







Article

# Guidelines for a standardized file structure for scientific data

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**Abstract:** Storing scientific data on the file system in a meaningful and transparent way is no trivial task. In particular when the data have to be accessed after their originator has left the lab the importance of a standardized file structure cannot be underestimated. It is desirable to have a structure that allows for the unique categorization of all kinds of data from experimental results to publications. It has to be accessible to a broad variety of workflows, e.g., via graphical user interface as well as via command line, in order to find widespread acceptance. Furthermore, the inclusion of already existing data has to be as simple as possible. We propose a three-level structure to organize and store scientific data that incorporates the full chain of scientific data management from data acquisition to analysis to publications. Metadata are saved in a standardized way and connect original data to analyses and publication as well as to their originators. A simple software tool to check a file structure for compliance with the proposed structure is presented.

**Keywords:** research data management; FAIR; file structure; file system

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Motivation

One of the most frequent issues in data management is the insertion of files into a meaningful data structure. Modern file systems offer many possibilities regarding the choice of names and complexity of folder hierarchies which can lead to many omnipresent problems in scientific data management:

- Finding specific folders in deep folder structures can become a time-consuming task, especially when dealing with large file sizes and a huge number of individual files.
- The tree-like nature of folder hierarchies can highly impede findability. The hierarchy of folders itself is in many cases arbitrary and therefore difficult to define in a general way.
- The lack of standards often leads to diverging and unnecessarily expanded folder structures that are impossible to understand by collaborators or new lab members.

Sophisticated solutions to address these problems can involve databases or object storage systems. Although these systems can provide a clean interface to data on higher levels, the low-level structuring problems often remain, as data files need to be accessible on traditional file systems in many cases.

There are existing approaches to standardize file system structures. To the knowledge of the authors they are, however, either very specific and tied to a single scientific field (e.g. BIDS [1]) or very abstract (e.g. ISA-Tab [2]).

Abstractness is not a problem itself, but grants much freedom to individual workgroups which again causes diverging systems and non-standardized file structures. Thus neither the specific nor the abstract approaches that already exist achieve wide-spread adoption.

From the need for simple, but generic and standardized file system structures we designed an approach that allows easy implementation. Since adoption by scientific users is the main focus of this effort, several considerations were important for the design:

- The new structure should be compatible with existing structures and at least allow for a smooth integration of existing file structures.
- The file system structure should allow access through very different scientific workflows. Usage by databases should be similarly possible as an intuitive access of the raw file structure. Users familiar with terminals should benefit from the concept in the same way as users more attracted by graphical user interfaces.

When using more sophisticated software such as databases, file structures are often replaced by random numbers or arbitrary identifiers that are not intended for use by end-users. However, we believe it is very important to retain traditional file system structures and human-readable filenames, as they have proven to be robust and also provide a fail-safe option in case other specific software systems fail. The file structure proposed in this article can be integrated into workflows involving research data management systems.

## 1.2. Aims

The implementation of the file system structure we present in this manuscript should achieve the following design principles:

- Allow for a mapping of the complete chain of scientific data management:
  1. Data acquisition (Experiment / Simulation)
  2. Data analysis
  3. Publication

Links between the different stages must be possible.

- Encourage transparency: The data structure should be understandable and searchable. Folders and files should have meaningful names. The folder hierarchy should be readily apparent to persons unfamiliar with it.
- Support of reproducibility: Ideally the structure should enable reproducibility of data analysis and publications from raw experimental and simulation data.
- All data must remain accessible even when original creators are not present anymore.
- The structure must provide a possibility for saving metadata.
- Integration of existing structures must be feasible rather than having to adapt to our structure

These design principles comply with the FAIR [3] guiding principles of data management.

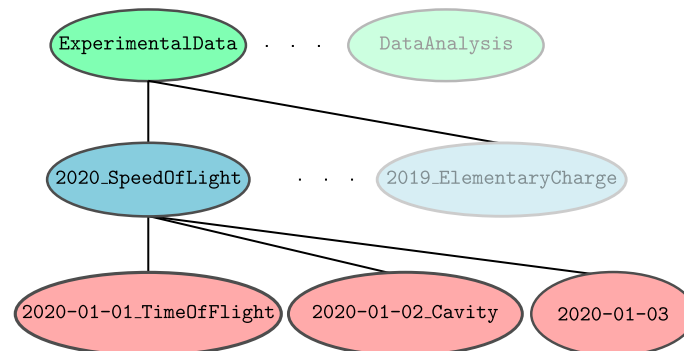
## 2. Results

### 2.1. Implementation

The actual implementation of the file structure consists of two parts: the structure of the directories on the file system itself and the storage of metadata. The former determines where data of individual experiments, simulations, and analyses are stored, while the latter contains necessary information about the data and is the only strict requirement for the actual contents of the directories.

**Table 1.** The two levels of the file structure for each category together with suggested names in the file system. Round brackets in the suggested names denote optional parts.

Category	Experiments ExperimentalData	Simulations SimulationData	Data analysis DataAnalysis	Publications Publications
Project	Descriptive project names (possibly with starting year of the project) but sufficiently general such that individual experiments, analyses, ... belong to one single project. (yyyy_)projectname			Publications include articles, conference talks, posters, ... publicationtype
Entries	Specific containers with actual results of experiment, simulation, analysis. Have to contain metadata, otherwise no restrictions on substructure. yyyy-mm-dd(_descriptor)			Individual publications with date and title. yyyy(-mm-dd)_title



**Figure 1.** The example project 2020\_SpeedOfLight contains data from three different experiments each of which is identified by date and the experimental method used to determine the speed of light.

### 2.1.1. Data structure

All data stored in our file structure are categorized as experimental data, simulation data, data analysis, or publication. Each category has two levels, as shown in Table 1: The top level specifies the general project, while the lower level contains individual experiments, simulations, analyses, or publications belonging to the respective projects. As explained above, we decided to include information into the directory names themselves to make the structure as accessible as possible. The naming conventions for experiments, simulations, and analyses are identical; the naming conventions for publications differ slightly (cf. Table 1) and will be discussed later.

The directories that belong to the categories themselves are simply named ExperimentalData, SimulationData, DataAnalysis, and Publications. The directory names at project level must be chosen carefully, especially if more than one person is involved in working on a project. Due to the hierarchical structure, they must be sufficiently general to prevent single experiments or analyses from being assigned to more than one project, while at the same time giving a clear impression of the contents of the project. Project names for experiments, simulations, or analyses belonging to the same project should be identical within the respective category directories. We suggest that the names of project directories start with the beginning year of the project, followed by an underscore that separates the year from the project name. Figure 1 shows the two examples 2020\_SpeedOfLight and 2019\_ElementaryCharge for two fictitious projects for the experimental determination of the speed of light and the elementary charge.

The entries in the project directories correspond to individual experiments, simulations, or analyses. Their names should begin with their (start) date. In addition, a descriptor can be given which further explains the content of the particular entry in more detail. Again, an underscore separates the date from the descriptor. Three exemplary experiments, each consisting of the measurements of the speed of light, are shown in Figure 1 as entries of the project 2020\_SpeedOfLight. Two of them, 2020-01-01\_TimeOfFlight and 2020-01-01\_Cavity, contain the experimental method as a

descriptor in their directory names, while the third one, 2020-01-03, is named after the date only. These directories contain all collected data and metadata (see section 2.1.4) in almost arbitrary structure. In particular, if the proposed file structure is used for already existing data, any structure that may have been previously defined, can be retained within these directories.

Publications include journal articles, but also dissertations and (conference) lectures or posters, as well as internal reports. We have found that there usually are only a few publications per project so there is little point in collecting them in project directories. Instead, we have decided to group them according to the type of publication, i.e., article, lecture, poster, etc. The directories on the project level are thus called *Articles*, *Presentations*, and so on. The individual entries correspond to individual publications and should be named (as above) with date and descriptor. For journal articles, a good descriptor could consist of the first author and the (short) title of the journal.

### 2.1.2. Dates and Years

In the proposed file structure, dates and years play an important role, as all entries must contain a date, and project names preferably the year. While choosing the “correct” date or year is very natural in many cases, it can be difficult in some cases. For a single session of an experiment, it would be very natural to choose the date of that experiment as the date for the folder name. However, This choice is less obvious, e.g., for measurements that extend over a period of several days or weeks.

We think that it is also very advantageous to save a date in difficult cases, as it can often be a helpful hint for finding data. In cases where the exact contents or names of projects cannot be remembered, it is often at least clear when approximately a project was carried out.

We therefore propose to consider the date of a folder as an approximate date that helps to locate data, rather than an exact timestamp with reliably interpretable meaning. A good standard rule for selecting dates is to simply take the start date, e.g. the start date of a measurement lasting several days, for naming the folder or project.

### 2.1.3. Categories

Note that there may be cases where it is difficult to assign a unique category to an entry. A numerical simulation could be considered a numerical experiment, and more complex forms of data collection could also be considered a form of analysis, too. Measurements of e.g., climatic or geological data are observations rather than experiments and therefore do not really fit into any of the above categories. We still decided to use the four categories experiments, simulations, analyses, and publications since in our experience, most studies can be sorted into one of them. Ultimately, the use of such human-readable categories will always lead to certain ambiguities in special cases. We use these four for reasons of generality and readability, and thus, ultimately, also for user-friendliness. Of course, they can be extended or replaced if necessary.

### 2.1.4. Metadata

After the introduction of the directory structure in which the data is stored on the file system, the second part of our proposed data structure concerns the standardization of metadata. This is the only strict requirement for the contents of each entry that we propose. We require that each entry contain a text file called `README.md` in markdown style following the pandoc implementation [4]. This file consists of a YAML [5] header in which metadata are stored in the form `key: value`. The minimal requirements to the keys are shown in Example 1. It must contain at least the name of a person responsible for the data under the key `responsible` and a short description following the key `description`. While of course more metadata could and should be stored, we have found that the combination of these minimal requirements and project and date from the file system structure already greatly improves the accessibility of stored data.

Depending on the respective entry, there can be any number of meaningful tags for saving the metadata to be selected. In the following, some recurring tags are explained, especially those, that are

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```

1 ---
2 responsible: AuthorA
3 description: Short report comparing different speed of light measurements
4 ...

```

---

**Example 1.** Contents of a minimal YAML header of a README.md containing the responsible person and a short description. Both information are given in the form of `key: value` pairs following YAML notation. The header starts with three hyphens `---` and ends with three periods `...`

---

```

results:
- file: single-averages-*.csv
  description: average speed of light from all single types of measurements
- file: all-averages.csv
  description: average speed of light from all measurements combined

```

---

**Example 2.** The files in which the results of, e.g., an analysis are stored, are listed and described under the `results:` tag as a list of `key: value` pairs.

associated with the linking of the elements of the chain of data management, as explained in section 1.2. Experiments, simulations, and analyses often require a description of the files in which the results are saved. This is done using the `results:` tag as shown in Example 2. This is where the YAML syntax comes in handy, since a list of value or a list of key-value pairs can be used instead of a single value. Since the results are stored in files that may require further explanation, we suggest that these files be listed in a list of the specific key-value pairs `file: <path>` and `description: <short description>`. Paths can be given either relative or absolute. They may contain wildcards following Python's glob syntax<sup>1</sup> e.g., if all files of one type in a given directory contain the same type of results. Instead of individual files, entire directories may be given if all files in this directory contain the same type of results.

Analyses e.g. of experimental data are linked in a similar way to the respective experiments. For this purpose, the `sources:` tag is used. Similarly, the publications are linked to the respective analyses, experiments, and simulations. Example 3 shows how this looks like for a publication based on several experiments and the analysis based on them.

As mentioned above, depending on the metadata requirements, many more tags can be included. An additional tag that has proven useful is the `revisionOf:` tag. For example, if an analysis contains

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<sup>1</sup> <https://docs.python.org/3/library/glob.html#module-glob>

---

```

sources:
- ../.././ExperimentalData/2020_SpeedOfLight/2020-01-01_TimeOfFlight
- ../.././ExperimentalData/2020_SpeedOfLight/2020-01-02_Cavity
- ../.././ExperimentalData/2020_SpeedOfLight/2020-01-03/velocities.txt
- ../.././DataAnalysis/2020_SpeedOfLight/2020-01-04_average-all-exp/**/*.csv

```

---

**Example 3.** A publication links to the corresponding experimental results and data analysis using the `sources:` tag. Paths to the sources are given as relative paths.

---

```
revisionOf: ../2020-01-04_average-all-exp
```

---

**Example 4.** The analysis in `2020_SpeedOfLight/2020-01-05_average-all-exp-corr` corrects the errors made in `2020_SpeedOfLight/2020-01-04_average-all-exp`. This is contained in the `README.md` of the new, corrected analysis using the `revisionOf`: tag.

errors and needs to be recreated, the metadata of the new, corrected analysis should be linked to the incorrect analysis using `revisionOf`.

The tags listed above and in the examples in section 2.2 represent those that we consider the most general and relevant. They can be extended as needed or desired. Note that, with the exception of `responsible`: and `description`:, all tags are optional. Thus, project-specific tags, e.g. those describing, the sample in a type of experiment can be easily integrated.

### 2.1.5. Remarks on archiving and purging data

To the end of the life cycle of scientific data, they should be archived and then deleted from the working file system. This is especially necessary for possible large original data sets from experiments or simulations. However, archiving and purging the original data should not break the links between publications and the corresponding analyses, simulations, and experiments. We therefore recommend the contents of the entries are deleted after archiving with the exception of the metadata file `README.md`. A tag `archived`: `<date-of-archiving>` must be added to its header. Depending on the details of the archiving, additional information can be specified, such as who archived it and where exactly the data is located in the archive. This ensures that the archived data remains linked to the original projects and publications. If necessary, this makes it easier to retrieve original data from old projects that have already been archived.

## 2.2. Exemplary data chains

Two examples of publications, a journal article and a conference presentation, will be inspected in more detail below. Both will represent the entire chain of data management; one in a top-down manner, starting with the publication and retrieving the experimental data published therein, the other in a bottom-up manner, i.e., from individual measurements and simulations to the conference talk.

### 2.2.1. Finding the experimental data for a publication

Suppose AuthorA, AuthorB, and AuthorC published an article about a comparative study of different experimental methods for determining the speed of light in the renowned *Journal of Relativity* in 2020. To achieve maximum transparency, the experiments whose data actually appeared in the publication as well as the analysis of these experimental data must be linked to the publication itself. According to the structure proposed in section 2.1.1, the article is stored in `Publications/Articles/2020_AuthorA-JourRel`. As explained above, the directory name is chosen by date, (first) author, and journal. This directory contains the PDF of the article as well as the metadata in a `README.md` file. Its content is shown in Example 5. In addition to the authors as responsible persons and a short description, experimental results and analyses are listed under the `sources`: tag. After the end of the YAML header, i.e., after the closing `...`, an additional markdown text can be added for further notes. In Example 5, a note about a corrected analysis was added.

This corrected analysis can be found following the entry under the `sources`: tag. When visiting the metadata file of `DataAnalysis/2020_SpeedOfLight/2020-01-05_average-all-exp-corr` which is shown in Example 6, this correction is taken into account by the `revisionOf`: tag. It links to the previous, incorrect analysis that is replaced by the corrected one. Note that the `README.md` file associated with the analysis links to the same experimental sources as the one belonging to the



---

```
1 ---
2 responsible:
3 - AuthorA
4 - AuthorB
5 - AuthorC
6 description: Article on the comparison of several experimental methods for
  → determining the speed of light.
7 sources:
8 - ../.././ExperimentalData/2020_SpeedOfLight/2020-01-01_TimeOfFlight
9 - ../.././ExperimentalData/2020_SpeedOfLight/2020-01-02_Cavity
10 - ../.././ExperimentalData/2020_SpeedOfLight/2020-01-03/velocities.txt
11 - ../.././DataAnalysis/2020_SpeedOfLight/2020-01-05_average-all-exp-corr
12 ...
13
14 # Further Notes
15
16 The corrected analysis was used in Figure 1.
```

---

**Example 5.** Contents of the README.md corresponding to the journal article in /Publications/Articles/2020\_AuthorA-JourRel. All three authors are listed as responsible persons. Both experimental data and the analysis conducted on them are listed as sources. Note that arbitrary (markdown) text may be added after the end of the YAML header for further notes and remarks.

publication. This redundancy is intended because in this way the experimental data are directly visible from the publication without having to visit the analysis. The results of the analysis and the scripts containing the analysis are further described using the `file:` and `description:` tags as explained in section 2.1.4.

The analysis links to the original experimental data on which it was conducted. The content of the metadata file of one of these experiments, contained in ExperimentalData/2020\_SpeedOfLight/2020-01-03, is shown in Example 7. Depending on the setup, the contents could be extended by, e.g., details of the instruments used in the experiment or of the environmental conditions during the measurement.

### 2.2.2. From data generation to a conference talk

Suppose that a new numerical climate model is created in a new project to predict the annual mean temperatures. This climate model uses historical climate data from 1980 to 2010 as training data. From this training set, the temperatures from 2010 to 2019 are predicted. Its accuracy is tested by comparing these predictions to actual measured data from the same years. This project therefore contains experiments (the measured climate data from 1980 to 2019), simulations (the predictions by the new climate model), and analysis (comparison of prediction and measurements for the years 2010 to 2019). Before data can be stored, a name for the project directory in all three categories must be defined. According to the above convention, the name 2020\_climate-model-predict is chosen. It starts with the year of the project start followed by a descriptor for its topic.

AuthorD is responsible for obtaining the historical temperature data provided by the service wheatherdata.example. The data are stored in ExperimentalData in separate directories for each decade. As explained in section 2.1.2, it is not immediately clear how to define the date for a measurement covering a decade. As proposed above, the starting date, i.e. 1980-01-01 for temperatures from 1980-1989, is used in the following. Another reasonable option would be to use the date on which the data were obtained instead. Since the historical temperatures are the only project-related measurements, the date is a sufficient directory names for the single entries, so data from the 80ies

---

```
1 ---
2 responsible: AuthorA
3 description: Average over all data of each type of experiment separately and
  ↪ combined.
4 sources:
5 - ../../../../ExperimentalData/2020_SpeedOfLight/2020-01-01_TimeOfFlight
6 - ../../../../ExperimentalData/2020_SpeedOfLight/2020-01-02_Cavity
7 - ../../../../ExperimentalData/2020_SpeedOfLight/2020-01-03/velocities.txt
8 results:
9 - file: single-averages-*.csv
10  description: average speed of light from all single types of measurements
11 - file: all-averages.csv
12  description: average speed of light from all measurements combined
13 - file: "*.pdf"
14  description: Plots of the averages
15 scripts:
16 - file: calculate-averages.py
17  description: python code doing the calculation
18 - file: plot-averages.py
19  description: create nice plots for article
20 revisionOf: ../2020-01-04_average-all-exp
21 ...
```

---

**Example 6.** The YAML header containing metadata of the analysis stored in `2020_SpeedOfLight/2020-01-05_average-all-exp-corr`. Note that the quotation marks in line 13 required by YAML for values starting with a wildcard character.

---

```
1 ---
2 responsible:
3 - AuthorA
4 - AuthorB
5 description: Radio interferometry measurements to determine the speed of light.
6 results:
7 - file: velocities.txt
8  description: velocities of all measurements
9 ...
```

---

**Example 7.** The YAML header of the metadata file of the experimental data stored in `2020_SpeedOfLight/2020-01-03`.



---

```

1 ---
2 responsible: AuthorD
3 description: Average temperatures of the years 1980-1989 as obtained from
   → wheatherdata.example
4 results:
5 - file: temperatures-198*.csv
6   description: single year averages of all measurement stations with geographic
   → locations
7 ...

```

---

**Example 8.** Exemplary metadata file of the temperature data stored in `ExperimentalData/2020_climate-model-predict/1980-01-01`.

is stored in `ExperimentalData/2020_climate-model-predict/1980-01-01` and so on. The annual average temperatures for different measurement stations are contained in separate files together with their respective geographical locations. This information is condensed into the metadata file shown in Example 8, again in the example of the data from 1980 to 1989. Together with AuthorD as the person responsible for transferring the data and a short description, the file contains the description of the individual files for each year using a wildcard expression.

The temperature data from 1980 to 2009 are then used as training data for a new predictive climate model. The model parameters resulting from the fit to the training data are stored in `SimulationData/2020_climate-model-predict/2020-02-01`. Again, only the date is used as directory name at the entry level. The training data are listed under the `sources`: tag in the metadata file as in Example 9. The model parameters obtained by the fit are then used to predict the temperature development in the years 2010 to 2019. The predictions are stored in the same directory as well as the python code used for the fit and the prediction.

In a subsequent analysis, the model predictions are compared with the measured data. The prediction error is determined by calculating absolute and relative differences between measurements and predictions. The metadata of this analysis are shown in Example 10 and references both the simulation and the measurement as sources. The results are displayed graphically and saved in the same directory.

The new model will be presented together with the analysis of the prediction errors is presented by AuthorD as a conference paper at the Climate Modeling Conference 2020 in Berlin. The presentation slides of this presentation are therefore stored in `Publications/Presentations/2020-03-01_AuthorD_climate-model-conf` together with their metadata, which are shown in Example 11. They link the presentation to the training and test data as well as to the simulations and analysis that compare predictions and measurements.

### 3. Discussion

The file structure presented here is implemented in the Research Group Biomedical Physics at the Max-Planck-Institute for Dynamics and Self-Organization in Göttingen. Currently, 10 experimental project folders, 17 folders for data analysis, 49 folders with publications and 15 project folders containing simulation data are stored according to this specification. Many more data sets are in a transition phase from previous heterogeneous structures. In our workgroup we employ the RDMS CaosDB [6]. The CaosDB crawler is able to index all data which complies with the proposed file structure. CaosDB provides a high-level interface to the data and allows for manual or automatic semantic queries.

The approach presented here is not intended to cover any detail of possible data structures. It is rather intended to be a first step towards a standardized data structure that can be extended in many

---

```

1 ---
2 responsible: AuthorE
3 description: >
4   Code for fitting the predictive model to the
5   training data and for predicting the average
6   annual temperature for all measurement stations
7   for the years 2010 to 2019
8 sources:
9 - ../.././ExperimentalData/2020_climate-model-predict/1980-01-01/temperatures-*.csv
10 - ../.././ExperimentalData/2020_climate-model-predict/1990-01-01/temperatures-*.csv
11 - ../.././ExperimentalData/2020_climate-model-predict/2000-01-01/temperatures-*.csv
12 results:
13 - file: params.json
14   description: Model parameters for the best fit to the training set
15 - file: predictions-201*.csv
16   description: Annual temperature predictions with geographical locations
17 scripts:
18 - file: model.py
19   description: python module with the model equations
20 - file: fit_parameters.py
21   description: Fit model parameters to training data using a basinhopping optimizer
22 - file: predict.py
23   description: Use optimized parameters to simulate average temperatures from 2010
24   ↪ to 2019
25 ...

```

---

**Example 9.** YAML header of the metadata file of the temperature predictions stored in `SimulationData/2020_climate-model-predict/2020-02-01`. Here, the `sources:` tag is used to denote the training data used to find the optimal model parameters. Note that instead of a single line, a YAML multiline block indicated by the greater-than sign `>` is used for the description in lines 4 to 7.

---

```

1 ---
2 responsible: AuthorD
3 description: comparison between predicted and measured temperatures for 2010 to 2019
4 sources:
5 - ../.././ExperimentalData/2020_climate-model-predict/2010-01-01/temperatures-*.csv
6 - ../.././SimulationData/2020_climate-model-predict/2020-02-01/predictions-*.csv
7 results:
8 - file: "*.pdf"
9   description: Plots of absolute and relative differences
10 - file: errors.csv
11   description: prediction errors for all measurement locations
12 scripts:
13 - file: differences.py
14   description: Calculate the absolute and relative differences between predicted and
15   ↪ measured temperatures, and plot them.
16 ...

```

---

**Example 10.** Contents of the metadata file of the analysis comparing the predictions of the new climate model to the measured temperatures of the years 2010 to 2019. Measurements and simulation results are both listed as sources. It is stored in `DataAnalysis/2020_climate-model-predict/2020-02-08_prediction-errors`.

---

```

1 ---
2 responsible: AuthorD
3 description: beamer slides of the conference talk given at the 2020 climate modeling
   → conference in Berlin
4 sources:
5 - ../../ExperimentalData/2020_climate-model-predict/1980-01-01/temperatures-*.csv
6 - ../../ExperimentalData/2020_climate-model-predict/1990-01-01/temperatures-*.csv
7 - ../../ExperimentalData/2020_climate-model-predict/2000-01-01/temperatures-*.csv
8 - ../../ExperimentalData/2020_climate-model-predict/2010-01-01/temperatures-*.csv
9 - ../../SimulationData/2020_climate-model-predict/2020-02-01
10 - ../../DataAnalysis/2020_climate-model-predict/2020-02-08_prediction-errors
11 ...

```

---

**Example 11.** The slides of the conference talk presenting the new climate model and its performance are stored in `Publications/Presentations/2020-03-01_AuthorD_climate-model-conf`. All measurements, simulations and analysis including the training data are listed in the metadata file.

ways. In our experience this first step already provides a great advantage in terms of findability and is most likely compatible with more sophisticated data management solutions.

It has also proven to be a valuable workflow to introduce new users within the workgroup directly to this data structure. In many cases, they have not yet decided on a fixed file naming scheme, so that they can adopt the approach presented here directly.

To make the transition to this standardized file structure smoother, we have created an open source validation tool (see Appendix A). This program is written in Python and can be executed on a file tree. The program checks whether the structure contained in this tree complies with this file structure definition and issues detailed notes in case of deviations. To make it easier to use, we plan to extend this tool in the future with a graphical user interface, that also allows the transfer and conversion of existing data into this structure.

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#### Conflicts of Interest:

- The funders had no role in the design of the study; in the collection, analyses, or interpretation of data; in the writing of the manuscript, or in the decision to publish the results.
- A.S. is co-founder of IndiScale GmbH, a company providing commercial services for CaosDB (mentioned in the discussion and in appendix A). IndiScale GmbH was neither involved in the design of the study, nor in the collection, analysis or interpretation of the data, nor in the writing of the manuscript or the decision to publish the results.

#### Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used in this manuscript:

RDMS	Research Data Management System
YAML	YAML ain't markup language
md	Markdown
FAIR	Findable, Accessible, Interoperable and Reusable

## Appendix A. Supporting software

There are currently two software projects which make use of the file structure proposed here:

- **CaosDB** [6] is an Open Source scientific research data management system that uses automated crawling for inserting data. The CaosDB standard crawler is able to insert and update data based on this specification.
- **Check SFS** is a collection of software tools for creating and checking file structures according to this specification. It is released as Open Source software here: <https://gitlab.com/salexan/check-sfs>.

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