

Workflow for Digital Photography

Episode 1: Acquisition

So.. you are the proud owner of a new digital SLR camera. Congratulations! You are about to embark on an exciting journey of creative expression. Whether you are a seasoned SLR veteran or a complete novice, the move to digital presents some unique challenges and opportunities that existed... but in a different way. So, sit back and relax and allow me to guide you through a sample workflow from getting those wonderful photos into your computer... all the way through printing. This is the workflow that I follow and it can be used as a model to help you create one of your own... the most important thing about a workflow is to stick with it. So... here we go!

1. Acquisition

The first step in your workflow is what I call acquisition... getting those photos from your camera over to your computer. So, let's get started!!

USB memory card reader: I highly recommend you invest in one. It can be a single USB reader made specifically for a CF card, or the more versatile 15-in-1 reader. I use an internal fan control/internal reader (figure 1) and highly recommend it. I also have a portable 12-in-1 USB that I also use... they are quite cheap but allow transfer speeds that exceed most transfers directly from the camera. In addition, they are convenient since the internal model is always available and tend to be more reliable than camera to PC transfers.

Figure 1

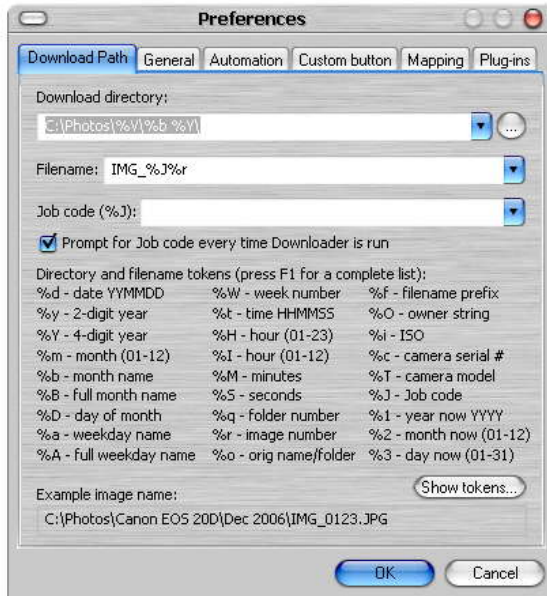


If you do not wish to use an external card reader, you can also hook the camera up to the PC with a USB or Firewire (if your camera supports firewire photo transfers) to transfer the photos.

Ok... so you have either plugged your memory card or camera into the computer. The next step is to use a **download manager**. Why? Well, a download manager will allow you to automatically transfer the photos to your PC in an organized manner... an important first step in digital workflow management. I use Breeze Systems Downloader

Pro (www.breezesys.com) to transfer my files (figure 2), but as we will discuss in future tutorials, there is a very good downloader included in IdImager – my catalog program of choice.

Figure 2



Why use a downloader? Well, we want to ensure our files are organized with either unique file names or directories. A downloader will do this for us automatically and will really make our lives easier once we start to catalog.

Here's another good reason – I shoot with multiple cameras in both RAW and JPG. Many times, I shoot both RAW and JPG on the same memory card. With downloader software, I don't have to manually separate the files or worry about files overwriting between cameras. Here's an example:

I am shooting portraits for a client. I use my Nikon D200 with 90mm Tamron lens attached for my tripod shots but then grab my Nikon D50 with 17-55 lens for some candid shots. Both my cameras are taking photos with numbers in the 9000 range: ie: DSC9400.JPG. If I were to just transfer the photos without a download manager, I would need to create directories on my Hard Drive, copy the photos by hand, and then rename the photos to ensure each reflects the camera.

Not so with Downloader Pro... I setup profiles that recognize the camera via the photo's EXIF info. By doing so, each photo will be renamed and placed in the correct subdirectory automatically, ensuring no photos are overwritten and everything is organized appropriately.

So, let me run you through how the photos would be created:

1. Downloader Pro finds all the RAW photos on the memory card.
2. It reads the EXIF of a Photo to transfer and determines the photo date.
3. It determines if a subdirectory already exists for that date and creates one if not:
P:\Photos\RAW\2006 December 17
4. It reads the EXIF of a Photo to transfer and determines the camera model and uses the map I created to create a filename prefix. The photo is transferred as:
P:\Photos\RAW\2006 December 17\D200_DSC9102.RAW

All RAW photos are transferred...

5. Next, Downloader Pro finds all the JPG photos on the memory card .
6. It reads the EXIF of a Photo to transfer and determines the photo date.
7. It determines if a subdirectory already exists for that month/year and creates one if not:
P:\Photos\2006 December
8. It reads the EXIF of a Photo to transfer and determines the camera model and uses the map I created to create a filename prefix. The photo is transferred as:
P:\Photos\2006 December\D50_DSC9102.JPG

By using a download manager, you will:

- a. automate your transfer process
- b. ensure organization of your photos
- c. save time by not having to manually create subdirectories and rename entries
- d. have piece of mind by using the downloader's verification process to ensure files are copied correctly.

All in all, I highly recommend the use of a download manager to transfer photos to your computer. However, if you don't take that many photos or just use a single camera, then by all means you can do this manually. The important thing to remember is just to be consistent... it will help greatly in the next few steps!

So... I hoped you've enjoyed the first step in workflow management. In the next tutorial, we will get started with the most important step: archiving and backup.