



Workflow Foundations

1

Adobe Photoshop Lightroom provides an end-to-end workflow solution, helping you work more efficiently with your digital photographs. Before you get started working with the many features you'll find in Lightroom, it is important to understand some of the fundamentals of workflow, especially as it relates to the approach Lightroom takes to that workflow. Then you'll be ready to dive in and start getting to know Lightroom, and using it to manage and process your digital photographs.

Chapter Contents

Getting Organized
Lightroom Workflow

Some Background

It still surprises me how quickly so many photographers made a complete switch from film photography to digital photography. Very early in the development of digital photography, it was clear there would be significant benefits. But human nature being what it is, it seemed reasonable to expect that the transition would be slow and cautious.

Instead, photographers made the switch with incredible speed. I think this took most of the industry by surprise—even those who were rooting for the success of digital cameras. In fact, digital photography grew at a frantic pace not only because many photographers saw benefits in digital photography compared to film, but also because the accessibility provided by digital imaging created tremendous enthusiasm. Many who are enjoying digital photography today never pursued film photography as a passion or hobby. Digital has certainly increased the number of photographers out there who could be considered very serious about it for art, business, or pure fun.

Although digital photography offers many benefits over film, there are also drawbacks. In fact, some of the great advantages led to challenges. Because there wasn't the sense of "wasting film," and because after purchasing gear there really wasn't an incremental cost for each new digital photograph that was captured, photographers have generally found themselves capturing far more images with digital cameras than they ever did with film. That creates an incredible challenge when it comes to processing and managing images. Many photographers feel that their digital captures are locked away inside their computer, either difficult or impossible to access.

Early on, digital photography could be thought of as being something akin to a big experiment. Tools were generally difficult to learn and customized to a particular task. And the tools didn't provide an end-to-end solution for photographers dealing with their images. Many photographers had to cobble together a variety of tools to meet their needs, with perhaps one application used for downloading images onto the computer, another for browsing and sorting the images, and yet another for optimizing and printing those images. It wasn't efficient, and it certainly created barriers for many photographers. Still, somehow we found a way, in large part because of our tremendous enthusiasm and also because we enjoyed the control we were able to exercise without the challenges (and smelly chemicals) when processing film images.

Fortunately, the trend in digital is for things to move pretty quickly. This has certainly been the case with digital photography. The number of software applications aimed at digital photographers grew very quickly, and they became better with each new release. Photographers were still cobbling together a solution from a variety of applications, but those applications were more feature-rich and efficient.

More recently, as photographers started getting a handle on the processing of their digital images, they also started realizing some of the many challenges inherent in a digital photography workflow. Specifically, they realized that the workflow didn't flow very smoothly at all in many cases. Workflow became a major buzzword, and was often cited by photographers as the number one issue they were concerned about in their photography. Workflow effectively focuses on the process you go through from

the time the images get onto your computer, organize them, optimize them, and share them with others.

Many software developers heard the concerns of photographers, and started addressing those concerns in their software applications. Instead of leaving the photographer to move the image through each step of their workflow, applications started offering features that helped move the images through the workflow. Some of these efforts included bringing features that had previously been handled by separate applications into one place, such as the addition of a File Browser and then Adobe Bridge to Adobe Photoshop (www.adobe.com). In other cases it was reflected in a more process-oriented approach to handling images, such as the concepts applied to the Capture One software for processing RAW images from Phase One (www.phaseone.com).

Adobe Photoshop Lightroom—the subject of this book—represents Adobe’s latest effort to address the need for a cohesive and efficient end-to-end workflow for digital photography. It combines the core features photographers need to be able to organize, manage, optimize, and share their images (Figure 1.1).

Note: Thank you to photographer André Constantini (www.sillydancing.com) for providing the beautiful photographs for this chapter.



Figure 1.1 Lightroom provides a cohesive and efficient way to handle end-to-end workflow.

Designed for a Sensible Workflow

Lightroom is best thought of as a workflow tool for digital photography. I think of it as “command central” for managing and processing digital photographs. To understand what Lightroom provides, it is helpful to understand the basic stages of a digital photography workflow. The key stages of such a workflow are as follows:

Importing There are various names and approaches to this phase of the workflow. In general, this is when the images are copied onto your computer or imported into a database so you can actually view the images.

Sorting You need to be able to review and evaluate your images so you can decide which aren’t worth keeping, which are your favorites, and which you want to process in some way.

Managing Especially because photographers tend to capture many more images with digital cameras than they ever did with film, it is critical that you have some method for managing your images so you can find the one you need when you need it.

Optimizing No matter how well you’ve configured your camera to capture a particular image, you’ll likely need to apply some adjustments to the images in order to make them look their best or realize your photographic vision.

Sharing Whether you are sharing your images through prints, digital slideshows, websites, or other means, you want to have a way to share those images quickly and easily with others.

Lightroom provides solutions for all of these stages of a digital photography workflow—in one application with a common interface that makes it easy to learn in a relatively short period of time.

Lightroom Modules

Lightroom divides your workflow into five individual modules that each address specific stages of the workflow. The modules are as follows:

Library This module provides tools that enable you to import, sort, manage, locate, and apply basic adjustments to your images (Figure 1.2). It is the module you’ll likely use most often in Lightroom as you work with your images. Lightroom is not an image browser, but rather a form of image management tool. You can’t view images in Lightroom until you have imported them into the Lightroom database.

Develop This module provides tools for applying adjustments to your images, including RAW captures (Figure 1.3). It is important to realize that Lightroom provides a nondestructive optimization solution. That means that all adjustments you apply in Lightroom don’t alter your original pixel values, but are rather stored as instructions within Lightroom about what adjustments should be applied to the image, and those adjustments are applied on the fly to the preview images you see within Lightroom.

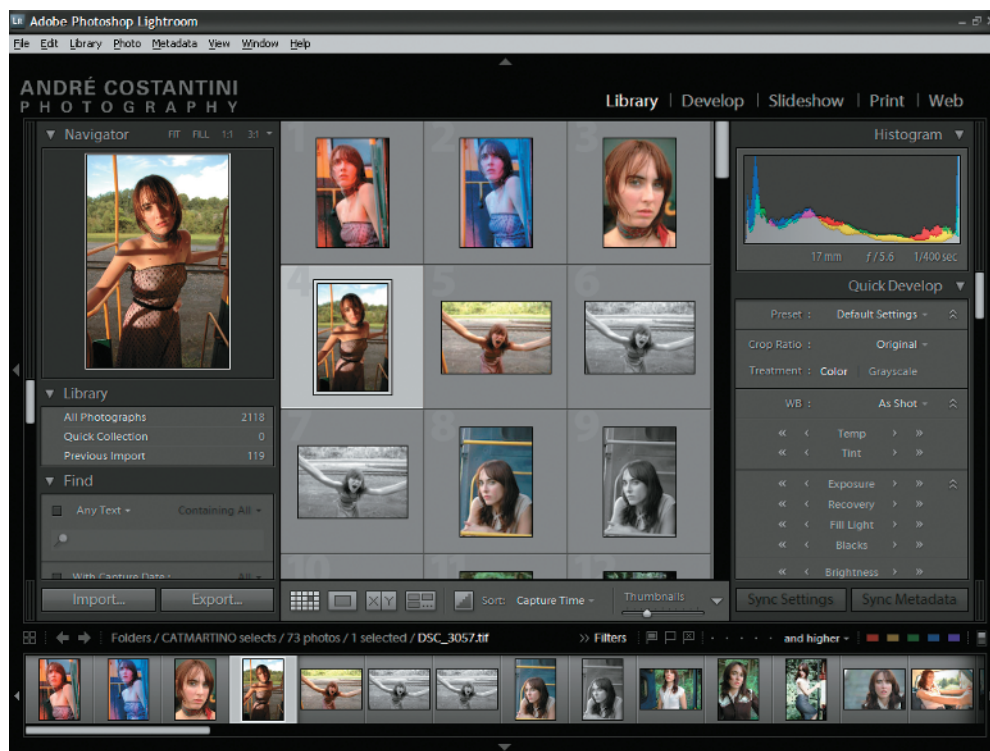


Figure 1.2 The Library module enables you to import, sort, manage, locate, and apply basic adjustments to your images.

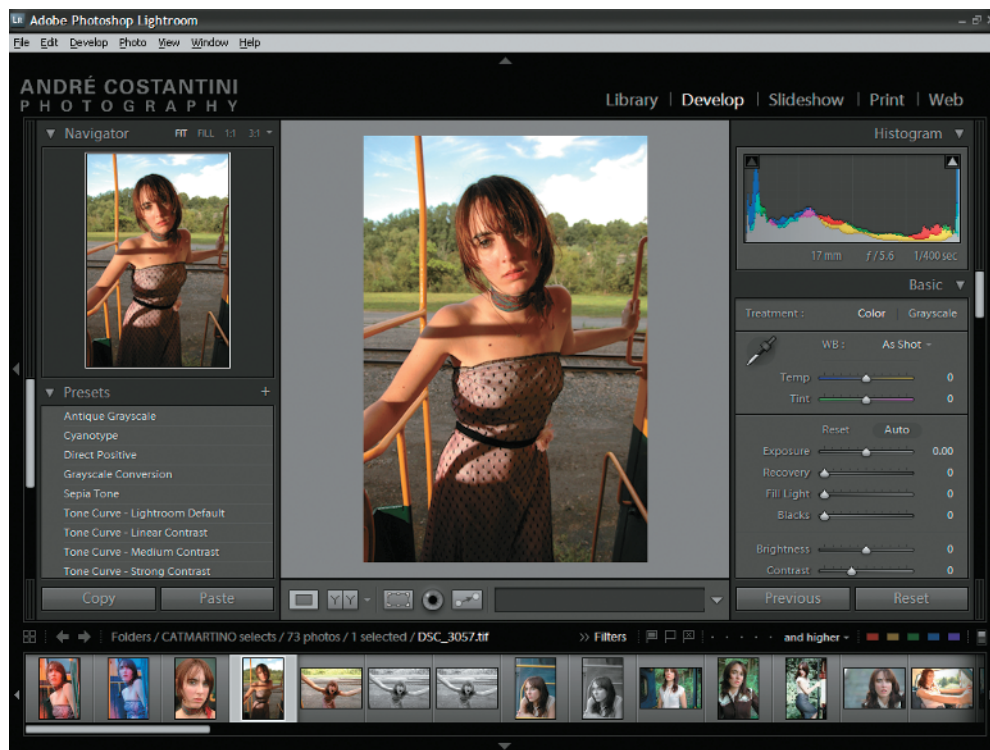


Figure 1.3 The Develop module is where you'll make most of your adjustments to images within Lightroom.

Slideshow This module allows you to quickly create basic digital slideshows for sharing your images (Figure 1.4).

Print This module allows you to print your images with great flexibility and control, producing anything from fine-art prints with a single image filling the page to contact sheets with many images per page (Figure 1.5).

Web This module allows you to create web galleries for sharing your images on the Internet very quickly and easily (Figure 1.6). It even allows you to enter your server information so the web gallery can be automatically uploaded to your website from within Lightroom.

Workflow Strategy

Each of the modules in Lightroom is the topic of an individual chapter of this book. But just as this book is a cohesive unit divided into chapters, you should think of each of the modules in Lightroom as part of a single unit. As you work through each of the chapters, keep in mind that all of the modules work together, and that each represents a stage of your workflow. You can move between modules very easily as you work on your images, and don't need to think of them as individual components that stand alone.



Figure 1.4 The Slideshow module makes it easy to quickly create digital slideshows.

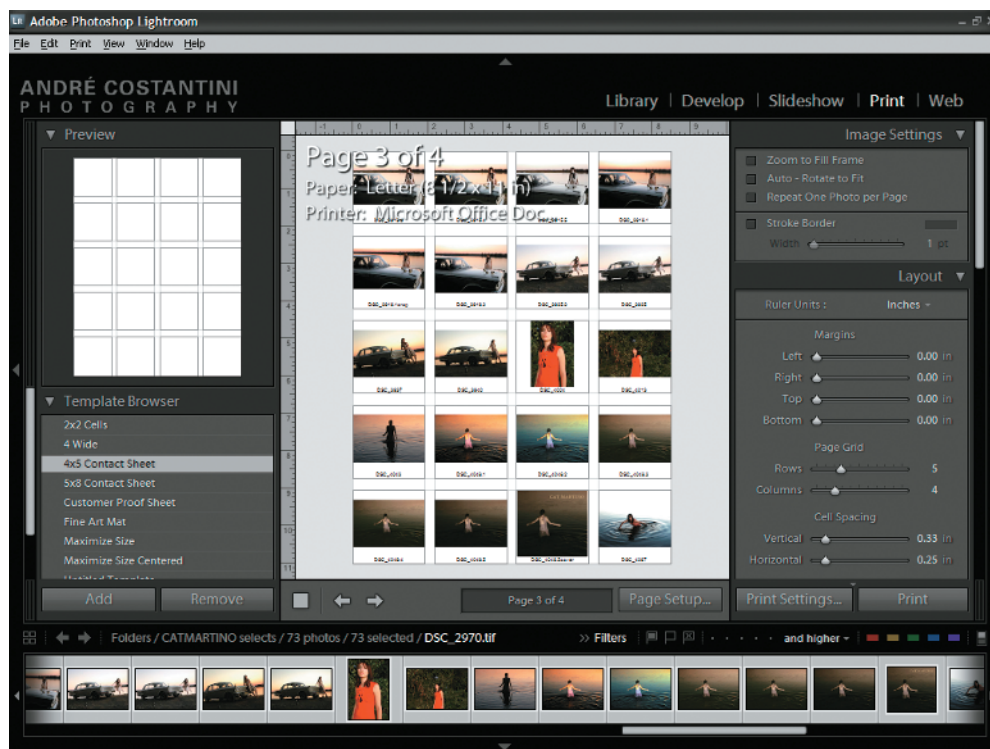


Figure 1.5 The Print module provides great flexibility and control for creating printed output with your images.

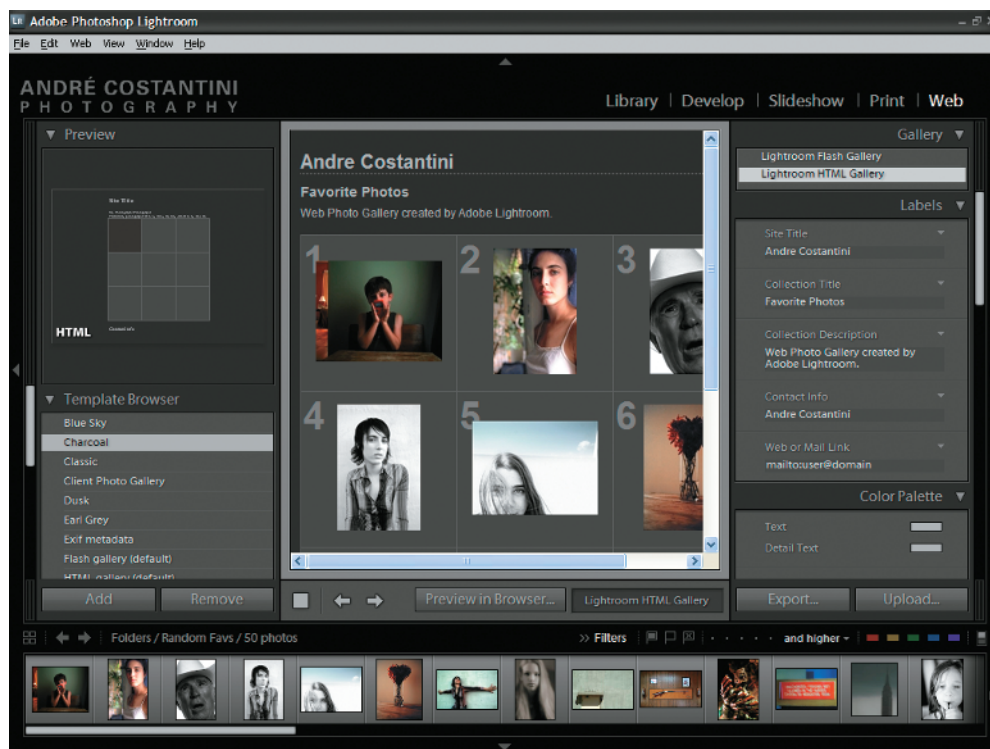


Figure 1.6 The Web module enables you to create web galleries to showcase your images.

Photoshop Replacement?

As you review the list of features found in each of the modules, you may wonder how Photoshop fits into the picture. The Library module contains many of the features and capabilities you'll find in Adobe Bridge and Adobe Camera Raw, both included as part of Photoshop. The Develop module contains tools for optimizing your photos that match many of the capabilities of Photoshop. The Slideshow, Print, and Web modules contain features that are similar to some of the automation tools found in Photoshop. In many ways, Lightroom contains the core capabilities of Photoshop that photographers are most interested in, bundled into a new interface with a more cohesive approach to the tasks photographers need to perform. This raises the question among many photographers as to whether Lightroom represents a replacement for Photoshop.

In some respects, Lightroom is exactly that. It provides all the basic features most photographers need, and might otherwise find in Photoshop. However, I consider it to be very much a supplement to Photoshop, not a replacement.

The key area where Lightroom leaves room for Photoshop is in the depth of adjustments you can apply with Photoshop. Lightroom doesn't, for example, include any ability to apply targeted adjustments to your images. I therefore think of Lightroom as a basic tool that provides enough adjustments for you to share your images with clients, but in some cases not the deeper features that will enable you to produce an image that you feel is truly ready to be considered "final."

As a result, I feel that Photoshop still has a significant role in any workflow, even with Lightroom. I cover the details of an image-optimization workflow in Photoshop in my book *Photoshop Workflow* (Sybex, 2007). Although Lightroom is a very powerful tool that allows you to process your images with great flexibility and efficiency, it is still first and foremost a tool for managing your images. You'll still often find the need to apply more-sophisticated adjustments with Photoshop. Think of Lightroom as providing an image-management workflow with some optimization, and Photoshop as providing an image-optimization workflow. The two work together to help you stay organized while producing the very best images possible.

Fortunately, Lightroom makes it easy to open images in Photoshop when the need arises, so the workflow stays cohesive and efficient even when Lightroom doesn't provide all the features you need.

We'll have to wait to see what the future holds for Lightroom. It is certainly conceivable that more image-optimization features will be added, and that Lightroom will become more of a competitor to Photoshop. In the meantime, the two work together to provide powerful solutions for digital photographers.

In general you'll likely find yourself moving through the modules in order. Each is listed at the top-right corner of the Lightroom interface, and you can switch between them by clicking on the name of the module you want to work in. As you do so, the images you're working on don't change. You select the images you want to work on in the Library module, and then work on them by switching to the other modules as appropriate, based on what you want to accomplish with the current images. Throughout each of the modules, you'll notice that the filmstrip along the bottom maintains a persistent view of the images you have selected in the Library module. This is just one example of the notion that Lightroom provides a single workflow that is simply structured into multiple modules to help you divide your work into more-manageable segments.

As you're getting started with Lightroom, I recommend that you move through the modules in order, from the Library module to Develop, and then through Slideshow, Print, and Web. The first two I think of as being somewhat "mandatory," in the sense that you certainly want to organize all your images and probably want to optimize at least your favorite images. The final three are all about sharing your images, and whether you use any, some, or all of them depends on your needs for a specific group of images.

Although any new software application can be a bit intimidating or overwhelming at first, I think you'll quickly find that Lightroom provides a logical and efficient approach to working with your images. This book will guide you through each of the modules and show you how to work with your images in each, and I think you'll soon realize that Lightroom is quite simple to work with, despite the many powerful features it provides. After you've finished reading this book and spent some time processing your images in Lightroom, I think you'll agree that it is a pleasant—even fun—experience. You'll gain efficiency in working with your images, and will likely find that Lightroom provides the time savings you need to be able to spend less time in front of your computer, and more time behind your camera doing what you enjoy most.

A Typical Workflow

To give you a sense of how well suited Lightroom is to enabling an efficient workflow, I think it is helpful to consider how you'll use Lightroom to work with your images.

Imagine that you return from a photo shoot, whether that's in your own studio or halfway around the world. You launch Lightroom and use it to download your images from your digital media cards and import them all in one step.

You then use the Library module to review the images. You start with a quick overview, using the grid view of the images. Then you start to review them in more detail, using the loupe view to get a close look at the images and decide which are your favorites and which should be discarded. You apply metadata to the images, adding your copyright information and perhaps adding keywords to individual images to help you find them later. As you're going through your images, perhaps

you even apply some quick adjustments to get them closer to matching your original vision. As you start to decide which are your favorites, you apply star ratings to the images. As you prepare to move on to the next step of the workflow, you might filter the images so you're looking at only the four- and five-star-rated images from the current photo shoot.

Wanting to spend some time making your favorite images from the shoot look their best, you move to the Develop module. Here you apply tonal and color adjustments to individual images as you examine them closely. This work goes pretty quickly, as you can use the filmstrip display to select individual images and then use the various sliders to apply adjustments to each image.

At this point you're ready to share your images. Lightroom provides plenty of options to you in the Slideshow, Print, and Web modules. Perhaps you immediately jump to the Web module so you can take your best images from the current photo shoot and quickly post them to an image gallery on your website. This is a simple matter of selecting the images, selecting the template, and uploading the result to your website because you have already entered your server information in the settings. Next you might create a slideshow, literally in seconds, so you can show the best images to your clients or friends. Next you might create a set of prints from the images so you can share those with clients. In total you probably spend about five minutes creating a web gallery, digital slideshow, and prints of the best images from the shoot. The only real time involved here is waiting for the printer to create the printed output, thanks to the efficiency of the Lightroom workflow.

How I Think about Lightroom

Lightroom is a completely new software application. Obviously, Adobe built upon a huge amount of experience from the work they've done on Photoshop and other applications. But with Lightroom, they had the luxury of starting from scratch.

Lightroom contains many indications of its ties to the past. In many ways it includes the features you'll find in the various components of Photoshop, which you're probably already familiar with. As I have said, the core features of Lightroom are contained in some form in Bridge and Adobe Camera Raw, as well as the various adjustment and automation tools found in Photoshop. In fact, at some very basic level you can perform just about every task you might otherwise perform in Lightroom by using Photoshop. So why would you use Lightroom?

My answer lies in how I actually think about Lightroom. Although it contains many of the features you'll find in Photoshop, the major benefit is that Lightroom was created from the ground up with workflow in mind. Although Photoshop improves significantly with each new release, each new release is an update to an existing product that requires a certain amount of continuity in the user experience. With Lightroom Adobe was able to start from scratch, making decisions based on what was best for the photographer rather than what made the most sense in the context of Photoshop.

continues

How I Think about Lightroom *(Continued)*

As a result, Lightroom is a simple and efficient application that enables you to work quickly with your images. After you've gone through this book and have become familiar with what Lightroom has to offer, your first reaction is probably to think that Lightroom is a relatively simple application that in some ways doesn't offer a huge number of features. However, as you continue working with Lightroom I think you'll find that it offers an elegant solution to the photographer workflow. It isn't overly complex, and yet it still affords tremendous flexibility. More importantly, because it maintains a certain degree of simplicity, it allows you to work very quickly after you've become familiar with all it has to offer. This book aims to give you exactly that level of understanding, so you'll grow to see Lightroom as a tremendous asset in your digital photography workflow.