Merging two catalogs into one

How to merge two separate Lightroom catalogs into a single, master catalog

The most effective way to work in Lightroom is to keep all your files stored in the one catalog. However, there may be valid reasons why you might wish to keep some of your photos archived in separate catalogs. This article shows how you might go about merging two catalogs into one and export the edit settings in a merged catalog back to the original catalogs.

Merging two catalogs into one

For most Lightroom users, one catalog is all you need. For example, I have one main catalog that is used to store everything that I import into Lightroom: work and personal projects alike. Basically, I am able to keep all my photo files on two internal 2 TB hard drives. These are then backed up to two other 2 TB external disks which are normally stored away from the computer for safe keeping. I also have a large collection of image files that are stored on a number of other hard drives. These are used to archive all the professional studio shoots that were worked on in the early part of the last decade (and earlier). I find there is no point cluttering up the main catalog with the image files that are mainly kept off-line. At the same time I don't like having lots of additional hard drives constantly powered up just so that once or twice a year I can access a file that's on one of them. Furthermore, there are an awful lot of duplicate version files in this archive that date back to pre-Lightroom days. The solution I have adopted has been to keep separate catalogs: one for all personal work and current work files and one for older work files and other redundant images. I find this allows me to keep the main catalog looking tidier and easier to manage.

But what if I wanted to work with the contents from both catalogs at once? There are times where it is not convenient to have to keep switching from one catalog to the other and I need to see everything that is on the system in one catalog. For example, I might want to reconcile the keywords between the two catalogs and I can do this kind of tidying up by working on a merged "uber" catalog. The following step-by-step example shows how I go about this, by merging the two catalogs into a single, combined catalog (see **Figure 1** below).

Figure 1   *In the following steps I show how I created a master, merged catalog that could be used to interchange updates with two subcatalogs: my main Lightroom catalog and an archive off-line catalog.*

> **NOTE**
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> **The merge catalog steps shown here lets you synchronize metadata settings such as IPTC metadata, keywords, image ratings, and Develop settings adjustments from one catalog to another and back again. If you wish to share other Lightroom settings such as develop presets or Print module templates, you will need to make sure you have opted to store the presets with the catalog (see main book).**

1. My main photo catalog is stored on internal drives that are regularly backed up to other external drives. As you can see, there are over 95,000 photos in this catalog. They mostly comprise of photos that have been taken over the last few years and other images I need to access regularly.

2. I also have a secondary off-line catalog that is used to manage the older image files, which are stored on a separate bunch of disks. These are mostly kept off-line and only switched on when I need to access the older data.
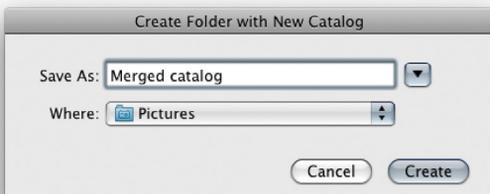
3. Let's now look at how I was able to merge the above two catalogs into a single catalog. To do this, I went to the File menu in Lightroom and chose New Catalog… This opened the "Create Folder with New Catalog" dialog shown here, which I named "*Merged catalog*".

Merged catalog.lrcat
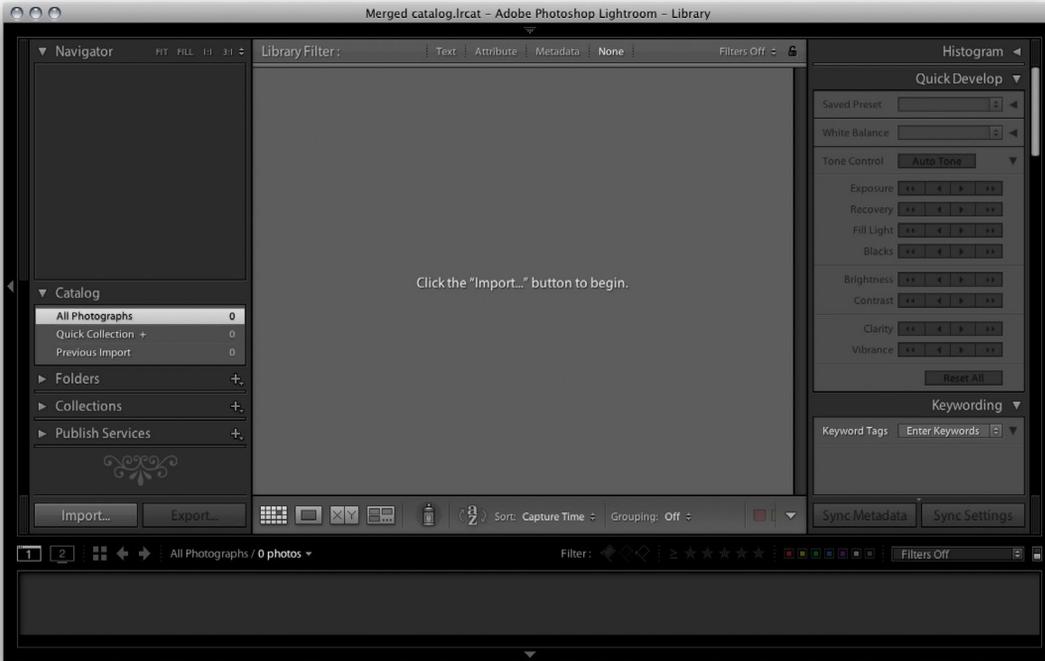
4. When I clicked the Create button in the previous dialog, this required Lightroom to close down the current catalog and relaunch, opening with the newly created catalog, which to begin with contained no photos.

Off-line catalog.lrcat
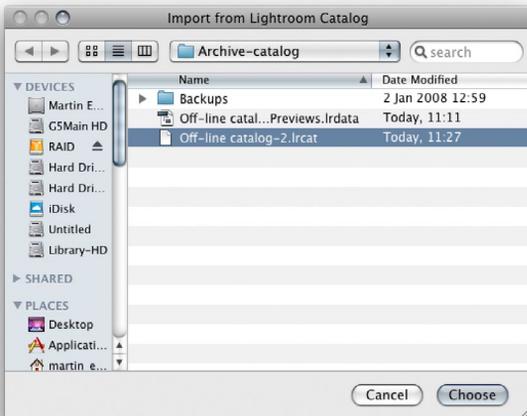
5. I was now ready to merge the first catalog. I went to the File menu again and chose Import from Catalog... I used the first dialog shown here to select the catalog to import from (in this case, the Off-line catalog) and in the second dialog, under File Handling chose "Add new photos to catalog without moving."

6. Here is how the Merged catalog looked after importing from the off-line catalog. At this stage it was a mirror of the catalog that was just been imported.
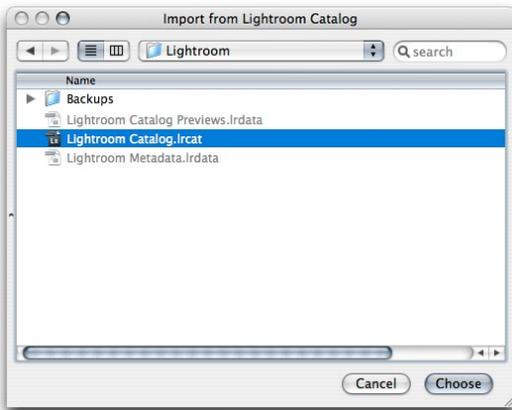
7. Here I repeated the same steps as shown in Step 5. I chose File ⇨ Import from Catalog, but this time selected the main Lightroom catalog. In the Import from Catalog dialog File Handling section I again chose "Add new photos to catalog without moving".

Merged catalog.lrcat

8. Here is how things looked after both catalogs had been imported into the one Merged catalog. I could now do things like edit the keywords for the combined catalogs, make changes to the ratings and labels, and also edit the develop settings (providing the photos were accessible online).

Lightroom Catalog.lrcat

9. Back in the original Lightroom catalog, here is how one of the folders looked before the catalog had been imported and edited in the Merged catalog.
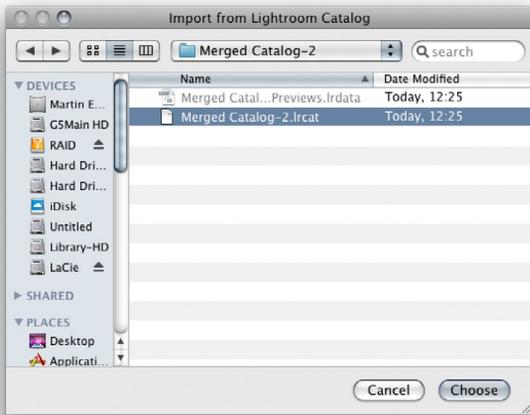
10. With the original Lightroom catalog open, I went to the File menu and chose Import from Catalog… Here, I selected the Merged catalog as the source and most important of all, in the File Handling section I chose "Don't import new photos." In the Replace section I chose "Metadata and develop settings only." These settings ensure that you don't import all the photos from the other catalog and that only the metadata edits get imported back to the original catalog.

11. Here is how the same Lightroom catalog folder looked after the recently edited changes in the Merged catalog had been updated to the main catalog.