(Approx. 487 words)

Can Two Files Have the Same Name?

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It was the usual family gathering. And, as usual, Uncle Backup and Aunt Fowlder were arguing. They both use Windows computers, and both save files into folders. Uncle Backup said, “NO, of course not; you cannot have two files with the same name; Windows won’t allow it!”

“Oh, don’t be silly,” said Aunt Fowlder. Of course, you can. I do it myself whenever I copy a file—it copies it with the same name!”

Well, dear reader, who’s right? This is a great trick question to bring up over beverages whenever you are in a tech discussion with friends.

The answer? Well, the answer is they are both right! Well, sort of. Fortunately, their argument was overheard by the good doctor, Doc Ewewmint.

“May I help you?” interrupted the good doctor, “Yes, you CAN have two files with the same name if they are in different folders! Let me explain. If you copy a file to a different folder, it can have the same name. But now you must remember carefully which folder you put it in. If you change one of the files but not the other, even if they have the same name, they will now be different.”

“Oh, that could cause trouble,” said Aunt Fowlder, “so when I copy my files to back them up on a different device, I name the folder “Backup” and the date or something. That way, I know they are not the ones I actively use and change daily. I am thankful that Windows keeps track of the date of each file.”

It happens that Aunt Fowlder’s husband also overheard the discussion. “Well,” he said, “that’s all true, of course, but you can have two files that appear to have the same name in the same folder – but they would be of different file types! You could have a word processing document file created in Word, for example, and another with the same name created by Word Pad. They would have different file types -- “.docx” (or “.doc” for Word) or “.rtf” (for WordPad) -- but other than that, they could have the same name.”

“That’s because the file type is part of the name!” said Aunt Fowlder. “My husband is so right about that.”

“Yes,” said the good doctor, “and the computer keeps all this straight. The computer recognizes the folder path to get to the file you want because you can have the same file name (even with the same file type or extension) in different folders. You could say that the “path” of the folders to get to the file is also part of the file name. Thus, you can never have two files with the same name!”

Well, I’m glad we all settled that and agreed! Now, should I use “Save” or “Save as”?