



TAKE CONTROL OF

Photos

Master Apple's
Photos app for
Mac • iPhone • iPad

by JASON SNELL

\$14.99

**4TH
EDITION**

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Read Me First

Welcome to *Take Control of Photos, Fourth Edition*, version 4.2, published in September 2025 by alt concepts. This book was written by Jason Snell and edited by Joe Kissell.

This book helps you get started with Apple's Photos app on a Mac, iPhone, and iPad. It focuses on importing libraries from older apps, managing your media inside Photos, and using Photos to edit and share your media with friends, relatives, and the world at large.

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What's New in Version 4.2

This update is designed to address changes introduced in macOS 26 Tahoe, iOS 26, iPadOS 26, watchOS 26, and tvOS 26:

- **Mac/iPad unity.** Many interface behaviors between Mac and iPad/iPhone are now the same, so the text has changed throughout and it's all a lot clearer.
- **Camera App changes.** In iOS 26, Apple has simplified the Camera app interface, which moved a bunch of stuff previously on screen into submenus. The book has been updated accordingly.
- **Collections View.** Photos now offers a few different ways to organize the Collections View. See [Customize the Collections View](#).
- **Live Event Details.** Photos has added concert and sports event information to the Get Info window on iPadOS and iOS, making it easier to answer the question, “Who was playing in that game?” See [Use the Info Window](#).
- **Spatial Scene.** Added information about Spatial Scenes. See [Enter Spatial Scene Mode](#).

Note: If you're still using macOS 15 Sequoia, iOS 18, iPadOS 18, watchOS 18, or tvOS 18, most of this book still applies. However, you can download the previous version of this book (4.1), if you like, which covers only those earlier operating systems. Again, use the link in [Ebook Extras](#), near the end of the book.

What Was New in Version 4.1

This update was primarily designed to address features Apple introduced with the iPhone 16:

- **Styles.** Apple replaced the Filters and Photographic Styles features in iPhone 16 models with a new “Styles” system, now detailed in [Adjust Items with Filters and Styles](#).

- **Camera Control.** The iPhone 16 models come with a new Camera Control button, which I’ve added to [Use the Camera App](#).
- **Books and Calendars.** For the first time in a few years, I test-drove a bunch of book- and calendar-printing services that integrate with Photos. See [Build Books and Calendars](#). I added more to this chapters based on receiving printed books and building a bunch of sample calendars.

What Was New in the Fourth Edition

In macOS 15 Sequoia, iOS 18, and iPadOS 18, Photos has grown and changed. As a result, I updated this book. Along with many smaller changes, this edition adds the following:

- **New interface.** On a Mac, things have only changed a little, but on an iPhone or iPad they’ve changed a lot. There’s a new single-pane view with the Library above and Collections below. See [Navigate the Photos Interface](#).
- **Collections.** A bunch of different Photos features—People, Memories, and Days among them—have been combined into a fairly unified interface called Collections. See [Browse and Customize Your Collections](#).
- **Wallpapers and widgets.** Apple keeps adding new ways to show off your photos on the Lock Screens of iPhones and iPads, and in the Photos watch face on watchOS. See [Show Off Your Photos](#).
- **Apple Intelligence.** Beginning with macOS 15.1, iOS 18.1, and iPadOS 18.1, a few new machine-learning features come to Photos—but only on devices compatible with Apple Intelligence. (That’s M-series iPads and Macs, and iPhone 15 Pro, Pro Max, or later.) Clean Up lets you remove stuff from the backgrounds of photos; see [Remove Distractions With Clean Up](#). You can also now have Photos create a Movie for you based entirely on a text prompt you enter, using Apple Intelligence; see the “View and Make Movies” section in the [Browse and Customize Your Collections](#) chapter.

Introduction

In 2002, Apple introduced iPhoto as a way for us to save our photos on our Macs inside a “digital shoebox.” These days a shoebox would barely handle a day’s worth of the photos and videos we shoot with our phones. It’s been more than a decade since Apple transformed iPhoto into the Photos app, and over time, the app has evolved to be the center of the universe for our photos and videos.

In this book, I describe how to perform essential tasks with Photos on a Mac, iPhone, and iPad. Apple deploys some of the most powerful functionality it has developed—including iCloud servers and their artificial intelligence technology—in the service of making your photo collection more accessible and discoverable.

My daughter, whose birth was the motivator for my very first digital-camera purchase, is now an adult whose entire life has been chronicled with digital photos—nearly a hundred thousand of them at this point. That entire catalog resides in my iCloud Photos library, accessed via Photos on all of my family’s devices.

Photography is how we preserve the images of our lives; it’s important that we understand the software that allows us to organize, view, and share those images. That’s what you’ll learn here.

The version of the book you are reading has been updated to reflect the changes in Photos version 11.0, available along with macOS 16 Tahoe, iOS 26, and iPadOS 26 in the fall of 2025. You can find an overview of the changes in Photos (and, by extension, in this version of the book) by reading [What’s New in Version 4.2](#).

Thanks for joining me on this journey. Let’s get started!

Photos Quick Start

This book explores Apple's Photos app (in macOS, iOS, and iPadOS) by walking you through the most essential tasks. You can read the chapters in any order. Click any link to jump to a topic.

Get organized:

- Photos has lots of features, and it can be a bit overwhelming when you first launch it. Get oriented with [Navigate the Photos Interface](#).
- Individual items, whether they're photos or videos, carry with them a lot of metadata, including tagging made by you as well as deep analysis by Apple's machine-learning engine. Read [Work with a Single Item](#) to get a sense of what tools are available to you.
- Photos provides numerous methods for you to organize your library, from favorites to keywords to albums and Smart Albums. See all your options in [Organize Your Items](#).

Explore your collection:

- Apple's machine-learning engine allows the app to identify objects, animals, and faces. And almost every camera these days embeds geographic data on all photos. Read [Find What You Seek](#) to learn how to zero in on the stuff you want to see.
- Remember Christmas three years ago? Photos does. Peruse Photos-generated slideshows of your photos. Check out [Browse and Customize Your Collections](#) for much more.

Perfect your photos:

- Give photos a little extra “pop” by cropping, applying filters, removing background items, and fixing red-eye and rotation problems. See [Make Quick Fixes](#).
- Learn how to [Make More Complex Edits](#) by applying adjustments, as well as editing with external apps if you prefer.

Sync your photos with iCloud:

- Make your photos accessible on every device connected to your Apple ID by learning how to [Sync with iCloud Photos](#).
- The iCloud Shared Photos feature allows you to pool your library with up to five other people. See all the details in [Use iCloud Shared Photos](#).

Import and manage photos:

- Photos for macOS, iOS, and iPadOS can import files directly from your camera or memory card. Read [Import Your Files into Photos](#).
- On a Mac, you can switch between libraries to keep collections separate and merge different libraries together. See [Manage the Library](#).
- If you shoot a lot of photos and videos on your iPhone or iPad, you'll want to know how best to capture those items by reading [Use the Camera App](#).

Show off your photos:

- Put photos right on your iPhone and iPad's Home and Lock Screens with widgets. See [Show Off Your Photos](#).
- Admire your favorite photos in your living room or your wrist when you [View Photos on Apple TV and Apple Watch](#)
- Don't let your photos stay locked up on your Mac. Learn the easiest ways to [Share Your Stuff](#) with others using social media and more.
- If your desired method of sharing your photos involves getting them out of Photos, [Export and Resize Images](#).
- Turn a special event's photos into a beautiful movie with its own soundtrack. See [View and Customize Movies](#).
- For all the convenience of digital photos, there's still nothing quite like holding an image of loved ones in your hands. Discover how to use new third-party extension apps to design printed calendars and books. See [Build Books and Calendars](#).

Navigate the Photos Interface

There are two primary areas of interest in the Photos app: the Library, which displays all your media in a grid, and Collections, which shows off portions of your library organized in various ways—some by you and some by Apple’s machine-learning software (**Figure 1**).



Figure 1: The Photos interface is similar across an iPad, a Mac, and an iPhone—but there are also some distinct differences.

Get Oriented with Photos Sections

On a Mac or iPad, you can access the Library and Collections views by clicking or tapping the items at the top of the sidebar on the left side of the Photos window. The Library contains all of your photos and videos in chronological order (see [Get Started with the Library](#)), while the Collections slices and dices your library in various ways (see [Navigate the Collections View](#)). The rest of the sidebar can provide quick access to various items also found in the Collections view, such as Favorites, a Map of where your items were captured (see [Find Items on the Map](#)), shared albums (see [Share Your Stuff](#)), and suggestions for items to be added to your Shared Library (see [Use iCloud Shared Photos](#)).

On an iPhone, you can toggle between Library and Collections by tapping on a floating toolbar in the bottom-left corner of the screen. If

you're scrolling through your Library, that toolbar is minimized to a single icon, but you can tap it to bring it to full size and then switch to the Collections view.

Get Started with the Library

The Library view is where your collection of photos and videos lives. Depending on your settings, the Library view may display items in your library, items in a shared library (see [Use iCloud Shared Photos](#)), or both libraries intermingled together. It might also organize items by year or month, or it might display every single item in your collection.

The Library view organizes your Photos library through time, with older items at the top and the newest ones at the very bottom. While viewing all photos is the default, you can more quickly navigate through time by changing your view. You can alter the view by clicking tabs (on top of the window on a Mac or iPad, on the bottom on an iPhone) to view your library by Years or Months.

Here's what the different views show:

- **Years:** Tiles depict single years in your library (**Figure 2**), with an image or video selected from the same time of year as the present day. In the summer, you see lots of beaches. In the fall, a bunch of kids going back to school. On an iPhone or iPad, you can swipe on any tile to see other images from that year.

Work with a Single Item

Looking at a huge catalog of items in Photos is great, but once you’ve found a specific image or video you want to interact with, you’ll want to zoom into the individual item view (**Figure 11**). To view an individual item, double-click it on a Mac, press the space bar on a Mac or iPad, or tap it on an iPad or iPhone.

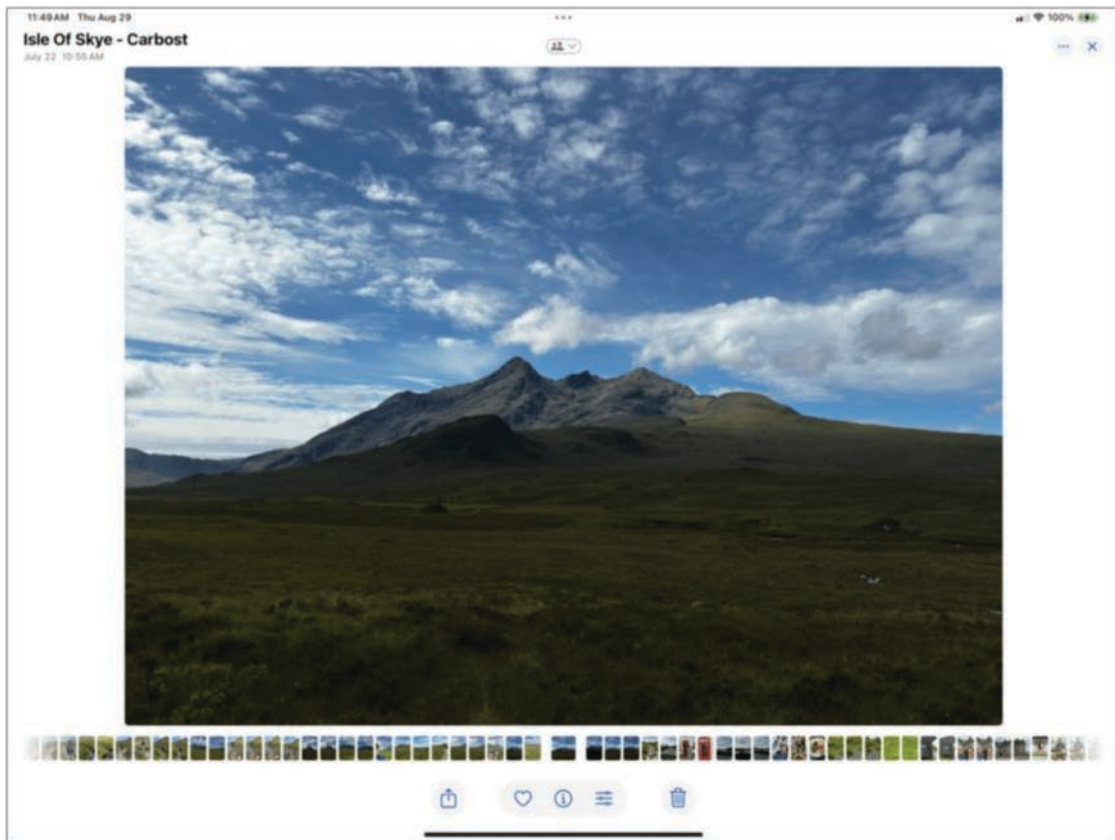


Figure 11: The individual item view lets you focus in on a single photo or video from your collection.

From the individual-item view you can drill down and get more information about your item, select text, and more. It’s also the gateway to editing items, which I cover in the chapters [Make Quick Fixes](#) and [Make More Complex Edits](#).

Identify Objects in Your Images

Photos offers an extra layer of machine-learning-based image analysis that attempts to add context to the contents of your items. When the info ⓘ icon on the toolbar is adorned with a couple of sparkly stars ✨ ⓘ it means that your photo contains items identified by Apple's image-analysis system.

To access more information, open the Info window. At that point, a small circular tag appears (it appears floating above most identified items, though it appears in the bottom-right corner for landmarks), and on an iPhone or iPad you also see them listed in the Info window (**Figure 12**). Among the items that Apple's system identifies are media (including book covers), art, landmarks, plants and flowers, pet breeds, food, storefronts, signs, and symbols.

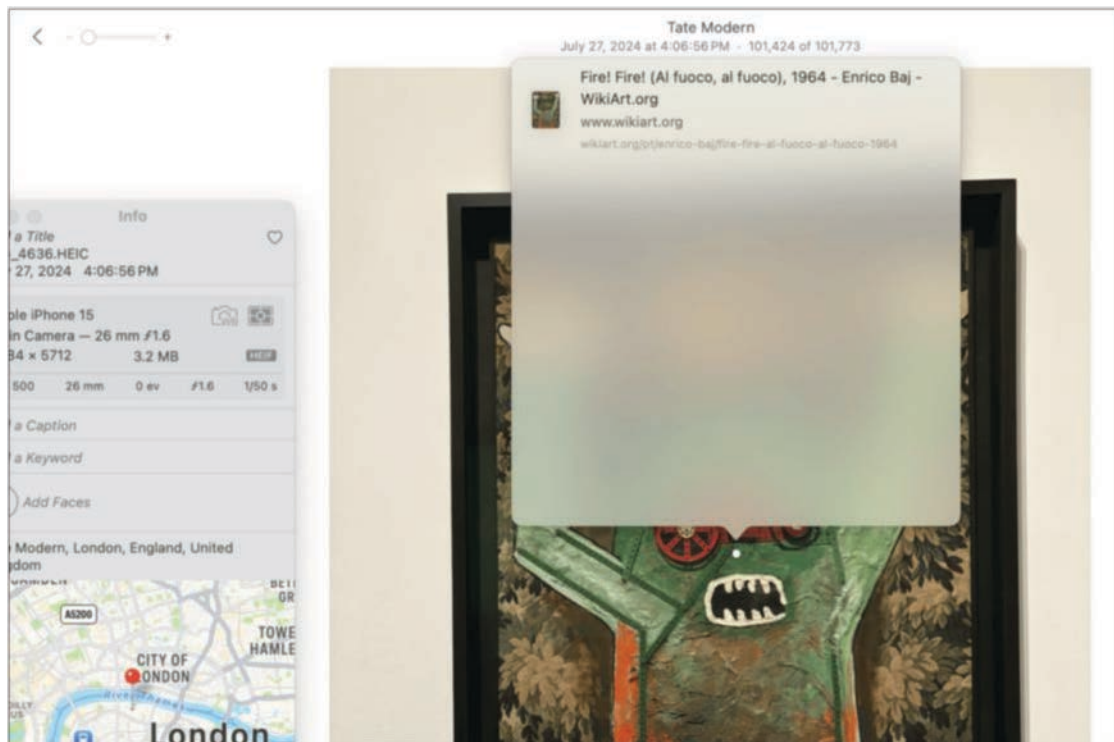


Figure 12: Photos identified this artwork all by itself.

To see what Apple has to say about the particular item in question, click or tap the small circle in the photo, or (on an iPhone or iPad) tap the Look Up option in the Info window. You're presented with a

Organize Your Items

Apple knows most of us don't have a lot of time to organize our photo libraries. That's why Photos uses machine learning to deeply analyze every item in a library to figure out their contents.

But not everyone is ready to give in to machine learning and let an algorithm make all the decisions about personal memories. That's why Photos also contains a set of simple organizational tools that let you embed additional meaning into the images you've captured.

Play Favorites

Some of us like to precisely quantify things. I knew a kid in high school who actually rated every movie he watched on a five-star system. (He [grew up to be a movie critic](#)—true story!) But most of us can't be bothered with complex ratings systems, so Photos uses a simpler approach: Favorites.

In All Photos and album views, all your Favorites appear with little white hearts in their bottom-left corner (**Figure 17**). Awwww. (There's even a subtle drop shadow, so if that corner of your photo is white, you can still see the heart.)



Figure 17: Find the fave: it's the one with the white heart in the bottom-left corner.

On a Mac, click or tap Favorites in the sidebar to see just your very best shots, as judged by you (**Figure 18**)! On an iPhone or iPad, swipe up to the Library view and tap the Sort  icon, then tap Filter, then Favorites.

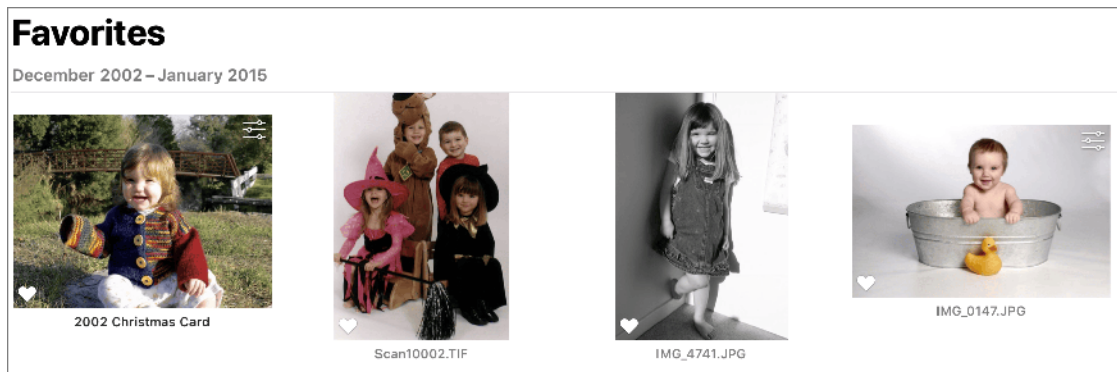


Figure 18: My favorite photos can be found in the Favorites view.

Make a Favorite

There are plenty of ways to mark an item as a Favorite on a Mac:

- Select an item and then click the heart  icon located toward the right side of the toolbar (**Figure 19**).

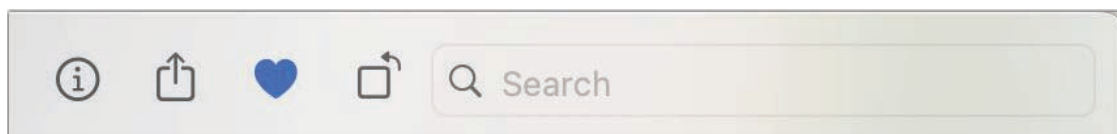


Figure 19: Show your love with the heart icon.

- Select an item and press the Period (.) key.
- Hover your pointer over the item and click the heart that appears.
- Select an item and choose Image > Add to Favorites.
- In the Info window (press $\mathbb{H}$ -I), click the heart  in the top-right corner.

To favorite an item on an iPhone or iPad, touch and hold the item and choose Favorite from the pop-up menu. If you're already viewing the individual item at full size, you can tap the heart  icon on the tool-

Browse and Customize Your Collections

If you're viewing a subset of your library in Collections, you probably see it in a standard interface that's used for Favorites, Albums, Days, and many other collections of items. This chapter shows you how to navigate that view, as well as throw in some specific tips for certain special collections such as Memories.

Get Oriented in a Collection

In a Collection, you're presented with a curated selection of photos and video, not every item that meets the criteria of the collection. Photos filters out some items it deems irrelevant or redundant. If you want to see them all on an iPhone or iPad, tap Show All at the bottom of the screen. (Tap Show Summary to get back to the summary.) On a Mac, click All instead of Summary in the tabbed buttons at the top of the Photos window.

On an iPhone or iPad, the top of most Collections shows a preview of a dynamically created slideshow of photos and videos (**Figure 30**), which Photos on an iPad or iPhone calls a Movie. If you'd like to play this Movie, complete with music, tap the Play ► button on the preview. On a Mac, click the play button on the toolbar. Movies are editable and customizable, to an extent—see [View and Customize Movies](#) later in this chapter for the details.

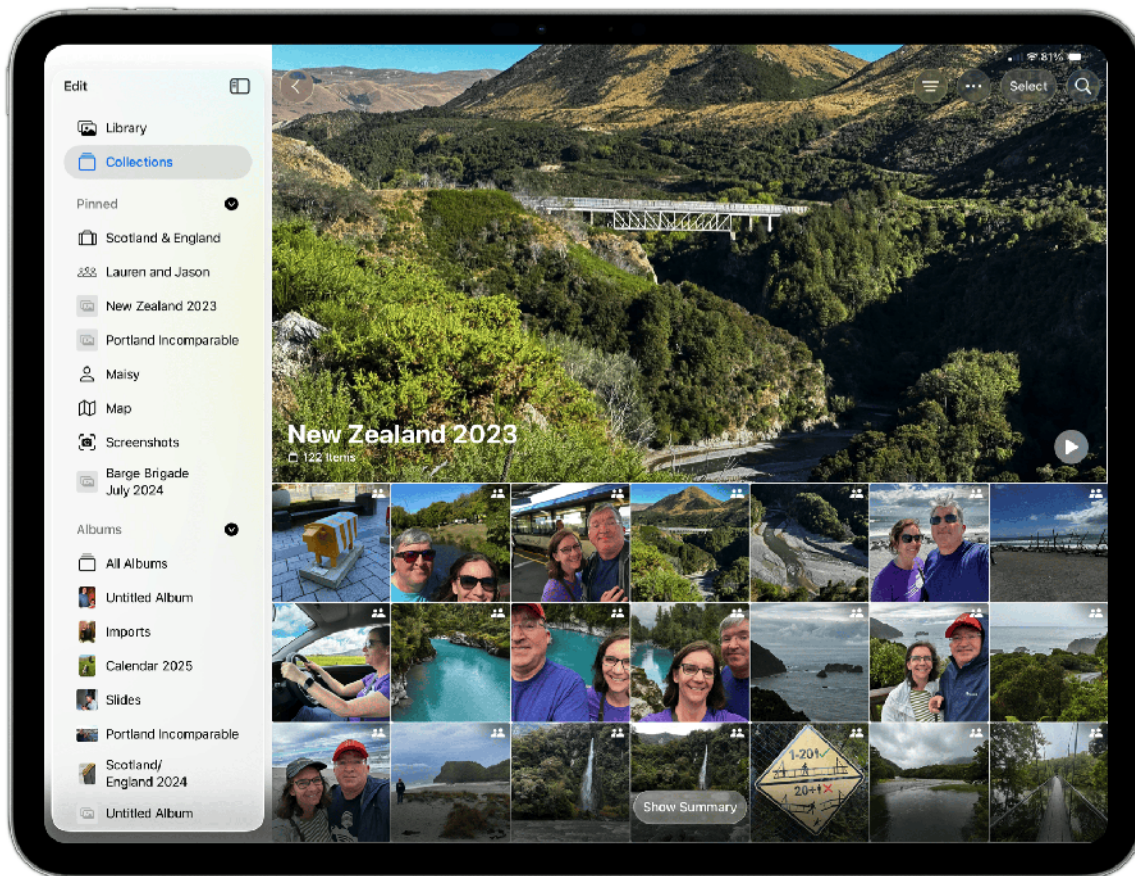


Figure 30: The top of most Collections is an auto-playing slideshow. Below, you can see a curated collection of items.

You can filter items out of this view, too, if you want to streamline what's being shown. Just click or tap the Sort and Filter  button, which is located at the top of the screen on a Mac or iPad, and at the bottom of the screen on an iPhone. Then you can choose to limit the view to just Favorites, Photos, Edited items, Videos, Screenshots, or any combination thereof.

To exit a Collection, click or tap the Back  button.

View and Make Memories

Photos uses its machine-learning powers to create collections of photos and videos that match a theme, whether it's a recent event, highlights of a certain day from one past year, or even the same day across many years. I've seen it generate montages of my pets, a collection of photos from my wife's fourth birthday party (we scanned in a bunch of slides from that era not too long ago), and much more. The idea is that

Find What You Seek

I used to manually tag and keyword all my digital photos and curate photo albums for every major life event, but the number of shots I took kept accelerating, and at some point I just gave up. I'm not alone—but artificial intelligence technology has come to the rescue!

All the images in Photos libraries are scanned millions of times with machine-learning algorithms to identify thousands of different scenes or objects as well as unique faces (see [Find People and Pets](#) for more on face-detection). Photos even scans for more detailed features like animal breeds and art (see [Identify Objects in Your Images](#) for details), as well as text that appears in your items.

This makes the Search feature in Photos incredibly powerful. Want to find a photo featuring skiing? Just type [ski](#) in the search field. The automatically generated Ski category provides you with possibilities (**Figure 37**). And that's just the beginning. While you may *want* to keep manually organizing your photo library, you may find that the search features in Photos make that labor unnecessary.

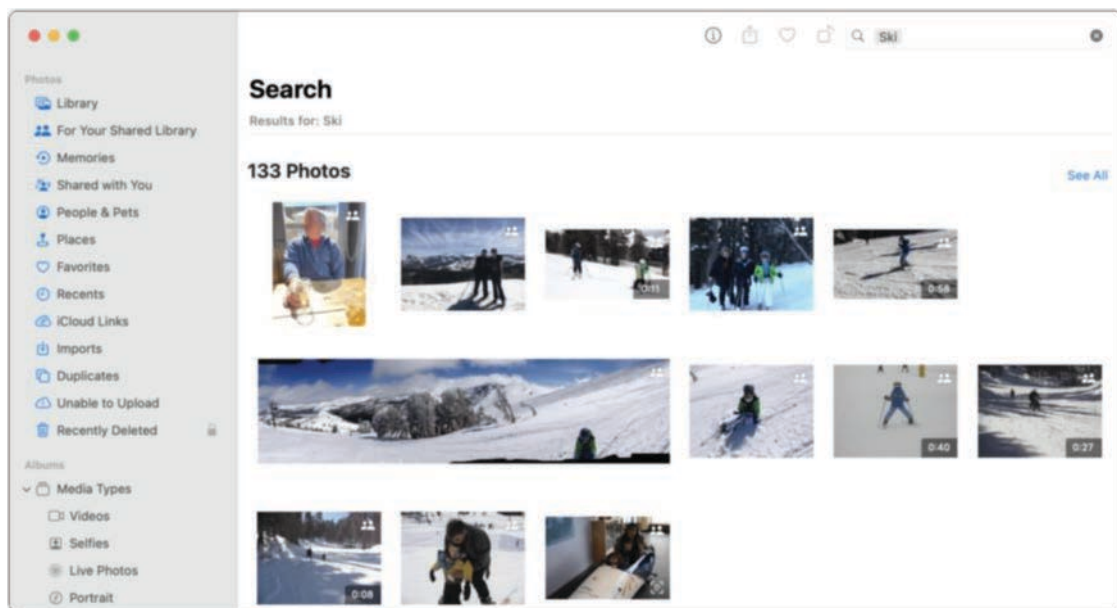


Figure 37: Photos found all my skiing photos quickly.

Embrace the Search Field

Apple has spent the last few years investing enormous amounts of resources in building machine-learning-based features for image search. As a result, the Search feature is now probably the most important single feature in Photos. You can quickly search keywords (**Figure 38**), titles, or descriptions. Enter a year, or a month and a year, or a date, and you see all the photos and videos taken then.

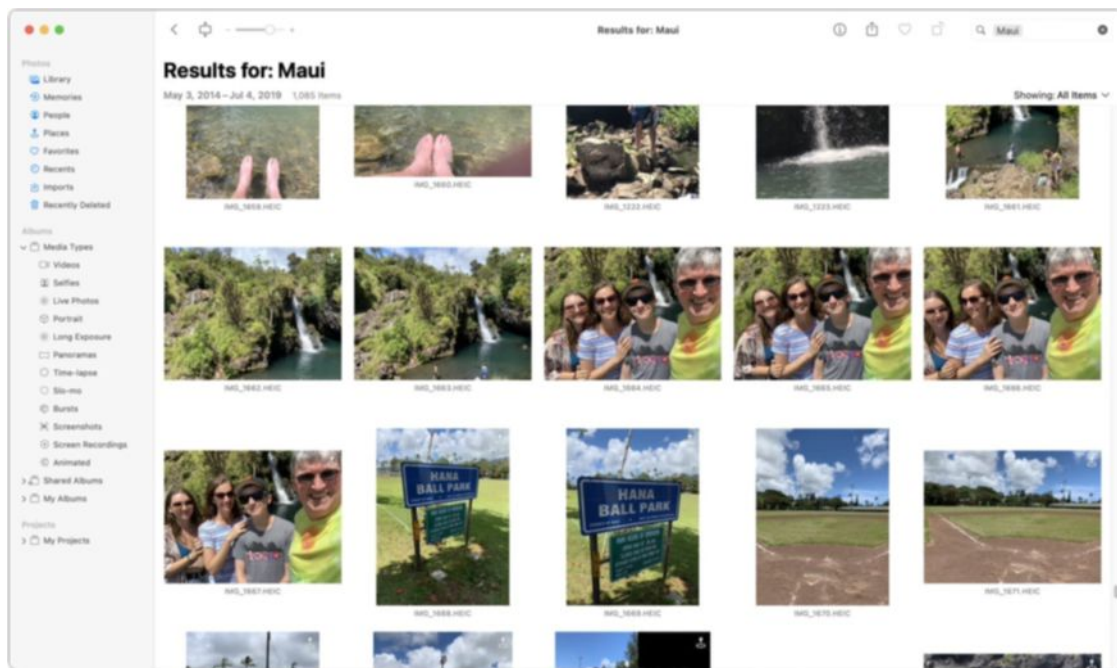


Figure 38: Type the name of a location (here, the island of Maui) to see all the pictures you took there.

I rely on the Search feature for navigating my library of nearly 100,000 items, and I highly recommend it. When in doubt, use the search field!

On a Mac, if you don't see the search field in the top-right corner, back out to a broader viewing level, such as the main level of an album. On an iPad or iPhone, there's a prominent Search button in the top-right corner of the Home Screen.

Quickly Jump to Dates

Type a month and year combination to see all items created on that date. So, for example, I enter **August 2004** to see all the items from the month my son was born.

Make Quick Fixes

Photos has a bunch of simple tools that can improve your photos and videos quickly and without a lot of fuss. In this chapter, I focus on these “quick-fix” options. For more advanced editing, see the next chapter, [Make More Complex Edits](#).

For most edits, you must enter Edit mode. On a Mac, select an item and press Return. (If you’re already viewing a single image, you can either press Return or click the Edit button in the top-right corner.) Move between different items with the arrow keys without leaving Edit Mode. When you’re done, click Done to exit the view. On an iPhone or iPad, tap to open a single item and then tap Edit.

When you’re in Edit mode, the entire Photos interface changes. You’ve got access to three different sets of editing tools, which are displayed as tabs on a Mac and as icons on an iPhone or iPad: Adjust , Filters , and Crop  (**Figure 56**). (You can also edit Live Photos from this mode. For more information on that, see [Edit Live Photos](#).)

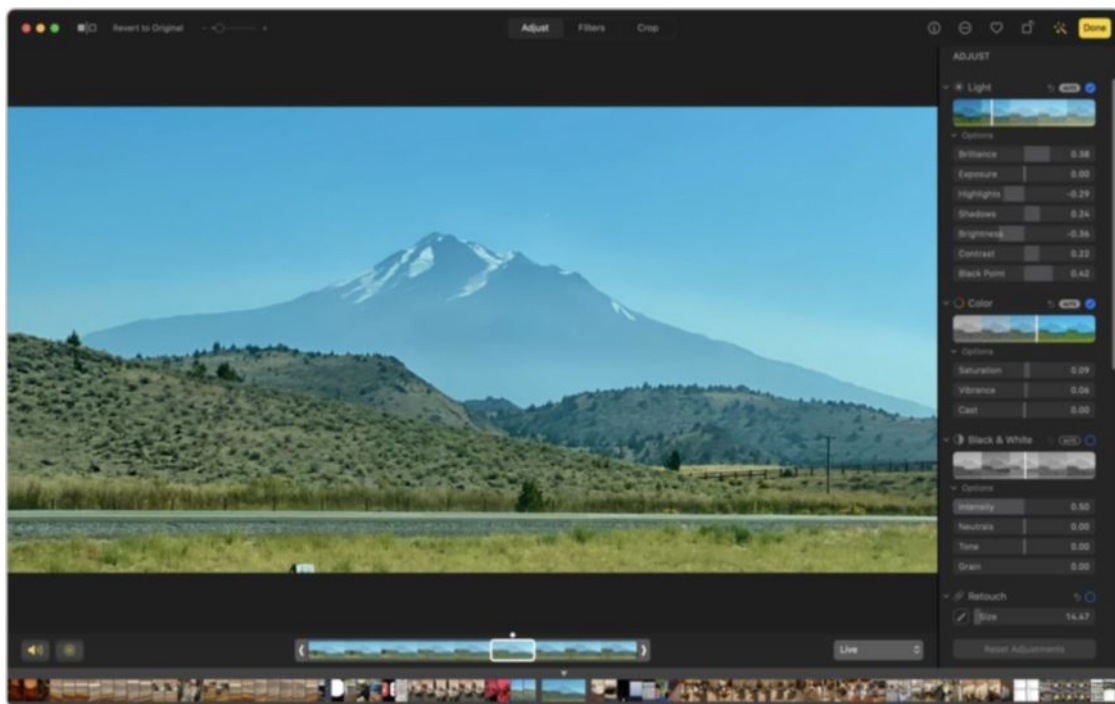


Figure 56: The Edit pane consists of a large image preview, tabs, and a strip of controls down the right side.

Tip: Two of the quick-editing features in Photos are so quick, they don't even require you to enter editing mode on a Mac. These items appear on the toolbar in the top-right corner of the Photos window. Rotation  is accessible at all times, and Auto Enhance  is accessible after you double-click any photo. You can also press ⌘-E at any time to auto-enhance a selected photo.

Use Auto Enhance

While Photos gives you lots of tools to tweak your items very carefully, it also offers a sophisticated auto-enhance feature. You can activate it by clicking the Auto Enhance  icon, which is always visible on the toolbar on a Mac and accessible from the Adjust controls  on an iPhone or iPad. When you Enhance an item, Photos analyzes it and makes its best guess about the proper levels, color, and more (**Figure 57**).



Figure 57: The Enhance feature tries to improve your photo, but usually doesn't overdo it. (Here, the right image is enhanced; the left is the original.)

Since it's operated by a computer and not a human, the Auto Enhance feature won't solve every problem. Sometimes it makes your item look worse, and other times it can be a bit too timid. But it's always worth a try if you're not confident using the more advanced features under the Adjust  icon. Even better, Auto Enhance's techniques aren't meant to be a mystery—every adjustment it makes is reflected in the detailed

Make More Complex Edits

Basic adjustments of the kind I described in the previous chapter, [Make Quick Fixes](#), are often all you need to make your photos and videos come to life. But sometimes you need do more.

On a Mac, select an image and press Return (or if you're viewing a single image, click the Edit button in the top-right corner) to enter Edit mode. On an iPhone or iPad, tap to view an item and then tap the Edit button. Then click or tap Adjust (designated by the  icon on an iPhone or iPad). You see numerous tools you can use to make your photos and videos look their best (**Figure 68**).

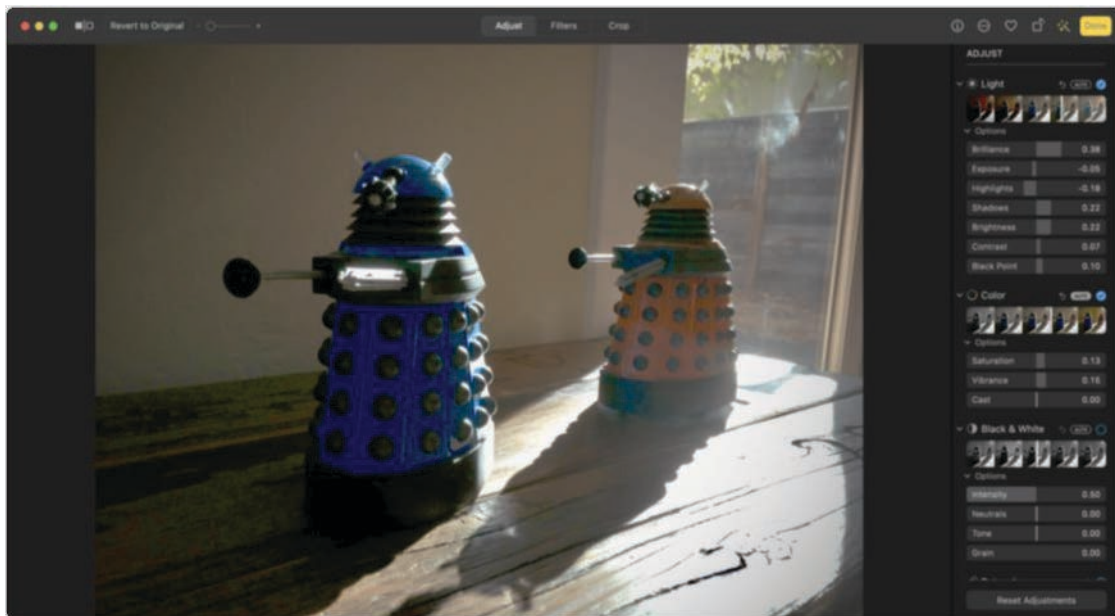


Figure 68: Exterminate all your items' flaws with the Adjust mode of the Edit view.

Adjust The Look Of Items

The adjustment controls in Photos are slightly different on a Mac and on an iPhone or iPad. On a Mac, you find 13 different controls on the right side of the window. When you hover over them, you see that many offer an Auto button to automatically apply basic adjustments,

as well as an undo arrow ↶. Click the disclosure arrow to the left of any item to see the controls that live underneath (**Figure 69**).

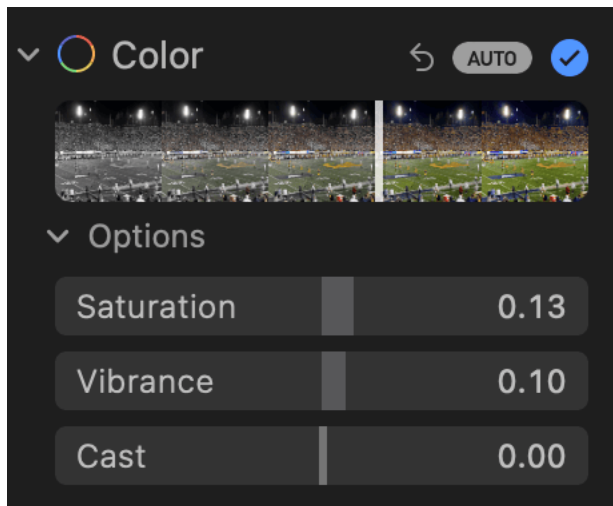


Figure 69: Many adjustment options on a Mac have a primary control (visible once you click the disclosure arrow) made up of component options you can display by clicking another arrow.

Many, but not all, of the adjustment controls offer an interface where you drag a control across a horizontal bar. The center position generally means no effect is applied, while dragging to the right or left applies an effect positively or negatively. For example, as you slide the Color control to the right, your image becomes increasingly saturated. If you slide it to the left, the color gradually drains away.

On an iPhone or iPad, the controls vary depending on your device and its orientation. In Adjust mode (**Figure 70**), 16 controls display as icons inside circles either on the right side of the screen (iPads and iPhones held horizontally) or at the bottom (iPhones held vertically) (**Figure 71**).

Use the Camera App

The Camera app in iOS and iPadOS is the gateway to the Photos library. I'd bet good money that the vast majority of items in iCloud Photos come from photos and videos taken with the Camera app on iPhones and, to a lesser extent, iPads. With each successive release of its operating systems, Apple tightens the integration between the camera app and the Photos library. So it's worth taking a spin through the Camera interface (**Figure 92**) to point out how your settings can impact what's saved to your photo library.



Figure 92: Control icons always stay at the “top” of the phone (where the earpiece slit is, left), while capture types and zoom controls stay on the “bottom” (where the charging port is, right).

Tip: To learn much more about all aspects of iPhone photography, check out Jeff Carlson’s book [Take Control of iPhone Photography](#).

Navigate the Camera Interface

The bulk of the Camera app’s interface is, of course, a preview of the image you’re capturing. But there’s a lot more to it than that. There are a set of control icons that you can use to toggle features on and off, a series of available capture types to determine just what the app should

be capturing and saving, and even a thumbnail to get you a quick view of recently captured images.

On an iPad, both the control icons and the capture types are on the right side of the screen, on either side of the big capture button (**Figure 93**). Any zoom controls are found on the left.



Figure 93: iPad controls (except for zoom) are kept on the right side, regardless of orientation.

On an iPhone, the control icons live at the edge of the phone where the earpiece and forward-facing camera and sensors are located. When you're holding the iPhone in its usual vertical orientation, this is the top, but the icons stay on that edge regardless of how you rotate the phone. Capture types and zoom controls likewise stay on the opposite side of the preview, on what is the bottom side of the phone if you're holding it vertically.

Import Your Files into Photos

If you use iCloud Photos, the images you take on your devices automatically sync to all your other devices (see [Manage the Library](#)), but sometimes you may end up shooting photos and video with a stand-alone camera, or might have someone hand you a memory card or USB drive loaded up with photos and videos. Photos can handle these classic methods, of course (**Figure 95**).

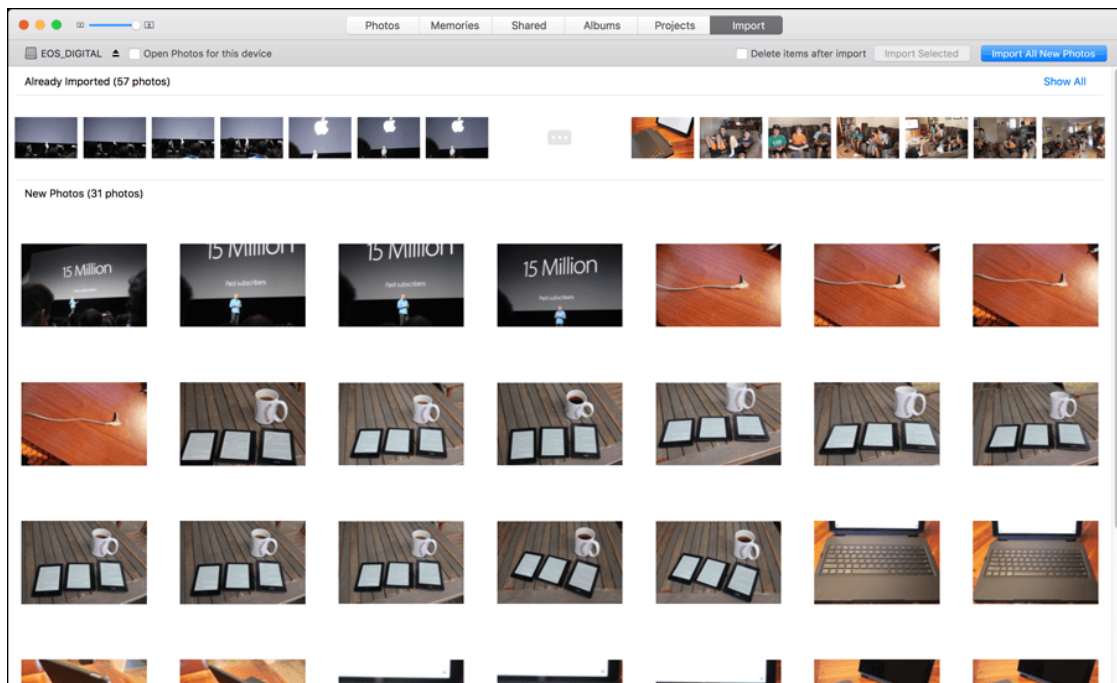


Figure 95: When you attach a camera or iOS device or insert a memory card, Photos displays the contents on the Import pane.

You probably want to import your files directly into Photos, though there are some instances where you might prefer to import them into your device's filesystem first and then add them to Photos later. If you plan to modify your images in some way before Photos ingests them, or (on a Mac) if you'd prefer to manually manage where your files are stored, use the second approach.

Import Files Directly

On a Mac, you can always import image and video files directly into your library by dragging them from the Finder into the main Photos window, or onto the Photos icon in the Dock. You can also choose Import from the File menu. Unless you've turned on the manual management of items (see [Manage Files Yourself on a Mac](#)), the file is copied into the Photos library.

On an iPhone or iPad, you can select a file in the Files app, tap the Share  icon, and choose Save Image or Save Video to import that file into the Photos library. If you want to select more than one file, tap Select, select the items you'd like to import, tap Share, and tap Save X Videos or Photos (**Figure 96**).

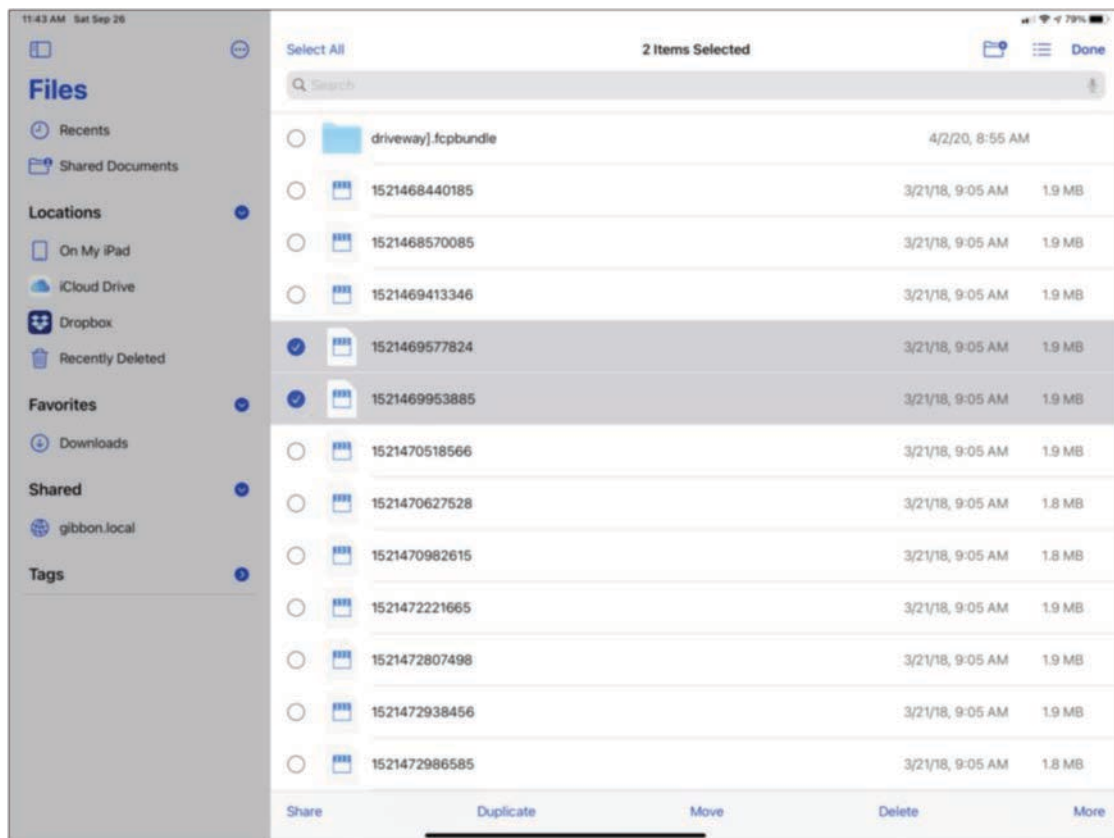


Figure 96: Selecting multiple video files in the Files app.

Manage the Library

At the heart of Photos in macOS is the concept of the library. (In iOS and iPadOS, there's only one library—or two if you are using iCloud Shared Photos. See [Use iCloud Shared Photos](#) for more.) You can have more than one library on a Mac, but only one can be synced with iCloud.

Here are the details of mixing, matching, and merging libraries in macOS.

Understand the System Photo Library

To simplify the process of syncing files with iCloud, Apple has limited Photos to a single System Photo Library. This is the library that's capable of syncing to iCloud (see [Manage the Library](#)). There can only ever be one at a time (**Figure 104**).

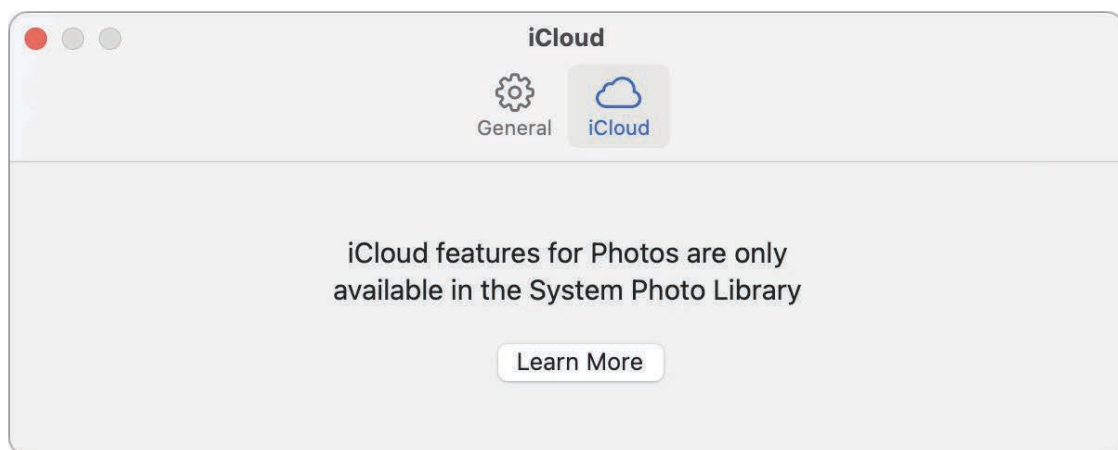


Figure 104: If you're not using the System Photo Library, you find no iCloud options whatsoever in the Photos settings.

You can designate a new System Photo Library at any time. To do so, open a different library, choose Photos > Settings > General, and click the Use as System Photo Library button. But be warned! This leads to the contents of your new System Photo Library and your existing

iCloud Photos library (if you have one) being merged together into one big library.

Which Library Is Which?

To help you differentiate between libraries in the Choose Library dialog, Photos adds the parenthetical phrase *System Photo Library* after the library that's capable of syncing with iCloud Photos. If the library you've opened most recently is not your System Photo Library, Photos adds the phrase *Last Opened* after that library. If you click any library, Photos displays the entire file path in text just below the list of libraries.

Use Multiple Photos Libraries on Mac

Most people probably use a single library with Photos. But if you're using a Mac and want to keep strict separation between different media collections, it's easy to create multiple libraries in Photos and switch between them (**Figure 105**).

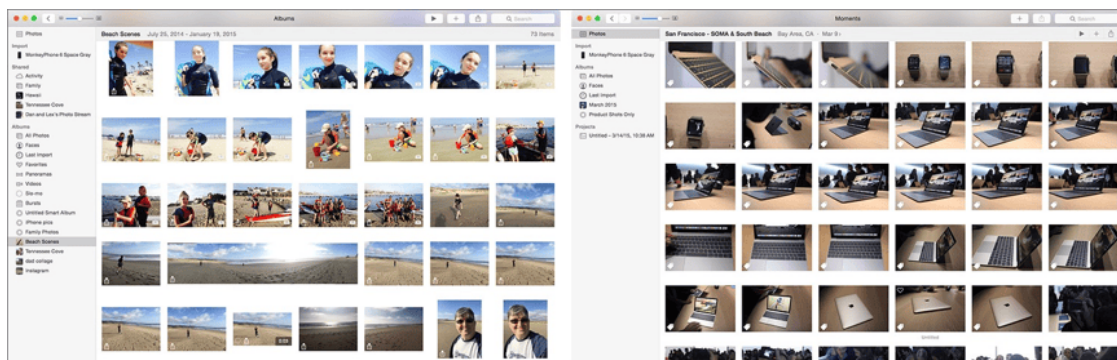


Figure 105: Two different Photos libraries, with entirely different sets of media.

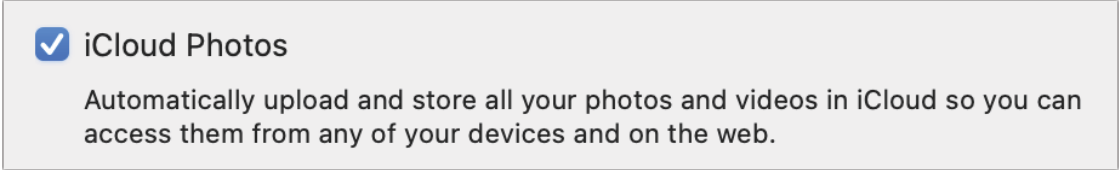
Reasons to Have Many Libraries

There are plenty of scenarios that might lead you to want more than one library:

- ✦ Create one for each client, if you're a freelance photographer.
- ✦ Keep your work photos separate from the family stuff.
- ✦ Let your kids mess with their photos without trashing your library.
- ✦ Separate the files you want to sync to iCloud from ones you don't.

Sync with iCloud Photos

While Photos works fine as a standalone image library, it's built to connect with Apple's online service, iCloud. With iCloud Photos, all your devices can view items stored in a single online library—and add new items to it—giving you access to every item in your media collection from any device (**Figure 109**).



☒ iCloud Photos

Automatically upload and store all your photos and videos in iCloud so you can access them from any of your devices and on the web.

Figure 109: Check the iCloud Photos box in Photos > Settings > iCloud to sync with iCloud.

Uploading your Photos library to iCloud adds convenience and a measure of safety to your photo collection, but there are numerous complications to this process, too.

The Cost of Cloud Storage

As of late 2025, every Apple ID comes with 5 GB of free iCloud storage. 50 GB of iCloud space (including not just your photos and videos but also your iPhone and iPad backups, as well as iCloud Drive files) costs \$0.99 per month, 200 GB costs \$2.99 per month, 2 TB costs \$9.99 per month, 6 TB costs \$32.99 per month, and 12 TB costs \$64.99 per month. If you subscribe to the Apple One bundle, you get 2 TB of iCloud storage—and can still buy additional storage on top of that. (To check the latest pricing and rates for different countries, see Apple's [iCloud+ plans and pricing](#) page.)

Those prices are comparable to what you can find at other services, including Google and Dropbox—but with better integration and syncing on Apple devices. However, if you're an Amazon Prime member, you should know that [Amazon Photos](#) offers unlimited photo storage free for Prime members (but only 5 GB of video). It's worth looking into, even if only as a second cloud backup for your images.

Set the System Photo Library on a Mac

iCloud syncing works with only a single library on your Mac, which Apple refers to as the System Photo Library. It's generally the first library that you opened when you started Photos. You can have as many libraries as you like (see [Use Multiple Photos Libraries on Mac](#)), but only one can sync to iCloud.

To change the System Photo Library:

1. Hold down the Option key and launch Photos.
2. Select the library that you want to sync via iCloud, and click Choose Library.
3. Choose Photos > Settings > General.
4. Click the Use as System Photo Library button (**Figure 110**).

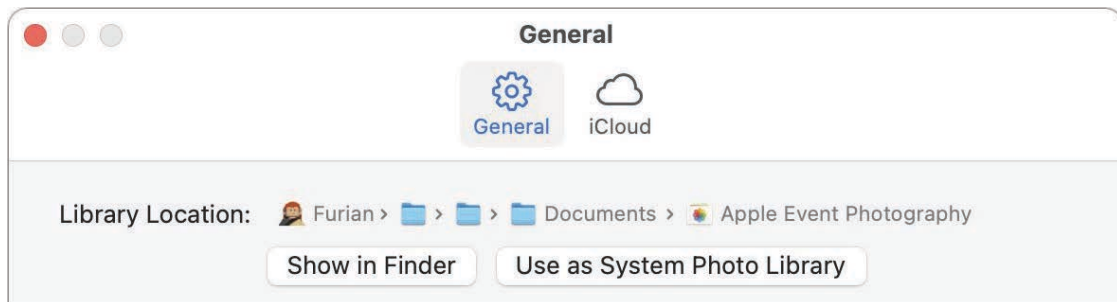


Figure 110: Click Use as System Photo Library to make your currently open library iCloud eligible.

Start Syncing With iCloud Photos

When you sync with iCloud Photos, you also have to choose which items are retained in your device's local storage. Here are the details.

Turn On iCloud Photos

To turn on iCloud Photos on a Mac, choose Photos > Settings > iCloud and select the checkbox next to iCloud Photos. Photos immediately begins uploading the entire contents of your library to iCloud. On an

Share Your Stuff

What good are photos and videos if you can't share them with friends? Traditionally, sharing photos meant sending prints or making albums. You can still do that—see [Build Books and Calendars](#)—but sometimes you want sharing to be more immediate. While iCloud Shared Photos is great for families (see [Use iCloud Shared Photos](#)), since you can share only one library, it's not the right fit for more casual sharing.

The answer for casual sharing is to create shared albums. You can share an entire album that others can update and comment on (see [Share Using Shared Albums](#)). And if your desired sharing method requires that you get your files *out* of Photos, you can do that too (see [Export and Resize Images](#)).

Transfer Your Stuff Directly

Sometimes you just want to get your photos or videos right out of Photos and into the hands of another person or another app. There are lots of different ways to do this:

- **Drag and drop:** On a Mac, the most direct way to do this is to select a file or files and drag them out into the Finder or other apps. In older versions of macOS, Photos didn't play well with other apps in terms of dragging and dropping files, but starting in Catalina it works pretty much everywhere. You can also drag and drop items from Photos into other apps using multitasking on an iPad.
- **Other apps:** You can pass your items directly to another app by clicking or tapping the Share  icon and choosing that app, whether on a Mac, iPhone, or iPad, though there are far fewer options on a Mac.
- **AirDrop:** If you're trying to directly transfer files to a device that's near yours (whether it's a Mac, iPhone, or iPad), Apple's AirDrop is the best method to use. Click or tap the Share  icon, choose

AirDrop, and pick a target device. The owner of the target device is prompted to accept the file transfer. (Your recipient may need to adjust their AirDrop settings in order to be visible on your device.)

- **iCloud Photo Sharing:** If you have this feature turned on, click or tap the Share  icon and choose Shared Albums (Mac) or Add to Shared Album (iPhone and iPad) to add a photo to any of your shared albums. (See [Share Using Shared Albums](#), later in this chapter.) Images shared using this feature are reduced to 2048 pixels on the longest edge.

Tip: Photos offers a few different ways for you to select more than one photo for use with the Sharing menu. On a Mac, Shift-click or ⌘-click to select a batch of items. On an iPhone or iPad, tap Select and then tap or slide your finger on items you want to select.

Export and Resize Images

Sometimes you need to export an image or collection of images, but don't want or need them at full resolution. (This often happens when I'm uploading a photo as an avatar or background image for a social-media service, where there are very specific file-size and image-size constraints.) This is easy to do on a Mac and more complicated on an iPhone or iPad.

Export and Resize Photos on a Mac

Photos for Mac's Export command is powerful. Here's how to use it for photos:

1. Select the photos.
2. Choose File > Export > Export X Photos (where X is the number of photos).
3. Choose whether to export the images in JPEG, TIFF, or PNG format; whether or not to embed metadata such as titles, keywords, and locations; and which file naming convention to use.

Show Off Your Photos

What's the point in taking photos if you can't admire them later? Apple has put a lot of effort into finding ways for you to stumble on some of your favorite photos when you're least expecting them. Recent software updates have added new ways to decorate your devices with photos you select—or that Apple selects for you (**Figure 141**).



Figure 141: The Lock Screen allows you to show off one favorite photo or cycle through curated selections.

Decorate Devices with Widgets

Widgets allow you to shuffle through items in a particular album or see a curated selection of your Memories and featured photos in new places on your devices. They offer an easy, fun way to be surprised by favorite moments and pictures when you least expect it. I added a Photos widget to my iPad recently and it's prompted lots of reminiscence, laughter, and hilarious text-message threads with friends.

There are two Photos widgets: Album, which shuffles through the contents of an album you select throughout the day (**Figure 142**), and Featured, which shuffles through Memories and featured photos. Both come in all four standard widget sizes.

To add a Photos widget on an iPhone or iPad, touch and hold on an empty space of your Home Screen until the icons go into jiggle mode, tap the plus $+$ icon, then scroll down until you see Photos, and tap it. Swipe to choose which widget you want to add, and then tap Add Widget. To add a widget on a Mac, click the clock on the menu bar to bring up Notification Center, then tap Edit Widgets. Or Control-click the Desktop and choose Edit Widgets. Then you can select Photos and choose any widget.

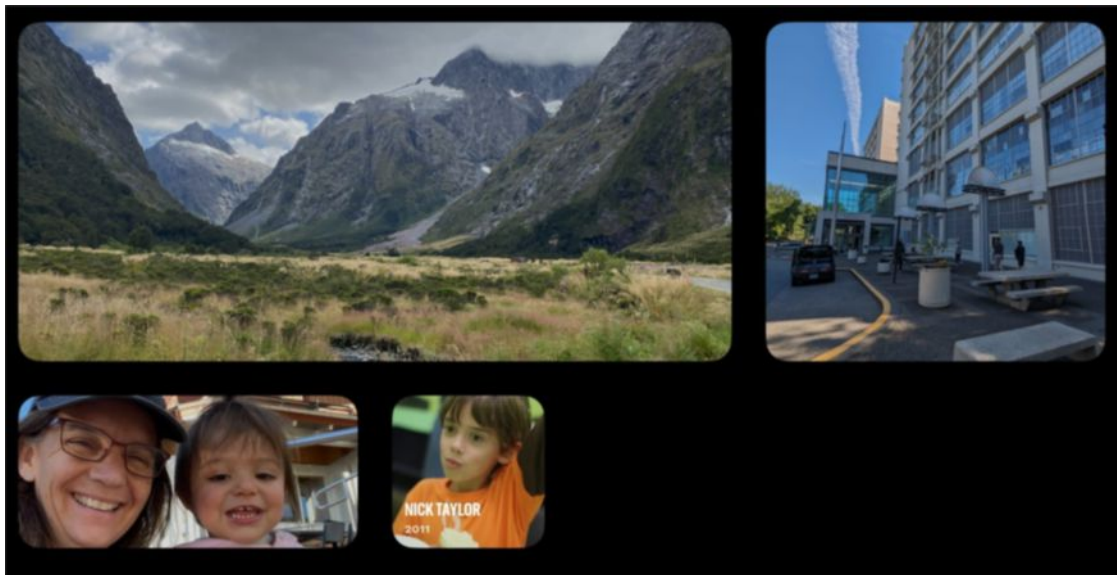


Figure 142: Widgets come in all kinds of sizes.

On an iPhone or iPad, when you're in "jiggle mode" you can tap a widget to edit its settings, which is how you select which album the Album widget shuffles through. If you're not in "jiggle mode" you can just touch and hold on a widget and then tap Edit Widget.

Numerous other apps are available that provide widgets that let you place favorite photos wherever widgets are found. The free iOS/iPadOS app [WidgetsSmith](#), written by longtime developer David Smith, is a great option if you really want to customize your Home Screen with favorite photos.

View Photos on Apple TV and Apple Watch

The Photos app on iPhone, iPad, and Mac is where Apple expects you to manage, edit, and view photos and video. That said, there are other devices in Apple’s ecosystem—the Apple TV and Apple Watch—that have their part to play when it comes to enjoying photos in contexts large and small.

View Photos on an Apple TV

Your living room is a natural place to share photos, and your TV set can be an excellent canvas. You can view Memories, albums, and your entire iCloud Photos library in the Apple TV Photos app (**Figure 152**).

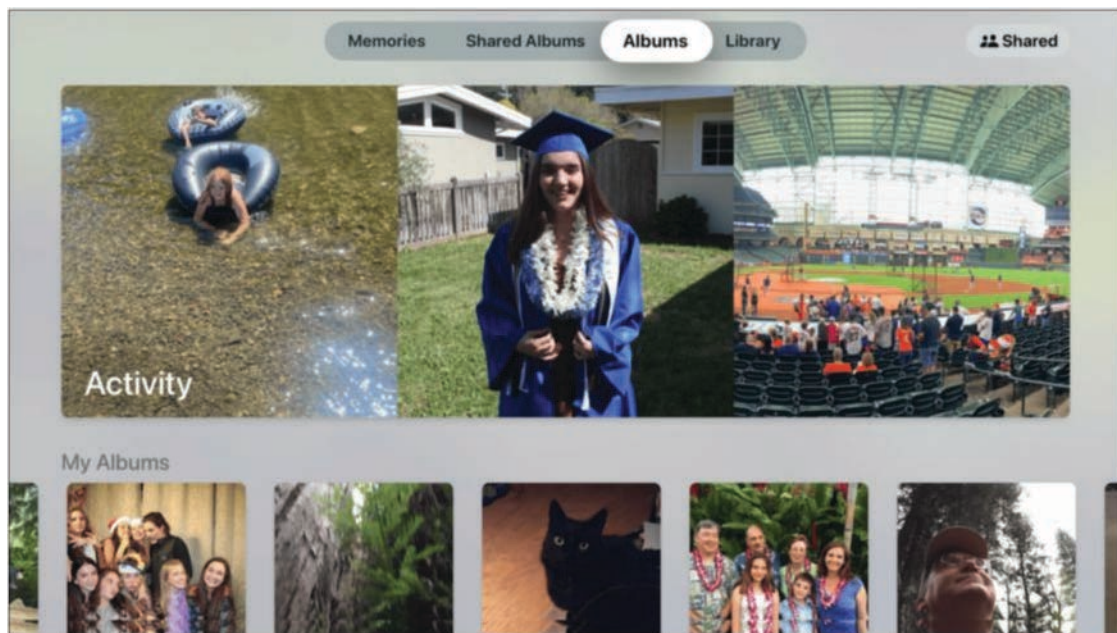


Figure 152: The Apple TV Photos app gives you access to your iCloud Photos library, Memories, albums, and shared albums.

Choose What to Make Available

When you first launch the Photos app on an Apple TV, it asks you to choose what images it should have access to. This is important, because Apple has anticipated that just because you're showing off images to visitors on your TV, you might not want those visitors to have access to every single item in your library.

If you want to open up your Apple TV for all your photos and videos, you must authenticate with your Apple ID (or a nearby iPhone or iPad) in order to unlock that feature. Otherwise, you can choose to use the Photos app just to display items from your Shared Albums. Then if there are items you want to show off to visitors, you can add those to a Shared Album (see [Share Using Shared Albums](#)).

View and Play Memories

All your Memories are viewable in the Memories view (**Figure 153**). On the top strip is a collection of recently generated Memories. Below, you can see all the Memories you've marked as favorites.

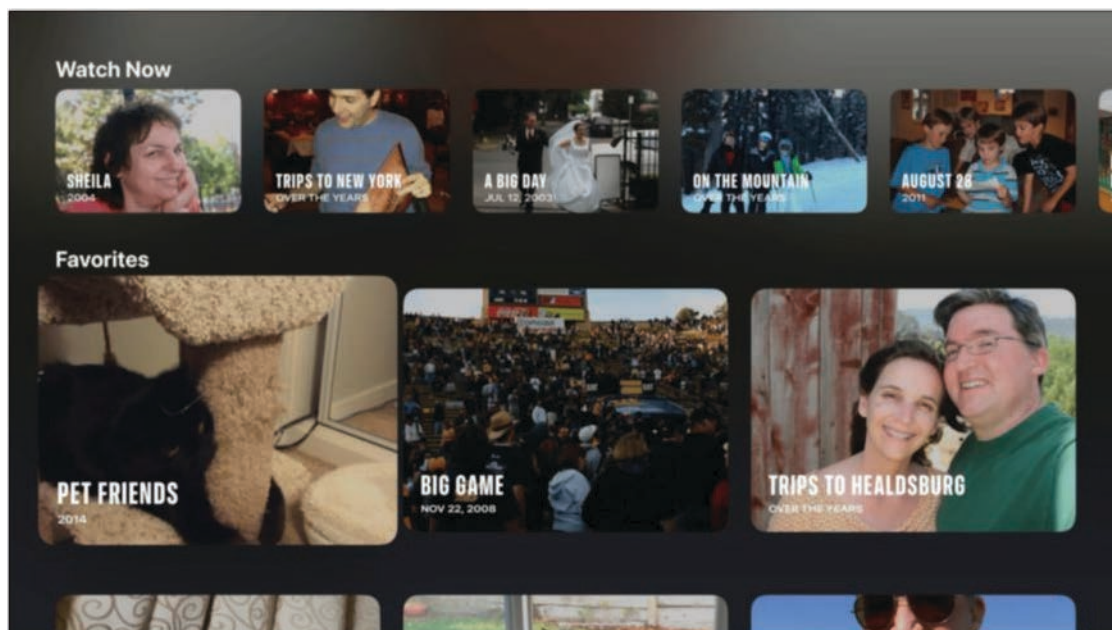


Figure 153: Swipe left to right on the Memories pane to go back in time.

Build Books and Calendars

My family has a tradition of curating our very best photos and creating annual calendars and books. These physical products are great ways to keep our photos in view throughout the year, even when we aren't staring at a device.

On a Mac, you used to be able to build books and calendars and send them off to Apple for printing. A few years ago, Apple dropped that functionality. These days, you can create books and calendars directly within Photos via third-party app extensions available for download in the Mac App Store. These free apps allow you to create projects based on your Photos library and order them from right within Photos.

The story's not as strong on an iPhone or iPad, though one app makes it more plausible to create and order books right from your iPad or iPhone.

Design Books with Third-Party Apps

A few apps are integrated with Photos to let you build paper books and calendars on a Mac: [Mimeo Photos](#) and [Motif](#) have been around for some time. They've more recently been joined by [Friedmann Print](#), [MILK](#), and [PrestoPhoto](#) (**Figure 162**).



Figure 162: A two-page book spread from PrestoPhoto.

To build a book with an app, choose File > Create > Book > App Store and you're taken to the App Store section containing all the compatible Photos book-building app extensions. Once an app is installed, you can create a new book by choosing that app from File > Create > Book. (If you issue this command after having selected a bunch of images in Photos, they're automatically added to your project.)

Tip: You might want to visit the websites of the various companies with book-making apps to comparison shop the costs, which can vary quite a bit based on size, page count, and shipping charges.

All the apps work similarly: Choose your book size and specs, including whether it's hardcover or softcover. Then you add photos or, in many cases, let the app automatically add your photos and choose layouts for you. Most apps allow you to choose from different template styles, and how many photos will appear on each individual page (**Figure 163**).

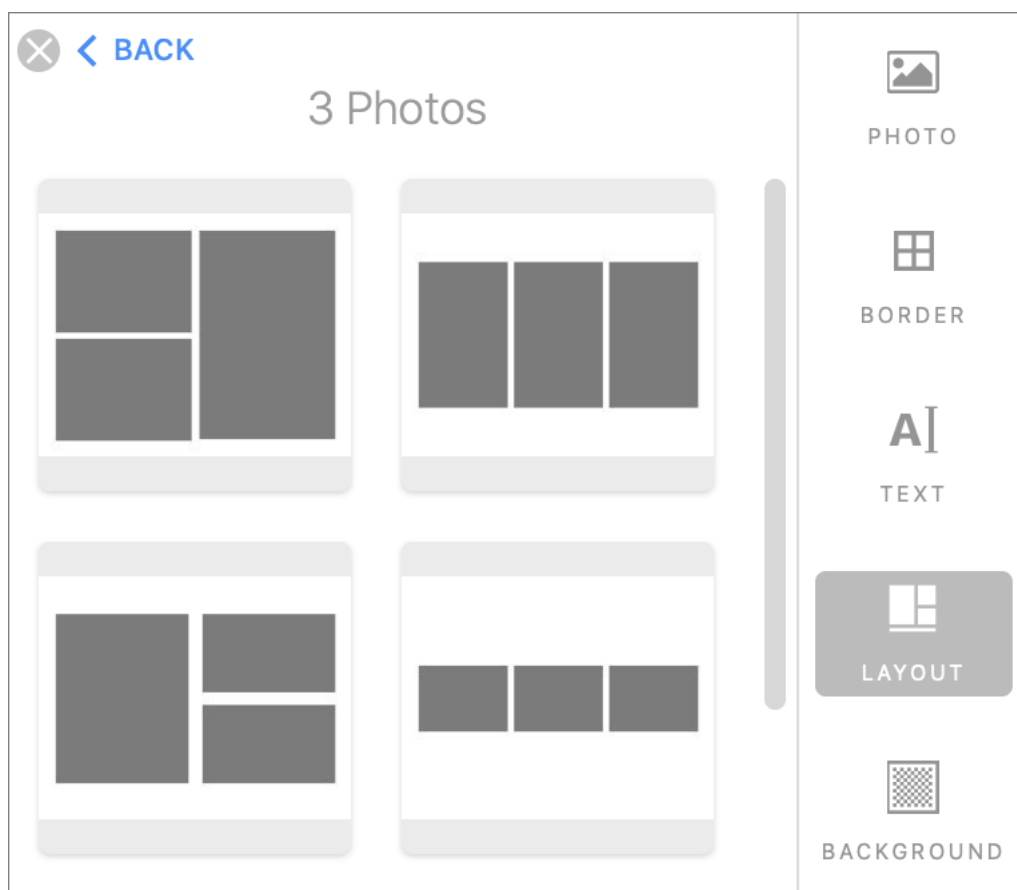


Figure 163: Mimeo lets you choose from pre-designed layouts based on the number of photos you have on a page or spread.

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Jason Snell has been writing about Apple since it was doomed—1994, to be exact—and was the lead editor for *Macworld* for more than a decade. He writes about technology at sixcolors.com, and is a columnist for Macworld. He hosts many podcasts on the Incomparable and Relay FM networks, including the award-winning [The Incomparable](#), [Upgrade](#), [Liftoff](#), [Robot Or Not](#), and [Downstream](#).

Jason lives with his wife and several animals in Mill Valley, California.

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