

INTRODUCTION TO DIGITAL PHOTO WORKFLOW

A digital photography workflow is the sequence of steps you take to capture, process and output your images. An effective workflow is one that you can follow repeatedly and that will save you time and provide the best possible results.

The right workflow for one person may not be appropriate for another due to a variety of factors such as personal preferences and skills, available software, shooting style/subject matter and time requirements. However, the best digital photo workflows share a common set of basic steps. (Each step may be comprised of a number of variables, the details of which are not covered here.)

To develop a workflow that suits you, consider your skill level, equipment (camera and computer), subject matter and your intentions for the final images. Your workflow will evolve as your situation changes over time.

Step 1. Capture

Using your digital camera, capture your photos in either RAW or JPG mode. RAW provides the highest quality but requires processing in the computer. JPG is lower quality but can be viewed and shared (such as in email attachments) right out of the camera.

Step 2. Transfer Images to Computer

Using a card reader, copy the files to your computer and immediately make a backup onto another hard drive or removable media such as CD/DVD. Depending on the software available, you can automatically rename the copied files, convert to other file formats and add metadata during the copy. If using catalog software, import the images into your database during this step.

Step 3. Review and Edit

Using your file browsing or catalog software, review the photos from the shoot(s) and begin rating them for further processing. Mark your selects with flags, stars, labels etc. to filter them from the rejected files. Optionally, delete the rejected files to save disk space. For the remaining images, add more detailed metadata, especially copyright notices and keywords. Sort the images as desired and create collections.

Step 4. Process Selects

Using your photo editing software, process your selected images to perfection. Consider tone and contrast (the range of light to dark), color (accuracy and saturation), sharpness and the need for any cropping and retouching. Apply creative effects such as black-and-white conversion, colorizing, multiple image composites, localized dodging and burning etc. during this step.

Step 5. Save Master and Derivative Files

Using Adobe software, save your Master working files as PSD or TIF. You can also save flattened and resized files for other purposes, including JPG for web, etc. If you intend to make prints of your photos, prepare the necessary files during this step. Make regular backups of your working files.

Step 6. Print and Present

Using your finished image files, you can make your own prints or send them to a lab for printing, upload them to a web site, email them to friends, make multimedia presentations, etc. The requirements and specifications for these scenarios will depend on the situation.