

# Image file organization and naming notes

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Having done photography for 40+ years, I have tens if not hundreds of thousands of photographs. Given the decades of time over which I created them, and the multiplicity of ways in which I started indexing, filing, naming, etc which changed over the years, it is no simple job to convert everything to a single naming schema nor is it possible to remember how and where they are stored simply by using the computer file system structure.

What I've done in recent years is think out how to eventually achieve that. Lightroom helps a lot.

My mantra:

- *The file system is for storage and archiving. Whatever structure and naming used must be extensible for the future and backwards compatible for the past, and must make backup and replication easy.*
- *Metadata is for identifying, searching, finding. All images must include metadata or they are not yet properly incorporated into the system.*

I make the distinction between "original" and "product" image files.

For original image files, new files are imported into the system in a date-organized folder structure, eg:

```
...  
Photos/  
Photos/2009  
Photos/2009/20090101-new_years_party  
Photos/2009/20090102  
Photos/2009/20090103-portrait_shoot_jmcallister  
Photos/2009/20090103-landscape_project_work  
Photos/2009/20090103  
...  
Photos/2010/20100202  
...
```

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Files are renamed on import into these folder using one of three naming patterns, eg:

- YYMMDD-fnum where fnum is the numeric portion of the camera's filename
- YYMMDD-tag-fnum where tag is a mnemonic, fnum as above
- YYMMDD-tag-seq3 where tag as above and seq3 is a replacement for when a sequence is needed.

Also on import, I assign a small number of keywords describing the images and apply a metadata template articulating the location.

Once in the catalog, each batch one at a time, I quickly run through the image files and add them, as appropriate, to a few collections that organize by subject matter (landscape, people, family, still life, sports, events, etc).

As older work is brought into the catalog, particularly old film work which has no metadata embedded, I first put them into a folder by date as above. As I sort through them, I identify approximate dates and set the capture time in groups. I add metadata tags identifying people, subjects, locations, etc as appropriate. Then I use the renaming tools to name them into the above file naming schema, and sort them into new folders in the folder naming schema.

For product image files ... those made from the original image files for a website gallery, for a client, for a book or folio, for prints for sale, for client license use, etc ... naming schema are different.

The folder structure is date-project organized, eg:

```
...  
Photos-Completed/YYseq3-Project_Name  
...  
Photos-Completed/09001-NYE_party-pix  
Photos-Completed/09002-Portraits_Cosmopolitan  
...  
Photos-Completed/10003-Landscape-Byxbee_Park  
...
```

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and subfolder names express different things, like "TIFF\_Masters", JPEG\_thmbs, Documentation, etc.

The file names for products varies depending upon the needs of the project they are a part of. TIFF Masters usually include the `fnum` portion of the original file name, or some fraction of the original file name, to facilitate backtracking to the original files in case further development or a different rendering proves to be interesting/needed/desirable. Other naming schema are linked to the web gallery, client, or project production needs.

All product photos have an additional tag or three added ... "finished" to indicate that a rendered TIFF master was produced, "folio" if it was included in a folio set, "client" if it was part of a client assignment job, etc. These tags are elided when files are prepped for distribution, they are for my use only.

It's a complex scheme, but handling tens to hundreds of thousands of image files is a complex task.