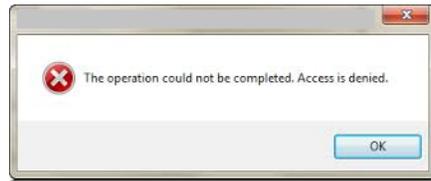


Long File or Folder Names are a Problem

By Lennie Torgerson

If a file's full path length is too long, you may not be able to access the file and a server may not be able to back it up or even find it.

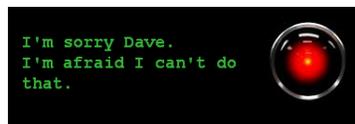
Recently, a designer I know tried to copy a file. He got an access denied error. Then he tried to edit the file, and again, was denied access. The permissions were all set correctly - he created the file, for crying out loud! – but, he still had no access to the file. (If the path is too long, you cannot edit the file.)



A planner that I was helping recently complained that her files were disappearing from the server. She had requested restores four separate times for the same data set. When she attempted to copy the restored files back to their original location, she started getting errors that the copy could not be completed. (If the path is too long, you may not be able to save the file.)



And another designer made many, many changes to a design file and decided that he should request a restore from the server backups to get back to where he'd been a week prior. He was informed that the specific file he had been working in was missing from the backup data set. (If the path is too long, your file may not get backed up.)



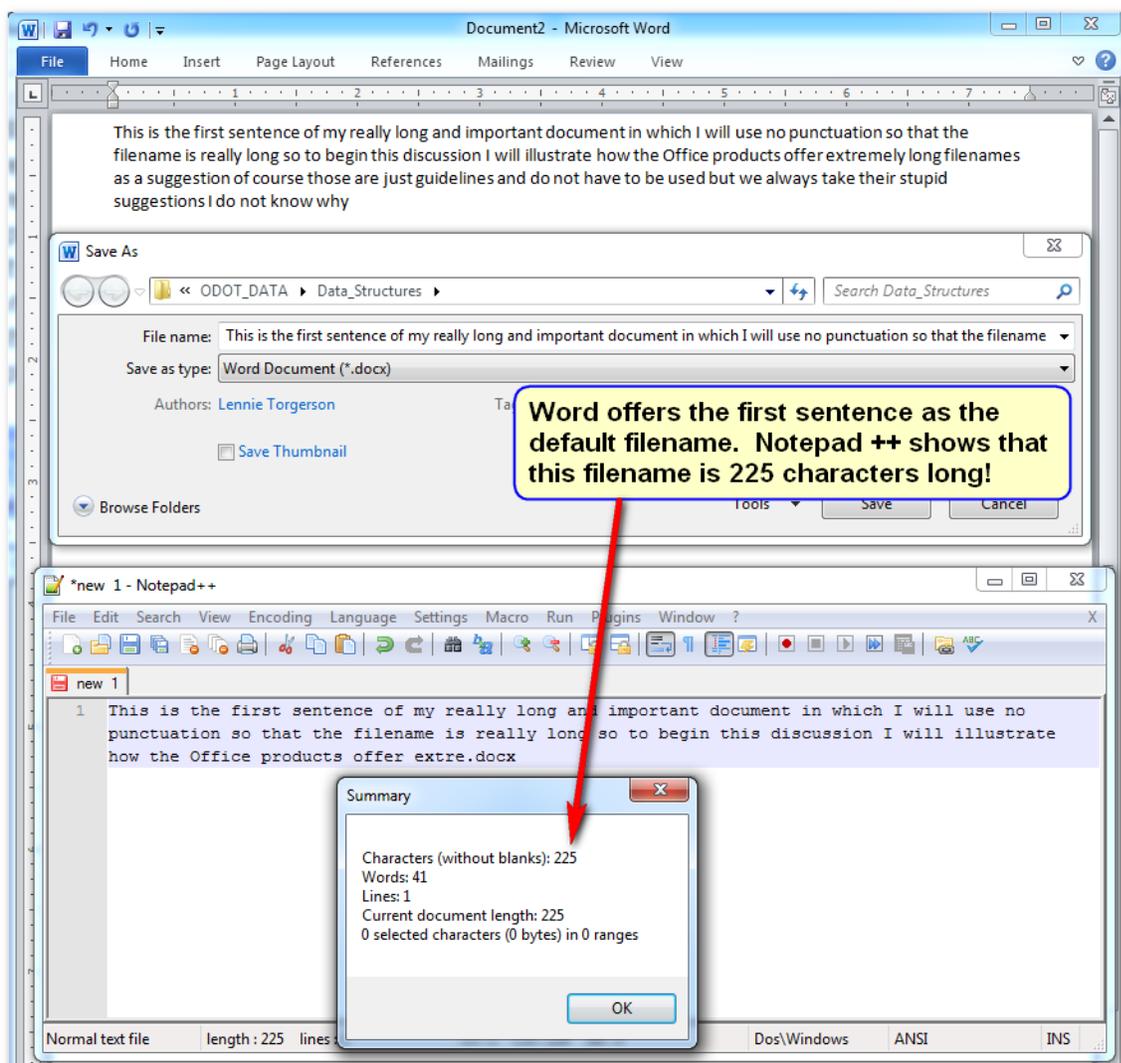
These unfortunate people have one thing in common and that is that they tend toward verbosity in their folder names and filenames. That's correct - their folder names and filenames are just too long! **When the full path length gets too long, the operating system cannot keep track of the file.** You can't edit it, copy it to another location, or even back it up!

Our folder structures are too deep and filenames are way too long!

How long is too long? Well, that's difficult to say, exactly. I have read in several documents that the limit is 255 characters. You shouldn't push the limit because there are characters in the path that we don't normally see. The "F" in your F:\ drive

represents a lot of characters. In mine it stands for \\wpdotfpr818\USERSENG\isd806 - that's 30 characters! Because of this, I recommend that you keep your folder and filenames shorter than 200 characters.

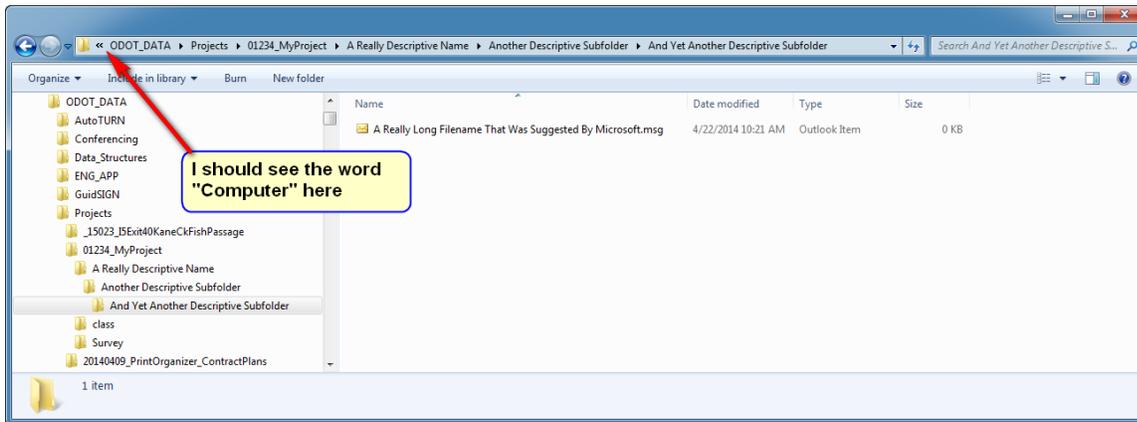
We are too descriptive in our filenames, employ useless characters like spaces, and create folder structures that have levels so deep a miner wouldn't want to attempt to drill down to the bottom! Worse yet, the Microsoft Office products offer us default names when we save, that are extremely long. We think we are saving time when we accept the default name, and don't realize that we might have difficulty accessing that file again. Check out the suggested filename in the example below.



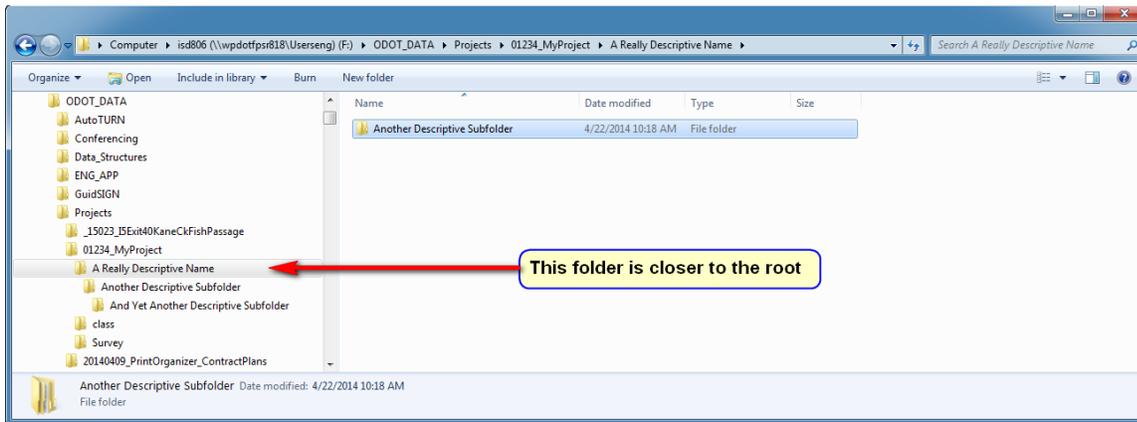
Outlook offers the entire Subject field as the default filename - which is too long!

So how do you tell if your data's in trouble? That's the problem, isn't it? You don't realize you're in trouble until you're hip deep in it. Look at the address field in Windows Explorer. Try to keep the path to your files short enough so that you can see the word "Computer" at the left side of the address field when your Explorer window takes up about 2/3 of the width of your screen. Of course, folks with higher screen resolutions will have more characters per inch, so understand that this is just a "rule of thumb", not a guarantee. If you treat the character limit like the edge of a cliff in the fog, you might be better off. Stay well away from the edge.

In the example below, the Explorer window takes up about 2/3 of the width of my screen and I do not see the word "Computer" at the left side. Combine that with an extremely long filename offered as a default from Outlook, and you get a file that is likely in trouble! It was probably lost as soon as I filed it away. I might as well throw it in the garbage instead of trying to save it.



How do you fix it? If your folder structures are way too deep and your filenames run on and on, your tree needs a good pruning. You will get the most out of the fewest edits if you shorten folder names closer to the root. First, pick a particular branch and exit any file that you may have open on that branch. Then, begin near the top (that would be the left-most side in Windows Explorer) and rename the folders so that they are shorter.



If you are storing STIP project data, consider using the key number and an abbreviated project name. For example, "54321 OR999 at Some Intersection or Creek" could become "54321OR999SomeCr". Notice the lack of spaces and using upper and lower case to make it more readable. I eliminated 25 characters!

If you've been saving email messages, you may want to shorten those long filenames. Try using numeric values to help your folders sort instead of using "A_", "AA_", or "AAA_" as prefixes to folder names. 1Zelda, 2Meeting, 3Admin, 4Project sort very nicely and your eye hardly sees the numeric prefix.

Things turned out okay for two out of the three people I mentioned earlier. The first two were able to rename their folders and reduce their path/filename lengths so that the data could be accessed and backed up. The third also shortened his path/filenames, but was out of luck when it came to retrieving files that were never backed up in the first place.