covering correspondence (see above) so that the context of the record is maintained.

- Name of correspondent
- Subject description
- Date of correspondence
- Add **Att** to indicate the document is an attachment
- When more than one attachment is received with the covering correspondence, add the numbering page format “xx of yy”– to indicate the number of attachments received with the covering letter (i.e. SmithH20111220RcvdAtt01of02).

2. **Dates**

Always use the international date standard of four-digit year, two-digit month and two-digit day:

YYYY Year (e.g. 2008)

YYYYMM Year, Month (e.g. 200803)

YYYYMMDD Year, Month, Day (e.g. 20080331)

Standardizing the date will allow everyone to understand that 20071207 means December 7, 2007 and not 12 July 2007.

Putting the dates ‘back to front’ will maintain chronological order when documents are listed in the folder directory and is helpful for retrieval.

When denoting fiscal year, always use the full four digits of the years with a system accepted separator in between. Dash (-) is recognized as the most commonly used separator to denote a fiscal year.

YYYY-YYYY Year-Year (e.g. 2010-2011 or 2010_2011 or 2010 2011)

Note: months entered alphabetically will not be file in chronological order.

3. **Version**

Note: If you are using an EIMS (Electronic Document and Records Management System), it will have an automatic version control mechanism.

Version control procedures should be applied to documents which are frequently updated (i.e. policy, procedures, etc.).

The version number of a record should be indicated in its document name by using ‘v’ followed by the two-digit version number (e.g. v01)

Increments should be indicated by a separator (e.g. minor revision v01-1 and major revision v02).

“Draft” or “Final” can be used to show the difference between drafts and published versions.

If there are several final versions, a publication date can be added to distinguish them.

4. Names/Author/Creator

When including a personal name, give the family/last name first, followed by the first initial of the given name. Adding an additional initial (if known) will distinguish the documents when several individuals with same first initial and last name.

If necessary, another identifier can be added (e.g. city of residence, county, parish, etc.)

A person's title (Mr, Miss, Dr, Hon) is not required unless for business purposes. Where this is needed, use the format Last name/Title/ initials.

Do not name records after the record owner or creator or after yourself. The desktop document properties capture this information as a matter of course

5. File Extension

The file extension (.doc, .docx, .msg, .ppt, .pptx, etc.) must be provided on all documents. Extensions are usually automatically generated and attached to the end of the document name by the application. The extension is used by the system to determine which application was used to create the document.

When saving e-mail records to a shared drive file classification plan, the extension should be ".msg".

6. Document Type

Document types are letters, reports, briefing notes, agenda, form, etc. Use abbreviations to reduce the length of the title (e.g. Agd for agenda). If document type is used in the naming, a full list of abbreviations should be developed by the departmental Records Manager.

When using directory and folder structures, document type may be added in the properties of the document under the "Category" feature and also using "Tags" under "Details" in the Properties menu of the document.

Do not include document type when the folder title already identifies the type (e.g. Reports).

7. Business Unit / Program

This element can help identify the creator of the document by listing the business unit or program area.

Do not use branch names as these are subject to change. Program names which are business functions change less often and can be added as a field for completion in the properties of the document (i.e. use Rebate Program instead of Revenue and Taxation Office).

EXAMPLES

	Correct	Incorrect
1	<p>When no separator is used: FinanceGeneralPurposeCtteeMinutes</p> <p>When using a separator: Finance General Purpose Cttee Minutes</p> <p>Note: If the document is inserted in a sub-folder “Finance General Purpose” which resides in a folder “ Committees”, then the document title can be: /;;;/Committees /Finance General Purpose 20111015Minutes.doc</p>	<p>The finance and general purpose committee minutes or FGPC minutes</p>
2	<p>For bilingual and unilingual documents :</p> <p>Important_Request_Demande_Importante Important_Request Demande_Importante Important_Request_En Important_Request_Fr</p>	<p>Important Request English & French</p>
3	<p>When using acronyms: CPRS-1050</p>	<p>Classification Plan and Retention Schedule for common records #1050</p>
4	<p>Ordering the elements for recurring events: /.../LunchLearnCttee/ 20040630Agenda 20040630Minutes 20050120Agenda 20050120Minutes 20050201Agenda 20050201Minutes</p> <p>Ordering the elements for infrequent events: /.../Events/ ProcurementAward20040905 RetirementParty20040630 UnitedWayBreakfast20030304</p>	<p>/.../LunchLearnCttee/ Agenda1Feb2005 Agenda20Jan2005 Agenda30June2004 Minutes1Feb2005 Minutes20Jan2005 Minutes30June 2004</p> <p>/.../Events/ 20030304UnitedWayBreakfast 20040630RetirementParty 20040905Procurement Award</p>
5	<p>Avoiding common words at the start of a document name:</p> <p>/.../Publicity/ Budget_Report_2003-2004_Final Budget_Report_2004-2005_Draft GrantP_2004-03-12</p>	<p>/.../Publicity/ DraftBudgetReport2004-2005 FinalBudgetReport2003-2004 LetterJBSmith</p>

	Correct	Incorrect
	RaggeT_2004-04-12 RichmondV_2005-07-29 SmithJB_2003-12-05	LetterPGrant MemoVRichmond MemoTRagge
6	Naming of correspondence documents including attachments and dates: /.../Complaints/ SmithJ20031205 SmithJ20040105Rcvd SmithJ20040105RcvdAtt01of02 SmithJ20040105Rcvd Att02of02 SmithJ20040220 ThomasH20030610Rcvd ThomasH20030610RcvdAtt ThomasH20030710 /.../Competitions/ EvansWAppeal20040715Rcvd EvansWAppeal20040820 EvansWAppeal20040905	.../Complaints/ AttachmentFromHThomas10Jun03 Attachment1fromJSmith Attachment2fromJSmith E-mailFromHelenThomas10Jun03 E-mailToJoeSmith5Dec03 LetterFRomJoeSmith5Jan04 LetterToHelenThomas10Jul03 LettertoJoeSmith20Feb04 /.../Competitions/ Appeal of William Evans-15Jul04 Appeal of William Evans-20Aug04 Appeal of William Evans-5Sep04
7	Using dates in document names: Org_Chart_20090228 Org_Chart_20090527 Org_Chart_20091112 Note: Organizational Charts are generally current on the day they are created. It is more logical to use a date than a version number for retrieval purposes.	Org_Chart_2009_ Org_Chart_2009_V3 Org_Chart_2009_V4
8	Personal names in document titles: BrownDrSR BrownSRWestmorland SmithJohnstonS	Dr Sam R Brown SamRBrown Susan Smith-Johnston
9	Using numbers and dates: /.../Planning/ Budget 2003-2004 v10 Budget 2004-2005 v01 Draft	/.../Planning/ 2003-2004BudgetV10 2004-2005BudgetV01Draft
10	Using version numbers, draft and dates CPRS Final 20110105 CPRS Final 20110304 CPRS Final 20110305 CPRS v02 Draft IncomeExpenditureAttributionModel2003-2004v03Draft IncomeExpenditureAttibutionModel2003-2004v04Final	CPRS Draft 2.1 CPRS Final CPRS Final version 2 CPRS Version 3 IEAmodel0304_draftv3 IEAmodel0304_finalv4

APPENDIX A

ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

Consistently used abbreviations and acronyms help in keeping the name length short and concise. However, if abbreviations and acronyms are not standardized, they can be very difficult to interpret as time goes by. A list of acceptable abbreviations and acronyms should be developed for each organization.

This appendix suggests some standardized acronyms and abbreviations.

Department Codes	<p>Refer to the Government Microsoft Outlook Global Address List. (e.g. ANBL, BNB-ENB, SD-DS, ECO-BCE, ED02, etc.)</p> <p>Please note that these acronyms may change; if so contact the departmental Records Manager.</p>
Abbreviations for provinces, territories and other countries.	<p>Canada Post abbreviations for provinces and territories (e.g. AB, BC, MB, NB, NL, NT, NS, NU, ON, PE, QC, SK and YT)</p> <p>Abbreviations for the United States are available at www.canadapost.ca</p> <p>Other country codes are available at http://www.iso.org/iso/country_codes.htm</p>
Commonly used acronyms	<p>ABC – Agencies, Boards and Commissions BOM - Board of Management CPRS – Classification Plan and Retention Schedule for Common Records ESS – Employee Self Service GNB - Government of New Brunswick MEC - Memorandum to Executive Council MLA – Member of the Legislative Assembly MOU - Memorandum of Understanding MRA – Municipal Records Authority for New Brunswick RCMP- Royal Canadian Mounted Police</p>
Sample word abbreviations	<p>Agr – Agreement Att - Attachment Ang - Anglais Cttee - Committee Co – Company Eng – English Fr – French and français Govt – Government Lgl – Legal Ltd – Limited Mtg – Meeting Mgmt – Management Org – Organization Qty – Quantity Rcvd– Received v - Version</p>
Committees , Associations, Boards and Commissions acronyms	<p>AMANB – Association of Municipal Administrators of New Brunswick CALJ – Canadian Association of Liquor Jurisdiction TAC – Transportation Association of Canada</p>

APPENDIX B

QUICK REFERENCE GUIDE

<p>Benefits of using naming conventions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Facilitate better access to and retrieval of electronic documents.• Allow sorting of documents in logical sequence.• Help users to identify the items they are looking for and support the recognition of the content of a document from a list.• Help keep track of document versions. <p>General Rules:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Keep document titles concise but meaningful.• Document title should<ul style="list-style-type: none">• reflect the content• make sense if the creator/author is unavailable.• The chosen language(s) should be reflected in the document title.• There is a 255 character limitation.• Avoid words such as<ul style="list-style-type: none">• and, or, the, le, la, les, etc.• Avoid repetition.• Avoid common words at the start of a document title (i.e. Draft, Final, Letter or Memo).• Always use the “File Extension” in the document title (i.e. .docx, .msg, .pptx, etc.).• Use capital letters to delimit words.• Use only the standard separator as determined by the organization (space, underscore (_) or dash (-)).• Use the document metadata/properties where appropriate instead of including them in the document title. <p>Acronyms and abbreviations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use only the approved acronyms and abbreviations as approved by the organization. <p>Correspondence</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Document title should consist of who sent the letter/e-mail/memo, subject, date and “Rcvd” for incoming correspondence.• Add “Att” to designate attachment(s) (e.g. SmithJComplaint20111216RcvdAtt01of02).	<p>Dates</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Start with the year<ul style="list-style-type: none">• (i.e. YYYYMMDD).• The dash is the recognized standard for fiscal year (e.g. 2003-2004). <p>Names/Author/Creator</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use last name first, then first initial of given name.• Use person’s title or rank only for business purposes in this format: Last Name/Title/Given Name Initial• Avoid using your name in the document title. <p>Non-alphanumeric characters</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Avoid using non-alphanumeric characters in document names (i.e.: \? = + # \$ < >, etc.)• French accents are permissible in most situations; check with your departmental Records Manager for assistance. <p>Numbers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Always use two digit numbers (e.g. District 01). <p>Punctuation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Avoid punctuation marks in the document title except for the approved separator(s) (i.e. space, underscore (_) or dash (-)).• Use of spaces between words can make web addresses difficult to read; use the underscore instead. <p>Order of the document name:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The order of the subject and date will depend on retrieval and the structure of the folders; the date will usually be first followed by the subject. <p>Versions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use the letter “v” to indicate a version.• Use “Draft” and “Final” to indicate draft and final documents.
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