

Project-based File Structure: Workflow & Organization for Animators

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A Note on Workflow: For most assignments animation students are expected to read and write projects directly to their personal hard drives. Working from the network or desktop, while tempting, are almost never good ideas. Working directly from your personal hard drive will help you avoid sluggish performance, broken links and lost project files. It will also give you a single parent file to help simplify the back-up process.

Taking the time to set up a *project file structure* on your hard drive before you begin a project will make backing up your work a simple task that may someday save an entire project. . . not to mention just making your everyday workflow faster and much easier.

The industry standard is to have your digital files live in at least *three separate places* to guard against catastrophic mishap. I recommend the following:

- **Personal Hard Drive**
- **Class Folder**
- **Cloud Storage**

1. Setting Up a Project-based File Structure on Your Personal Hard Drive

Project-based File Structure: A *project-based file structure* on your personal hard drive will help to keep all the assets of your project under a single parent folder. It should contain all the supporting files of your increasingly complex projects in a safe, accessible way to stay organized, making your assets easy to locate, and the entire project easy-to-back-up.

Each project should begin with a file structure that will cover your basic production needs. Naturally the list of folders will grow and evolve as the production progresses.

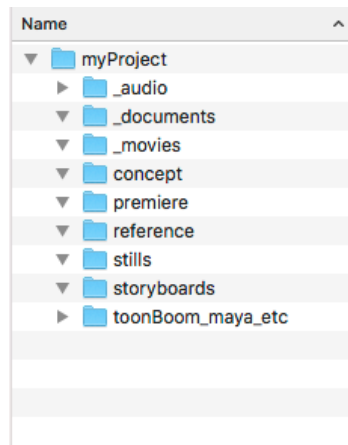
Resource Folder: I also recommend a *resource* folder for tools, scripts and assets that span projects like textures, sound effects, films and images that exist outside of a single production. Keep in mind that assets that link to a production (i.e. textures, audio files, etc.) should live inside the project's specific file structure.

Inside my *resource* folder, I have a *utilities* folder to store various technical files such as photoshop brushes, fonts, software codes, etc.

2. Examples of Organizing a Project-based File Structures

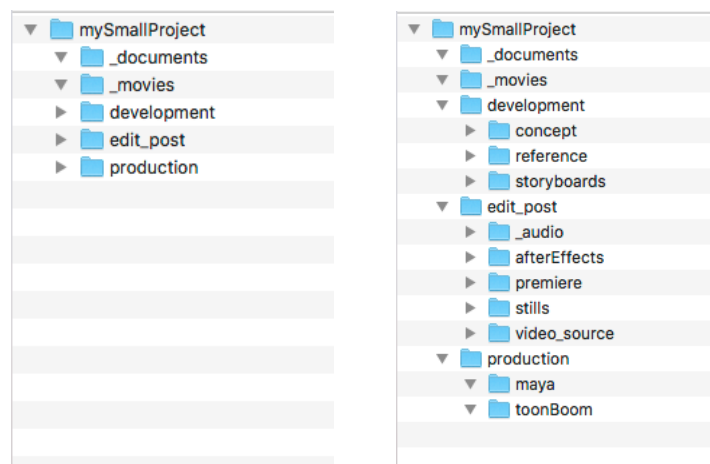
There are almost as many ways to set up a project file structure as there are projects themselves. The smart thing, is to adopt some underlying principles and implement them at the beginning of your projects. Over time your workflow will evolve and so will your file structures. Below are a handful of examples, each on increasing in complexity in response to the complexity and scale of the animated project.

- A. Starter Project:** This project structure starts simple but can grow as the project increases in size and/or complexity.

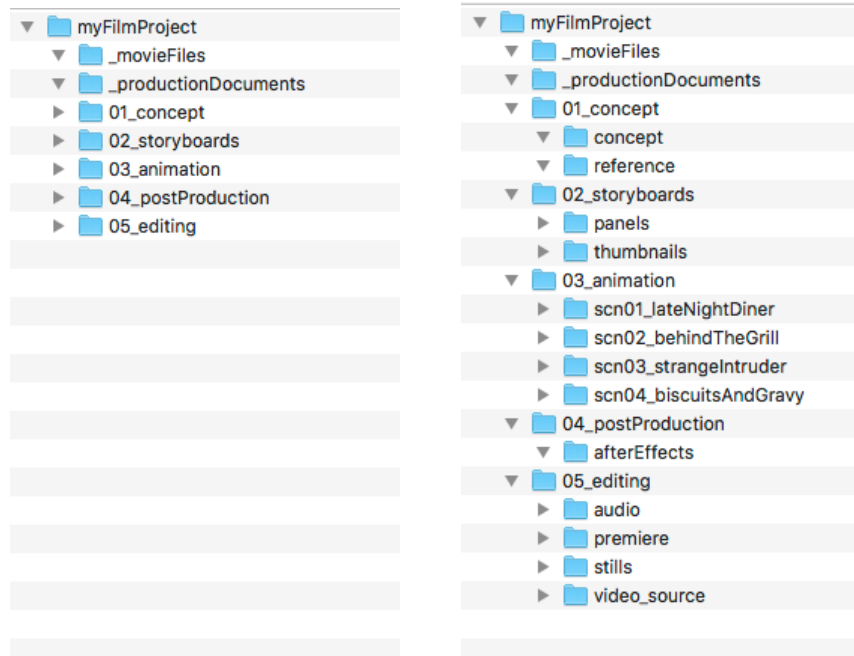


I put an underscore (_) in front of certain folders to make them rise to the top of the list. Inside the **_audio** folder goes music, tempo tracks, and sound effects. **_documents** is for schedules, class notes, and story treatments. **_movies** is where versions of the final product go as the project matures as well as story reels, progression reels, etc. The folders underneath will grow in number if the project grows.

- B. Small Project:** This project assumes a *research and development* stage as well as *editing* and *post-production*. Might as well start with a structure that can handle it.



C. Short Film Project: A short film project that unfolds over a couple of semesters is a much different beast than a class project. It only follows that a project of this scale requires a different level of organization. The key difference here is that I've numbered the folders to reflect the order of production AND I've added a **03_animation** folder which I've broken into scene-specific folders so all of the assets for each production scene is stored together. Notice that I used both scene numbers and a natural naming to help me remember what each scene is about. All those numbers make it easy to get lost.



Whatever level of complexity you're working with, get into the habit of building a folder structure before you get too deep into the project. If you do, you'll find that not only are your files safe and easy to back up, but remarkably, you'll spend less time looking for files and more time making the work!

And remember, no file structure is perfect. You'll change and message this all the way through the production process.