

3 Easy Ways to Organize Your Digital Photos

By Jill Duffy & Ruben Circelli. May 7, 2025

You don't have to sort your photos perfectly, especially when you can put in minimal effort and get satisfactory results. Follow these steps for quick and easy organization.



(Credit: Dropbox/Google/Agus Subianto/marcoventuriniautieri/grinvalds/Getty Images)

How awful does it feel to open a digital photo and not remember anything about it? The good news is that you can help yourself avoid that experience by organizing your pictures. And contrary to popular belief, that process doesn't have to be a pain. Below, we share a super simple way to sort your digital pictures that takes little effort. It's not perfect, but it's a lot better than nothing.

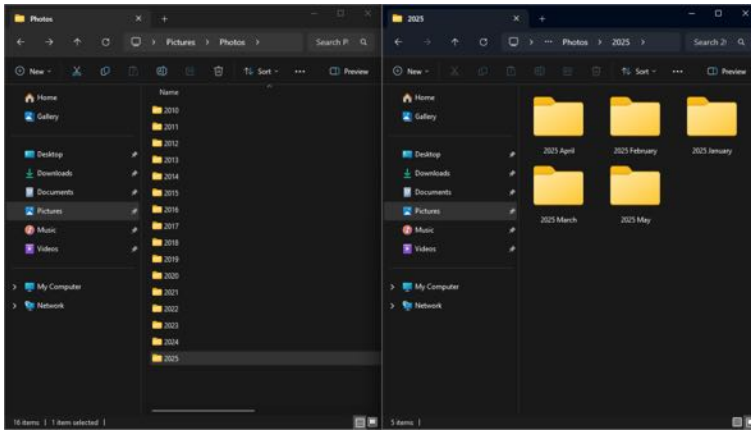
With all that in mind, imagine finding an old photo. What do you want to know about it? Likely, you will come up with some variation of these three questions:

1. When did you take it?
2. Who's in it?
3. Where did you take it?

1. When Did You Take the Photo?

If you do nothing else, at least make sure you batch organize your photo folders by date. Creating folders for different years is a tried-and-true method. You might have heard about this trick before, but it's worth reiterating because it's so effective and simple.

Start with folders called 2025, 2024, 2023, and so forth. Within those folders, set up subfolders by date, such as 2025 January. You should include the year in your subfolders, just in case you accidentally move it somewhere. It's also helpful when you search for files, folders, and images. Setting up folders and subfolders is easy, fast, and kind of foolproof. You can't really mess it up.



File Explorer in Windows (Credit: Microsoft/PCMag)

The next step is to sort photos into their corresponding folders. Will the results be perfect? Probably not. Sometimes your computer assigns a photo's date based on when you imported it, which can complicate the process. But you can always do cleanup later, and some organization is better than no organization.

2. Who's in the Photo?

If you've batch organized your photos into dated folders and still have the stamina to do a little more tidying, the next step should be to determine who is in the pictures. In all likelihood, you know the people in your photos, or at least you can identify them.

Depending on how long ago you took your photos, though, that might not always be the case. Sticking with the idea of organizing photos in a way that takes minimal effort, I have two suggestions. One is to use face recognition. The other is to add your subjects' names to the file name once you identify them.

Use Facial Recognition

To set up a facial recognition feature, you tell a photo app who a person in a photo is and feed it some sample photos. Then, the software can identify that person across other photos in your collection. Many [photo editing apps](#) have facial recognition, including preinstalled apps such as [Apple Photos](#). Voilà. As long as you continue to use this particular photo app, you can easily find pictures of certain people.

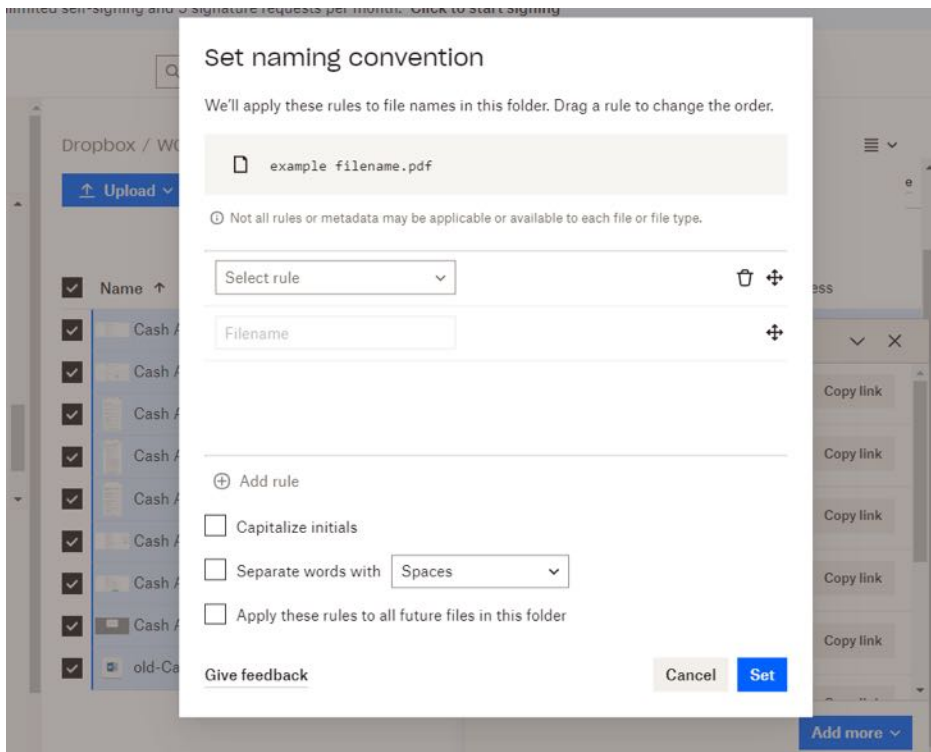
Facial recognition isn't for everyone, whether you simply oppose it on principle or find that it isn't accurate enough. Even without a twin, facial recognition software can confuse people and make mistakes.

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Add People's Names to the File Name

It sounds obvious, but including people's names in relevant photo files is a huge help. If you have a bunch of photos of Bob, finding those photos is as easy as searching for a name. It's up to you whether you want to include last names or go by nicknames. We recommend using whatever makes the most sense to you. If you have a lot of pictures of animals, landscapes, or objects, you might include the name of the thing or place instead.

You can manually label each file with the appropriate names, but that's tedious, especially if you have a lot of photos. A faster way is to automate the process. Here's a [tutorial for automatically renaming files in Windows](#). Dropbox has a similar feature for renaming multiple files at once.



Another easy solution is to just make a subfolder and use a similar naming technique for the folder name. Whether you decide to rename the individual photos depends on how much time and work you want to put into it.

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Dropbox's file renaming tool (Credit: Dropbox/PCMag)

What About Metadata?

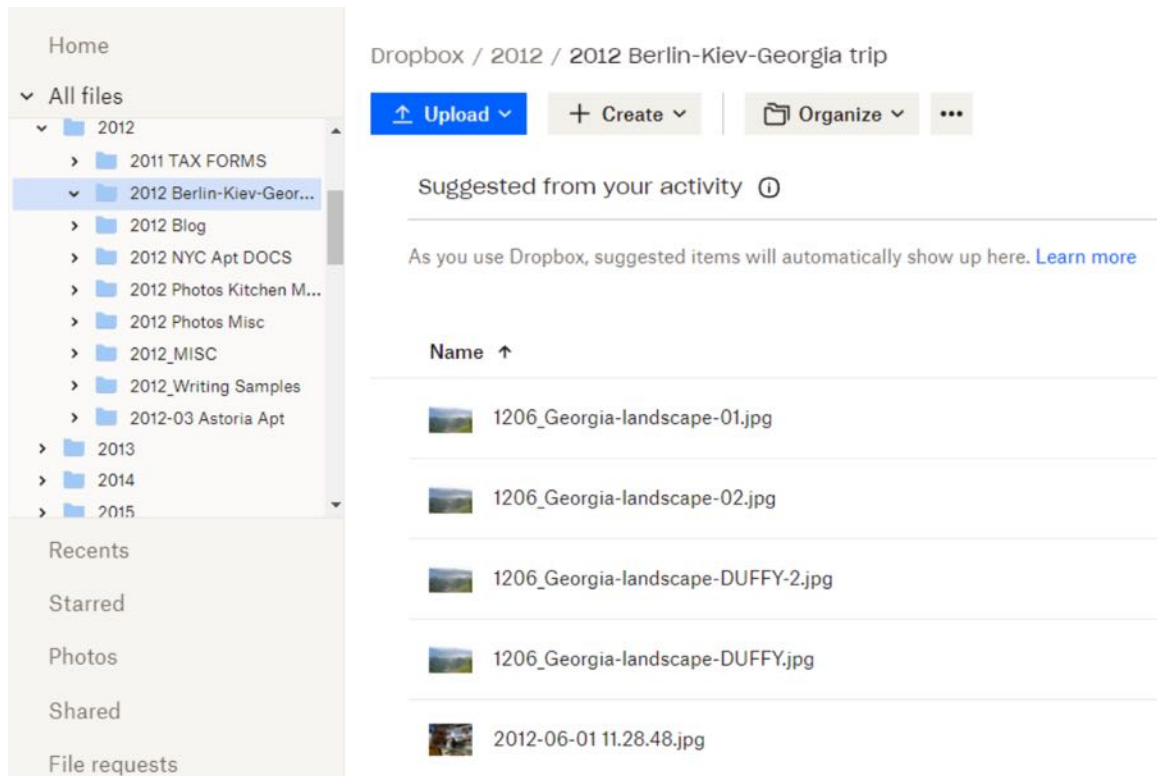
A photographer might tell you that the proper way to add people's names to photo files is to put them in the metadata. Metadata, in this context, means text connected to a photo that gives you information about it, such as a description, technical details, and a title. If you're not a photo enthusiast, however, I'd skip it.

3. Where Did You Take the Photo?

The last big piece of information about many photos is where you took them. Sometimes the *where* is intertwined with the *when*. If you're looking for photos from a wedding, you might remember the month and year when it happened. Depending on the device you used to take the photo, a file's metadata might already have location data.

You can lump pictures from your travels together into a subfolder with the name of the place. Before you give your subfolder a name, think about whether you have more than one way to say the place you went. For example, if you were in Rome and Tuscany, you might name the folder *2025 Tuscany Rome Italy*. Cover all your bases.

Five years from now, you might go looking for pictures of your trip to Italy, which won't be so helpful if you called the folder Tuscany.



Dropbox's folder structure (Credit: Dropbox/PCMag)

Remember, It Doesn't Have to Be Perfect

So much of organizing your digital life is about making things better, not perfect. Wouldn't it be ideal to have the attention span, energy, and time to go through all your digital photos one at a time, adding descriptions, locations, titles, and other metadata to preserve them perfectly? It would, but who actually has all that?

Think about what's good enough for you, as it might be different from what's good enough for someone else. Take your answer and the tips we shared here to come up with a way to organize your photos that meets your actual needs. It doesn't have to be perfect.

About Jill Duffy

Contributor

I've been contributing to PCMag since 2011 in a variety of ways. My column, [Get Organized](#), has been running on PCMag since 2012. It gives advice on how to manage all the devices, apps, digital photos, email, and other technology that can make you feel like you're going to have a panic attack.

My latest book is [The Everything Guide to Remote Work](#), which goes into great detail about a subject that I've been covering as a writer and participating in personally since well before the COVID-19 pandemic.

I write about work culture, personal productivity, and software, including project management software, collaboration apps, productivity apps, and language-learning software.

Previously, I worked for the Association for Computing Machinery, *The San Francisco Examiner* newspaper, *Game Developer* magazine, and (I kid you not) *The Journal of Chemical Physics*. I was once profiled in an article in *Vogue* India alongside Marie Kondo. I'm currently pursuing a few unannounced long-form projects.