Lightroom CC workflow

Lightroom CC Workflow

About the author (me!)

I'm Adrian Vila (aows), a Spanish-American photographer currently based in Spain.

I love traveling the world making images along the way. I try to show my own perspective of all those beautiful places, the beauty I see but also the impact of humans in nature and the passing of time.

You can find a lot more information about me, articles about photography and the outdoors, along with much more educational material on my website: https://aows.co

I also have a YouTube channel where I bring you along on my adventures across the US and the world: https://youtube.com/aowsphotos

Find me everywhere else: Instagram, Twitter, Facebook.

Contact me directly using my email: hi@aows.co

ADRIAN VILA, JUNE 2018

Introduction

You shoot a lot of pictures every day, you have a few projects going on at any given time, you upload your images to multiple social networks, to your website, you sell stock photos, you print your photos... among many other things.

Making a big photo library efficient for several projects is hard. Keeping it clean, tidy and, most importantly, safe, can be overwhelming. But I believe it doesn't have to be.

Over the years, I've developed and refined a workflow that I use every time I make new images.

The goal of this workflow is to have a small catalog, easy to manage and browse, and unload everything that we don't use elsewhere (and still keep it accessible).

I use the new Lightroom CC (the cloud-based software from Adobe), but all this applies to Lightroom Classic CC as well.

If you use a different software to edit and catalog your photos, that's ok, you'll still be able to get some useful tips from this workflow.

Take this as a starting point for you. Obviously not every step will suit your needs, and you might want to simplify it or make it more complex depending on your style.

If you want to follow my steps, then you'll need:

- A computer with Adobe Lightroom CC installed.

- A subscription to Adobe Creative Cloud (if you want to synchronize your images across your devices and have yet another copy of your photos in the cloud).

- A couple of hard drives with enough free space.

- A Google account.

- A subscription to Backblaze or any other cloud-based backup system (if you prefer, additional hard drives).

Thanks to this workflow, I'm able to release new photos more often, make progress on my projects much faster, and I don't lose track of any of my images like I used to.

My hope is that you can add some of these steps into your workflow, and find some inspiration to develop your own new techniques. This is a life-long endeavor and you'll find the way you work with your images constantly evolving.

If you have new ideas about how to improve this process, please share them with me! hi@aows.co

Remember: photography is not only about getting the shot, but about sharing those memories with your loved ones.

Importing your pictures

Unloading your images from the memory card is the first step in the process. Here, we are going to set the foundation for an efficient and safe way to manage our library.
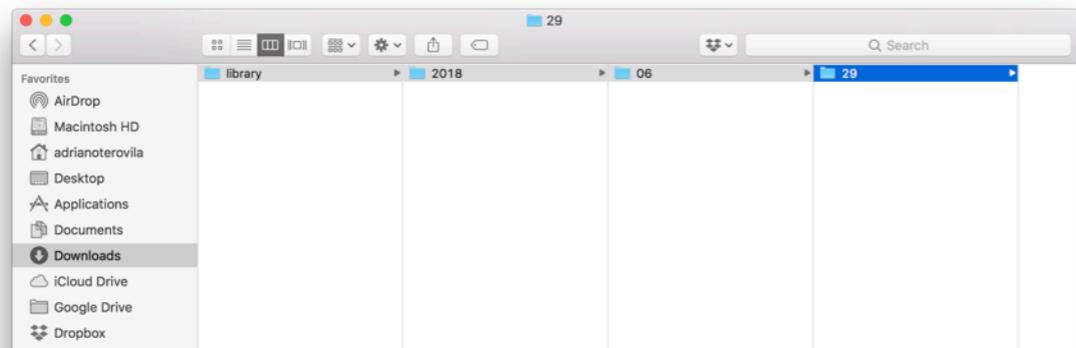
Copy all your files to a hard drive

The first thing I do doesn't involve Lightroom, but the good ol' and reliable Finder (on a Mac) or File Explorer (in Windows).

To do this, we connect the camera via USB cable to our computer, or even better, we insert the memory card in the memory card reader if our laptop has one.
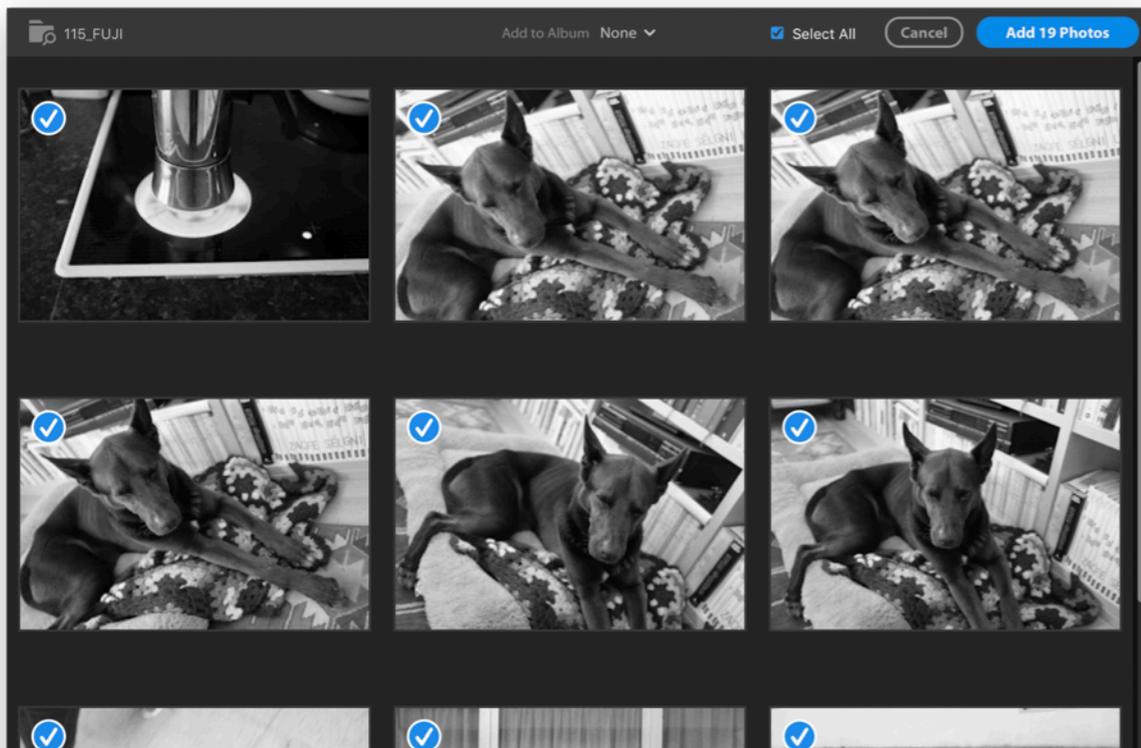
I own a Macbook Pro. I love this computer even though it added something I rarely use (the Touch Bar) and I lost something I used all the time (the memory card reader). I had to buy a USB-C hub that came with a slot for both SD and MiniSD cards. It was pricey, but it's been working flawlessly for a year and it's imported thousands of my photos (I scan my film photos through this adaptor as well).

You can find a link to this adaptor and all the gear I use on this article on my website: *https://aows.co/about/my-camera-gear.*

No matter how you access your memory card, we are going to copy all the pictures (the RAW files if you shoot in RAW, the JPGs if you shoot in JPG, or both if you shoot in both) to the hard drive.

I follow the folder hierarchy you can see on the previous page. Under one common folder (called *library*), I then archive my images under *YEAR -> MONTH -> DAY*. I do not separate them by camera, but you could if that helps you find your photos later.

This is going to be our first copy of our images, and it will contain *every single picture we take.*

Import your images to Lightroom

Over the years, I've learned that photo processing software is usually very buggy, and I've found myself several times missing some images after importing them to some of these apps.

The previous step guarantees we will always have all the originals even if the software we use (in this case, Adobe Lightroom) fails to import them all (or if they "magically" disappear in the future, as it's happened to me as well).

Click on the "+" icon on the top left of Adobe Lightroom (see image below) and select *browse* from under *ADD PHOTOS*.

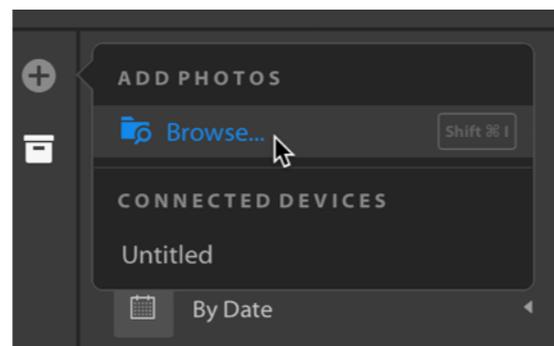Find your images and select the ones you want to import.

> **Note**: *at the time of this writing, Lightroom CC has a bug where it'd copy an image twice if you import RAW and JPG. It treats them as separate pictures, unlike other software (like the very own Lightroom Classic CC, or Apple Photos) that usually bundles both files under one photo.*

Next, Lightroom will show you a preview of those images. Make sure those are the ones you wanted to import and click "*Add X Photos*" on the right top of the screen.

This process might take a while depending on the number of photos and their sizes.

Once it's done, you'll find your imported photos under *All Photos* or expanding *Recently Added*, both on the top of the left pane.

Click on the last import under *Recently Added* to see your images.

Select all the images pressing *Command + A* (on a Mac). You can also do it from the menu *Edit -> Select All*.

These photos you just imported do not belong to any album just yet. Let's create one, a very important one.
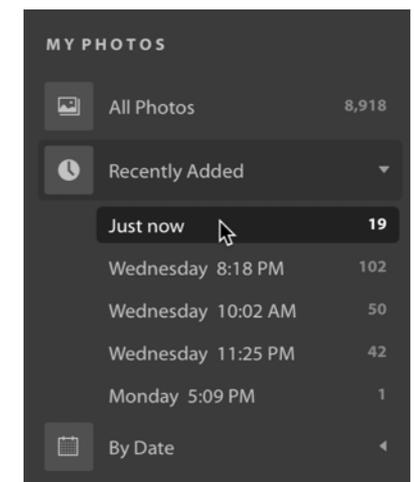
This is one of the keys of my Lightroom CC workflow. Things start getting out of hand very soon if you don't have your images under control.

The way I do this is by having an album that I call *"to review"* where I put every single new photo I import into Lightroom.

As the name might suggest, that's the port of entry of my images into my library, and it's where I catalog them from.

On the left pane and next to *ALBUMS*, click on the "+" icon. Give it a name and check *"Include the X selected photos"*.

We should now have an album called *"to review"* with all our imported photos in it.
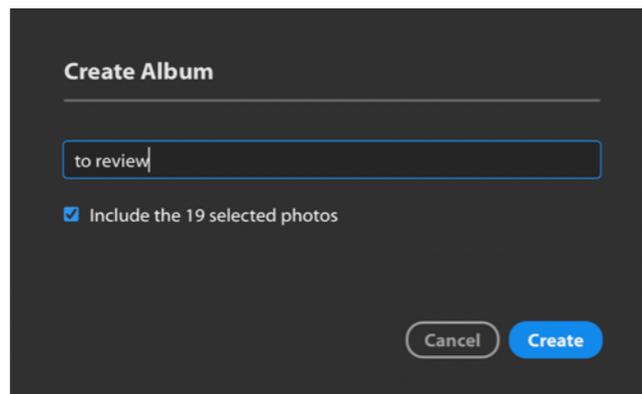
Do not move or copy them to anywhere else in Lightroom yet. Remember, it's very easy to lose control of your images if you don't follow all the steps in the workflow.

Notice that Lightroom CC will start backing your photos up to your Adobe Cloud right away.
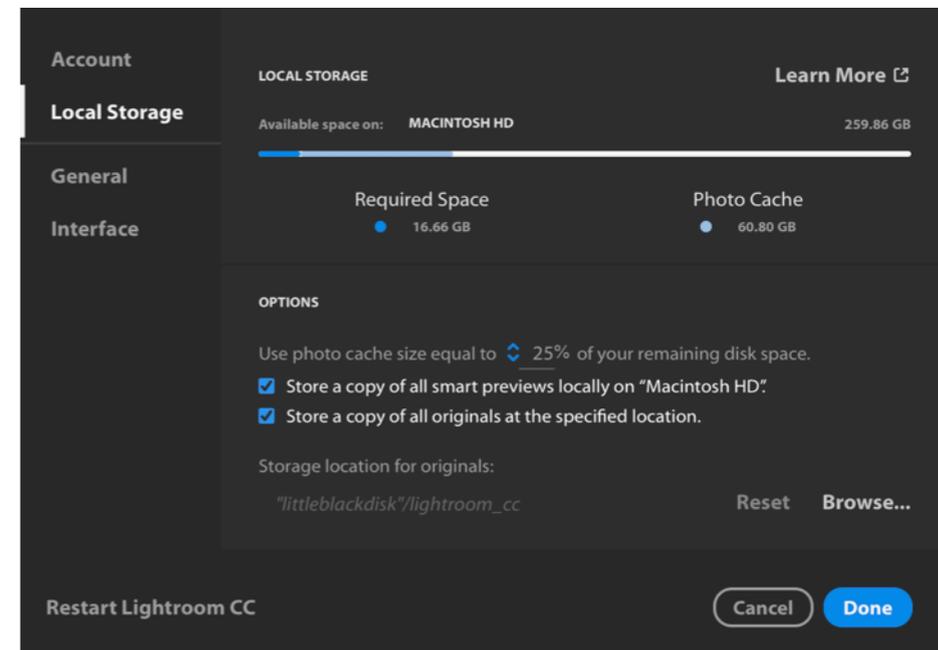
Keep a local copy of your Lightroom catalog

This is optional, but I'd recommend doing it as well. Lightroom CC is a cloud-based software, meaning once you import your photos it will keep your original files in the cloud and will use low resolution versions of your photos locally (to save space and bandwidth).

You can change this in the preferences. Selected *Adobe Lightroom CC -> Preferences* or press "*Command + ,*" (on a Mac) to open the preferences (see image above).

Under *Local Storage*, you can tell Lightroom CC to keep a local copy of your originals. You can have it wherever you want. I use an external hard drive for this (*hard drive 2*, not the same I used in the very first step!).
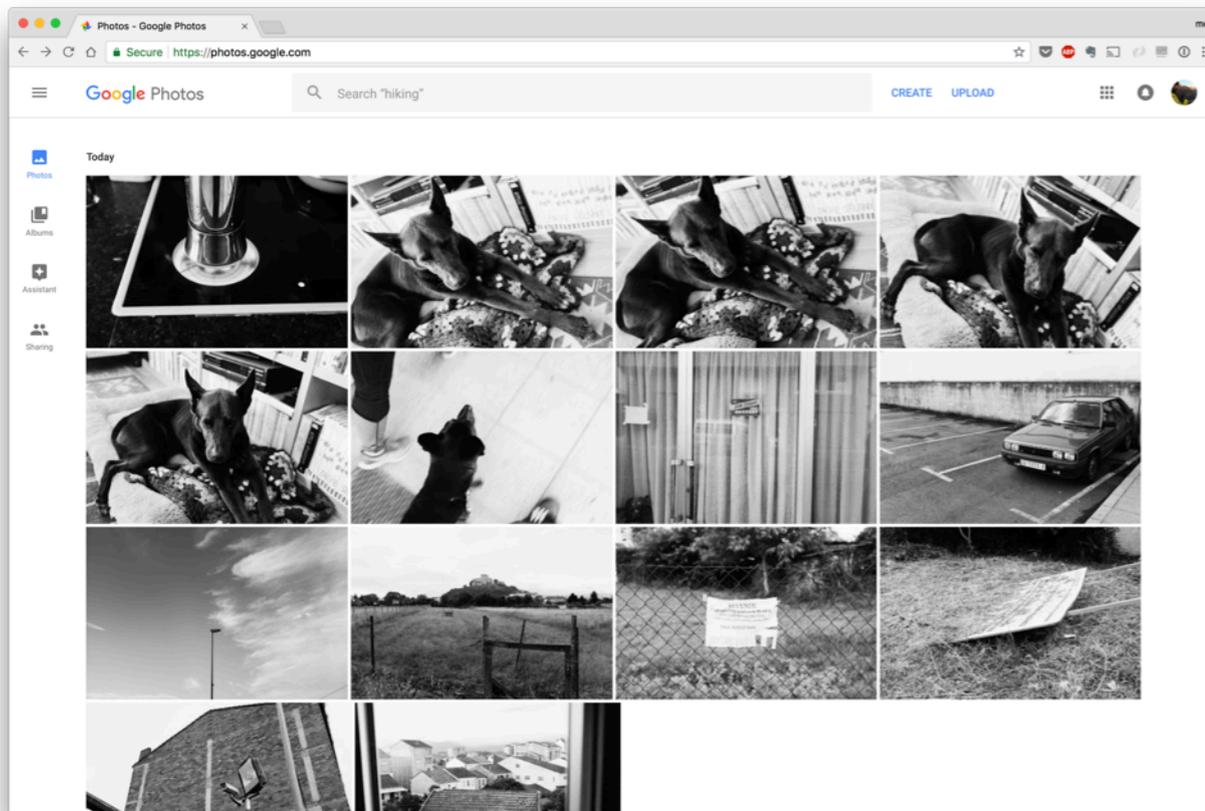
Export your images and upload them to Google Photos

This next step is very important to this workflow. Not only does it serve as an extra copy of our photos, but it's also the best way to find our photos in the future.

I have a preset that converts my RAW files into gorgeous black and white images. If you don't want to have a "generic" preset you can always use the JPGs from the camera for this.

The editing tools (including presets) are out of the scope of this book, to keep it simple and short. Let's assume you've applied said preset and exported your images to your hard drive, or you are using JPGs straight from the camera.
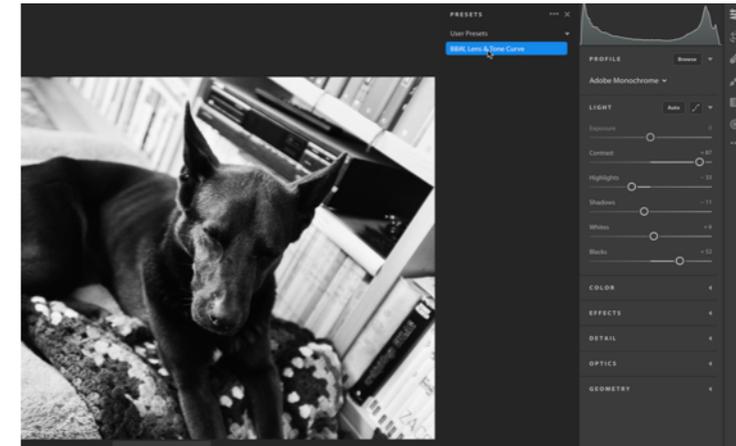
It's time to upload them to Google Photos.

Google Photos has become an essential tool in my photography process. This is the only place where I know I'll find *any* photo I've *ever* shot, using *any* camera. Seriously, I have *decades* worth of images in there (*122,179 photos* as I write this).

I use the free version of Photos, which allows me to keep a 16MP version of my pictures. If you want to keep the original resolution, you have to pay.

I find the free version more than enough. I already have a copy of my original photos in a hard drive (that will get backed up, more information about this in **Step 3**), so I don't need an extra one.

This is a *last resort* copy: if for any reason we lose all other copies we still have a more than decent resolution version, easily accessible from any device.

This huge repository of photos and the amazing technology Google Photos is built upon allow me to find virtually *any* photo, at any time, in seconds.

As I've mentioned before, one of the important rules of my workflow is to keep only the images we have published or we need for on-going projects in Lightroom. Everything else must go to keep it small and clean, a catalog that it's easy to work with.

What happens if we need the RAW file of an image we thought we didn't have any use for later on?

Well, there's still the copy in our hard drive, remember? But it'd be very hard to find a specific photo without any help. This is where Google Photos comes in.

The search engine is brilliant and it allows you to find photos not only by name, location, time or camera used, but also by the subject. You can type *"Luna at the beach"* (yes, it identifies people... *and dogs*).

Once I find the photo I'm looking for, I take a look at the *info* panel to see the original filename. Knowing the date and the name of the file, finding the RAW file in my hard drive is straightforward thanks to the folder structure I use.

SUMMARY

1. Copy all your files (RAWs and/or JPGs) from the memory card and onto a hard drive.

2. Import them into Lightroom CC.

3. (Optional) Apply a preset and export your photos.

4. Upload JPGs (from the camera or after applying the preset) to Google Photos.

This might seem like a lot of work for just a first step in the workflow, but trust me, you want to be organized and keep things tidy.

Follow these steps as soon as possible after shooting your images. The longer you wait, the easier it will be to lose track of your photographs.

So far, we have achieved:

- Local copy of our original files in *hard drive 1*.

- Local copy and cloud copy (Adobe Cloud) of the images in our Lightroom CC catalog.

- Quick edits of our images in Google Photos, ready to be shared and found in the future.

- Our pictures are in a Lightroom album called *"to review"*, waiting for us to go through them.

Cataloging our images in Lightroom CC

Our images are safe in two hard drives plus a couple of copies in two different "clouds". Now, the "real" work begins. It's time to categorize them and move them through the catalog, but in a sustainable and reasonable way so we never lose control of our library.

This step of the process is very simple but very time-consuming.

The goal is to keep just the photos that we use in our work, projects, stock, social media, website… and nothing else.

Following the next steps, you'll be able to catalog your images really quick and get rid of the clutter. In addition to this, my workflow provides a very easy way to edit (select) your work.

You can see my folders and albums structure on the next page. Keep reading to understand why this works for me.
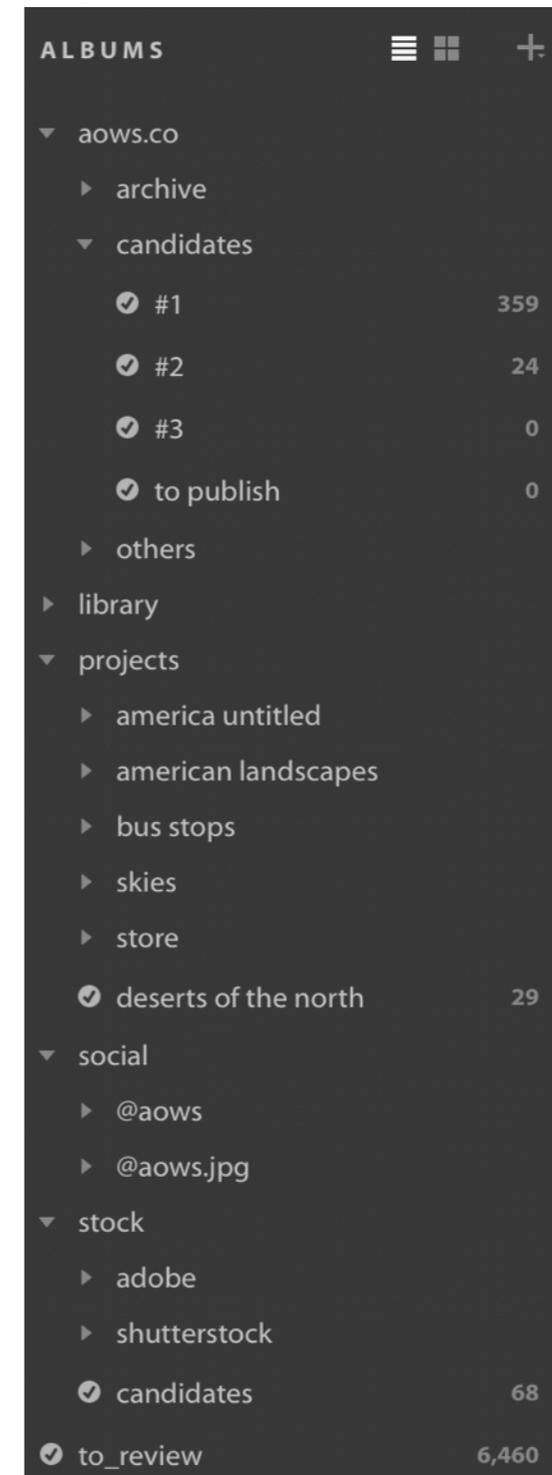
My folders / albums structure in Lightroom CC

Create one folder for each project

I have a folder for every use I give to my photos. As you can see, I have a folder for the photos I publish on my website, another for the pictures I share on social media and the same for the photos I sell on stock websites.

Then, I have a "super" folder for projects, where each of them gets yet another folder.

Make a copy of the image for each project

Open the album *"to review"* and start from the top or from the bottom, as you prefer. One by one, decide if you are likely to use those photos for a specific project or if it's very unlikely.

If there's a chance you might use it, right click on the image and select *"make a copy"*.
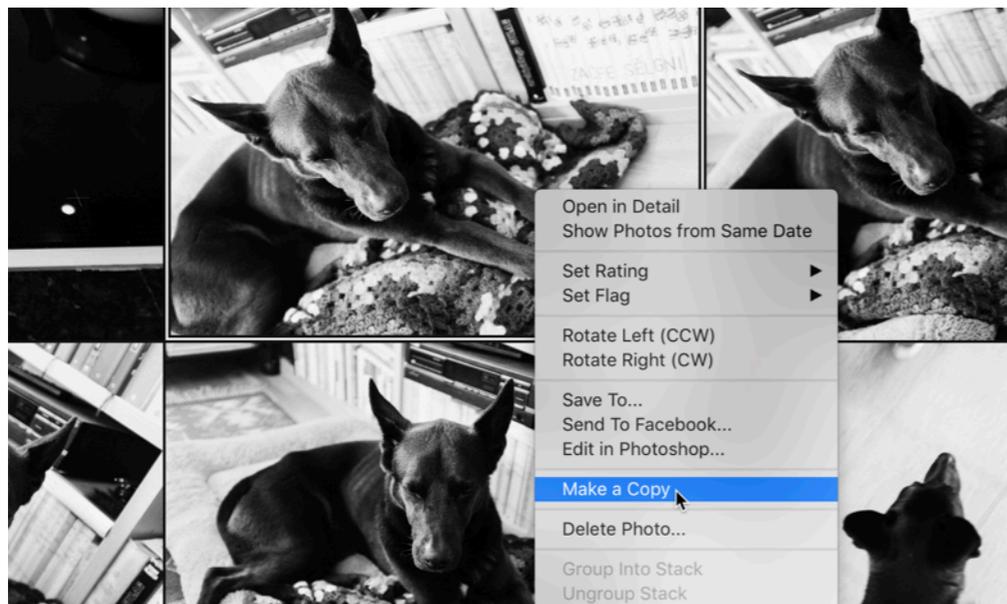
A duplicate of the image will show up to the left of the original picture. Drag the copy to the desired project and then remove it from *"to review"*.
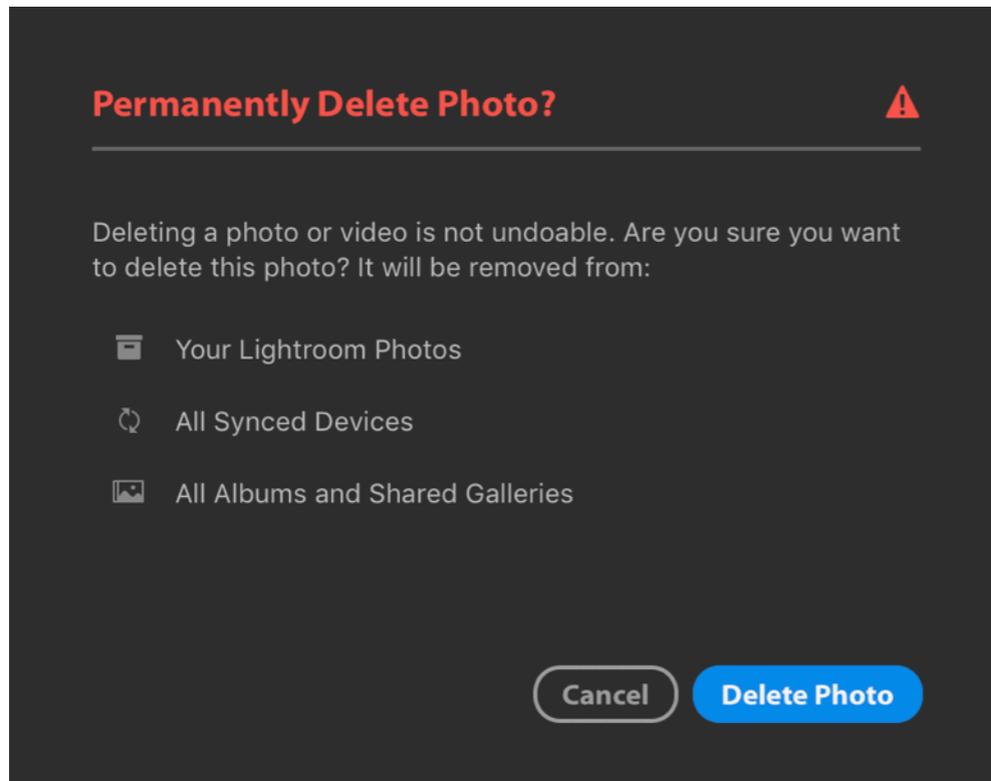
This is crucial, since this step will create an *exact copy* of the original image that we can modify as much as we want for that project, while we can have a completely different processed copy for a different project.

Maybe you'll use it in color in Project A, but black and white for Project B. Maybe one will be square and the other one landscape. The crop might be different.

If we drag the same image to different projects then the changes we apply to it, no matter where we do them, will be reflected in every project (since Lightroom is treating it as just one single image).

Of course, this is only necessary if you use your image in two or more different projects. If you use your picture for just one project, then there's no need to make a copy and you can drag the original one.

Once we have all the copies cataloged in their corresponding projects, we make sure the original image is deleted from Lightroom. And I don't mean *removed from the album "to review"*, but *deleted from Lightroom*. On a Mac, you do this by pressing *Option + Delete*, or *Edit -> Delete Photo* on the top bar menu.

Permanently Delete Photo? ⚠

Deleting a photo or video is not undoable. Are you sure you want to delete this photo? It will be removed from:

🗄 Your Lightroom Photos

🔄 All Synced Devices

🖼 All Albums and Shared Galleries

Cancel   **Delete Photo**

Delete away

Most of my images never make it to any project.

Some because they are no good, some because they are personal photos to document my life. Google Photos is the place where I can see them, not Lightroom.

These images get removed right away. If you know you aren't going to use an image for an upcoming / on-going project, do not hesitate to remove it.

Remember, you can always get the RAW file back from your hard drive.

This is very important, although it can be hard to get rid of so many images.

How to select your images

You might have noticed that I have some albums called *"candidates"* for every project in Lightroom.

That's the way I select, edit or curate my images.

Take my website as an example. Under the folder *"aows.co"*, I have another two: *"archive"* and *"candidates"*.

Archive is the folder where all my the images I've published to my website live.

Candidates is where I select which ones will eventually make it to my website.

An image will have to go through 4 stages to get published on my website (although I'm flexible and some images I love right away make it immediately).

Dragging a photo to a project doesn't mean it will get used for / published on that project. This allows me to go really fast through all the shots in *"to review"*. I loosely categorize them because I know I can change the selection later on.

To do so, I usually have a few albums called *#1*, *#2*, *#3*... and so on, depending on the project.

If I think I might publish a photo on my website, then I drag it to *#1*. I repeat for every photo from *"to review"* I have time to look at at that time.

I then let them sit there for a while. Sometimes it's days, sometimes it's weeks or even months. Some photos grow on you; some do the opposite.

As a rule of thumb, the longer a photo sits in one of these folders, the less you like it - therefore I might delete it (hard delete).

But if I like what I see whenever I go through *#1*, then the image makes it to *#2*. Once again, I'm very flexible with this so some images might jump to *#3* or even *"to publish"* (the last step) right away.

Once a photo makes it up the ladder to *"to publish"*, then I can start editing it and getting it ready for publication. When that happens, I move it to *Archive* where it will live forever, and it disappears from *Candidates*.

SUMMARY

1. Create a folder for every project you have worked / are working on.

2. Don't drag the original image to a project; make a copy instead.

3. Delete the original photo from *"to review"*, whether you copied it to a project or not.

4. Create several albums for each project and start moving your images through them as you select them (don't forget to let them sit for a while).

5. Delete those that didn't make it, and move the ones selected for that project to their permanent folder under said project.

6. Repeat every few days and keep the images flowing from one folder to the next. You will always have curated images ready to release / use.

I'm sure all this sounds like a lot of work to you, but at the end of the day, I find myself being much more productive using this workflow.

As a result, I have more images to publish more often, and I have fewer of them collecting dust in a random Lightroom album that I will never look at again.

I follow the same structure and process for every project and even for the photos I upload to stock websites.
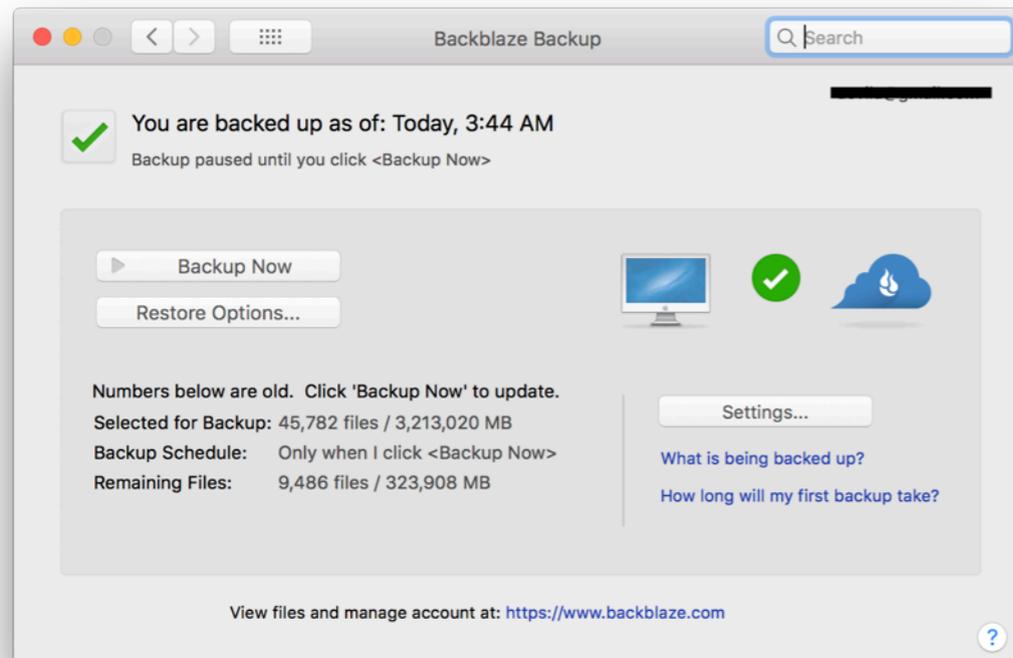
I do not do this for social media though. For that, I just go to the published images on my website and select one whenever I feel I want to post something.

Remember: put your own platform first.

Backing everything up

Finally cataloged and published, our images are ready to be backed up yet again.

The final step in this workflow involves backing everything up to the cloud.

We already have up to 3 copies of the Lightroom catalog photographs: two local copies in two different hard drives, and one in the Adobe Cloud. Let's not forget about Google Photos either.

The pictures that we have deleted from Lightroom live in only one location though. We have a low-*ish* resolution copy in Google Photos, but no way to recover the RAW file if our hard drive fails.

This is why we need a cloud-based backup system. I use **Backblaze**: it's simple and it works just fine. It's $5/month or $60/year, and since you can back up as many files as you want (including those in external hard drives) you'll get more bang for your buck if you have a lot of data.

I back up *everything*, not only my images. All the footage for my Landscape Photography YouTube channel is up there. As are a lot of personal files. More than 3TB distributed in 3 hard drives.

The downside is: it takes *a long time* to upload all that data.

Note: *if you are interested in signing up, you can do it through this link to get one month free (and I'll get another month for free as well):* https://secure.backblaze.com/r/011s3a.

There are plenty of other cloud-based backup services out there, and you can even use additional hard drives and keep them in a different physical place.

Whatever you do, keep at least two copies of everything. It took you a lot of effort to create those beautiful images and work, let's not lose it due to a hard drive failure or a bug in the software.