

## *Digital File Management*

*(AKA: I've done all this awesome work and I don't want to lose it)*

*Written by Tamzin Byrne*

I've worked in community radio and TV for nearly 3 years. On my computer, in my 'radio and TV' folder, I have 6125 individual files, saved in 2549 folders which take up 27.1GB. On the computers at my station and my uni, I have another 30GB, mixed up in other people's work, across a whole bunch of projects. I've put all this time and effort into making great media... but now I can't find any of it!

Digital file management is the boring but important part of creating great multimedia work. I'll admit - it's a bit of a chore. But when you've finished a podcast or a video, just spend a minute or two filing your work carefully to save yourself time and trouble later on.

There are three parts to DFM:

- organise your work, logically and systematically, with all the relevant info
- store it safely, on a computer, a hard drive or even online
- back it up, so that you'll never lose it

### **Organising your work**


It's important to keep your files in order, with descriptive names and clearly marked final copies. You want to be able to find things quickly and have any other relevant info (names, dates, locations, scripts) stored with your work. If you keep your file names consistent, it will be really easy to search your archived work. By including all this info, you're making it easy for your computer to find stuff.

### **What's your name again?**


I have dozens of files called 'tamz story', or 'piece from tamz'. That's useless, I have to open the file to find out what it is, which takes time. And I can't search my files – the search engine doesn't know what's in them. You need descriptive names which include the sort of information that will help

you identify your file when you've long forgotten the details. Let's use a hypothetical here – I'm doing a radio story on bullying at school. I've interviewed child psychologist Dr Brian Smith (but you might have interviewed a band, or you could be editing segments for a comedy podcast)


- Start a word document which has all your contacts, your list of questions, your script – all the information you're using to work on this piece. Save that in the same place as your audio work. Later on, when you come back to look at this work, you'll need that info.
- When you've recorded your interview, save a copy of the raw data. This is the ultimate backup in case everything goes wrong. When you're editing and moving files, it's easy to make a mistake. Keep it in a high-quality format (320kb mp3, or a wav file), and [back it up](#) straight away. We'll call this file:  
bullying\_briansmith\_childpsych\_RAW.mp3

 bullying\_briansmith\_psych\_RAW.mp3


- Before we start editing, we need to make a copy. This is the working copy, the file that we can play with and change around, knowing that the original file is safely tucked away. Let's call it:  
bullying\_briansmith\_childpsych\_EDIT.mp3

 bullying\_briansmith\_psych\_EDIT.mp3

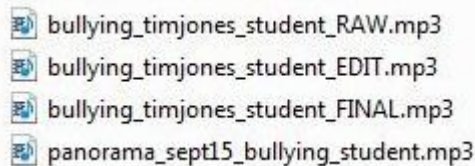
- When we're done editing and adding music, we'll save a final copy, a nice clean copy without all those editing marks:  
bullying\_briansmith\_childpsych\_FINAL.mp3

 bullying\_briansmith\_psych\_FINAL.mp3

- To finish off, we need a fresh copy to send to the producer, or to put up as a podcast. You need to save in a lower quality format ([128kb mp3 is best](#)), so people can download it easily. This name needs to make sense to other people:  
panorama\_sept15\_bullying\_pyschologist.mp3

 panorama\_sept15\_bullying\_psychologist.mp3

- Next, we might interview a schoolkid (Tim Jones) about their experience. We'll call these files:  
bullying\_timjones\_student\_RAW.mp3  
bullying\_timjones\_student\_EDIT.mp3  
bullying\_timjones\_student\_FINAL.mp3  
panorama\_sept15\_bullying\_student.mp3

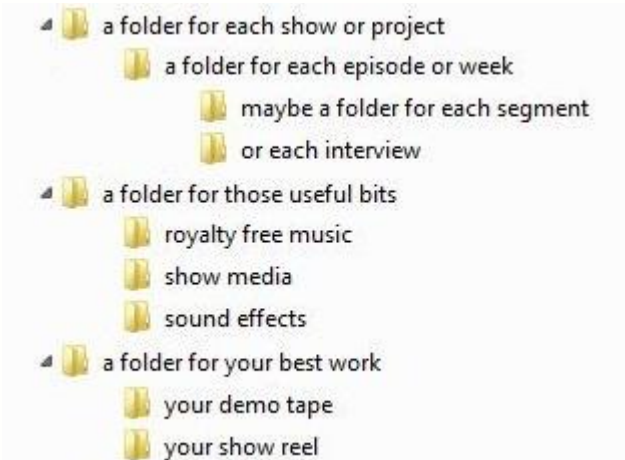


### Why did I do it like this?

- All the work on this story will be grouped together as bullying\_whoever\_whatever.mp3
- You'll know straight away what you've recorded, who it was, where they were from
- Searching is easy – the right info is in the name of your file
- If you want to find all your final copies, you can just search for FINAL and they'll all pop up
- When you run out of room on your hard drive, you can search for the word RAW and delete all those big old files
- If you avoid spaces and foreign characters, you're less likely to have a problem with the file later

### Manila is so 20<sup>th</sup> century

You'll need a set of folders – this is like a digital filing cabinet. Keep your folders simple. Don't make a folder for every single thing, it's better to group things together, and to give your files descriptive names. A lot of the info you've included in your file names already will make your work easy to find in bigger folders.

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- ▾ a folder for each show or project
    - ▾ a folder for each episode or week
      - ▾ maybe a folder for each segment
      - ▾ or each interview
  - ▾ a folder for those useful bits
    - ▾ royalty free music
    - ▾ show media
    - ▾ sound effects
  - ▾ a folder for your best work
    - ▾ your demo tape
    - ▾ your show reel

### Are you still with us?

Organising your work is important. It's like your washing basket. You can spend 10 minutes every morning looking for the other sock. Or, you could just put your clothes away to start with and have socks ready to go all the time.

You'll probably come up with your own system, but remember these points:

- Name your files carefully and consistently
- Include lots of info in your filenames, for easy searching
- Keep a copy of your raw audio until you're sure you don't need it
- Store your work in folders – but don't make them too complex

### Storing and transporting your work

You'll probably end up using a whole bunch of computers to record, edit and broadcast or publish your work. If you're moving files between home, school, uni and your station, they'll get really mixed up.

You should choose one place to be your main file location – for me, it's my laptop. I gather up all my random files and move them to my laptop regularly, about once a week. Whatever you choose, make sure it's stable and safe – you don't want someone accidentally deleting your work.

Then you'll need some way to carry your files around and move them between different computers. I use my mp3 player – it works just the same as a flash drive, but with the added bonus of having all my music on it! It's worth spending money on something reliable with lots of space, but not so expensive that losing it would be a catastrophe.

## Storage solutions – what makes the grade?

Glance through this list, and have a think about what might work best for you.

Home desktop computer	Your best option. It's big, it's safe, it's not going anywhere. Your only risk is burglars, or your baby brother accidentally deleting your work (true story).	Safe and reliable: A+
Laptop	A close second. Totally portable and totally yours. You can set it up with the software you want and take your work anywhere. Just don't lose it – then you're stuffed.	Portable but loseable: A
Network drive at school or uni	Lots of schools offer a networked space to store your files. It will be a professional quality drive, backed-up automatically, so your media will be totally safe. But, you might not have much space. Another big drawback – network admins get really suss if you're keeping hundreds of mp3s on there and they've been known to delete stuff without asking. But, if you keep your files named and organised, you should be fine.	Take your chances: B
Stand-alone hard drive	I'm talking about the big, professional-looking hard drives. They are just the same as the ones inside your computer, but in their own box. They are quite cheap, very reliable and they have lots of space. But, they need their own power supply and they really, really don't like being carried around. Leave a big hard drive like this on your desk at home or school. A good option if you share a computer with your family, but want your own storage space.	Big, chunky, safe: B+

Flash drive or pocket drive	These little devices are really handy. They fit in your pocket and they run off power from the USB port on the computer. Unless you're prepared to spend some money, though, they can be unreliable. You also want to make sure you've got lots of space – media files can be big.	Pocket-sized media: A
iPod or mp3 player	A really big one, like an iPod classic, is a great way to carry your files around. You're likely to have your music with you already - you might as well carry some files on it too. Don't rely on it, though – your iPod will get stolen. Best used as a way to transport your work to and from your regular computer.	Convenient, but iPods get stolen: B
USB key or thumb drive	Easy to transport, easy to use. But they're tiny, so you'll fill it up fast. Great tool, but keep your work somewhere more secure.	Useful but small: C
CDs	CDs seem cheap (\$20 for 50 discs), but at the rate you'll be using them, the cost will add up. And CDs aren't perfect – they scratch easily and sometimes just spontaneously fail, so that's not a very safe way to keep your awesome media. They're also hard to organise. You'll spend hours looking for the file you want.	Avoid if possible: D

## Backing up your work

You should keep more than one copy of your work. If your computer dies, you want to be able to recover your work.

For your very best work, the work that you're most proud of, keep as many copies as you can. Keep your demo tape on your computer and on your portable hard drive. Put a copy on your mp3 player and upload a copy to your blog. If you've put hours of work into something and you think it's one of your best pieces of media, you want to make sure you can find it when the ABC or Austereo calls and asks for a show reel.

For most projects, it's enough to keep it on a computer and on a portable drive. For really important stuff, you could set up a proper backup copy in a different location – like school, or your friend's house. My Dad backs up all of his work on a hard drive in the boot of our car – he figures that the chances of the house burning down AND the car getting stolen are slim to none.

## Online storage

Online storage can be very useful, if you're working across many computers. Services like [Dropbox](#) and [Syncplicity](#) are websites where you can upload your files and access them over the internet.

You treat them like a regular hard drive, but all your work is online. They have tons of storage space, so you could use an online service as the main location for your work. You can upload and download your files from any computer, which makes transporting your current work easy. Some of them come with a program that you can install to automatically sync your computer files with your online folder.

Most of them are free, but that's a risk: some services have closed down very suddenly. The technology is still very new, so everyone's still figuring out how to make online storage work reliably and quickly. And if you're producing high quality audio and video, you can very quickly blow your download quota just accessing your own files.

It's something to have a play with, to see if it works for you. But don't rush to put all your work online. A physical hard drive or computer is still the best.

### *About the writer:*

*Tamzin Byrne, 26, volunteered at SYN Media for a number of years in various roles including presenter, producer and SYN Radio Programing Manager. In 2009, Tamzin won the Radio Producer of the Year Award at the annual SYN Awards Ceremony for her work as Executive Producer of Panorama.*