

Tuesday, March 24, 2026

File Organization in Lightroom Classic

Goal:

Provide some insight to help understand the organization structure of LR and illustrate available tools to help design a workflow to organize your photos.

Basic LR Structure or Hierarchy

In addition to various organizational tools, LR's organization is based around:

- Catalog
- Folders
- Collections

Catalog

- The Catalog is the top level of the Lightroom hierarchy.
- It tracks photo information such as location, edits, metadata, and keywords but does not contain the actual photo files themselves.
- The catalog files ending in .lrcat, .lrdata should be located on your computer's internal hard drive or fastest drive to give the best performance.
- Backup your Catalog each time you exit LR to an external or different drive from your main catalog.

Organize Photos before Using Lightroom

- Create a main folder on the external hard drive for all photos, named "Photo Library" or something similar.
- Think about the things you shoot: Weddings, Flowers, Architecture, Landscapes, Astrophotography, Family, Travel, Nature, Sports, Street Photography

- Create Folders for the main things you shoot, then when importing, photos will go into one of these folders or buckets.

Folders

- Folders represent the physical location of your images on your hard drive.
- An image can only exist in one folder at a time in LR.
- Folders can contain subfolders.
- Always make changes to file or folder locations in LR to maintain the links to files in the LR catalog.

Collection Sets, Collections, and Smart Collections

- These are virtual containers to group photos.
- Unlike folders, a single photo can be part of many different collections simultaneously without being duplicated on your hard drive.
- Collections can be modified or deleted without affecting actual image files or locations.
- Collections are convenient because they are available in all LR panels: Develop, Print, Map, Book, Slideshow, etc.

Collection Sets

- Collection sets are virtual folders used to organize collections.
- Collection sets can be modified or deleted without affecting image files or locations.

Smart Collections

- Smart Collections add automation to file organization based on criteria you define.
- Smart Collections will automatically update when new files meet the set criteria.

Key Words

- Keywords add an additional level of detail to image files.
- Keywords are embedded in the image metadata.
- Consistency is critical in keywording to optimize search functionality.

- A keyword list can be used to ensure consistency and streamline keyword workflow.
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Renaming Files

Rename files either at import or after import to something that makes more sense than cr35b2756.cr3.

Metadata

- Use in Library filter.
 - Use Blank fields.
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Flags

- Reject (X) -can be used in the first pass of culling.
 - Pick (P) - can be used in the second round of culling for pictures to be considered for post-processing.
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Ratings

- 1-5
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Resources

SLIM Video

Scott Kelby's YouTube Video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JLX27yyDils>

Backup Software: Carbon

Mac: Carbon Copy Cloner

PC: Acronis Cyber Protect Home

Cloud Backup

Backblaze: \$6.00/monthSubject