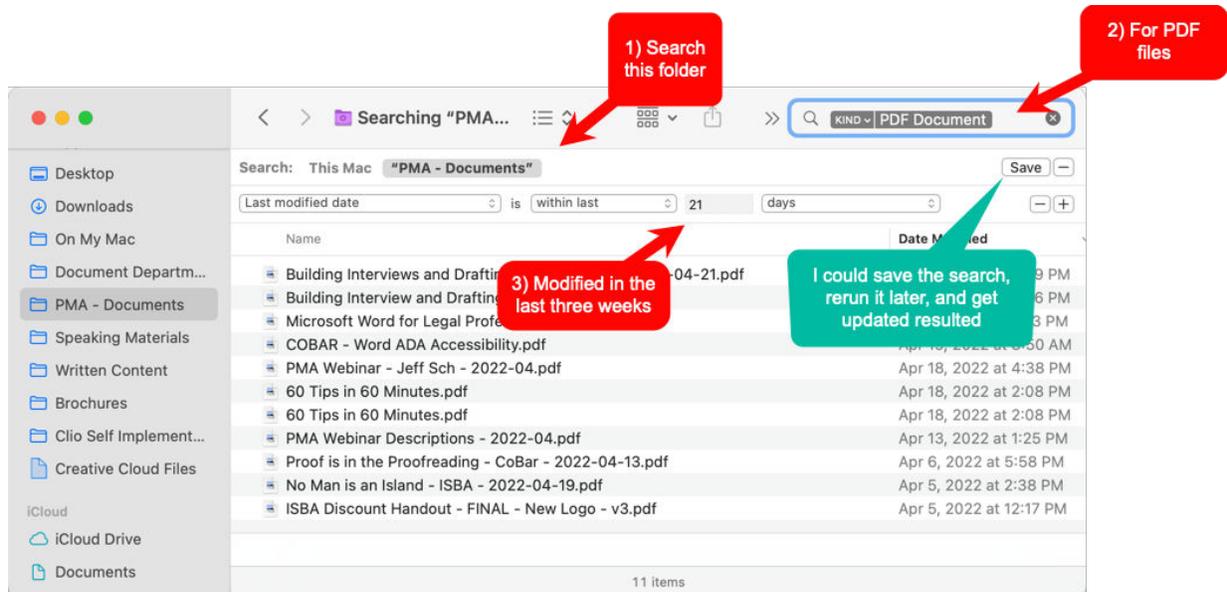


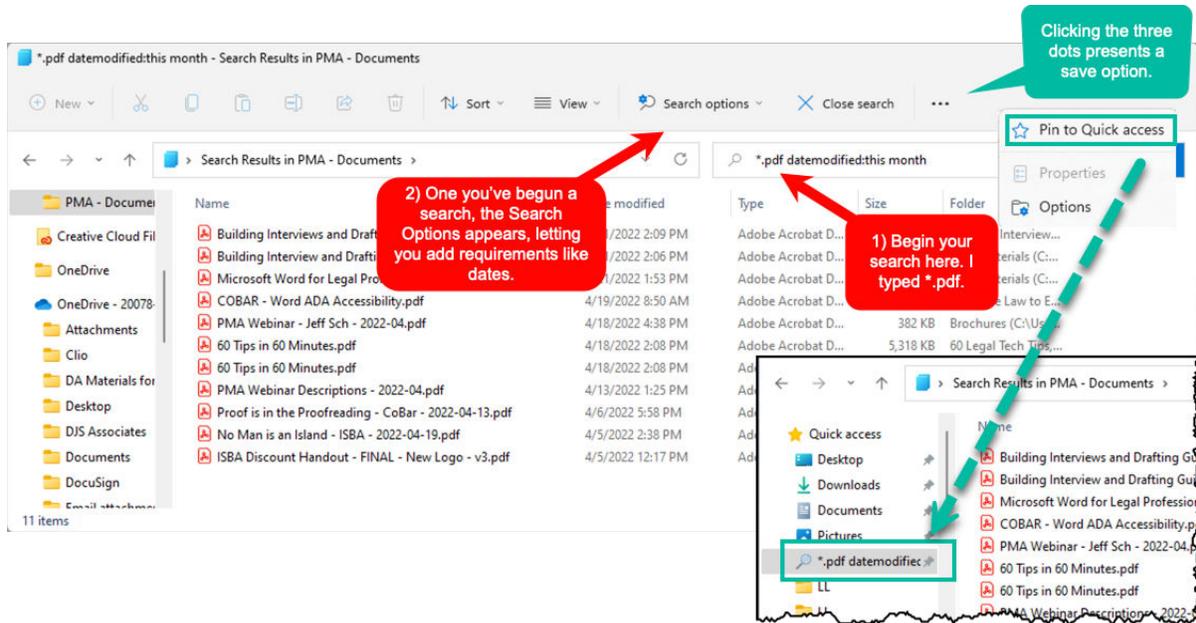
ESTABLISH FILE NAMING CONVENTIONS

For solo and very small firms, a full document management system (“DMS”), such as [DocMoto](#), [iManage](#), or [NetDocuments](#), may be overkill from a price and complexity standpoint. But you still need and deserve logic and searchability of client files. Although foregoing a DMS means losing some helpful features, such as access control, document profiles, and transparent document versioning, you can still create and implement some free techniques to make finding files simpler.

Modern computing devices, whether traditional computers or mobile devices, have powerful search and file metadata capabilities built in. For example, Apple Macs can create a “[smart folder](#)” that is essentially a saved search of your hard drive. Every time you open that folder, the computer reruns the search and finds any new documents meeting the search criteria.



You can do something similar in Windows, but it's a bit less elegant:



These saved search technologies rely on metadata to work. As legal professionals, we think of metadata as bad because it can leak confidential information if handled improperly. But metadata, broadly-speaking, is simply information *about* a file rather than information *in* a file. Information *in* a file would be the content of the document, the text of your pleading, for example. Information *about* the file would be word count, the last time the document was edited, and who did the editing, for example.

Before one even faces the question of metadata and saved searches to make finding files faster, there's something very simple even a harried solo practitioner can tackle to make finding files easier – a consistent naming scheme for your files.

If you don't have a DMS, then you need to establish the rules by which files will be saved and named.

FILE NAMING LIMITATIONS IN WINDOWS

Each file in Windows is located at a "path." The term path refers to the complete location of your file, not just the name. For example, "C:\Docs\Letter to Client" has a file name that's 16 characters long ("Letter to Client"), but a path of 19 characters ("Docs" and "Letter to Client"). The "Docs" portion and the "Letter to Client" portion can each be 255 characters. The "full path" limitation, meaning all folders, subfolders, and file name combined, is an astounding 32,767 characters.

If you need to more than 255 characters for each path component and file name, Microsoft provides instructions [here](#). You should work with your IT vendor to implement this change as it involves editing the [Registry](#), a technical part of Windows.

But, assuming you're not nesting files and folders with immensely long names, 255 characters is a lot, and a huge improvement over Windows' original 8-character limitation. Therefore:

- Then: wjpcp01.dep
- Now: 2021-10-30 - James Smith Perjury Case Deposition 01.docx

UNACCEPTABLE CHARACTERS

Windows reserves several characters for internal use and forbids them from being used in a file name. A file name may not contain any of the following characters:

- < (less than)
- > (greater than)
- : (colon)
- “ (double quote)
- / (forward slash)
- \ (back slash)
- | (vertical bar)
- ? (question mark)
- * (asterisk)

FILE NAMING LIMITATIONS FOR MACS

Modern Apple Macs and iOS devices run on the [Apple File System](#), released in 2017. Mac file names are also limited to 255 characters.

UNACCEPTABLE CHARACTERS

Apples reserves a single for internal use and forbids it from being used in a file name.

- : (colon)
- Additionally, while not a restricted character, starting a file name with a period (*e.g.*, “.Letter to Client.docx”) will cause that file to disappear from view. It’s still present and recoverable, but it’s best to avoid the problem. Macs hide all file names starting with a period from the user’s view.

RECOMMENDED PROTOCOL

If you would like everything sorted by date (which is what most lawyers like), simply precede every file name with a date, year first. If you enter the date month/day/year, then all of the January files (for all years) are lumped together, all of the February files are together, etc. Our file naming convention:

2021-10-30 - Letter to John Doe re billing system.docx

The date indicates the date the document was mailed out if it's a letter; and the longer description makes it clear what this document contains without even opening it. If you are scanning a document you received, then the date should be the date the particular document was received.

If you prefer documents organized by type rather than date, you could do the following:

Letter - John Doe re billing system- 2021-10-30.docx

In this second example, the files will not be organized by sent or received date, but by type. All “Letters” together, all “Pleadings” together, and so forth. The most important part is not the order, but the consistency:

- Affidavit - ;
- Complaint - ;
- Letter - ;
- Pleading - ; and
- Settlement - .

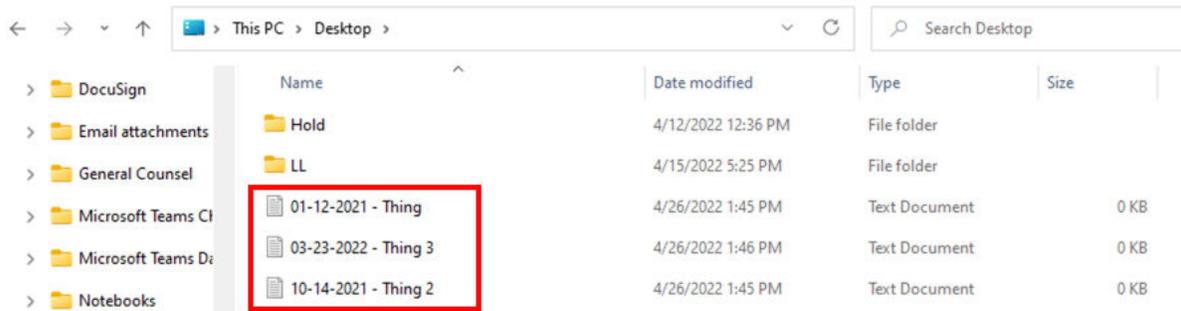
or

- 2021-10 - ;
- 2021-12-11 - ;
- 2022-01-04 - ; and
- 2022-02-22 - .

VALUE IN ADDING A DATE YOURSELF

First, the value in using the European date model (4-digit year, 2-digit month, and 2-digit day) is to force everything to be in date order. Using the American model would produce a flawed order in Windows:

- 01-12-2021;
- 03-23-2022; then
- 10-14-2021.



Second, adding the date yourself tells you when you sent or received a document. It does not rely on the date in the document because the document could have been sent later than it was dated, lost in the mail, etc. Additionally, adding the date to the file name prevents reliance on an operating system date for “date created” or “date last modified”, something that can be altered by an action as small as opening, but not even editing, the file.