

Photo Organizing Checklist

Organize first, then digitize — seven steps from shoebox to backup



Old photos are easiest to scan, name and share when they are sorted first. Work through the steps below in small sessions; the next three pages keep track of what you have, what you have scanned and who is in each picture.

STEP	WHAT TO DO
Gather	Collect boxes, albums, envelopes, slides and negatives in one place and list them.
Sort	Group by decade, person or event before scanning. Set aside duplicates and blurry shots.
Plan	Choose a file-naming pattern and folder structure before the first scan.
Scan	Work in small batches and log each one. Many guides suggest 300–600 dpi for prints.
Name + describe	Rename files and record who, where and when while the details are fresh.
Back up	Keep three copies on two kinds of storage, one of them away from home (3-2-1).
Share + store	Share copies with family and store the originals safely.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- ☐ Handle photos with clean, dry hands or clean nitrile gloves, and hold them by the edges.
- ☐ Work at a clean, clear table with no food or drinks nearby.
- ☐ Avoid paper clips, rubber bands, sticky notes and tape on photographs.
- ☐ Write on photos only if you must — lightly, on the back edge, with a soft pencil.
- ☐ Store originals in a cool, dry, stable room — not an attic, basement or near heat vents.
- ☐ For new sleeves and boxes, look for enclosures that passed the Photographic Activity Test (PAT).

BACK UP

3-2-1: keep at least three copies of your scans, on two different kinds of storage, with one copy kept away from home. Check that every copy opens at least once a year.

MY FIRST SESSION

DATE	BOX / ALBUM TO START WITH	GOAL (HOW MANY PHOTOS)
NOTES, QUESTIONS FOR RELATIVES, SUPPLIES TO GET		

Collection Inventory

List every box, album and envelope before you start

[illegible]

Scan Log

One line per photo or batch – you will always know where you stopped



FILE-NAMING PATTERN

SCANNER / APP

[illegible]

Who's Who Sheet

Write names while someone still remembers them

PHOTO / FILE ID	PEOPLE (LEFT TO RIGHT)	PLACE	DATE (OR ABOUT)	WHO IDENTIFIED THEM

Use “unknown” rather than guessing, and note who gave each name – it helps when two relatives remember differently.