



File Naming for Photographs

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Photograph Preservation, Selection, and Digitization Planning

Digital surrogates for photographic collections should be named with unique, persistent identifiers to help locate them throughout their lifecycle. The filenames should be directly associated with the analog collection naming conventions in most cases, as to keep consistency between the analog item and its digital counterpart.

Generally, we recommend that file names:

- **Are unique** - no other digital resource should duplicate or share the same identifier as another resource
- **Are consistently structured** - file names should follow a consistent pattern and contain consistent information
- **Are well-defined** - a well-defined rationale for how/why files are named assists with standardization and consistency in naming and will ease in identification of files during the digitization process and long afterwards
- **Are persistent** – files should be named in a manner that has relevance over time and is not tied to any one process or system. Information represented in a file name should not refer to anything that might change over time.
- **Observant of any technical restrictions** – file names should be compliant with any character restrictions (such as the use of special characters, spaces, or periods in the name, except in front of the file extension), as well as with any limitations on character length. Best practice is to limit character length to no more than 32 characters per file name.

Specifically, we recommend that file names:

- Use a period followed by a three-character file extension at the end of all file names for identification of data format (for example, .tif, .jpg, .gif, .pdf, .wav, .mpg, etc.)
- Take into account the maximum number of items to be scanned and reflect that in the number of digits used (if following a numerical scheme).
- Use leading 0's to facilitate sorting in numerical order (if following a numerical scheme).
- Do not use an overly complex or lengthy naming scheme that is susceptible to human error during manual input.
- Use lowercase characters and file extensions.

Example of a file name following these rules:

