

## Organize Your Photo Collection

April 7th, 2011  
Intended for: [beginners](#)

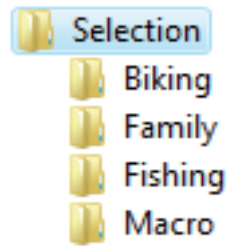
One of the great advantages of digital photography is that your costs per shot are zero—you can keep shooting as long as you have the time, interest, and card space. But this also makes archiving pictures and managing your photo collection more demanding than ever. As the hundreds of pictures on your disk become thousands, the need to have a simple and clear organization for your photos will become more and more urgent. Zoner Photo Studio can be a great aid in setting up this clear archive structure.



The structure of your photo archive must fill at least two basic functions. It needs to help you find the right photo right now, and it needs to be maintainable without much extra time and work. For this, it needs a good foundation. The foundation of any photo archive is its division into folders. The foundation of a useful archive is a suitable branching structure for those folders. There are countless possible structures, but only a handful of handy ones. Which to pick depends on how you shoot.

### One level, folders named by topic

We strongly recommend against using this structure (all photo folders beneath a single folder) unless the photos' filenames themselves carry useful information. While this method lets you see all folders at once, you will quickly lose track of what's what unless you have a great memory. This method is mainly useful for organizing selected photographs that need to be sorted by contents (nature, people, still lifes, nighttime, etc.) and are a few hundred or less in number. Even still you will often face decisions like whether e.g. a night forest photo is a nature photo or a night photo. For this reason it is often better to use ratings and keywords to ease finding such pictures than it is to use the folder structure this way. Ratings and keywords are a subject for a different article, however.

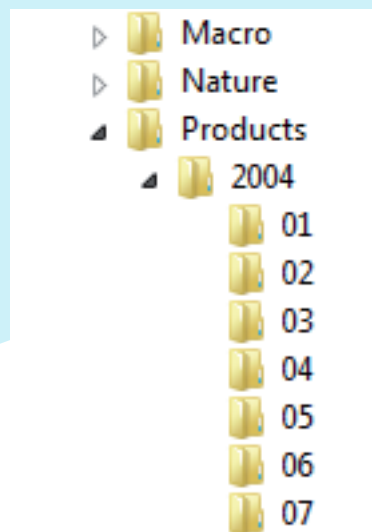


### One level, folders named by date

If you really only take a few sets of pictures a year, this kind of structure can be enough. The folder name should always start with the date, ideally in the format year-month-day, so that alphabetical sorting puts the folders in chronological order. Don't forget to use two digits even for single-digit days and months—that is, a format like "2011-01-01." This dating system is easy to navigate, universal, and unlimited in its uses.

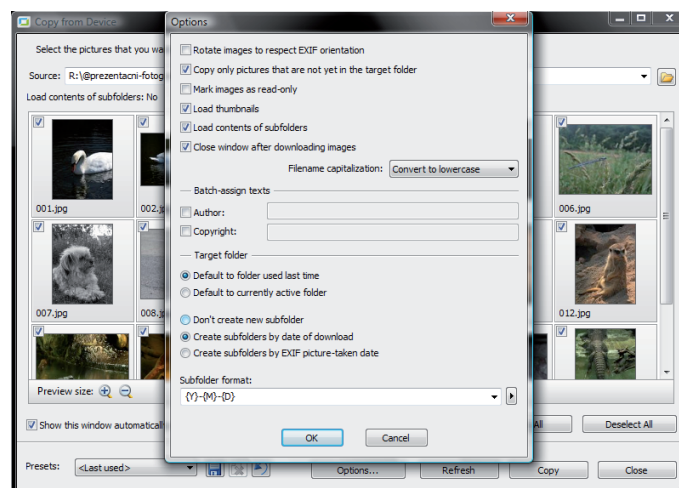
### Multiple levels, folders named by date

The more pictures you take and the more photo folders you create, the sooner a single-level structure will stop being easy to browse. Once the first level has more than about 30 folders, it can be a good idea to create a second level and make the first level represent years. With more than about 30 folders per year, a third level may be in order, with the second level now representing months. This gives you a good-looking, easy to navigate, date-sorted folder tree.

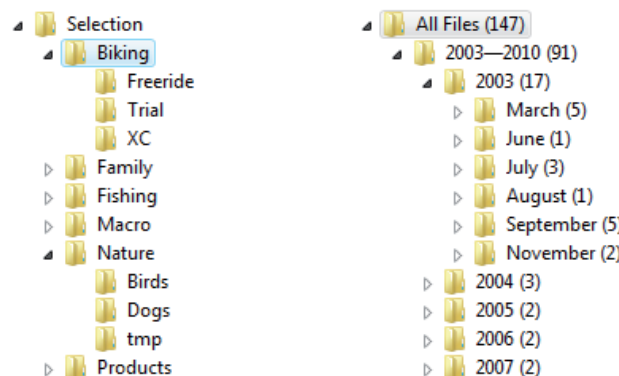
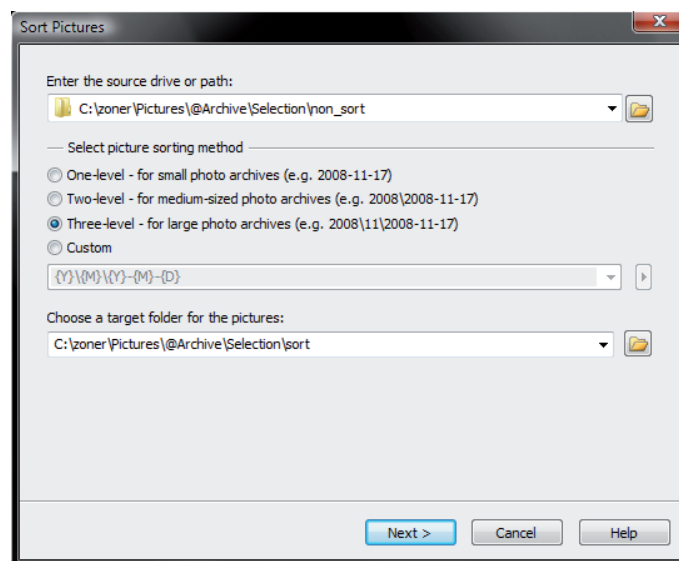


## But How Do I Set This Structure Up?

If you're just starting, it's easy. The foundation is just to keep the date set right in your camera and to choose and maintain a system—that is, a folder structure. You can use the **Copy from Device** function in [Zoner Photo Studio](#) to help with this, as it offers an option for automatically creating subfolders named by picture-taken date as the pictures are downloaded. For example, with the factory setting of {Y}-{M}-{D}, this option makes the program automatically create folders with names like 2010-12-18, 2010-12-24, 2011-01-01, etc. as your photos are downloaded. You can then add descriptive names (e.g. "Christmas," "Rockies Shoot," "Grandma's") after the dates if you wish.



When you instead need to reorganize an existing photo archive, try the **Organize** menu's **Sort Pictures** function. In this simple wizard, pick a structure to use, the file formats that the sorting should affect (note the quick on/off toggles for all picture/audio/video formats at once), a minimum size for files to sort, and folders to exclude from sorting. The three most commonly used ways of sorting by date (with three different numbers of levels) are available conveniently. This makes it very easy to turn your formless mass of photos and "New Folder" folders into a nicely organized tree structure. And it is done by copying, not moving, so if you make a mistake, you have lost nothing. If you later want to add another part of your old archive structure to the new one, just browse to it and run **Sort Pictures** again. If you keep the same sorting method on the second run, the function just sorts the new pictures into your already-built structure.



If you do not want to reorganize your existing system by picture-taken date but you do still need occasional chronological access to your photo archive, use the Catalog for this—but that's another subject!