

File Structure

Computers organize data in hierarchies, and the metaphor for thinking about that is to think of file folders. Imagine your computer as a filing cabinet. The drives are the drawers and inside the drawers you keep your file folders. That is where the metaphor breaks down a bit, because on a computer it is quite easy to put a file folder within another file folder -- sometimes you can have a large number of folders within folders. (This is called nesting folders.)

That is the essence of the hierarchy we need to use in web design.

Naming files & folders

A few things to keep in mind to ensure you don't run into problems:

- 1. Short file names, no longer than eight characters.**
If you have file names that are longer than eight characters, the server might not be able to see them. This is no longer the case at Western, though longer names sometimes get shortened when you save from PC to Mac.
- 2. No blank spaces in the name.**
Similarly, servers have to interpret what that blank space actually means. Most put [%20] where there is a blank space, but some put in other characters, and these will mess up your links. If you must have a space in the name, use the underscore [_] character, so names will look like: adobe_1.html
- 3. All lower case letters.**
Again, this is getting to be less of a problem, but some servers do not recognize upper case characters. Some recognize both, but if you start adding upper case characters randomly, it makes it more difficult to remember. (It's also less work to type in lower case only.)
- 4. Names that make sense from looking at them, and that are descriptive.**
Pick a name so that you will be able to recognize what the page is, just from reading the name. This will save you hours of time by not opening the wrong files.

Also, make the names related. The exception to this is that the front page of each section (or the front page that belongs to that folder) should be called "index.htm".

Why this is so important in web design

Essentially, html is a set of instructions. Think of it as a recipe for how a web page should be put together, written for the browser software (Netscape, IE, Firefox, Safari, etc.). A lot of what you see on a web is actually in the recipe itself -- in the HTML file.

But a lot of the ingredients are in other files. One of the trickier bits of those recipes is showing how pages are linked together and how to show images and other media files. This is why good file structure is so matter, because that is how you instruct the browser to put the page together.