

File Naming Conventions & Directory Structure

Background

File and directory naming conventions are crucial to creating a well-organized Web site. Organization provides many benefits, not the least of which is helping your visitors navigate your site.

- Web users often try to guess or remember URLs. A consistent directory structure helps people to intuitively navigate a Web site.
- When Web sites are well organized in advance, directory and file names are less likely to change down the road, avoiding broken links and bookmarks.
- Web site managers benefit from an organized structure when it comes time to determine ownership of files and clean up directories in order to keep pages current. New managers can easily learn the structure.
- Consistent structure and well-named files help developers when performing maintenance. Files they need to update are easily found, even if they are not familiar with that technology.
- A well-organized site structure can help Web site managers get more out of their statistics packages by providing more specific reporting on subsections of data.

Goals

- Encourage the use of clear and mnemonic filenames.
- Promote a level of consistency in naming that will foster a relatively intuitive access to files and Web space.
- Ease management and maintenance.

Specific Guidelines

- Use separate subdirectories for major sub-sites or content categories linked from the main site, as in <http://attra.org/espanol/>.
- Note that URLs, file names, and file extensions cannot contain uppercase letters, spaces, or special characters (e.g., & or \$), but may contain letters, numbers, underscores, and dashes.
- Make sure that file names clearly denote their content; do not use the DOS 8-and-3 naming convention.
- Make sure that HTML file names end in .html but NOT .htm.
- Delete all extraneous, non-linked (orphan) files.
- NOTE: Many existing Web pages do not conform to these guidelines. These guidelines should be followed as you move forward. In general, it is not advisable to change a file name once it has been posted to the Internet as this may adversely affect search engine listings and rankings.

General Guidelines

- URLs must be as logical and clear as possible and make sense to people not familiar with your organization. Use unabbreviated words or common acronyms. They should be easy to remember and easy to spell: e.g., `beef_marketing.html`, NOT `beefmark.html`.

Web Guidelines & Standards

- With that in mind, URLs should still be as short as possible. Longer URLs are harder for people to remember and type and are often broken when sent through e-mail (An e-mail allows about 70 characters per line).
- Avoid overly general file and directory names (e.g., file1.html, file2.html). File names should be based on the page title.
- Use numbers only if there is a compelling reason to do so, such as a date (e.g. 090204_newsletter.html NOT newsletter3.html or sept2_2004_newsletter.html).
- The home page of a directory should always be named index.html. This allows for shorter URLs as users can "chop off" the file name and still get to the page (e.g. attra.org/espanol/ defaults to attra.ncat.org/espanol/index.html).
- Divide larger groups of files into subdirectories.
 - If you have several files in a given directory such as espanol_horticultura.html, espanol_agronomia.html, espanol_manejo.html, move them into a subdirectory called "espanol" and call them horticultura.html, agronomia.html, and manejo.html.