Topic 9 – Creating Catalogues in Lightroom
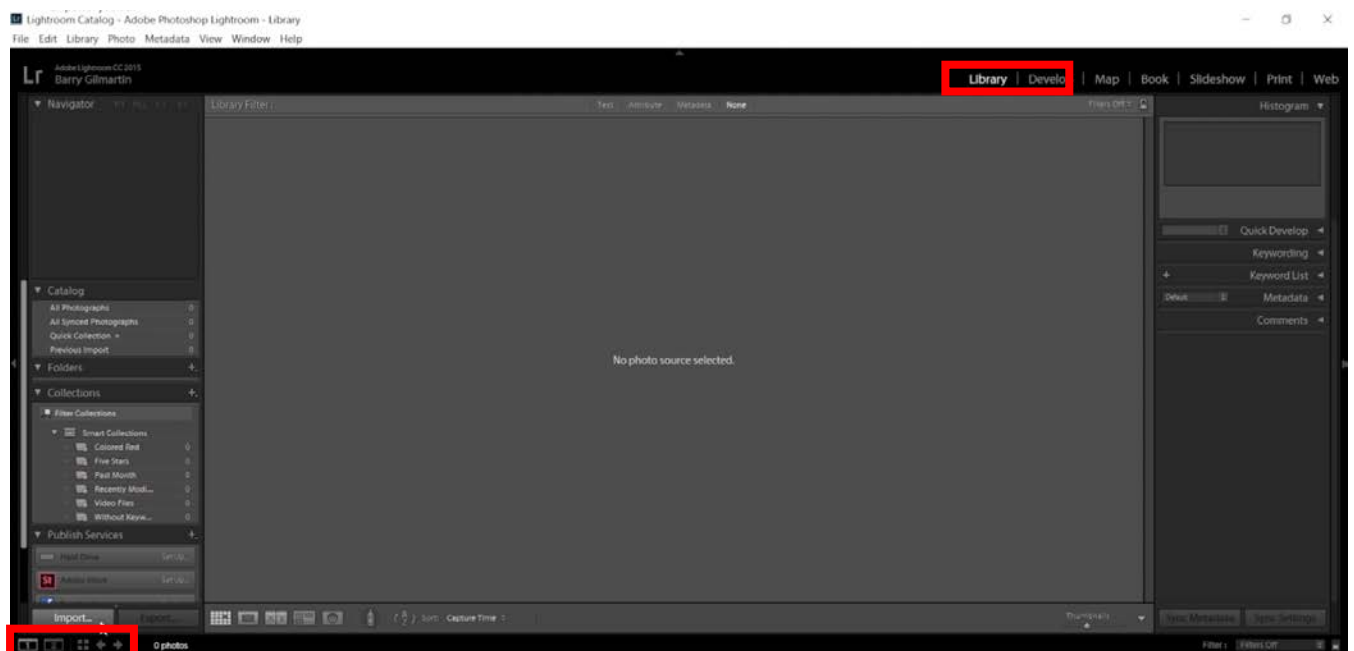
Learning Outcomes

In this lesson, I want to look at how we can create a catalogue and import photos from a folder in Lightroom.

Create a catalogue

When you first open Lightroom it will ask you to create a catalogue. After you've done that, the next step is to import in some photographs and video files. Firstly, we need to navigate to the Library module. In the Library module, we're looking for the Import button. It is located down here in the lower left-hand area.

You can also find the same import command under the File pull-down menu. Go to File, Import Photos or Videos. You click on this menu item or just click on the Import button and this will open up our Import dialog. The dialog that you'll see is created by these different areas or columns. We have a column on the left, one in the middle, and then one on the far-right side of our screen.

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Let's begin here on the far left. Here, we need to select our source. To keep it simple, as an introduction to Lightroom, let's select a source which is a folder of images. Click on the folder you want. When you click on that folder, you should see the images over in the middle section here. If not, it's because you have this checkbox unchecked. Without this checked it will only show the top-level folder and nothing inside of it.

In other words, it's not showing any of our subfolders that we have here. In order to include those, either click on the checkbox or just click Include Subfolders. Now we can see all of our photographs. You can use the scrollbar here and just click and drag in order to scroll down so we can see some of these images. So, we're selecting a folder which is located on our hard drive, or maybe on an external hard drive.
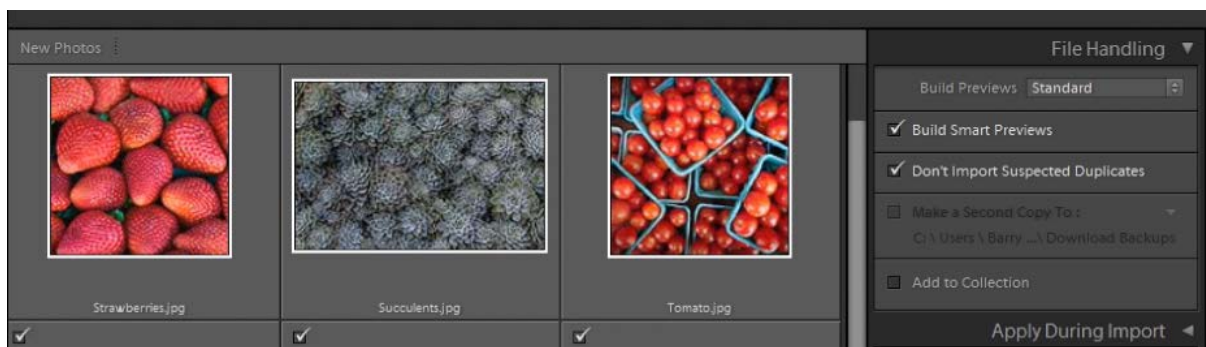

We need to determine which files we want to bring over and how we want to import those into Lightroom. We have four options and I'll highlight one which is Add, just to keep it simple and to avoid confusion as we are learning. This is the option that you want to use if you want those images to remain just as they are. So, you don't want to change their file type, their file name, or their location. In this case, we are happy to do this. We want these files to stay in the Pictures section where they are. However, we do want Lightroom to know they exist so that we can start working on them.

Once you've determined how you want to bring those files over, you can decide which images you want to import into Lightroom. Watch this as we click on Uncheck All. You'll notice that all of the images have become grey and appear dormant. If we only want to bring in individual images, we can then click on these checkboxes and select those to be imported into Lightroom. Usually, you will want to bring everything in so let's choose Check All. You can also click on an image. If we want to view this bigger, we can use the thumbnails which we have here and we can switch between the Grid view, which we're currently in, and the Loop view which we can use by clicking this icon. To return to the Grid view, click on this icon here. Let's move to the column on the right. So, we're just bringing these files into the catalogue and we're essentially telling Lightroom that we have files, that we want to keep in their current location, but we also want Lightroom to know where they are and to have a link to them.

We can Build Previews. The Standard Preview will generally work best for you. It will give you a big enough preview to be able to evaluate and work on the image. We also have Smart Previews. This is the checkbox that you'll want to turn on if you're working with a laptop and an external hard drive. Sometimes your hard drive is turned off. If it's turned off, Lightroom can use a Smart Preview so you can keep working on the image in the Develop module. After this, we need to turn on the checkbox to Not Import Suspected Duplicates in case we already have those files inside Lightroom.

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Now we're ready to bring these files over we simply click on the Import button. You can see here that it's importing these files at their current location. It isn't copying, it isn't moving, and it definitely isn't changing the files but Lightroom now knows that these images exist and where they are. It will then start to build our previews.

This process will not delay our workflow because it's taking place behind the scenes. Let's use our scrollbar and begin to scroll up and down and view these images.

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What have we learned today? A Summary

In this lesson, we have learned how Lightroom creates catalogues and how the program links to folders of images that we have on our hard drive.