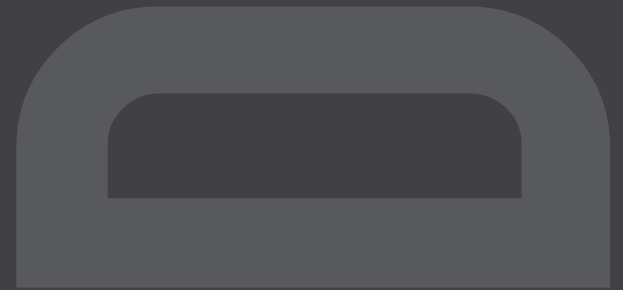# INTRODUCTION TO PHOTO BOOK DESIGN

PBDW

INTRODUCTION

I love photo books. Seriously, I love everything about them. Creating, organizing, designing, printing and sharing them. I am constantly researching and creating new ways to incorporate design elements into my photo books. I seek inspiration from magazines, movies, the internet, and graphic design.

A lot of people may love the idea of them, but when it comes to sitting down and putting forth the effort to make one...well, the book remains as a to-do list item.

I started Book This Project to design and create custom photo books for families. But I realized, some people enjoy the creative process themselves. They just need a little help on how to get started and to get it finished. And that is exactly what this course sets out to do.

I outline an efficient and effective way to break down the design of a photo book into manageable steps. We will work through it step by step. Each lesson has its own action worksheet to keep you on top of the design.

By the end of this course, provided that you stay current with the assignments, you should be finished with your photo book. And if you are creating an annual photo book, which includes photos from January to December, all you will need to do is update your book with those photos once they have been taken.

ABOUT ME

Before we get started, I thought I would provide you with a few details about me. I have been married to my husband for 9 years and have two small children, Alden and Lydia. I'm a registered architect in the state of New York but live in Lexington, Kentucky. We have a small but wonderful bungalow and live within three miles of my in-laws. I can't imagine my life without them!

One year ago, I started Book This Project because I love design, I love photography and I love making books for my family. It is the perfect way for me to combine all of my passions in one place. I'm always looking for new design techniques to incorporate into photo book design. And just as I try to post a photo every week, I design a sample book cover to practice my design skills and flex my creative muscle.

If you are interested in seeing my 2011 photo book plus a video of all of my images I used, click here.

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PHOTOGRAPHS

LESSON 1: GETTING STARTED

Starting point

This course starts at the beginning of the photo book process. I am assuming you have two things already to get started: photographs and a computer program to design.

If you have already started a book, that is fine. You may have to back-track or re-think a few things but hopefully in the next 4 weeks you will pick up some tips to help you finish it.

If you know you want a book but don't know where to begin...you are in the right spot!

Photo Book Company

There are so many photo book companies you can use. Snapfish, Shutterfly, Blurb, Mpix Books, Adorama books. There are a variety of companies who provide press printed or lay-flat books.

I love the look of lay-flat books. Photographs are printed on hefty, professional grade paper and there is no center spine to worry about, which makes it much easier to design.

But there are trade-offs:
- The number of pages are limited
- The books are more costly
- Can take longer to produce

So…why do I recommend blurb?

For my personal photo books that cover an entire year, I want to include quite a bit of photographs which means significantly more pages. But, I don't necessarily want to sacrifice on quality. I have been impressed with blurb's printing quality and highly recommend their pro-line paper.

Of course, you a free to use any company that suits your needs, but this workshop has been designed to cover blurb's books and utilize their BookSmart program. As always, I will address questions you may have based on other companies you may be using, but there will be a skew in the material to blurb, as it is the one I am most familiar with.

The first step to designing a photo book is to define the technical parameters of the book. This directly impacts the number of photograph you select, how they will be featured, and how many pages you will need. Before we get into the specifics of how many photographs you have and how many photographs you will need, we need to define what it is you want.

The technical qualities are:

- Cover
- Paper
- Size
- Quantity
- Price

VIDEO

THIS VIDEO IS A TOUR OF THE BLURB WEBSITE..
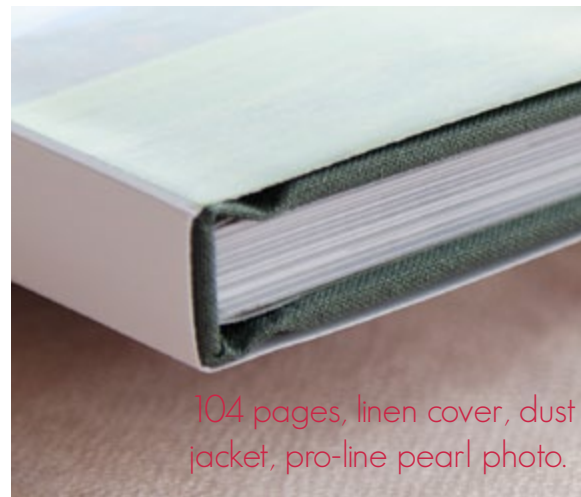OR CLICK HERE.

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All five of these factors influence the end product. The sooner you can set these parameters, the more straightforward the book design process will be.

Don't forget about the vision, or aesthetic goal, you defined for your photo book in the pre-workshop exercise. This directly translates into the technical details of the book.

I mention this in the video but it is worth repeating in print.

If you want to use Matte, Lustre, or Pro-line paper, you will have to select a book with 240 pages or less.

In the end you will want to find the specifications that match as closely as possible to all of your criteria.

66 pages, hardcover, image wrap, standard paper.

240 pages, linen cover, dust jacket, pro-line pearl photo.

360 pages, hardcover, image wrap, standard paper.

104 pages, linen cover, dust jacket, pro-line pearl photo.

Size of Book:

This is the trickiest of all because it deals with proportions! It is important to keep in mind the size of the pages as well as the proportions of the photographs you want to include. It is easiest for me to define these with photos.

The patterned paper is 12"x12" scrapbook paper and represents the Large Square book from Snapfish, Shutterfly, Blurb, and Adoramapix.

This will be the scale of reference throughout this course.

The best way to get a sense of scale when it comes to what size to select is to test it for yourself. I know you have a piece of 8-1/2" x 11" paper around your house.

Do you have a book on your bookshelf that is that size?

Do you want something larger or smaller than the piece of copy paper you are holding in your hand?

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7"x7"

8" x 10"

8.5" x 11"

10" x 8"

12" x 12"

13" x 11"
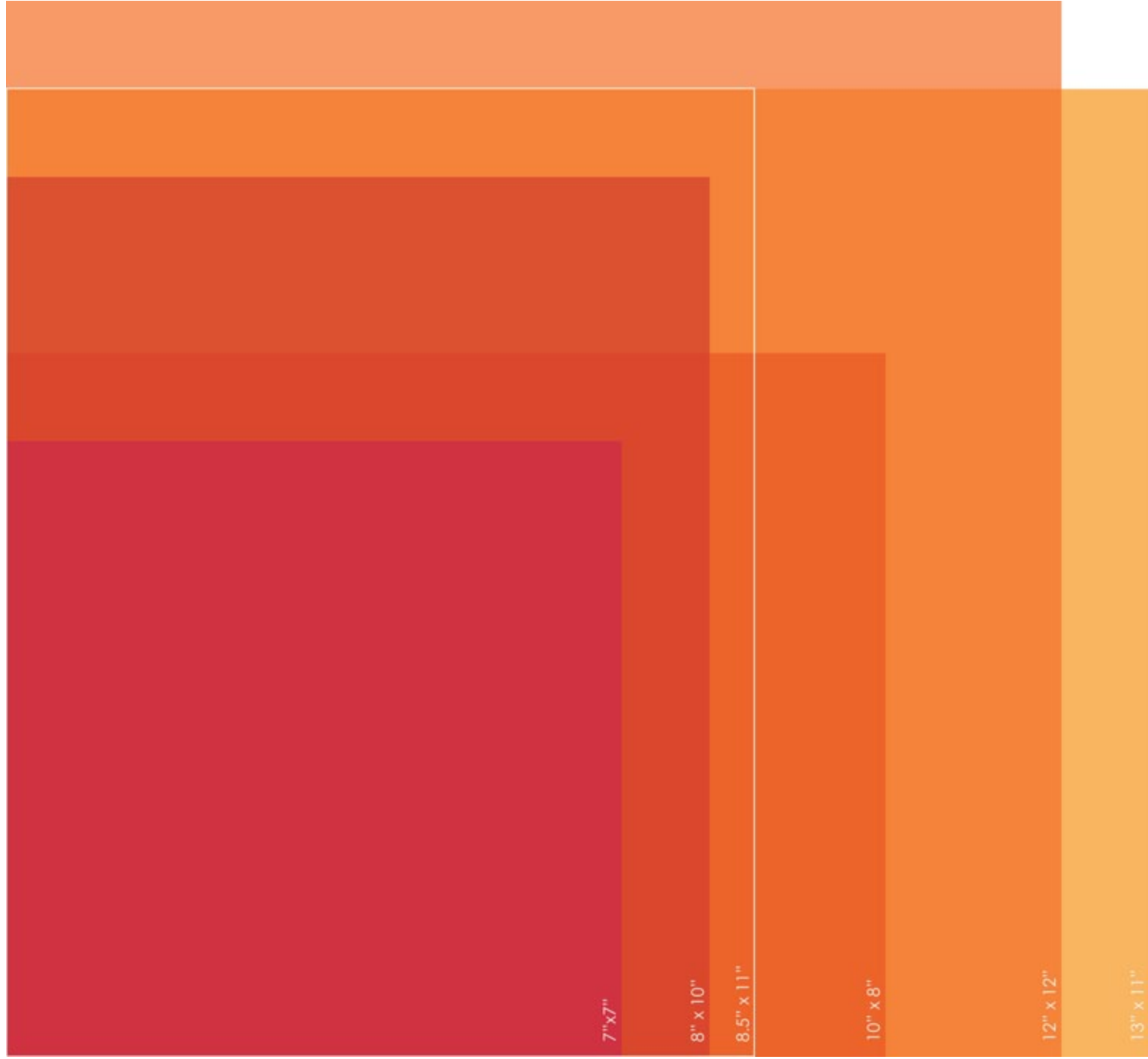
1

You should also factor in the orientation and size of the photographs you want to primarily use in this book. If you commonly shoot in landscape mode, a photo book in the landscape orientation may make the most sense for you. Square books are great for either type.

If you want to feature photographs as a bleed, keep in mind the spread dimension. It may seem counter-intuitive but selecting the portrait size book will actually show more of the scaled 4"x6" photograph on the spread.

To demonstrate, here is a 4"x6" photograph placed full scale in a variety of book sizes. Full scale means, the shortest dimension of the photograph matches the shortest (bleed) dimension of the layout. In other words, there is no cropping in the design program. As much of the image is being displayed on the page.

Here is how the original image appeared in Lightroom - cropped to 4"x6". In this case, the bleed occurs in the height dimension.

DSC_3407.NEF
9/10/12 5:39:49 PM
4928 x 3264

The 4"x6" photograph is inserted into a Square photo book. The pink lines represent the edge of the book and the spine, centerline, of the book. (This is typical throughout the entire course.)
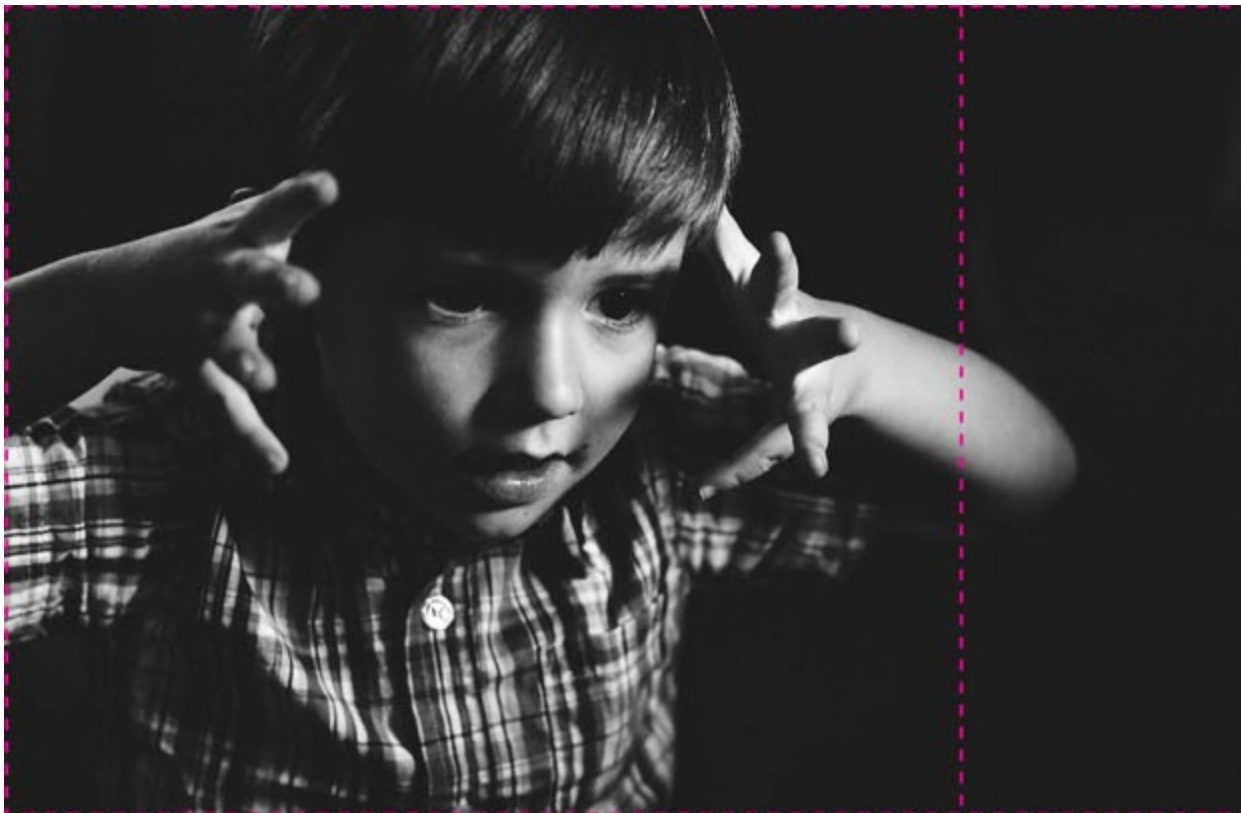
The 4"x6" photograph is inserted into a Standard Landscape (8" tall by 11" wide) photo book.

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The 4"x6" photograph is inserted into a Standard Portrait (11" tall by 8" wide) photo book.

The 4"x6" photograph is inserted into a Large Landscape (11" tall by 13" wide) photo book.

Of course, in all of these examples, you could scale the image to take up the entire spread. But the more white space there is in these examples, the more the image is going to be cropped in the software program.

Another thing, you may prefer to have the white space (or a color) off to one side or both. You could also add smaller photographs to add to the story being told on the page.

The purpose of this example is to start to illustrate how the placement of the photographs impacts the size of the book you select. The more informed you can be at the beginning, the less mistakes you will make as you move through the process.

To conclude this section on the technical specifications, I thought I would end with a couple of examples to show how the vision translates into the spec.

If you want a photo book that is:
- simple, clean and refined;
- 1-4 photographs per spread;
- no text, not even captions; and
- want it to sit on your coffee table.

Your technical details may be:
- Large Landscape (13"x11");
- Proline Pearl Photo paper;
- 100 pages; and
- Linen cover with proline end pages.

If you want a photo book that is:
- Clean borders around the photographs;
- quite a bit of photographs to document the year;
- Some captions to describe events; and
- your kids look through frequently.

Your technical details may be:
- Standard Landscape (10"x8");
- Standard paper;
- 400 pages; and
- Hardcover with image wrap.

At the conclusion of this lesson, there is a worksheet that lists out the variations you can select. Then go to your preferred company and see what the best book for the right price is going to be for you.

At this point, you don't have to start the book design process. That is next week! The goal for this week is to have a sense of the limits of the book. Why? Because this directly relates to how many photos to select. On to Lesson 2!

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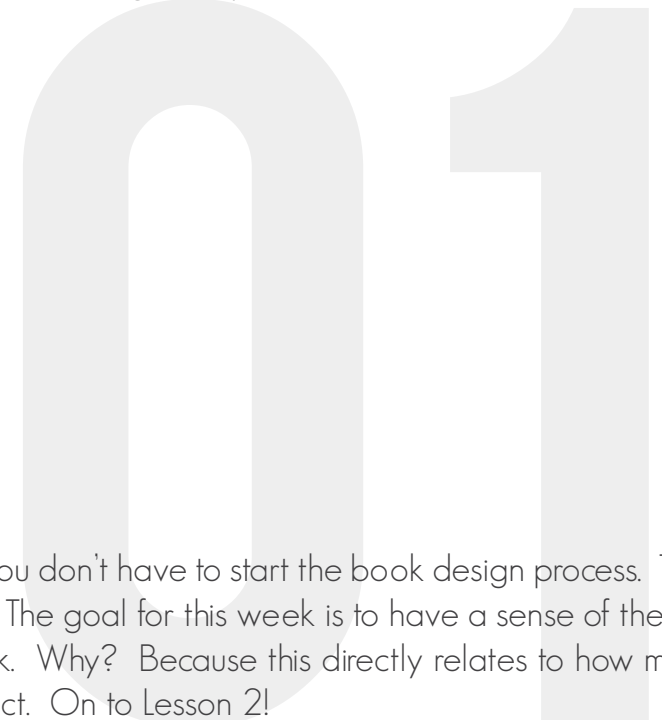
LESSON 2: DEFINING THE NUMBER OF PHOTOGRAPHS

The next step in preparing for your photo book is to organize your photos. Now if you are anything like me, this is one of the biggest hurdles to get over. How do you begin to figure out which photos to include?

I take well over 10,000 photos a year, so narrowing this down, well, it does take some time. But when you establish a concept as we did in the first step, it makes it much easier to do.

To overcome your massive amounts of photos, sit down with an objective eye and figure out your absolute favorites. Plus, and this is key, set a target number photos you want in your book.

I recommend 4 photographs per page. Now, this does not mean you are going to have only 4 photos on a page...this is a guide to get you to narrow down your photos. So, if you wanted a 100 page photo book, your target is 400 photographs. This is not an absolute, just a goal to reduce your photos from 10,000 to around 400.

I understand how daunting that sounds. So...I want to provide you with some tips or guidelines in this lesson.

In general, you want to select photos that are going to tell the story you established with your vision.

Let me start with my typical family photo books as an example.

My goal is to document my year. Month by month. I try to include my favorite photos from each of the days I shoot. I like to shoot 2-3 days of the week. Also a part of my aesthetic preference is to have some pages, like birthdays or major events, with a lot of photographs, and some pages where there is only 1. I keep all of this in mind as I narrow down my photos.

Let's use some math!

For a 200 page book, with approximate target of 4 photos per page, I have to select 800 photos for the year.

Divide that by 12, I need to select 66 photos per month.

Divide that by 4, I need to select 16 photos per week.

Finally, if I commonly photograph 2-3 times a week, I need to select 6-8 of my favorite images from each day.

Now, before you say, that is nice…but life doesn't work that way. I get that. This is just a starting point. A way to objectively limit yourself when you are trying hard to narrow the huge quantity of photos.

For me, I find that it is much easier to sit down and say, "Ok, I have 10 minutes. I need to find 20 photos I really enjoyed this week and tag them for my photo book." Or if you are sitting down now, with 10,000 photos, start with January and find a way to select your 50 best images from the month. It makes the task so much more manageable.

I want to stress this is an approximation. Understand that you have the freedom to select only 1 awesome photo from a particular day and that you can incorporate 12 from another. What I am saying is a guide. With this approximation, I suggest you err on the side of more photos. You can always narrow even further once we start to lay out the pages.

One more example. Let's say you want to create a vacation photo book from your week-long vacation. You have 1,000 photos and want a 100 page book full of photos documenting your trip. In this case, take the number of pages times (x) 8 and then divide by the days.

100 x 8 = 800 / 7 = 115 photos per day

Does that make sense?

If you don't think I am an organizational nut-job yet…I created a spreadsheet specifically to manage this task. I love it because the formulas are embedded so you can play around with the numbers until you find the fit that works best for the technical specs outlined in Lesson 1.

This is so much easier for me to communicate via video, so check it now.

VIDEO

HERE IS A VIDEO ON SPREADSHEET.
OR CLICK HERE.

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In the worksheet included at the end of this lesson, I have outlined the steps for you to define your target number. Revise it as needed to fit your mission. If you have a question or want advice, send me an email, post to facebook or leave a comment below. Sometimes it takes an objective sounding board to figure out the best strategy for you to narrow your photos!

Organizational systems
With a target in mind, the next step is to sit down, go through your photos and organize which ones should be included in your photo book. The best way I have found to easily stay on top of photos that you want to include is to employ a rating system and establish a Smart Collection or Album.

Perhaps most of you are familiar with this already...but just in case... A rating system is where you quickly go through each photo and flag it as one you want to use. There are many options when it comes to rating photos, so do what works for you. I am going to guess most of you have a set-up already in place. My suggestion is to start to work with a particular code, star, color, or keyword added to your workflow.

Let's look at several of the many ways you can rate photos. All of these depend on the editing or image library program you are using.

• Stars
• Keywords
• Color
• Thumbs Up

Keep in mind, many of the free book design software programs allow you to pull photos from your computer, flickr, smugmug, etc. If you find it easier to use those program to sort and organize your desired photos, use it! I want you to establish what works best for you and your workflow.

If you want to see how to use a Smart Collection in Lightroom, watch this video.

VIDEO

HERE IS A VIDEO ON MAKING A SMART COLLECTION.
OR CLICK HERE.

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Selecting

If you are still having problems selecting which photos to use, try to select the photos you think are necessary to communicate what you want to say. What is critical to convey the mood or the event/day/moment? Finally, approach your photographs with an objective eye. And this gets easier with practice, but try to determine which photos are going to translate into a desirable layout.

To boil it down to some key points:

Uninterrupted time. Try to find time, even if it is 15-20 minutes that you can sit down and devote to one complete task. Whether it is selecting photos for the week, month, event, etc. preforming the task in one sitting is going to make you more productive.

Set a time limit. Give yourself a deadline to select your photos. Reward yourself when you reach your goal!

Use an objective eye. It's hard, but remove the mommy goggles and examine, objectively, which photos are going to work the best. This is not to say you shouldn't select the photos that pull on your heart strings. You want photos that you love, even if technically imperfect, in your book. The point is to not be distracted by all of the wonderful photos showing how adorable your kids are. I'm sure that is every single one!

Make quick decisions. Don't agonize of which photo of your son riding his tricycle you should include. Select one and move on. There are other ways to show the multiplicity of an event. You can print 4"x6" prints, make a video of your stills or only showcase them on your blog.

Stick to your vision. If your vision is fewer quantity, larger scale images, you are going to have to be more selective in your process. In that case, stick to the core narrative you want running through your book.

Be creative. If you find yourself drawn to a particular set of images but not sure if it works in your current book, save them for a separate book. Give these photos their own ranking and smart collection.

For instance, if you realize you have so many photos of your kids looking away, or smiling, or crying…make a specific book for only those photos. Then you don't have to incorporate them into the book you are working on now.

In my case, I love to photograph my kids on my bed. I just love the light, my blank wall behind them, and the smiles on their faces when they get to play there. Knowing this could be a whole separate book, I don't have to worry about selecting photos from those days for my current photo book.

Finally, a video to illustrate how I culled photographs from a day at the park into a spread. 120 photographs down to 58 down to 5.

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VIDEO

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Editing Photos

I'm not going to go into detail on editing photos for your photo book because I am guessing you all have your own system and preferred method of editing photos.

One tip I will provide is to make sure the editing is consistent for all of the photographs on a page. And if not, make sure there is some identifiable semblance or reason for the variety of processing styles on a page.

I even prefer to keep my black and white photos on separate pages from color photographs when possible. Obviously, this is just a personal preference, not a requirement!

The key is to be deliberate when editing your photos for your photo book.

Exporting Photos

Once your photos have been placed into a special collection and edited, you are ready to export.

Now you are faced with two options.

1.
Export your photos as you design each page. With this method, you are selecting the exact photos you want and at the proper size.

If you proceed with this method, you can export with the intended page number as the custom name. The size of the photos can match the image boxes on the page.

Advantage:

• You design each page as you go and select only the photos that you truly want to use in your photo book.
• Each image is sized appropriately so there is shorter cropping time once in the design program.
• You have more control over the crop of the photograph.

Disadvantage:

• You are constantly working between two programs.
• The actual time to assemble the book takes longer because you design it page by page.

2.
Export all of your photos in the collection at the largest possible size and resolution. Once in the online program of your choice, you can select the exact photos you want.

If you proceed with this method, I recommend exporting with the name as the date (if you are making a chronological book) or as the name of the event. This makes it easier to find the images in proper order.

Advantage:

- You only have to work in one program at a time. Once you finish things in Lightroom (or your editing program of choice), then move on the book design software. There is no back and forth.
- There is more flexibility in testing which images may work best in a variety of layouts.

Disadvantage:

- If you have a large book with a lot of photos – all sized to the maximum dimension, this could slow down the program.
- It is harder to control the crop. You may forget your intentions when you were selecting that photo.

Either method will work. It depends on your own workflow and schedule. Test each version and determine what will work best for you.

Here are the key tips to exporting.

1. The file should be JPG or PNG.
2. Images should be in RGB or Grayscale.
3. sRGB is recommended for Blurb's BookSmart.
4. The resolution of images should be 150 – 300 pixels per inch.

Check with the particular company you intend to use for specific exporting instructions.

If you are working within Adobe Photoshop and saving the image(s) as JPG for a book, make sure the image size, color space, and resolution meets the qualifications for your book printing company.

VIDEO

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Here is what you want to avoid:

Exporting a 4"x6" photo with the short edge to 4" and 150 DPI. When you get into the online program, you decide you want that image to fill the entire page. This forces the short edge to become 8" – doubling the size and reducing the quality. You will most likely get a yellow caution triangle indicating your photo is too small and may appear pixilated.

It is great that the program will alert you. But! Now you have wasted time. You have to go back and re-size the image. The goal here is to be efficient and size appropriately from the beginning.

In conclusion, here is my typical workflow when selecting/editing/exporting photographs for a photo book.

1. Import photos.
2. Reject/Delete undesirable photos.
3. Give 3 stars to the photos I really like.
4. Narrow the selection to show only the 3 stars photos. Edit.
5. Determine which photos I want in my photo book. Keep in mind my target number for each event.
6. Mark these photos with a key word, star, color or other demarcation that automatically places them in a smart collection or album.
7. Go through the photos in this special collection one more time with an eye for consistency in editing.
8. Export with short edge set to 8-1/2" (or as required for the specific designed layout) and 300 ppi.
9. All exported photos go into a folder labeled "2012 Photo Book" on my desktop.

Time to take action.

I realize you may not be able to get through your entire photo collection in one week. But it is well worth it to do as much as you can this week. Depending on how many photographs you have, this could take a couple of days. So don't be hard on yourself if you don't finish narrowing all of your photos this week. You will still have plenty time to go through your photos as we move through the design of your book.

Hopefully now you have some strategies and tips to help you select which photos will work great for your book!

At the very least, you should decide the technical specs and define your Target Number!

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TAKE ACTION NOW!

PRINT OUT THE WORKSHEET AND CRUNCH SOME NUMBERS.

FIGURE OUT THE TECHNICAL DETAILS OF YOUR BOOK PLUS DEFINE YOUR TARGET NUMBER.