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Making and presenting slideshows

If you want to make quick, easy slideshows that you can present and/or send to other people, Lightroom's Slideshow module often fits the bill. You can create, present and export slideshows with customized designs, transitions and soundtracks. You can play a slideshow from within Lightroom or export it in several formats.

⌘+Return or Ctrl+Enter

Play impromptu
slideshow in
another module

Lightroom 3 offers some significant improvements in the creation of slideshows. That said, Lightroom really can't compete with dedicated slideshow programs. I hope this chapter will show you all that's possible within Lightroom slideshows and help you see where Lightroom's slideshows fit in the larger landscape of on-screen presentation software. Set realistic expectations and I think you'll find you can use Lightroom for most of your slideshows.

Working in Slideshow is similar to working in Web. The Slideshow workflow is:

1. Organize the photos that will go into the slideshow
2. Go to the Slideshow module (and open all the panels)
3. Make sure your photos are showing in the correct order in the Filmstrip
4. Check the options in the Toolbar and change them if necessary
5. Choose a template to start the layout process
6. Customize the slide designs
7. Add music or other audio soundtrack (optional)
8. Preview your slideshow and make any necessary adjustments to settings
9. Play the slideshow in Lightroom or export it to file(s) on disk

⌘+Option+3 or Ctrl+Alt+3

Open the
Slideshow
module

ORGANIZE PHOTOS FOR THE SLIDESHOW

In Library, organize photos for your slideshow in Library first, including adding any metadata you want to use in the slideshow, such as titles and captions.

Multi-line captions

In the Library Metadata panel, you can insert line breaks if you want to have multi-line captions.

Slideshow module panels

After switching to the Slideshow module, start your work with all the panels open.

The left panel set contains Preview, Templates and Collections. The right panels contain all the controls for customizing the slideshow; see Figure 8-1.

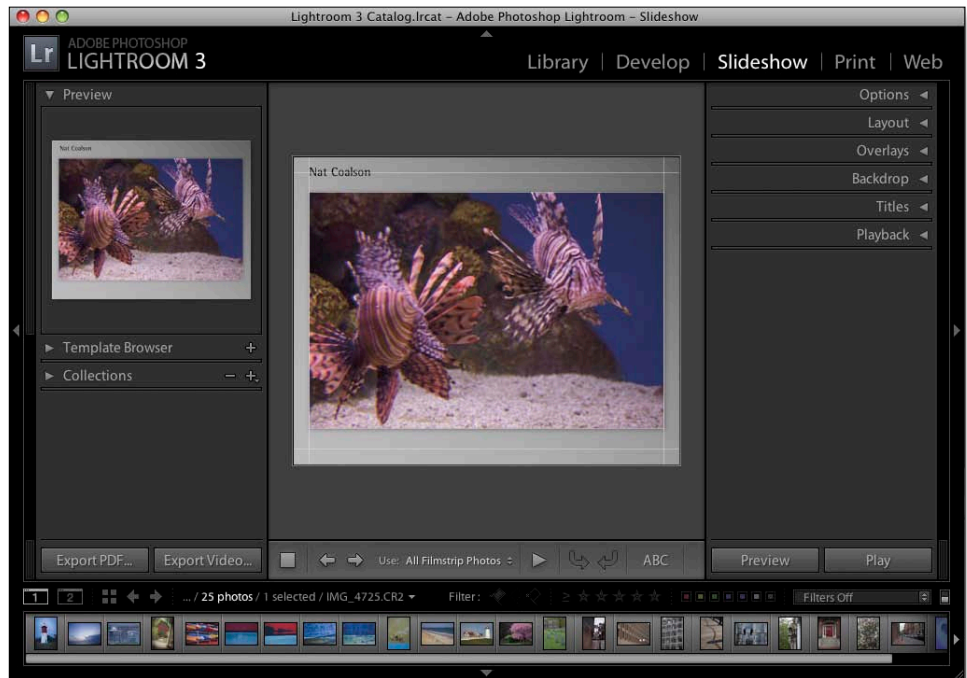


Figure 8-1

Remember that you can right-click or control+click on a panel header to enable Solo Mode; this is especially useful in Slideshow. As you work top to bottom on the right panels, it's a lot easier to stay focused on the current task if the other panels are closed.

Check the Toolbar and Filmstrip

Make sure the Toolbar is visible (T). Make sure all the photos showing in the Filmstrip are the ones you want to include in the slideshow. If not, on the Toolbar, click the Use: popup menu to change the source of photos to be included (see Figure 8-2). You can click and drag photos in the Filmstrip to change the order. If you have photos showing that you don't want in the slideshow, make a new collection and you can then remove the unwanted photos without affecting your original source.



Figure 8-2

Choose a template

Within the Lightroom default installation, there are two sets of Slideshow templates shown in the Template Browser: Lightroom Templates and User Templates. Lightroom comes with several basic (and generally unattractive) templates; you likely won't want to use these just as they are but they provide a good starting point. If you haven't saved any of your own Slideshow templates before, the User Templates set will be empty. Later, when you're done customizing the design, you can save your own templates.

From the Template Browser panel, choose a template to use as the basis for the new slideshow (see Figure 8–3). As you move your cursor over the templates they are shown in the Preview panel above. Click a template to load it. (I'm starting with Default.)

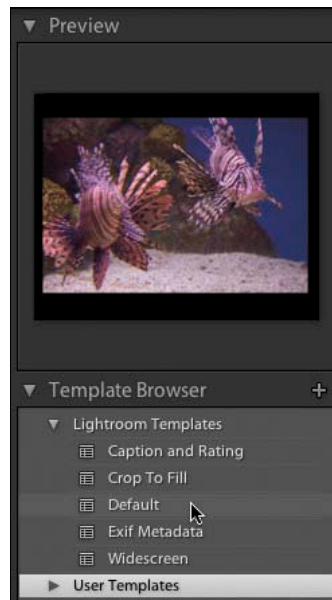


Figure 8-3

CUSTOMIZE THE SLIDESHOW

Customize your slideshow design using the panels on the right side of the screen. I almost always work from top to bottom, but inevitably there will be some going back and forth. If you're not sure how a specific control works, try it! Just keep tweaking the controls until you like the way the slideshow looks. Details for each of the panels are below.

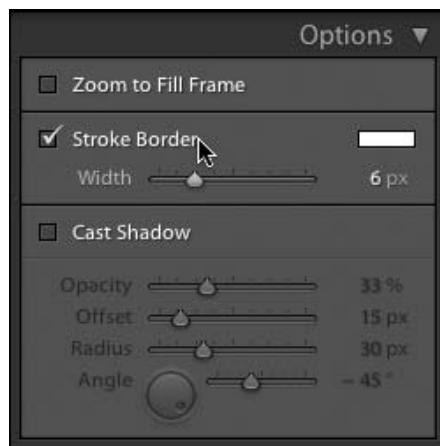


Figure 8-4

⌘+1 or Ctrl+1

Open/close the Options panel

Options panel

Starting in the Options panel (see Figure 8–4), set how the photos are placed on the slides. Zoom to Fill Frame will enlarge (and most likely crop) the photos to fit within the “live” area of the slide defined by the margins. With Zoom to Fill enabled, you can't control the position of the photo within the live area.

Next, you can add a Stroke Border by ticking its check box. This adds a solid outline around the photo. Set the width of the border using the slider, or by typing in a numeric value. To set the color of the border, click the rectangular swatch to the right of the panel. This opens the color picker (which is explained in detail in Chapter 4).

When you're done making changes in the color picker, click the X in the upper left corner or simply press Return/Enter. If you want to cancel any changes you made in the color picker, press Esc. For more on the color picker, review Chapter 4.

The bottom portion of the Options panel contains the settings for Cast Shadow. These shadows show “behind” the photos, as if the photos were floating in front of the background. You can't apply a color to the Cast Shadows; they're always neutral gray.

Tick the checkbox to enable or disable shadows. Then use the following four settings to customize the shadow:

Opacity: the overall strength of the shadow. 100% opacity will be solid black, and lower opacities will make the shadow lighter and transparent over the background. If you're using a solid color or gradient for the background, the effect of Opacity is not as evident as when using a photo as a background (which we'll discuss in just a bit).

Offset: sets how far away from the edge of the photo the shadow is placed. Larger offsets give the appearance of more depth between the photo and the background.

Radius: defines the softness of the edge of the shadow. A radius of zero will be a totally hard edge. Larger values will apply more feathering of the shadow edge. You'll need to work a bit with the settings for Offset and Radius to get your ideal combination of distance and softness.

Angle: simulates a single light source positioned to illuminate the slide. The circle shows this as if the slide is laying flat and the light is above. You can click and drag inside the circle to position this virtual light source, use the slider or enter numeric value. Like Radius, the effect of the Angle will be more, or less, obvious depending on the Offset.

⌘+2 or Ctrl+2
Open/close the
Layout panel

**⌘+Shift+H or
Ctrl+Shift+H**
Hide/show the
layout guides

Layout panel

The Layout panel (see Figure 8-5) is where you set the slide margins, which determine the photo's distance from the edges of the slide. You can set different margins for each side, but the same margins are used for all slides.

Tick the checkbox to Show Guides or uncheck the box to hide them. With guides visible, you can set the widths for Left, Right, Top and Bottom using the sliders or by typing in numeric values. Also, when the guides are visible, you can click and drag to position them directly in the preview.

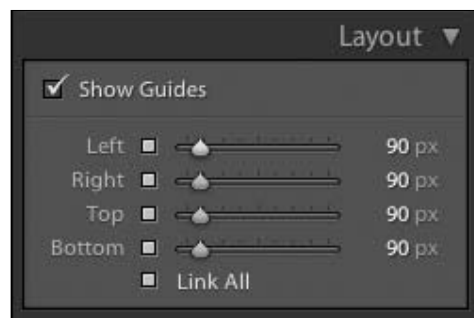


Figure 8-5

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To quickly apply the same values for all the margins, tick the Link All box. You can tick individual boxes to link the values of specific margins such as top and bottom, etc..

⌘+3 or Ctrl+3
Open/close the
Overlays panel

Overlays panel

In the Overlays panel, you can configure text and graphical elements that appear on the slides along with the photos; see Figure 8–6. Like the other panels, Overlays is split into distinct sections that control different options.

Identity Plate: as explained in other chapters, Lightroom’s identity plates are graphical or text elements that you can create, customize and use in a variety of ways. In Slideshow, identity plates are typically used to “brand” the presentations. As do the other modules, Slideshow allows you to place an optional identity plate on the slideshow. A slide layout can only include one identity plate. (However, you can apply additional text overlays, see next section).

The following example explains how to place your name in text on the slides.

First, check the box to show the identity plate. (When the box is unchecked, the identity plate is inactive and the controls are dimmed.)

The identity plate preview box shows the currently selected identity plate. A checkerboard pattern in the background indicates areas of transparency, where elements “behind” the identity plate will show through. With a text-based identity plate, everything but the letters themselves will be transparent; when you’re using a graphical identity plate, areas of transparency will be determined by the image that’s loaded.

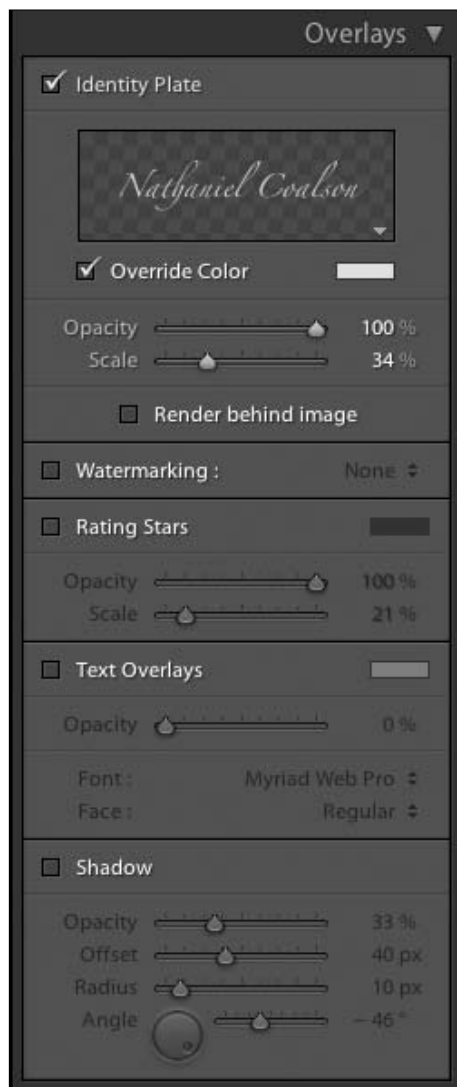


Figure 8-6

The default preview is your Main Identity Plate, as configured using the Identity Plate Setup window. If you've made other identity plates, you can click the preview and choose another from the popup menu. If not, click Edit... to make a new one. This opens the Identity Plate Editor, which functions the same in all modules.

At the top of the window, set the radio button to "Use a styled text identity plate". Type your name, studio name, or any text you want in the text area. You can then apply settings for Font, Style, Size and Color. To change the fonts, the text must first be selected. By selecting individual parts of the text, you can style the different parts with multiple fonts, sizes and colors (see Figure 8-7).

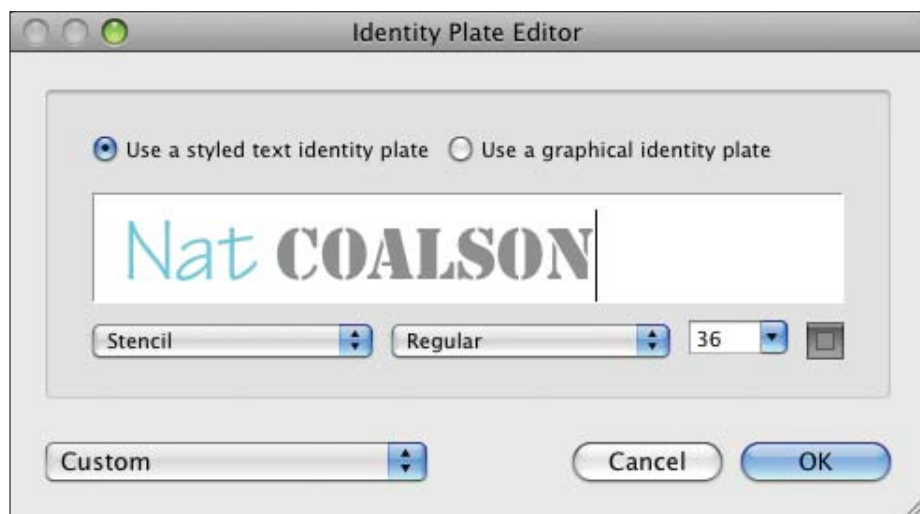


Figure 8-7

After you've styled the identity plate, be sure to save it as a preset for later. Click the dropdown menu at the bottom left of the window (it will say "Custom") and then Save As.... Enter a name and click Save. Click OK to exit and apply the changes.

Design graphical identity plates in Photoshop

For the most control over the appearance of all the identity plates you use in Lightroom, I recommend you design them in Photoshop, save them as PNG files, and then bring them into the Lightroom's Identity Plate Editor. This is explained in detail in Chapter 6.

Back in the Overlays panel, the preview shows your selected identity plate. Below the preview box is an option for Override Color, which as the name implies, will override any colors in the identity plate with a color you set here. Tick the box to enable the function, then click the swatch to the right to open the color picker and set the color.

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Below Override Color are sliders for Opacity and Size. Opacity sets the level of transparency for the identity plate; at 100% it is solid and totally opaque. At lower levels you can see elements showing through the identity plate. To scale the identity plate, you can drag the size slider or enter a numeric value.

To position the identity plate in the slide layout, just click and drag it to the position you want. Also, when you've clicked to select the identity plate in the layout, you will see control handles appear. Click and drag the handles to scale the identity plate interactively. Rotate the identity plate by selecting it and clicking one of the rotate buttons in the Toolbar; see Figure 8–8.

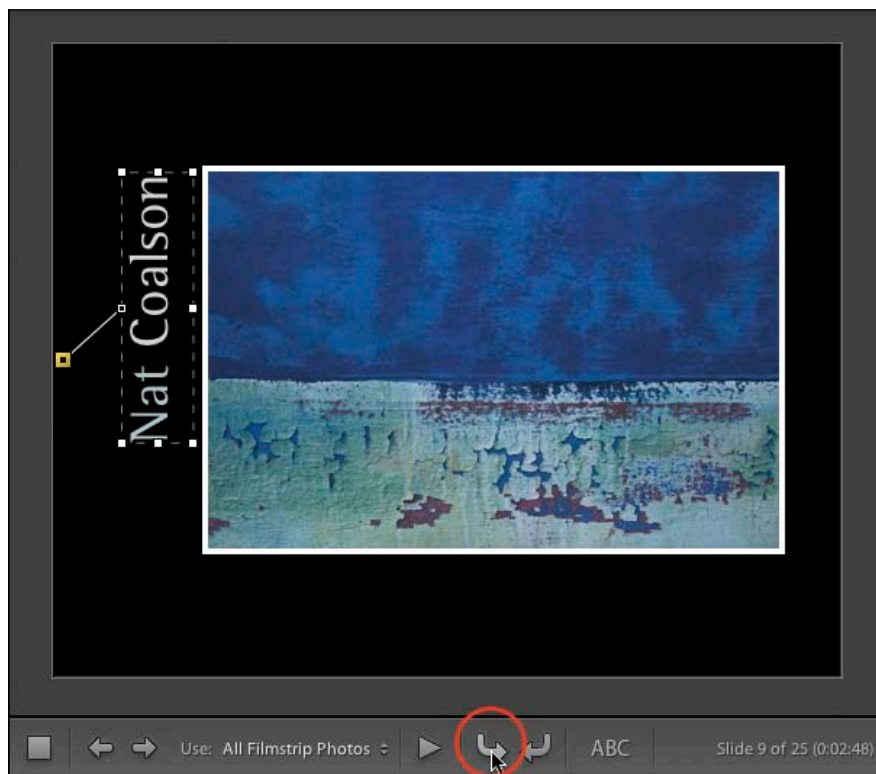


Figure 8-8

It is possible that a combination of dragging and rotation will place your identity plate off the slide entirely, where you can no longer access it by clicking. If this happens, simply uncheck the box to turn it off, then back on again. It will reappear in the default location at the top left of the slide layout.

At the bottom of the Identity Plate section is an option to Render Behind Image. This can be useful if you want to use a large identity plate as part of the background of the slides. With this option enabled, the identity plate will be placed behind the photos, and in front of the background.

Watermarking: you can also apply a watermark to your slideshow. Check the box to enable it, then choose a watermark from the popup menu. Watermarks are covered in Chapter 5.

⌘+Option+T (Mac only)

To show the Character Palette, Windows also has a Character Map (under Accessories on the Start Menu) from which you can copy and paste characters. You can do all kinds of cool things with type and symbols in watermarks and identity plates.

Rating Stars: enabling this option will display any rating stars on the slides, for photos that have them applied. Click the color swatch to change the color of the stars. New in Lightroom 3, you can also change Opacity and Scale for the Stars.

Text Overlays: check the box to display text overlays on the slides. The checkbox hides or shows *all* text overlays. **However, with an individual text overlay selected in the layout preview, the Text Overlays controls affect only the selected overlay.**

To make a new text overlay, first make sure the Toolbar is showing (press the T key to hide/show the Toolbar). On the Toolbar, click the ABC button (see Figure 8–9) or use the shortcut. The text entry field becomes active. This allows you to set custom text. Type your text into the box and press Return or Enter when you're done. The new text overlay is inserted at the bottom left corner of the slide, using default values based on your operating system.



Figure 8-9

Or, instead of custom text, click the popup menu text to the custom text field (see Figure 8–10) and choose another kind of text to display. The options contained here represent *tokens*, which are variable placeholders for specific types of metadata.

There are options for Equipment, Date, Exposure, Caption etc., all which will use the specific data unique to each photo in the text overlay,

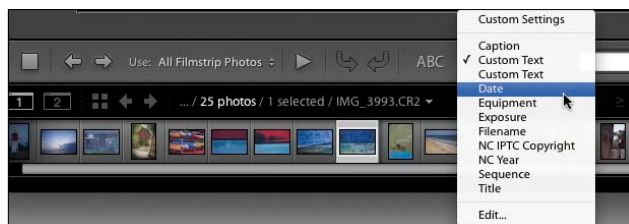


Figure 8-10

so each photo will show different text. This is in contrast to the custom text overlay, which remains the same on *all* slides.

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If you want to show individual Titles or Captions for the photos, they need to be entered in those corresponding metadata fields first (in the Library module).

Once you've inserted a text overlay, you can click and drag to move and/or resize it with the control handles. You can also use your keyboard arrow keys to nudge overlays in small increments.

Also, when a text overlay (or identity plate) is active, you'll see a small square with a straight line connecting it to the text overlay box (refer back to Figure 8–8). This is an *anchor point* to aid positioning the overlay precisely on the slide. If you click the point and drag it around the slide, you will feel it “snap” to various key positions such as the corners and centers of the slide edges and photos. As you move it, also notice that it becomes attached to different corners of the text overlay.

Once you've snapped the point to a location, you then snap the text overlay to the point, using the straight line as a visual reference. The benefit to this method is that the point always remains snapped to the center or edges of the photo or the slide, independent of the size or position of the text overlay itself. If you need to resize or move a text overlay to a precise position, you'll find that this straight-line, snapping behavior makes it very easy, without the need for rulers or math.

You can also rotate text overlays. With the desired overlay selected, click one of the rotate buttons in the Toolbar.

When you've positioned your text overlay where you want it, use the Text Overlay controls on the panel to change Color, Opacity, Font and Face for the overlay.

Continue making as many text overlays as you need by clicking the ABC button or using the shortcut. To delete an existing text overlay, select it with your mouse and press Delete.

⌘+4 or Ctrl+4
Open/close the
Backdrop panel

Backdrop panel

On the Backdrop panel you can customize the background for the slides. For a solid black background, simply uncheck all the options. Otherwise, use the provided controls (see Figure 8–11) to apply styling for the following:

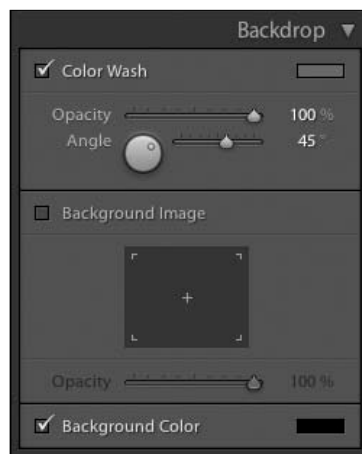


Figure 8-11

Color Wash: this setting applies a gradient across the background, which smoothly transitions from one color to another.

Click the swatch to open the color picker, then either select a color from the box or click and drag the eyedropper to choose a color from anywhere on your screen. Use the Opacity and Angle controls to fine tune the application of the gradient.

Background Image: here you can select photo in the catalog for the slide background, which then interacts with the other Backdrop design controls. (The background chosen must be in the current catalog.) Click and drag a photo from the Filmstrip to place it into the background. You don't have any control over the scaling or placement of the background photo.

Background Color: this sets a solid color for the background. Click the swatch to open the color picker.

Keep backgrounds simple

Remember that the goal of the presentation is to feature the photos. To that end, keep your backgrounds and other elements simple and clean so they don't distract from the images.

⌘+5 or Ctrl+5
Open/close the
Titles panel

Titles panel

The Titles panel (see Figure 8–12) provides options for creating intro and ending screens for your slideshow. The title screens can be made simply of a solid color background or you can use identity plates to apply text or graphics. You could instead design custom images to use as intro and ending screens.

To enable one or both screens, tick the appropriate checkbox(es). You can then apply the settings for each screen independently.

Considering the ability to use straight text and/or graphics files, the options here are endless. The only potential shortcoming to this feature is that you can't independently control the timing of intro and title screens. The intro screen will have the same timing as the rest of the slides, as will the ending.

However, if the slideshow isn't set to automatically repeat, the ending screen will show indefinitely. (I'm hoping future versions of Lightroom will provide more control over title and ending screens, including support for videos and animated text for credits, even if it's just using GIFs).



Figure 8-12

If you want to make identity plates to show textual titles or credits, consider setting up the text in a text editor first, then copy and paste the text into the Identity Plate Editor.

Design title screens and backgrounds in Photoshop

For the most control over the look of your backgrounds, set them up in Photoshop and import them to the catalog as JPGs or TIFFs. You can then insert them in the slideshow as slides of their own wherever you like, or drag and drop to apply them as the backgrounds or identity plates for photo slides.

⌘+6 or Ctrl+6

Open/close the Playback panel

Playback panel

Here, you set the parameters for the playback of the slideshow; see Figure 8-13.

To add audio to the playback, tick the box to enable the Soundtrack. Beginning in Lightroom 3, it is no longer necessary to use an iTunes playlist for this. As a matter of fact, Lightroom no longer supports the use of a playlist at all; you can only assign one audio file to the slideshow. If you need a long soundtrack using multiple songs or audio clips, you will need to edit them all together into one file first. Lightroom can use MP3 or AAC format audio files, but can't work with audio files that are encrypted by digital rights management (DRM) encoding (as the warning icon on the example shows).



Figure 8-13

Click the button labeled Select Music. This opens a dialog box from which you can choose a single audio file from any connected drive.

To the right is a button labeled “Fit to Music”. This feature only applies when the Slide Duration checkbox (below) is ticked. This allows you to automatically set the length of the slideshow to match the song duration.

If you want to manually advance the slides during playback, leave the Slide Duration box unchecked. Otherwise, to have the slides advance automatically, tick the Slide Duration checkbox. Using the Slides value, you can then manually set the amount of time that each slide will be displayed, or click the Fit to Music button above and the timing will be calculated automatically.

The Fades setting determines the blend between outgoing and incoming slides. Fades won't show when manually advancing the slideshow.

The fade Color can also be set here, which will blend the selected color with the photos being faded together, as well as transitions to and from the intro and ending screens. This can help make your slide transitions appear smooth.

If you're not using Fit to Music, you can set the Slide and Fades timing however you wish. If you are using Fit to Music, the Fades setting has a direct relationship to the Slide setting. Lowering one value will increase the other in order to produce equal spacing for all slides.

Ticking the Random Order checkbox will show all the slides randomly. If you enable repeat, the random order will apply during each loop, so it's possible that the same photo will be shown twice in a row. If you're presenting photos from a group of people, Random Order might be a good idea as it doesn't show any preference. But if you're just showing your own work, or have a specific sequence to use, you'll probably want to leave this unchecked.

Finally, the Repeat checkbox determines whether the slideshow will automatically loop to the beginning and play again after reaching the last slide or the ending screen. You don't have the option to set a specific number of loops. If Repeat is enabled, you must stop the slideshow manually by pressing the Esc key.

Save a new template

After you've designed a slideshow you like, be sure to save it as a template. Click the + button on the Template Browser panel header and give the template a meaningful name.

Update a template

To save changes you've made to an existing template, right-click or Ctrl+Click on the template, and from the popup menu, choose Update with Current Settings. (You can't update Lightroom's built-in templates this way.)

**Option+Return
or Alt+Enter**
Preview the
slideshow

PREVIEW THE SLIDESHOW

You can see how the slideshow will look by previewing it in the main content area. This is essentially the same as playing the slideshow, but it doesn't blackout or fill the screen while playing. In most cases, while you're previewing the slideshow this way, you can also make adjustments to settings and the changes are applied—in real time—as the preview continues.

To start previewing the slideshow, click the Preview button at the bottom of the right panel, or the arrow button on the toolbar.

To exit the preview, press the Stop button in the Toolbar (see Figure 8–14) or press Esc.

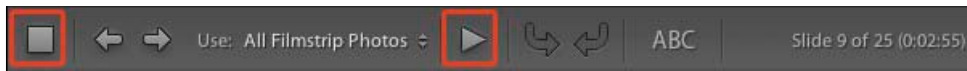


Figure 8-14

Color spaces and previews

Lightroom slideshows (and slideshow previews) use the Adobe RGB (1998) color space to render the files to screen. For this reason, in very rare cases, your photos might look different in the slideshow than they do in the other modules. Adobe RGB is a larger color space than sRGB (which is used for the Web module) but smaller than ProPhoto, which is used for high quality previews in Develop. Usually, only some colors will be affected—those with extreme saturation in certain hues like pure blues, reds and oranges. In most cases, this shouldn't cause a problem. I just wanted you to be aware of the reasons, if this should occur.

PRESENTING OR EXPORTING THE SLIDESHOW

When you've finished designing your slideshow, you have four presentation options:

Return or Enter

Play the slideshow

1. Play the slideshow in Lightroom. Click the play button at the bottom of the right panel, or use the shortcut. This blacks out the display, starts the slideshow immediately and shows all the slides full screen. You can pause the slideshow by pressing the space bar. To stop the slideshow, press Esc.

Space bar

Pause the slideshow (press again to resume)

Apply attributes while the slideshow plays

To apply attributes while a slideshow is playing, you can use the keyboard shortcuts for ratings (0-5), flags (P, X, U) and color labels (6-9) .

Esc

Stop the slideshow

Play the slideshow on a second display

If you have a secondary display connected to your computer, you can play the slideshow there. In the Slideshow module, under the Window→Secondary Display menu, choose the option for Slideshow, or press ⌘+Option+Shift+Enter or Ctrl+Alt+Shift+Enter.

Playback problems

If the slideshow stops playing, shows blank slides, or jumps back to the first slide at the wrong time, it's likely because large previews haven't been rendered for those photos. Lightroom 3 offers a new feature to Prepare Previews in Advance, which you enable by checking the box at the bottom of the Playback panel.

⌘+J or Ctrl+J

Export the slideshow as a PDF

⌘+Option+J or Ctrl+Alt+J

Export the slideshow as a video file

⌘+Shift+J or Ctrl+Shift+J

Export the slideshow as JPG files

2. Export the slideshow as a PDF file. Click the “Export PDF” button at the bottom of the left panel set. A dialog box appears, providing options for the exported file; see Figure 8–15. If you want Adobe Acrobat and Acrobat Reader to auto-play the slideshow, and show it full-screen, you must enable the option for “Automatically show full screen” (or you can change these kinds of settings by editing the PDF with the full version of Acrobat). The PDF file will not contain a Soundtrack.

3. Export the slideshow as a movie file. A single mp4 movie file (H.264) will be created containing the entire slideshow with all title screens, slides, and transitions. If a music file was selected, it will be included as well. (However, if the music track is longer than the slideshow, it will fade out and the movie will end after the last slide.) The Save dialog box allows you to specify the location to save the new movie file and provides a menu to select the size of the video; see Figure 8–16. These movies can be shared online or optimized for mobile devices.

4. Export the slideshow as a set of JPG files. Select the menu command Slideshow→Export JPEG Slideshow, or use the shortcut. Each slide will be saved as a single JPG file. Title and ending screens are not created. Output sharpening is not an option. The Save dialog box provides controls for the size and compression level of the files; see Figure 8–17.

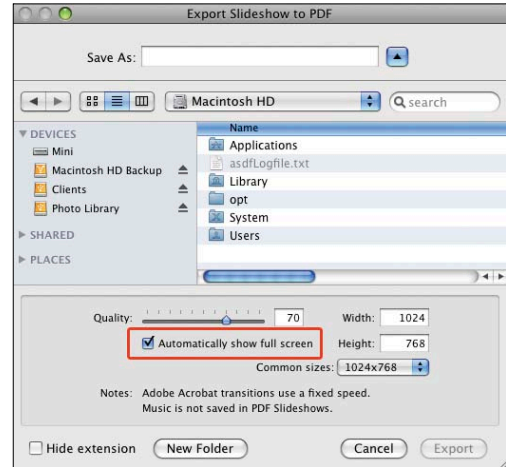


Figure 8-15

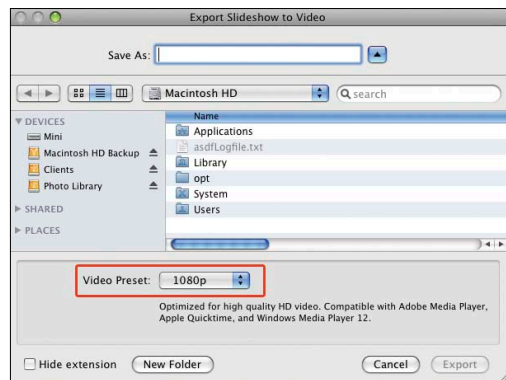


Figure 8-16

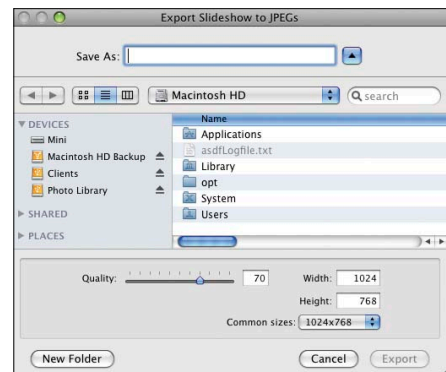


Figure 8-17