

How To Organize Your Photos

--by Steve & Susan Mark



Step 1. Gathering Your Photo Prints

Rescue

It's time to rescue your photos from every corner of the house where they might be found. Check your closet shelves, drawers, shoe boxes, and closets. Don't forget to search any garage, basement or attic storage places.

You need to gather them **all** into one location. The guest room, a dining room table, or even a corner of your bedroom will do. You'll need a chair and a work surface. Of course if you're young and flexible, you could always plop down on a comfy pillow and work on the floor. If not, even a folding chair and a good sturdy card table will work.

Good lighting is also important. As you dig through your forgotten treasures you'll need to see clearly. We suggest you use a table lamp or simply situate your work area near a window if you're planning to work during daylight hours.

As you come across any digitized photos (those without prints) stored on CD ROMs, DVD ROMs, flash drives, hard drives, or other storage media, gather these into a location near your computer. We'll talk about how do deal with these later.

Step 2. Choosing your Categories

Classifying

As you begin thumbing through groupings of photos in your collection, begin determining the categories you will use to sort them. There are lots of possibilities here. You might choose to divide your photos into basic event categories such as:



- family
- friends
- vacations
- celebrations
- holidays
- birthdays
- weddings
- baby's first year
- military
- legacy/heritage
- family/general

Parents or grandparents might choose categories that encompass highlights of the life of each child such as:

- school pictures
- playtime
- clubs
- sports
- music
- theatre

Make note of the most promising possibilities and then choose the one that best suits your individual needs. If you have mountains of photos, we recommend sorting chronologically and by event. It may prove helpful to simply start with the present and work your way backwards through time. Your categories may look something like this:

- **2006 June - Jr.'s First Steps**
- **2005 August - Billy Jr. is Born**
- **2004 June - Billy and Sue's Wedding**
- **2003 May - Billy the Graduate**
- **2002 Sept - Billy's School Band**
- **2001 Nov - Billy's School Play**

There is no right or wrong way to categorize your photos. Everyone's photo collection is different so go with what works best for you.

Existing Photo Albums

So what to do with groups of photos already in albums? Whether or not to remove them at this point is up to you, but if you choose not to do so, we suggest labeling the cover of your photo albums with a post-it note so you can quickly determine what's inside. If a photo album covers more than one category, list each on a separate post-it.

Make it your resolution to ensure every precious photo is stored some sort of photo-safe container as soon as possible after your project. Remember, you can never go back and recapture those moments.

Another way to preserve these treasures is to scan them and store them on digital storage media. By doing this you have created a backup which can be digitally restored and or reprinted as necessary. More on digital photos in Step 4.

Step 3. Sorting Your Photo Prints

Before



After



Note: If you're planning to scan your photo prints you can do your sorting in digital format. Skip to step 4.

Sorting Bins

Now that you have selected your categories, you'll need to get your photos into sorting bins. If you really want to make this process easy, there are a number of inexpensive high-quality sorting bin products on the market that are made specifically to be photo-safe, take up a minimum of space and provide a convenient way to store your photos until you're ready to put them in albums.

The less expensive and perhaps more expedient alternative is to use a medium size box and a stack of manila envelopes.

Making A Mole Hill Out Of Your Mountain

Begin digging through your collection, choose a category that most pertains to the photo you're looking at and place it in the bin for that category. For now, don't worry about placement order within each bin. As you sort your photos, you may wish to label them. You don't necessarily need to write on each one, but you'll find it helpful later if you label one or more photos within groups with information such as:

- Whose birthday it was
- What year it was and how old they were
- Whose wedding it was
- Location(s) where ceremony and or reception was held

Make sure you always use a photo labeling pencil that was specifically designed for writing on the backs of photos. This is extremely important because acid or lead from an ordinary pen or pencil can damage your irreplaceable photos. If you don't have a photo labeling pencil, use a sticky note attached to the back of the photo.

It's also important to be choosy as you go through these photos. **One of your category bins should be a wastebasket.** If you find a photo that's out of focus, grossly unflattering, overexposed or just plain boring, get rid of it now. If it makes you cringe to look at it now, chances are it would next time too. You may be surprised at how many photos you've kept that fall into this category. Discarding them now will save you time later when you prepare your photos for insertion in a photo montage video and ultimately for permanent storage or insertion in a photo album.

Duplicate prints are great for making sure everyone in the family gets to share important photos. If you've ordered extras and still have them, make a stack to mail out to those for whom they were originally intended. Some people will keep a separate box for duplicates. We recommend that you avoid putting your duplicates in with your sorted photos. Having only one of each in your primary sorting boxes will simplify the process of getting and staying organized.

We also recommend that you separate your negatives from your photos, placing them in envelopes. Be sure to label each envelope to show what group of photos it contains and the name of the category where the original prints are stored. If you don't make digital scans of your prints, you'll want to store your negatives in a fireproof box in case anything ever happens to your photos.

Step 4. Organizing Your Digital Photos

In Step 1, during your rescue / retrieval mission, you gathered your digitized photos on DVD's, CD ROMs, hard drives or other storage media, placing them near your computer. Although we mentioned only digital photos, you might wish to extend this process into other digital media, such as avi movies uploaded from a digital camera or camcorder.

Whether you are organizing your digital media for archival purposes, or for inclusion in a video photo album, the sorting method is quite similar to organizing still photos.

1. **Copy** all of your photos onto a large hard drive with plenty of empty storage space. Here your files can be viewed, moved and renamed as necessary. You can use any basic computer file utility such as Windows Explorer (PC Users), or Finder (Mac Users).
2. **Create folders** and subfolders corresponding to the names of each category in your list.
3. **View** each of your photos. **Drag and drop** your photo files into the folder corresponding to the appropriate categories for each. As you do this, we suggest you take time to rename each file in much the same way as you would label the back of a printed photograph.

Backup the Backup of your Backup!

In many cases digital photos are never printed. Most of us worry about our photo albums and prints being lost in a fire, but the simple truth is that you run a much greater risk of a hard drive crash, losing digital photos and the precious memories they hold.



We recommend having a backup of your digital photos in at least **three places** such as:

- **An archival hard drive ...**
 - Great for holding huge archives of digital photos and other digital media.
 - We recommend using an external hard drive dedicated to this purpose.
 - Leave the hard drive disconnected from power except during those times you need to access the files it contains. This will minimize the wear and tear on its moving parts.

- **Optical discs such as CDR's or DVD-R's ...**
 - Readily available and very inexpensive.
 - Store them easily in small places.
 - Keep an additional backup copy in your safe deposit box.
 - We recommend using CD/DVD pockets in the pages of your photo albums.
 - Exercise care handling your optical media. CDR's and DVDR's can become unreadable if scratched or cracked. Handle from the outside edges to avoid getting fingerprints and smudges especially on the bottom side. NEVER lay your disc on a dusty work surface.
- **Prints of your digital photos.**
 - If you have a photo quality printer you can print these yourself using quality photo paper.
 - For better print quality use an online photo service such as Flickr, Snapfish or Creative Memories Photo Center.
 - Your photo prints can be preserved and shared in traditional photo albums.

Step 5. Final Preparation for your Photo Montage Video

Organize your photos as outlined in the preceding chapters and then move on to the steps below. We'll cover both photo prints and digital photos.

1. **Choose the categories** to be used in your photo montage video.
 - Each category will become a chapter in your video.
 - For prints create and label a separate envelope for each video chapter. For digital photos create a master folder for your video and separate subfolders for each chapter.
2. **Select the best photos**
 - Try to choose images that show clear detail.
 - Where possible, choose images of people over scenery.
 - Choose candid shots that reveal character and personality.
 - Include images of people in action.
3. **Determine the order**
 - Place your photos prints in the order in which the video chapters are to appear. Drag and drop a copy of your digital photos to the proper category subfolder in your master video folder.
 - Using a photo safe pencil or sticky notes on the back, number your photo prints and place them in order in the appropriate category envelope. For digital photos, using the rename command, insert a three digit number and one space at the beginning of the filename. (If the original filename was "sam at party.jpg" rename the file "001 sam at party.jpg").

Here is an example of the chapter labels for a Video Photo Album comprised of over 100 photos. These labels would appear on chapter envelopes for photo prints and on the category subfolder for digital photos.

A Tribute to Billy Davis	
Chapter 1 School Play Photos #001-017	Chapter 4 Billy & Sues Wedding Photos #069-091
Chapter 2 School Band Photos #018-039	Chapter 5 Billy Jr. is Born Photos #091-118
Chapter 3 Billy Graduates Photos #040-063	Chapter 6 Jr.'s First Steps Photos #118-133

Q: What if I want to include digital photos with my prints?

A: If you're planning to use a combination of digital photos and prints, use the same procedure as outlined above. When you come to a digital photo in your photo order, simply insert a slip of paper labeled with the path name (foldername/filename) for that photo on your enclosed CD Rom.

Commit to Get Started Today

Photo preparation is key to a successful photo montage video. It can be fun and easy once you have a game plan and a commitment to get it done.

To recap:

1. Get all your photos in one place.
2. Select your category names
3. Sort your photos into the appropriate categories
4. Number your photos

Points to remember:

- This is a process to be savored. If you don't have sufficient time to split everything into categories, simply arrange your photos in chronological order.
- Do the work in small manageable doses.
- If you find yourself feeling overwhelmed, take a break and come back later.
- Once the organization phase is completed you are only one step away from having your photos in a form that can be shared and enjoyed by all for generations to come.

Take your time and enjoy the memories and feelings each photograph evokes.

If you need help, call or write us.

Steve Mark

Applause Audio Video

<http://www.applauseav.com>

steve@applauseav.com

817-456-1438

About the authors

Susan and I have made it a new tradition in our family to do everything we possibly can to actively preserve our own family history. Sure, it takes a little time, effort and some careful organization. But we still do it because we believe there's nothing more important than celebrating the connections that bind families and loved ones together. And we routinely encourage our friends, clients and colleagues to do the same.

We hope you'll find this guide helpful in simplifying the seemingly daunting task of organizing the boxes and stacks of photos that seem to accumulate in every household. Your comments and suggestions are welcome.

