



Culling a Shoot in Lightroom

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In this lesson, we're going to take a look at the process of culling a photo shoot in Lightroom. The term, "culling," refers to the process of reducing things down to the best.

Folder Organization (Timestamp 1:27)

Before looking at the culling process, I'd like to briefly share my folder organization system. Note that there is another lesson dedicated completely to folder organization.

I organize all of my images by date, so I have one folder for each year. Inside the year's folder, there is a folder for each individual photo shoot. I have a specific system for organizing these individual shoot folders.

Each shoot folder contains a series of subfolders:

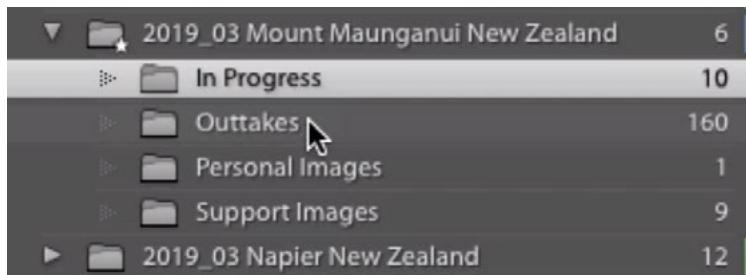
In Progress: This subfolder contains all images that I still need to work on.

Outtakes: In this subfolder, I place images that I should never need to look at again (out of focus, unusable, etc.).

Support Images: This subfolder will contain things like the individual images used to create panorama or HDR images.

Personal: If I have any family/friends images that I don't want to share with the general public, they will go in this subfolder.

If an image is complete and ready to show the public, it will be moved to the base level of the shoot folder. This just means that it will not be placed in any of the subfolders.



Every shoot is organized into a series of subfolders.

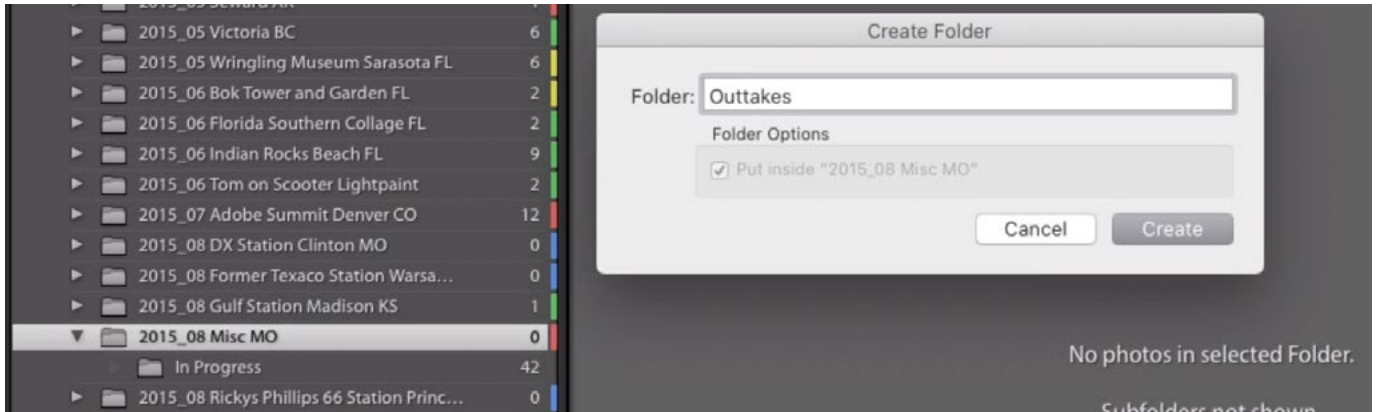
In order for this system to work properly, we need to tell Lightroom to NOT display images contained in subfolders. If we click on the folder for a shoot name, we only want to see the images that are contained in the base level folder for that shoot. We do not want to see the images that are contained in the subfolders (In Progress, Outtakes, etc.). Should we want to view those images, we would need to click on the subfolder to view its contents. Additionally, we want the number next to the shoot name to represent the number of images that are contained only in the base level folder. These are the images ready to show the public. We don't want this number to include the images contained in the subfolders. We can specify that Lightroom behave this way by clicking on the Library menu and making sure that the "Show Folders in Subfolders" setting is turned off.

Prepping a Folder Before Culling (3:26)

Now let's look at how I work my way through a fresh folder of images from a photo shoot. My goal is to narrow down the number of images to just those that really need to be worked on, and to move all other images into the "Outtakes" subfolder as I work my way through.

Create subfolders After a shoot has been imported, you should have one folder containing all of the images. If you're going to implement the system I use, you will need to create the necessary subfolders. To create a subfolder, right-click on the name of the folder and choose "Create Folder Inside..." from the pop-up menu. A dialog will appear, prompting you to type in a name for the subfolder. After you click the Create button, you will see the new subfolder appear inside the base-level shoot folder.

To use this system, you will need to create an "In Progress" subfolder and an "Outtakes" subfolder. Then, move all of the shoot images into the "In Progress" folder. Now, the goal is to work in the "In Progress" subfolder and narrow down the number of images to just those that really need to be worked on. All the OTHER images will be moved into the "Outtakes" folder as you go through it.

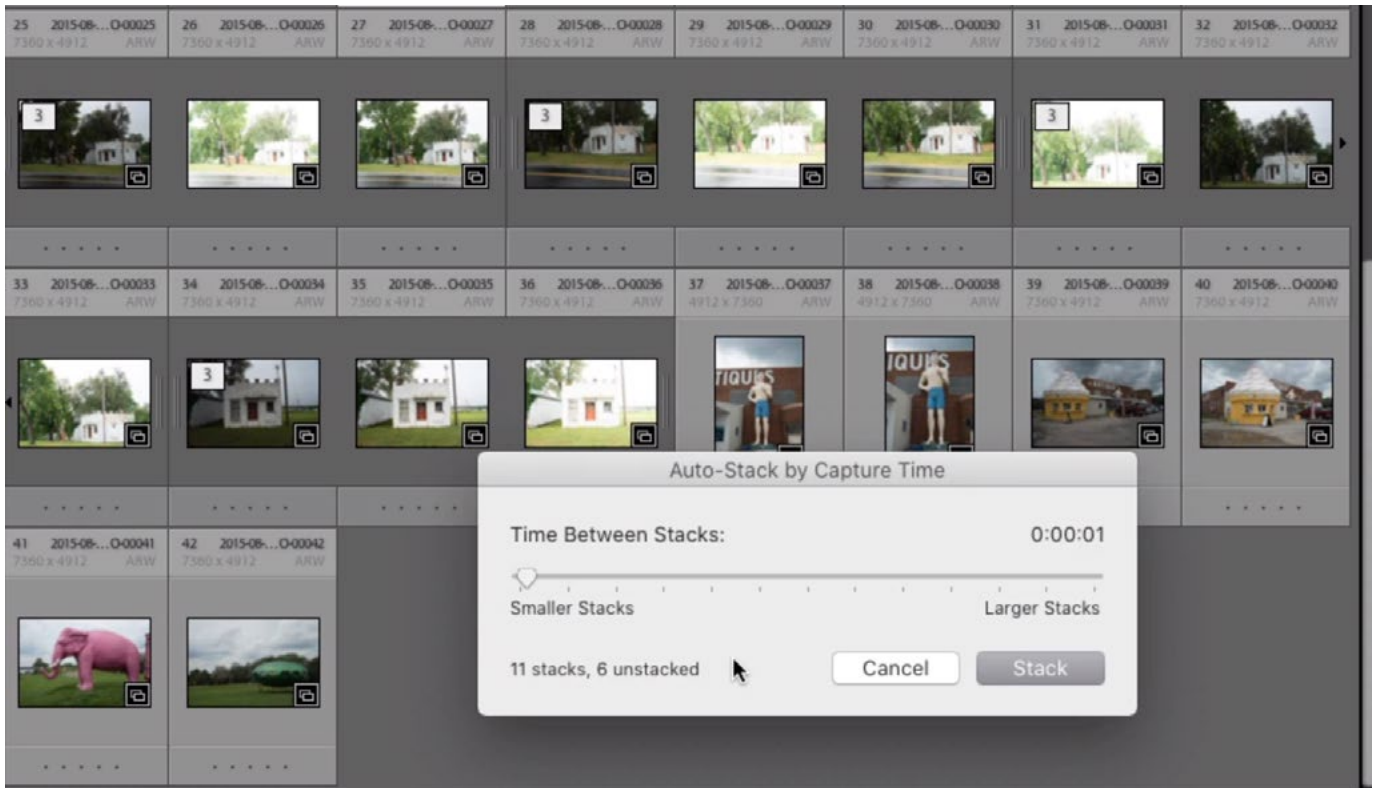


To create a subfolder, right-click on the folder name and choose “Create Folder Inside” from the pop-up menu. This dialog will appear, prompting you to name the subfolder.

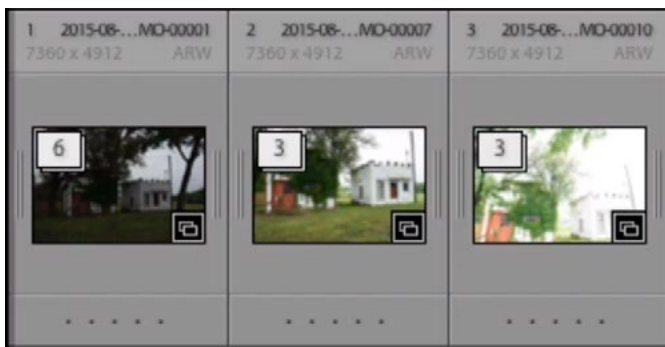
Auto-Stack by Capture Time This is a setting that will be relevant if the folder contains a lot of images that were shot for HDR. When you shoot for HDR, you take a bracketed set of images in quick succession. These images will be later merged to incorporate a larger dynamic range. If you have shot a lot of images like this, you’re going to have a LOT of images in the shoot folder. That’s because there’s either three or five files for each shot. That’s the case in the video example folder that I used.

In order to clean up the folder, you can stack each series of files that will make up a single image. When you stack a set of images, only one will appear as a thumbnail in Lightroom. The rest will be stacked underneath it, as if the set of images is neatly arranged into a pile on your desk. It would take a long time to manually stack each set, but there is a setting that automates the process.

Click on the Photo menu and choose Stacking > Auto-Stack by Capture Time. A dialog will appear and it will contain a “Time Between Stacks” slider. This slider determines the maximum number of seconds there can be between shots before it thinks those shots are related. For example, if you set this slider to 10 seconds, then all images shot within 10 seconds of each other will be grouped into a stack. At the bottom of the dialog box, it will tell you how many stacks there will be, based on the current slider setting.



ABOVE: We are choosing to Auto-Stack by Capture Time and the “Time Between Stacks” slider is being set to one second. This will stack all images that were captured within one second of each other (bracketed HDR images). **LEFT:** When images are stacked, a number will appear in the top right corner of the stack’s thumbnail.



When stacking bracketed HDR images, I will usually set the slider to one second because the bracketed shots are captured in rapid succession. Click the Stack button and the images will be stacked. This will clean up the folder, making it easier to look at.

When a set of images has been stacked, a little number icon will appear in the top left corner of the image thumbnail. Click on the number to expand the stack. Click a second time to collapse the stack.

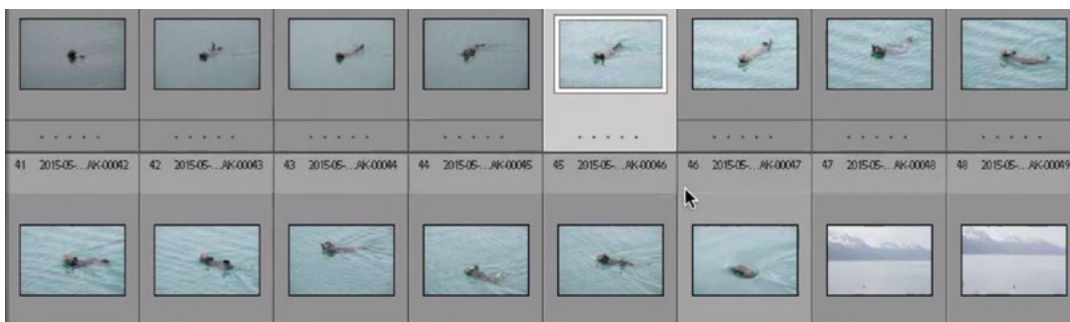
Note on stacking: When you stack images in Lightroom, it will always place the first image in a sequence at the top of the stack. This is the image that will be visible when the stack is collapsed. If your camera is set to shoot with default stacking settings, this is fine. By default, the camera will shoot the images in this succession:

- The “properly-exposed,” default exposure
- The darker exposure
- The brighter exposure

With these default settings, the “normal-looking” picture will be at the top of the stack. One of the custom functions in your camera determines the order in which images are captured when it has bracketing turned on. I personally like to change my settings so that it will capture the darkest image first and then go progressively brighter. Know that if you also use these settings, then the darkest of the HDR images will be at the top of the collapsed stack. It’s just something to be aware of when working with camera settings.

Culling the Shoot (7:30)

Narrow down an image sequence As you scroll through the shoot, there will likely be sets of images that were shot in sequence. For example, in the lesson video, I am looking through a shoot from Alaska and I have a sequence of images featuring a swimming otter. When I come across a set like this, I will review all of the images in the sequence and mark the ones that are obviously bad. These are the ones I absolutely know that I’m not going to work on.



Here is a sequence of images that will need to be narrowed down to the best one or two images.

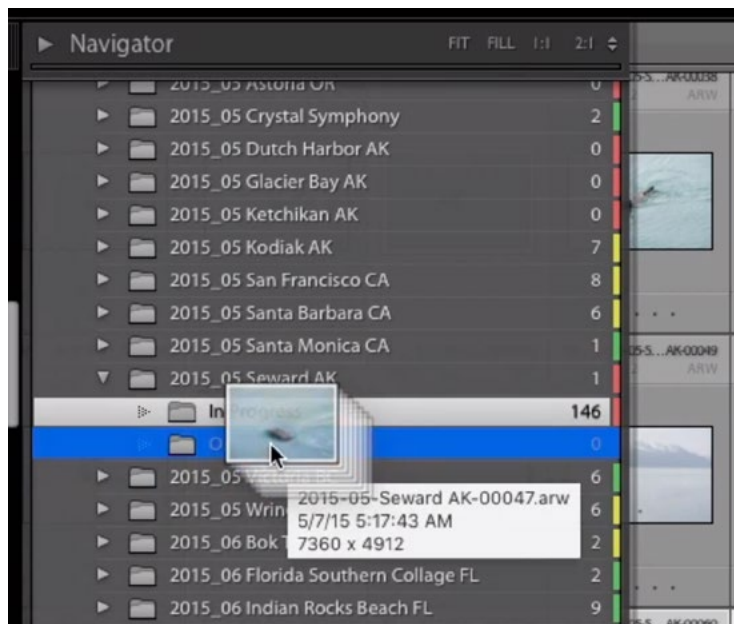
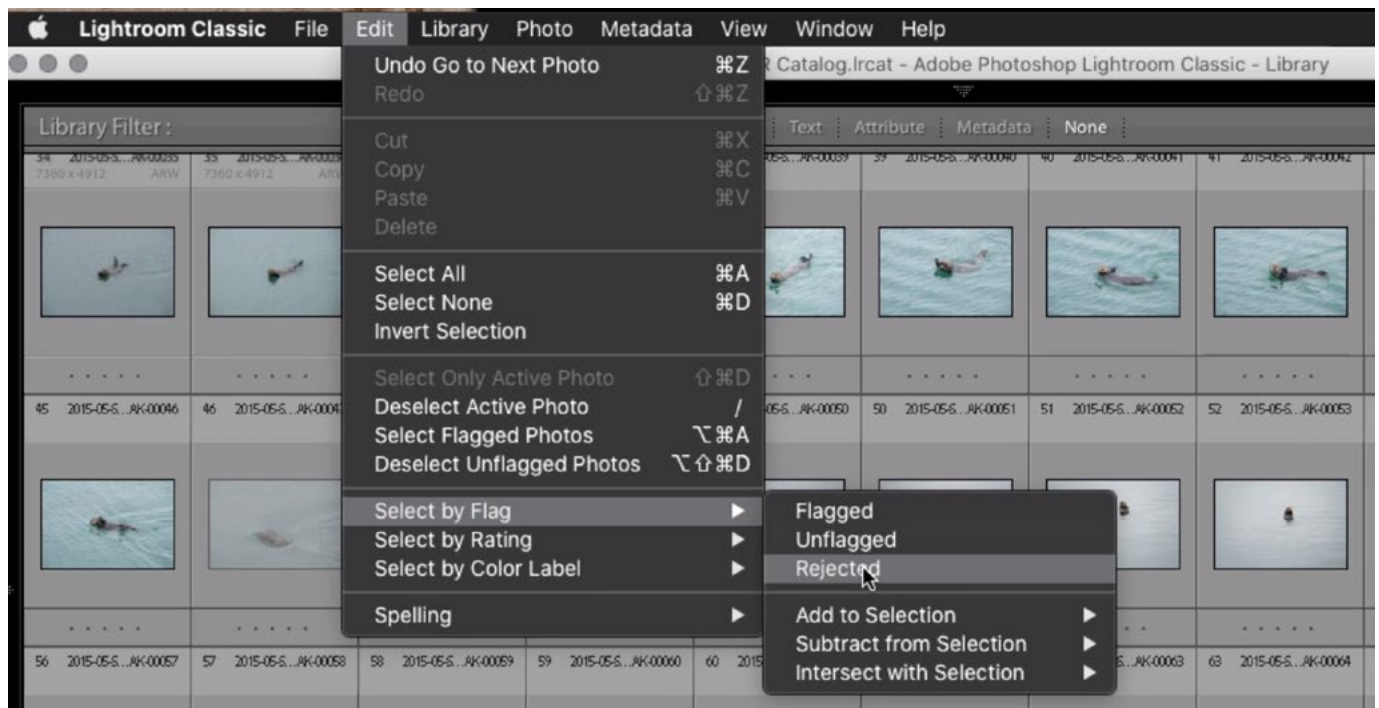
Flag image as reject I'll take all of the bad images as flag them as rejects. You can flag an image as a reject by clicking on it (to make it active) and then tapping the X key. Alternatively, you can click on the Photo menu and choose Set Flag > Rejected. You will see a little "X" flag icon appear in the top left corner of the image thumbnail. If you accidentally mark an image as a reject, you can unflag it by tapping the U key (for Unflag) or by using that same Photo menu option.

I will select the first image in the sequence and tap the Space Bar to enter Loupe View and make it fill the screen. If I think that there's any chance at all that the image will work, I'll leave it alone. I'll tap the right arrow key to move to the next image. If any of the images are obviously bad, I'll tap the X key to mark it as a reject. A "bad" image would be one that is completely out of focus or where the composition is really undesirable. At this point, I am not yet trying to determine which of the images are really good. I'll continue tapping the right arrow key to move through the images until I reach the end of the series.



LEFT: In Loupe View, I tapped the X key to mark this image as a reject. **ABOVE:** When an image is flagged as a reject, a black "X" flag will appear above its thumbnail.

Now I need to move all of the rejected images into the Outtakes folder. There is a way of quickly selecting images based on their flags. I'll click on the Edit menu and choose Select by Flag. This will let me select all images that are either flagged, unflagged or rejected. I'll choose the Rejected option. All of the images marked as rejects will become selected and I can drag them as a group into the Outtakes folder.

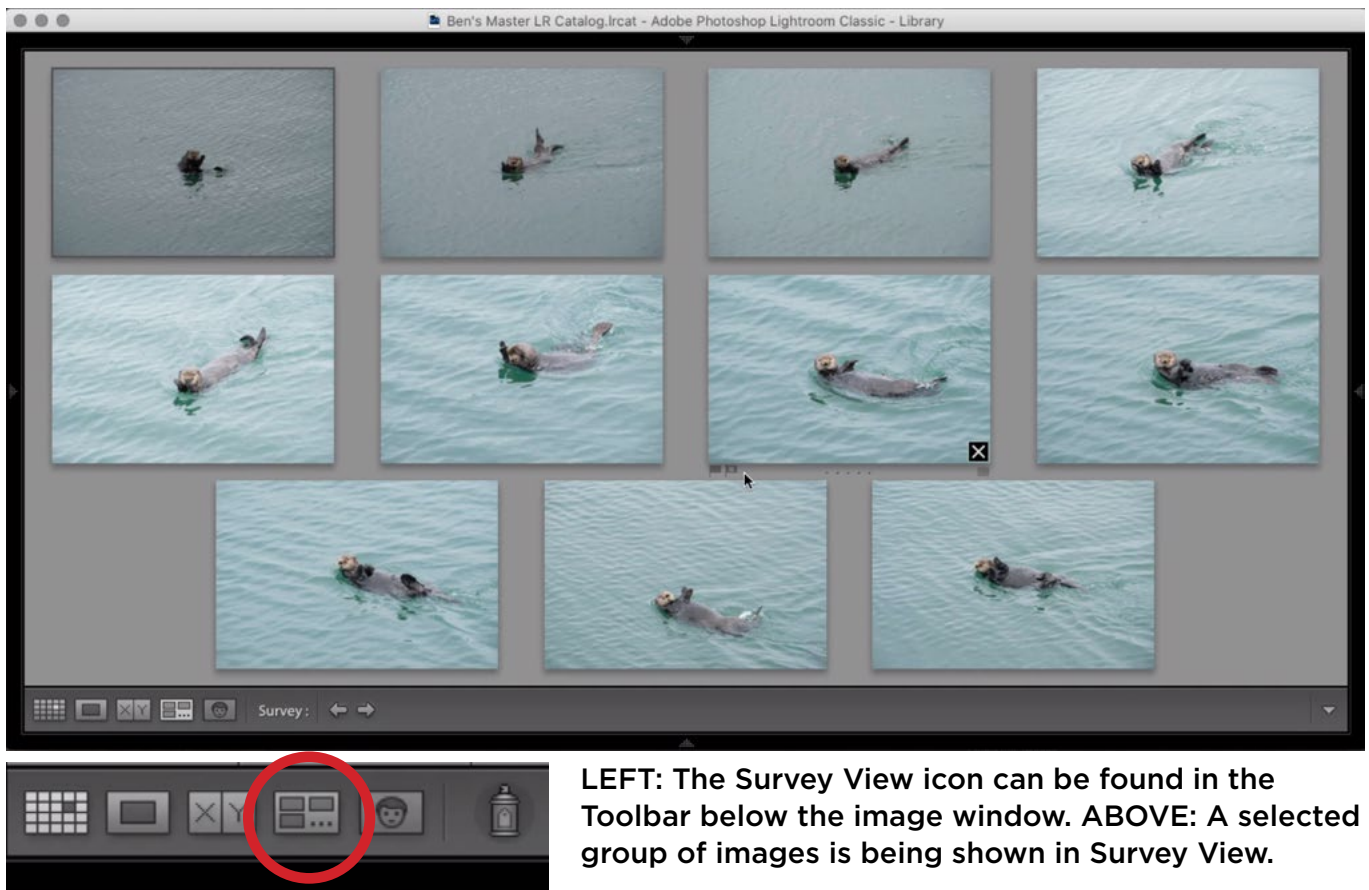


ABOVE: We are choosing to select all of the images that were flagged as Rejected. **LEFT:** The Rejected images are being dragged, as a group, into the Outtakes subfolder.

Narrow down sequence using Survey View I am still working on the same sequence of images. I've already removed the obvious outtakes but I need to narrow the sequence down further. This can be done using the Survey View.

The Toolbar runs along the bottom of the Lightroom window, just below the image window and above the Filmstrip. If the Toolbar is not visible on your screen you can tap the T key to toggle its visibility. The left side of the Toolbar contains some view options. The fourth icon from the left is for Survey View and that's what I'll use now. To enter Survey View, you can either click on the icon or tap the N key.

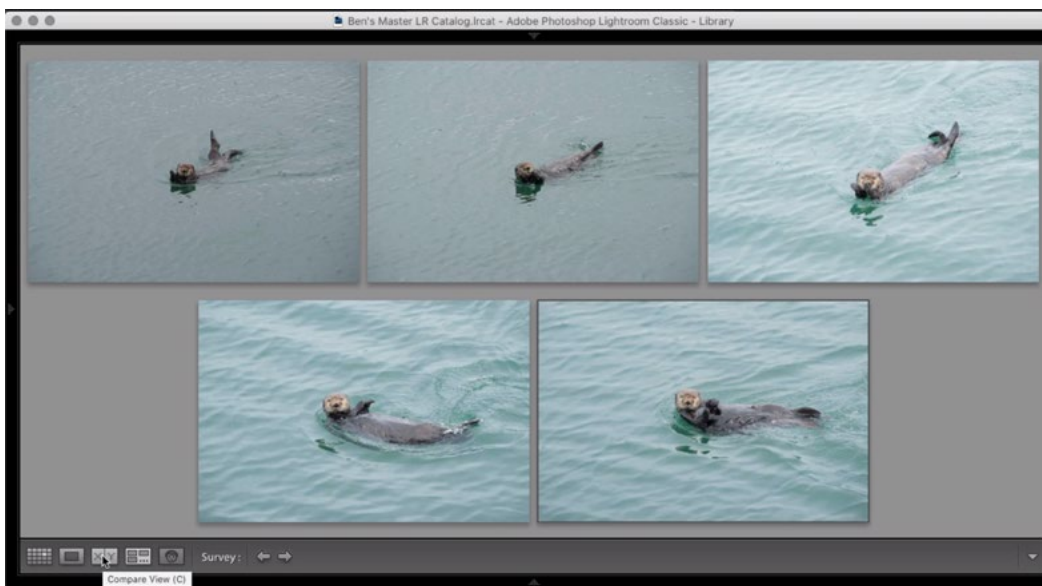
Survey View will show all selected images so that it's easier to compare them. If I hover the cursor over one of the images, an X icon will appear in the bottom right. Tapping this icon will remove the image from the view, making it unselected. I'll evaluate the images in this view and tap the X icon for all images that I know I'm not going to use.



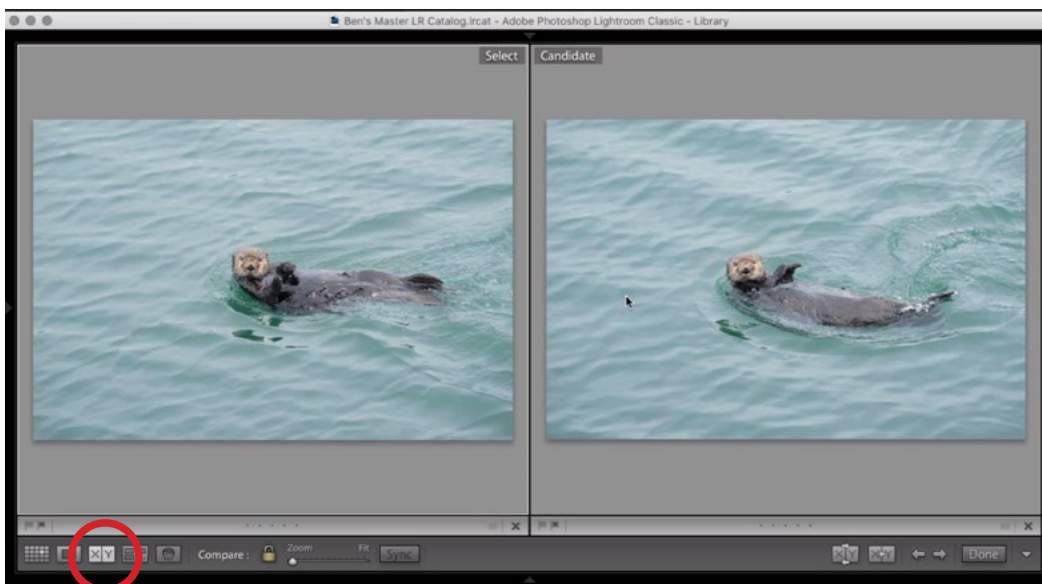
LEFT: The Survey View icon can be found in the Toolbar below the image window. **ABOVE:** A selected group of images is being shown in Survey View.

NOTE: When you hover the cursor over an image, the flag and reject icons will also appear under the image. If you click on one of these icons, it will mark ALL of the Survey View images as flagged or rejected and that's because all of the images are currently selected. This is why I'm tapping the X icon (to remove an image from the selection) instead of tapping the Flagged icon.

After removing the weaker images from the selection, I will try to determine which of the remaining images is the strongest. I'll click on the image I THINK is the strongest to make it most selected. An outline will appear around the edges of the image.



The set of images was narrowed down in Survey View. We clicked on the bottom right image to make it most selected. You can see an outline around this image.



We entered the Compare View (icon circled) and the image that was most selected appears as the "Select," on the left.

Compare View Now I have narrowed down the set of images and I have highlighted the image that I think is the best. I will now compare this image directly against the other images (one at a time) using the Compare View. I'll click on the third icon from the left side of the Toolbar below the image window. This will open the Compare View. (Alternatively, you can tap the C key to enter Compare View.)

In Compare View, only two images will be visible at a time. The most selected image (the one I think is the best) will appear on the left and it will be marked as "Select." One of the other selected images will appear on the right and it will be marked as "Candidate."

If I think that the Candidate image is stronger than the Select image, then I can swap the two images by tapping the Swap icon, which is near the right side of the Toolbar. If I am sure that the Select image is stronger than the Candidate image, I'll tap the X icon



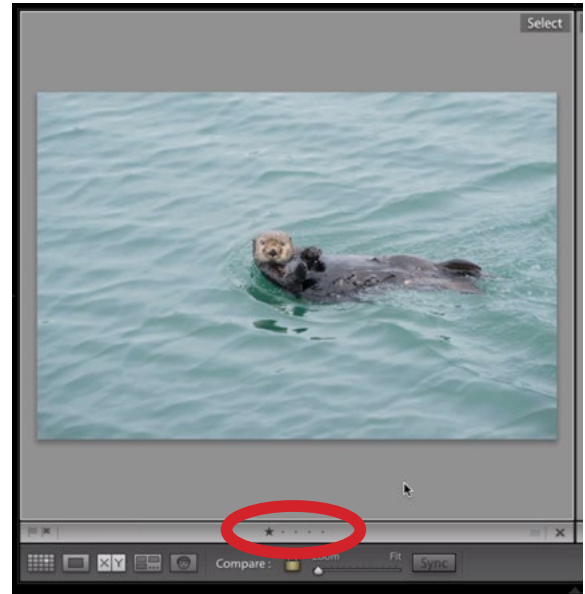
In Compare View, the swap icon can be used to convert the Candidate image into the Select image.

in the bottom right corner of the Candidate image in order to remove it from the selection. After removing the Candidate image, another of the selected images will take its place. I'll continue the process of either tapping the Swap icon or the X icon. If I'm not sure about which of the two is better, I can temporarily skip the decision and use the arrow icons (on the right side of the Toolbar; see screenshot above) to cycle to the next candidate image. In this view, I can also click within the image window to zoom in on the images. When I click on one image, both images will zoom equally. This can be helpful in comparing the quality of the two images.

I'll know that I've made my way through all of the images when an image pops up that was not in the selected sequence. I wish that it would simply show an empty window instead of an unrelated image, not that's not currently the case.

After I've narrowed down the series to one or two standout images, I will give that image (or image) a star rating so that it stands out from the others when I am viewing the images in the Grid View. You can give an image a star rating by clicking the little dots below the image. There are five of them. Clicking on the center dot would give the image a three-star rating, clicking on the right-most dot will give the image a five-star rating, and so on. To me, it doesn't matter what the rating is because it's just being used to serve as a visual reference.

I'll return to the Grid View by clicking on the grid icon in the Toolbar or by tapping the G key. Back in the Grid View, I can see the starred image[s]. I will select all of the OTHER images in that sequence and drag them into the Outtakes folder.

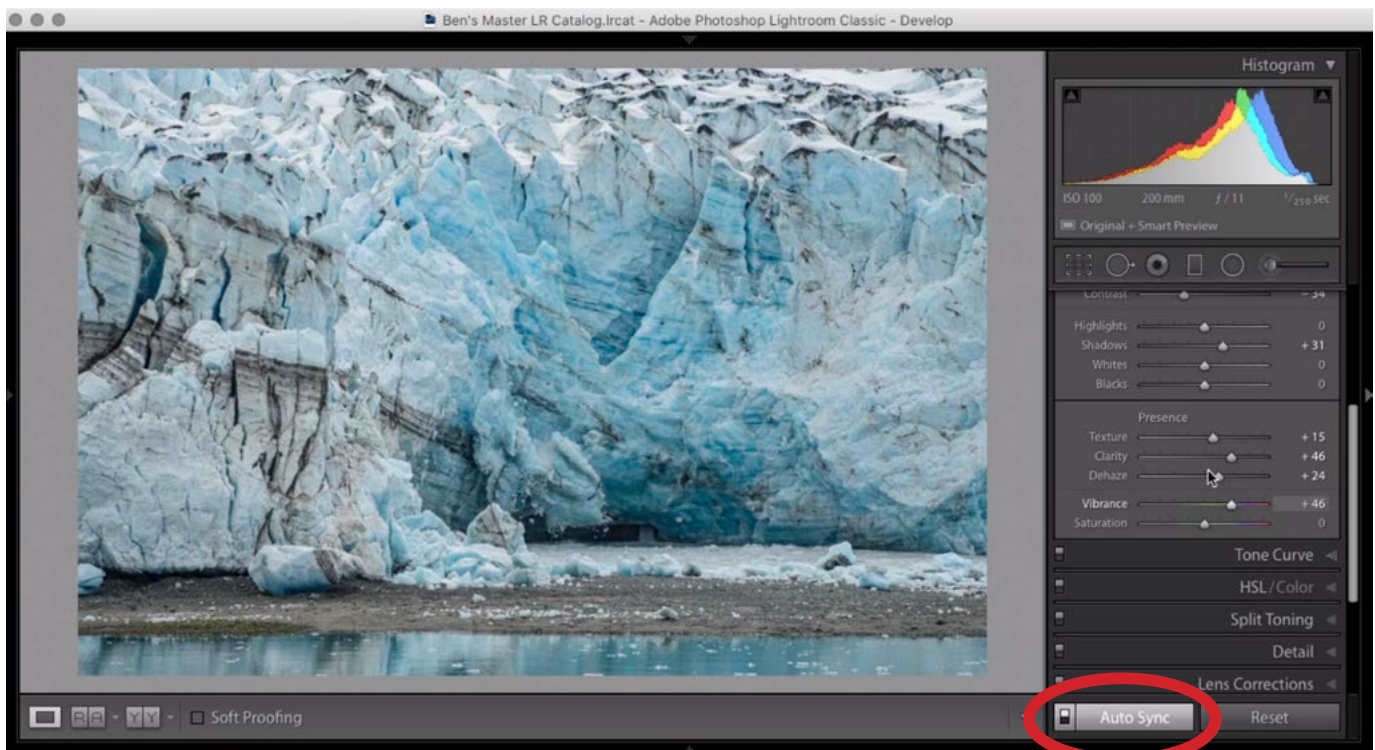


The Select image was given a star rating by using the dots below the image (circled).

Adjust Images Before Evaluating (25:55)

There may be instances where you'll need to adjust a series of images in order to better evaluate them. In the lesson video, that was the case with the series of glacier images. I felt that the shadows were too dark for me to see what was going on in those areas.

To adjust all of the images at once, I'll make sure they're all selected and then I will move to the Develop Module. Here, I need to make sure that the Auto-Sync setting is turned on. It can be found in the bottom right corner of the interface. When this setting is turned on, I can make changes to the image I'm currently viewing and those changes will be reflected in all the other selected images as well. I'll use the tonal adjustment sliders to brighten the shadows and make a few more tweaks that I think would make it easier to evaluate the image. When I'm done, I'll return to the Library Module.



A series of similar images is selected the Develop Module settings are being used to make adjustments to all of the selected images. The Auto Sync setting (circled) must be turned on in order to adjust multiple images at once.

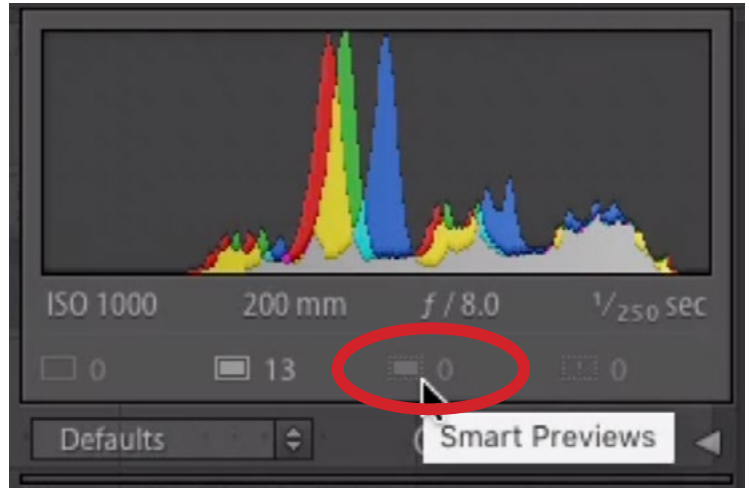
Evaluating Panoramas (27:05)

I sometimes end up with a large number of images that were captured to create panoramas. If these panoramas were all captured at the same location, it can be hard to compare and evaluate them as individual, un-stitched images. If I were to stitch each panorama series, it would take a lot of processing time because the images are all high resolution. To get around this, I might temporarily unmount my hard drive and then stitch the lower-resolution previews instead. Before doing this, however, I need to make sure that all of the images have Smart Previews.

Build Smart Previews You can tell if an image (or images) has a Smart Preview by looking at the bar that's directly beneath the Histogram. In the lesson video, I selected the 13 images that were captured to create a panorama. Looking beneath the Histogram, it tells me how many of the images have previews and how many

of the images have Smart Previews. The third icon represents Smart Previews. In my example, none of the images have Smart Previews so I will have to create them. With all of the images still selected, I'll click on the Library menu and choose Previews > Build Smart Previews.

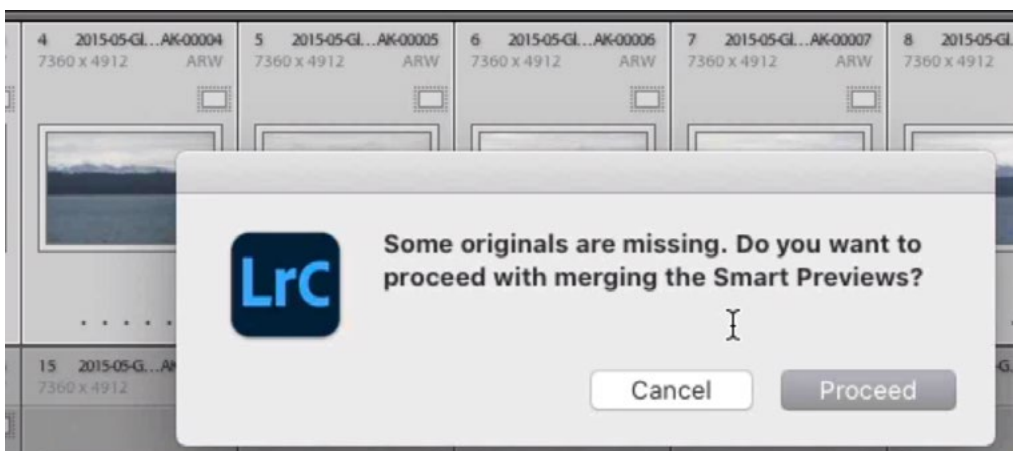
Now, I will eject the hard drive that contains my images. After doing this, Lightroom will no longer have access to the original pictures.



None of the selected images have Smart Previews.

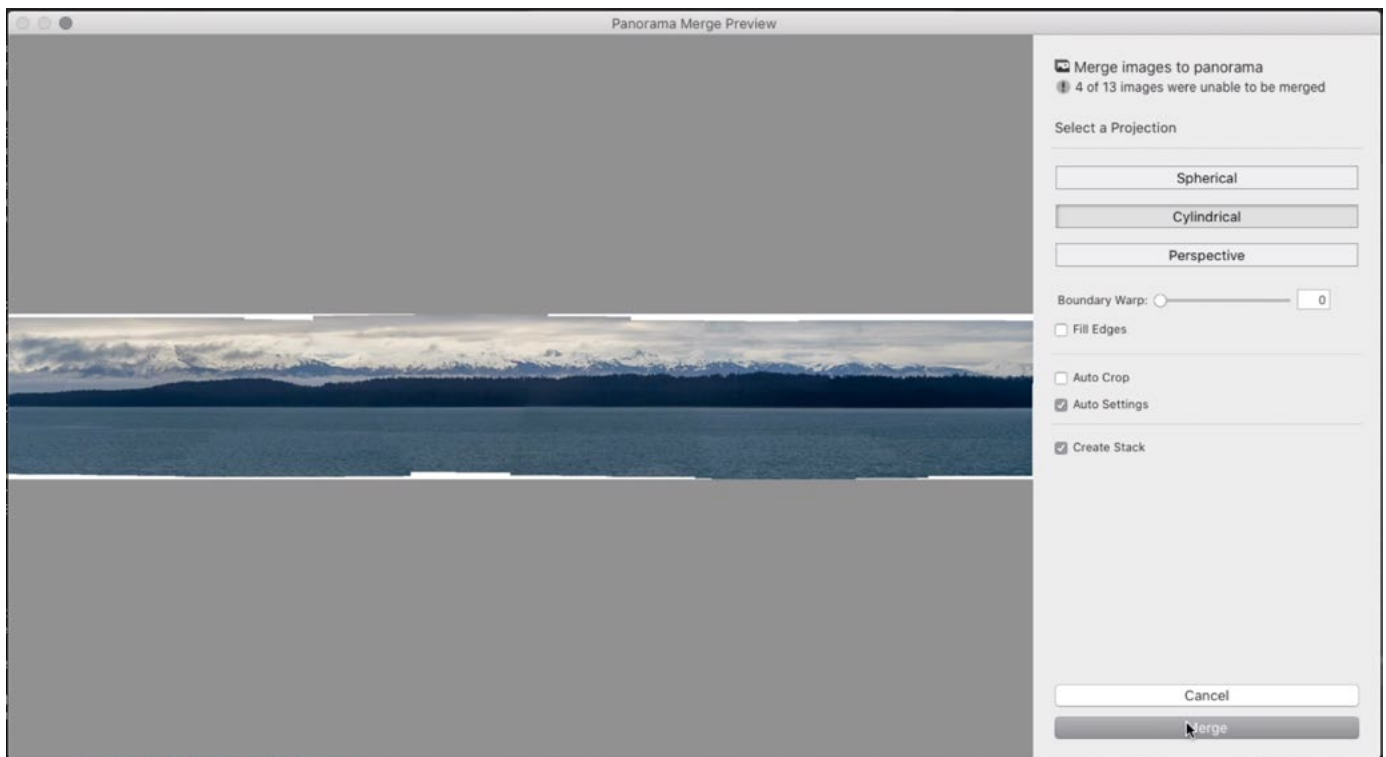
I'll make sure that all of the panorama images are selected, I'll click on the Photo menu and choose Photo Merge > Panorama. (You also have the options of merging images into an HDR or HDR panorama.) A warning dialog appears, indicating that the original image files are missing. It asks if I would like to merge the Smart Previews instead. I DO want to merge the Smart Previews, so I will choose the "Proceed" option.

Smart Previews are scaled-down versions of the original pictures. Merging these is a good way to test how they will look as a merged panorama, without taking the processing time of merging the high resolution versions.



When merging the images into a panorama, Lightroom is warning us that the original files are missing and that it can only merge the Smart Previews.

The Panorama Merge Preview window will appear. I'll experiment with the settings here and then click the Merge button in the bottom right. The Save dialog will appear because the images' original location is the hard drive that has been disconnected. I'll need to choose a new location in which to store the merged panorama. Seeing this lower resolution panorama will allow me to better evaluate the image so that I know whether or not it will be worth the time to merge the high resolution version.



The Panorama Merge Preview is showing the merged Smart Previews.

Applying Color Label to Shoot Folder (31:07)

After I have completely narrowed down the shoot, I will usually be left with one image for each composition, or piece of subject matter. These are the images that will ultimately get adjusted and completed. At this stage, I will change the color label that is applied to the base level folder. In a previous lesson, titled Lightroom Color Labels, I covered my folder labeling system.

The color applied to the base level shoot folder will indicate what the status of the shoot is. I use the following colors to label my shoot folders:

Green: There is no work left to be done on that particular shoot. This means that there is nothing left in the “In Progress” sub-folder. When this is the case, I will often times delete the “In Progress” folder entirely.

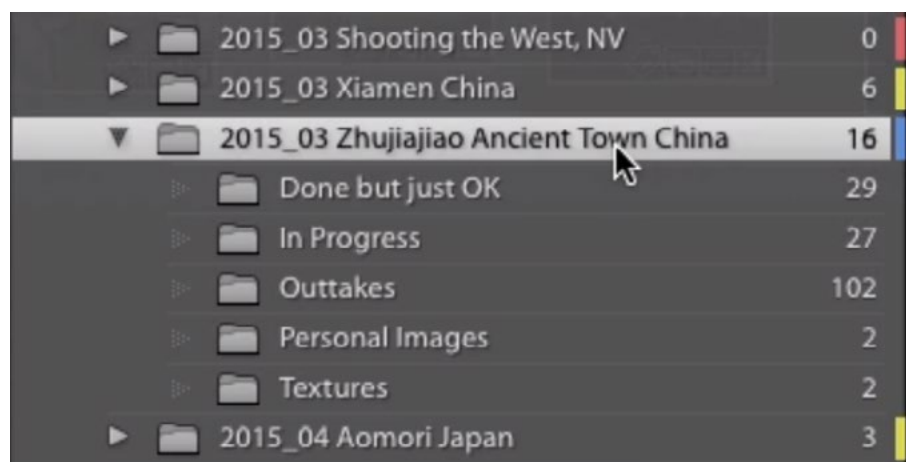
Blue: The shoot has been culled down completely. This means that I’ve narrowed the shoot down to ONLY the images that need to be worked on before being moved to the base level folder.

Yellow: I have started to cull the shoot down, narrowing it down to fewer images, but I am not done with the culling process. This means there is a good number of images in the “In Progress” folder, but there are probably many MORE images in the “Outtakes” folder.

Red: This shoot has hardly been touched and has a LOT of work left to be done. The number of images in the base-level folder is likely 0 because nothing has been processed yet.

Purple: These are for images that are not meant to be part of my overall image tracking system. For example, I have a folder that contains photos I took of my house for insurance purposes. They’re basically just for reference and not intended to be processed.

Because the shoot has been culled down completely, I will set the color label to Blue.



The shoot has been culled completely but no work has yet been done on the images. Therefore, this shoot folder has the blue color label.

