

Photos Takeout User Guide & FAQ

Version 2.7 (4 October 2024)

[Customer Support: Click here](#)

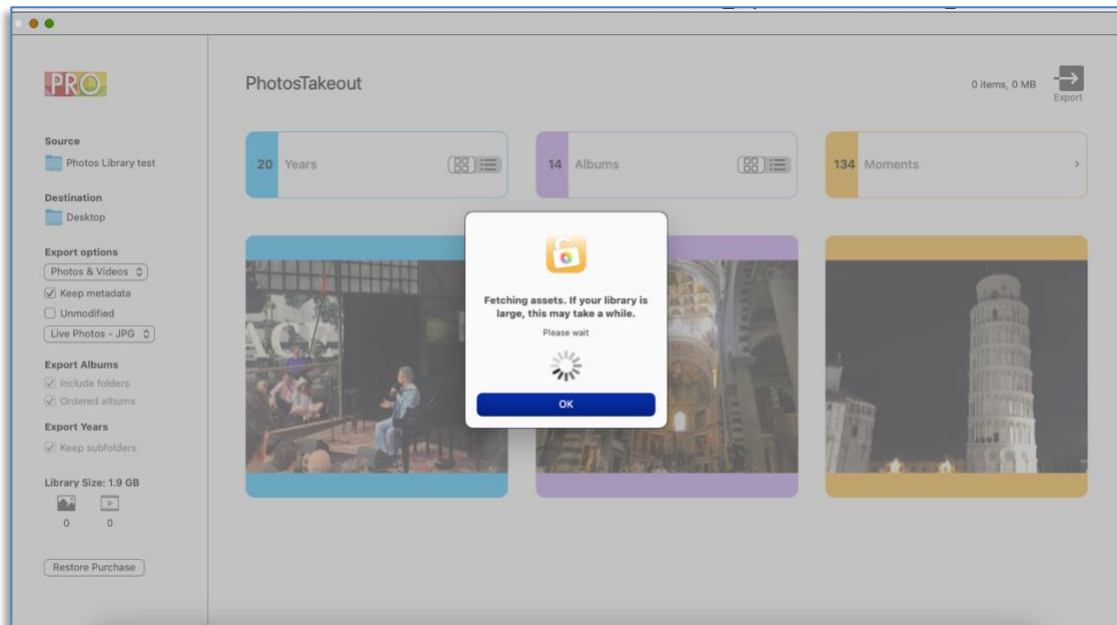
Photos Takeout exports photos and videos from the Mac Photos library in neat folders. It's easy to use: Just select years, albums or days and click Export.

Before starting your export, ensure that:

- ❖ Photos Takeout has access permissions¹. In **System Settings**² > Security & Privacy > Privacy > Photos, the Photos Takeout box must be check marked.
- ❖ The **Source** library you select is your **System Photo Library**³. Check Photos **Settings** and change if necessary.
- ❖ The drive on which your Photos library resides has enough free space (If you have photos in iCloud, Photos Takeout will first download and then export them⁴).
- ❖ If **Destination** is an external drive, it is formatted as APFS / extended journaled⁵.

Control Panel

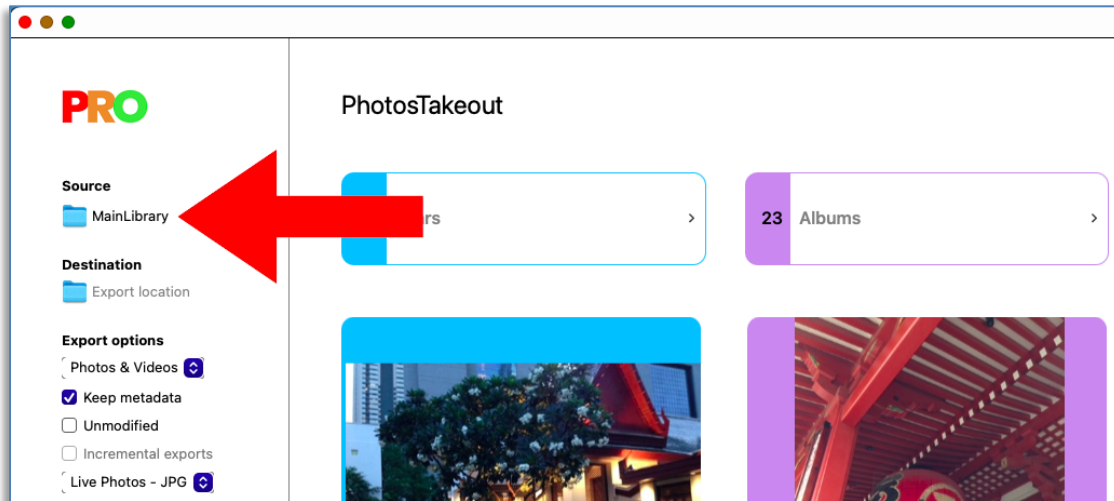
On launching Photos Takeout, you'll see this screen:



In the left pane, specify the **source** Photos library, the **destination** and export preferences. In the right pane, select which Years, Albums or Days to export. Click **Export** to start exporting.

Left pane

Source: Photos Takeout will export photos from this library. If you have more than one Photos library, ensure that you choose the current system library as the source.



If you set Source as a library other than the system library, none of the iCloud-based, edited and referenced items will be exported. To export from a library that's not currently the system library, first set it as the system library in Photos > Settings (or Preferences).

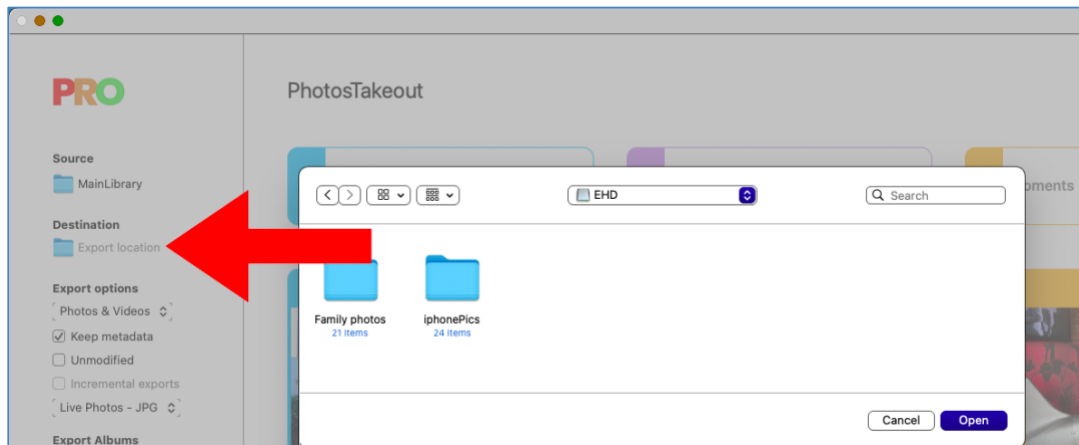


By default, the Photos Library is located in the Pictures folder. Select it, then click **Open**. See footnote⁶ if you have difficulty in selecting the library).



Depending on your library's size, it may take a few seconds to several minutes to load. A 100GB library may take 2-3 minutes to load; 1TB library much longer.

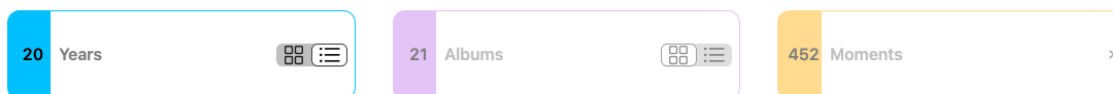
Destination: In the left pane, click below Destination and select where to save the exported folders, e.g. Mac's desktop, Dropbox, Google Drive, EHD etc. The destination location must have enough free space to accommodate the selected items, and preferably be formatted as APFS or extended journaled (See Footnote 5 at the end of this Guide for other formats).



Export options: Use these filters to fine tune the selection of items to be exported.

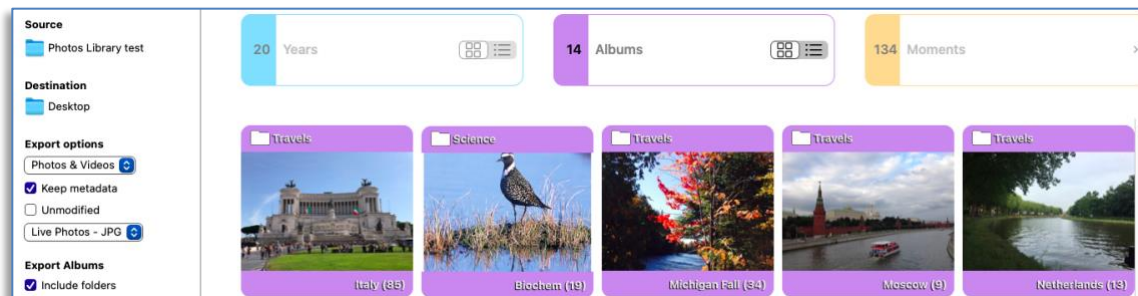
- **Keep metadata:** Check marking this will embed all EXIF/IPTC metadata as well as any titles, descriptions, keywords or locations that you have added in Photos. If you want to remove metadata for privacy or other reasons, uncheck this box.
- **Unmodified:** Leave this box unchecked to export the latest versions of photos and videos with all your edits. To export the unmodified originals, check it.
- **Keep Folders:** If the selected albums are in folders, check marking this box will export the albums along with the folder-subfolder hierarchy.
- **Keep ordered:** If the photos have been custom-arranged in an album, check mark this box to preserve the sequence. Items in the album will be renamed as album-name 000n.filetype (Feature available only in Catalina and later).
- **Keep subfolders:** When exporting Years, check this box to get monthly subfolders. They will be named 1 (for Jan), 2 (Feb) etc. For Moments, this option is greyed out.
- **Media selector:** To choose between Photos & Videos, Photos Only, Videos only.
- **Live selector:** To choose between exporting only the JPG component or JPG + MOV.

Right pane



To export ALL years, ALL albums or ALL moments/dates, click on the relevant top-level button, and click Export.

To select specific years, albums etc., click the relevant button. This opens **Icon View**, which shows the selected category's folders, item counts, and thumbnails. For a more granular selection, switch to **List View** by clicking on its icon within the Year or Album tabs⁷



To select multiple non-contiguous folders, ⌘-click them. For contiguous folders, click the first folder, then hold down Shift and click the last folder in the range.

After this, click **Export** button on top right. A progress indicator will show % complete. If any photos aren't found or fail to export, you'll get an alert. See FAQ for what to do.

Free Trial and Upgrading

- **Free version:** To check out how the app works. Exports only one photo per folder.
- **Power version:** For Photos libraries of up to 50GB in size. Unlimited exports.
- **Pro version:** For larger libraries (No limitation on library size).
- **Power Up:** If you already have the Power version, the Power Up in-app purchase lets you upgrade to Pro Power version by paying just the price difference. Do not buy the Pro version separately, because then the App Store won't know to apply a discount.

Contact Us for Support

Click **Help** > **Contact Us** in the app's top menu bar. Include a detailed description of the issue and, if possible, a screenshot of the issue. Also mention:

- MacOS version, Photos library's total size (GB) and items count,
- Location of Photos library (whether on Mac or EHD?)
- Location of photos (in Mac Photos, iCloud, referenced, or a combination of these)
- Export destination (Mac, external drive, NAS, cloud storage etc.)

FAQ and Troubleshooting

GENERAL

1. I have a multi-terabyte library. Will Photos Takeout handle it?

Yes, the Pro version can handle libraries of any size. For small libraries (up to 50GB), you only need the Power version. Library size equals photos saved in the Mac Photos library plus those in iCloud and any referenced photos.

2. Are photos and videos exported in the original or reduced resolution?

Photos are exported in original resolution. For lossy formats e.g. JPG, the file size (MB) may differ a bit but resolution (MP) stays the same.

3. Is metadata preserved when exporting, for both photos and videos?

Yes. Check 'Keep metadata' box to retain the EXIF and IPTC metadata, as well as Title, Description, Location and Keywords that you've added in Photos app.

4. I have two Macs. Do I need to buy two licenses to use Photos Takeout on both?

No: You can use one license on up to 6 Macs. Log into the other Mac using the Apple ID with which you purchased the app, and the 'Get' button in the App Store will change to the Download (cloud with downward arrow), indicating that it's a free download.

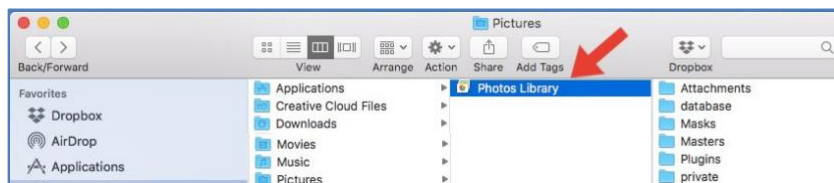
USING THE APP

1. Where is my Photos Library located? I can't seem to find it.

Its default location is in User/Pictures folder, and it has the same icon as the Photos app. If you don't see the library there, or can't find the Pictures folder, click Finder > Go > Home > Pictures, drag it into the Favorites, then select it from there.

2. I launched the app but couldn't select the Photos library: On trying to select it, the 'Open' button was greyed out.

Select the library (Red arrow in the screenshot below), not the expanded folders within it. Single-click to select the Photos Library, don't double-click on it.



3. How to export from a Photos library that's *not* the system library?

For Catalina or later, Photos Takeout exports photos stored in iCloud, edited photos and referenced items *only* if the system library is set as the source. To change the system library, open Photos > Preferences/Settings > General > Set the desired library as the system library, as explained [here](#). Close Photos app, then launch Photos Takeout.

For Mojave and older, you must first download photos stored in iCloud to the Mac Photos library, then export with Photos Takeout. Source doesn't have to be the system library.

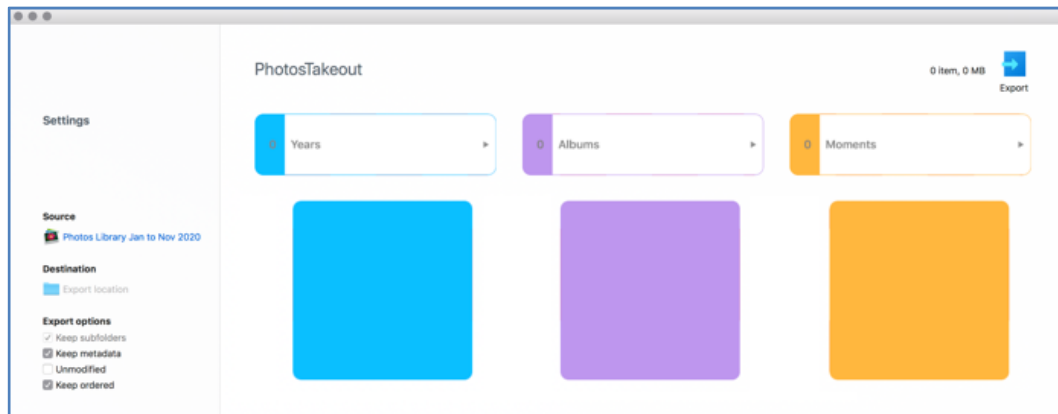
4. I get 'Error: Database is locked message' on launching the app.

If the Photos app is open, quit it. Then open Activity Monitor > Select Photos Agent and photolibraryd > Press (x) to quit the processes. This should resolve the error.

5. There are two user accounts on my Mac. Can Photos Takeout run from both?

Yes, provided that Photos Takeout is installed in the shared Applications folder.

5. App shows zero items in Years, Albums and Moments. Nothing happens when I click the Years, Albums or Moments buttons (Screenshot below):



Open Settings (System Preferences) > Security & Privacy > Privacy > Photos, and check mark Photos Takeout. Further, even if Source is already set, click it and reselect the system library. This grants Photos Takeout access to your library.

Another reason may be version mismatch, e.g. trying to use a Catalina library on a Big Sur Mac, or a Sonoma library on a Mojave Mac, or an iPhoto library on any Mac.

6. How to select multiple albums or years for export?

To select all items, Press Command-A or click Edit > Select All. To select multiple non-contiguous items, hold down the Command key and click each item. To select a range of contiguous items, click the first item, then hold down the Shift key and click the last item. Or drag with mouse to select the items within the selection rectangle.

7. Some items failed to export. Error message: “X files exported. Y not found.”



Several possible reasons; the main ones are listed [here](#). Try to eliminate these. If the problem persists, contact us with the details listed in **OTHER** section below.

8. How to download photos stored in iCloud to Photos app on my Mac?

You need to do this only in Mojave or older. In Catalina and later, Photos Takeout can automatically download and export photos from iCloud. To manually download photos from iCloud, go to Photos > Preferences > iCloud > select Download Originals to Mac. Once they are downloaded, use Photos Takeout to export.

9. I added Titles to photos, and in the Photos app I can see the original file names as well as Titles. But after exporting, I only see one name. Why?

Apple Photos stores original file names as well as Titles. Photos Takeout keeps Titles if present, otherwise the original names. Also, if multiple photos have the same name, they'll be sequentially numbered e.g. Vacation 1.jpg, Vacation 2.jpg etc.

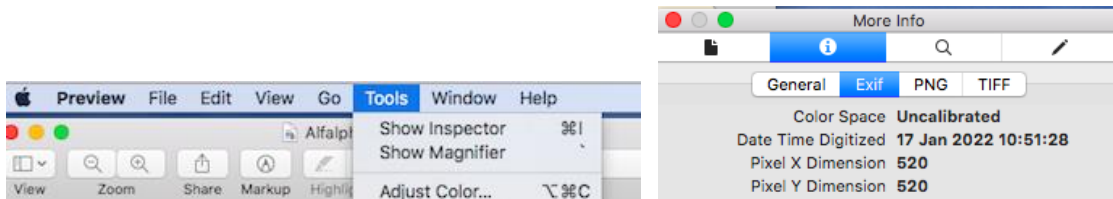
10. I exported photos to external HD but they're all zero kB and can't be opened. The error message says "File could not be opened because it is empty"

Check the EHD format (Right-click EHD icon on the desktop > Get Info). It should be APFS or Extended Journaled, not MSDOS (fat 32) or ex FAT.

To check whether EHD format or permissions are causing this problem, try exporting a single year or album to your **Mac desktop** and see if it exports correctly.

11. The original dates were not retained in the photos that I exported. They all show "Created" date as "Today".

Are you looking at Created date in Finder? Don't. Finder shows when a photo was saved i.e. downloaded to its current location. Open the photo with Preview > click Tools > Show Inspector > EXIF, and you'll see the EXIF Date.



12. Why did formats of some HEIC files change to JPG upon exporting?

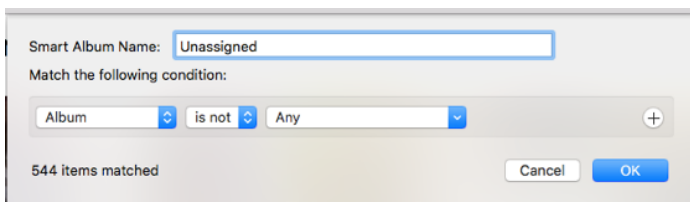
Photos Takeout exports *edited* HEIC items as JPG and *edited* MP4 files as MOV. This is consistent with how Photos does it. This doesn't happen for unmodified originals.

13. How to export shared albums or smart albums?

You can find **shared albums** and **favorites** album under the Albums tab. Select and export these just like other albums. The Photos app strips most metadata from shared albums. To export a **smart album**, save it as a regular album under My Albums, then you'll be able to export it like other albums.

14. I want a complete backup. If I export all albums, that won't be complete because photos not assigned to any album will be left out. What to do?

In Photos app, click File > New Smart Album, and use the following settings to create a smart album of all unassigned photos. Then convert it to a regular album and export:



15. I can export Year- and Date-wise folders, but how to export month-wise folders?

Export Years and check mark the 'Keep subfolders' box in the Export Options panel.

16. How to avoid files being renamed as albumname-NNN when I export an album?

Uncheck the *Export Albums > Ordered Albums* box ('Ordered Albums' option is for users who've custom-arranged photos in albums, and want to retain this ordering on export.)

17. How does Photos Takeout handle export of raw images?

Raw photos may have been imported into Photos as raw-only or raw-jpeg pairs. For both cases, Photos Takeout exports according to the following rule:

Unmodified check-marked: Only the unedited original RAW file will be exported.

Unmodified unchecked: Only the latest edited JPG version will be exported.

18. My current system library on Mac syncs with iCloud. I also have a library on EHD that's too big for Mac or iCloud. If I set this as my system library for using with Photos Takeout, won't it start uploading to iCloud?

No need to upload the photos to iCloud – or even to Mac. Use the following workflow:

- Temporarily disconnect the Mac from iCloud. [See how](#).
- Connect EHD to Mac. In Photos Preferences, make the EHD library the system library.
- Launch Photos Takeout and export whatever you want
- Reverse Step 2 (Disconnect EHD; revert to normal Photos and iCloud settings).

19. I use iCloud Photos, with *Optimize Mac Storage* checked in Photos Settings. If I export all photos, will everything be downloaded to Mac before export? What if there isn't enough free disk space on the Mac?

In Catalina and later, Photos Takeout fetches items from iCloud. In Mojave and older, you have to download them into the Photos library and then export. If your Mac doesn't have free space, move your Photos library to an EHD ([See how](#)), set this library as the system library (in Photos > Settings), wait for it to sync with iCloud, then export. This will download items from iCloud to the library on EHD instead of Mac.

20. The progress indicator is stuck at X% and the app seems to be hanging.

Photos in iCloud are first downloaded to Mac Photos – so ensure that your Mac has enough disk space to accommodate everything. Downloads from iCloud also take long if you have many files or a slow wi-fi. Very rarely, the progress indicator may run ahead and wait for exports to catch up. Please wait for the process to finish.

21. In my Photos Settings, “Copy items to the Photos library” is unchecked, i.e. photos are stored as referenced files. These failed to export.

In Big Sur and later, you need to give Photos Takeout full disk access. Quit Photos Takeout. Open System Preferences > Security & Privacy > Privacy > in Left pane, select Full Disk Access > In Right pane, click (+) and add Photos Takeout to the list and check mark it > Reboot the Mac. Now the referenced files will be exported.

22. Why is face recognition information not exported as part of metadata?

Because face data is not part of metadata. Workaround: Add names of people in the photos as keywords (Go to **People** view in Photos > click on a face > photos will be displayed > Select all > right click, Get Info > add the person's name in keywords).

23. If I re-export albums or years, will I get duplicate files and folders or updated assets including those added since last export?

Depends on whether the **Incremental Exports** box is checked on not:

If it is checked AND you've subscribed to this service, only the assets added or modified since the last export are exported. Please see the Incremental Exports guide for details.

If not exporting incrementally, selecting the same location (path) will add duplicate files in the previously exported folders; e.g. file XYZ will be duplicated as XYZ0. If you edited this file since the last export, XYZ0 will reflect the edits. If you export to a different path, all the folders will be created afresh and the latest set of photos saved in them.

24. My Live Photos were exported as JPG/HEIF. What about the video?

Click on the Live Photos selector in the Export Options panel, and select the dropdown option JPG + MOV. The videos will be saved in a separate folder.

OTHER

1. Does Photos Takeout work with iPhoto or Aperture libraries?

No, Photos Takeout is only meant for Photos app. Not iPhoto or Aperture.

2. I have an old Photos library (probably Mojave or Big Sur) on an external drive, and Photos Takeout on a newer Mac. How to export from this library on the new Mac?

You must first update the Photos library. Make a copy of the library, connect the external drive to the new Mac, and open the library with the **Photos** app. You'll be asked whether to update it; say yes. Once it is updated, quit Photos and use Photos Takeout to export.

3. My question isn't answered here. How to get **Customer Support?**

Click **Help > Contact Us** in the app's top menu bar. Include a detailed description of the issue; if possible, a screenshot of the issue; and the following information:

- MacOS version, Photos library's total size (GB) and items count,
- Location of Photos library: On Mac or EHD? If EHD, confirm that it is APFS/Extended Journaled
- Location of photos (in Mac Photos, iCloud, referenced, or a combination of these)
- Export destination (Mac, external drive, NAS, cloud storage etc.)

KNOWN ISSUES

1. Some features aren't available in Mojave and older. For example, photos and videos saved in iCloud must be downloaded to the local library before export; keywords are not exported; new features like List View and Incremental Exports aren't available.
2. Metadata added to **videos** via the Photos app is not retained upon export (Note that this also happens on exporting with Photos app – Date & Time original are retained only when you exported unedited originals, not in edited videos).
3. When exporting the folder-subfolder-albums hierarchy (with 'Keep folders' check marked), the albums and folders must have distinct names. If an album has the same name as its parent folder, photos will be saved in the parent folder.

Follow Photos Takeout on [Facebook](#) for the latest news on features, tips & tricks etc.

Check out our other apps:



[Pic Scanner Gold](#)
(iOS)

Created in 2013, Pic Scanner was the world's first mobile app for scanning and auto-cropping multiple photos at a time. It offers unlimited scanning and great features for a one-time price. No subscription or in-app purchases. One million users!



[SnipTag](#)
(macOS)

Two powerful tools for photo scanning projects:
1) **Snip**: Scan multiple photos per scan with a scanner or digital camera. Batch-crop them *all* with just one click.
2) **Tag**: Add captions (dates, descriptions, locations) and metadata to photos in batch mode.

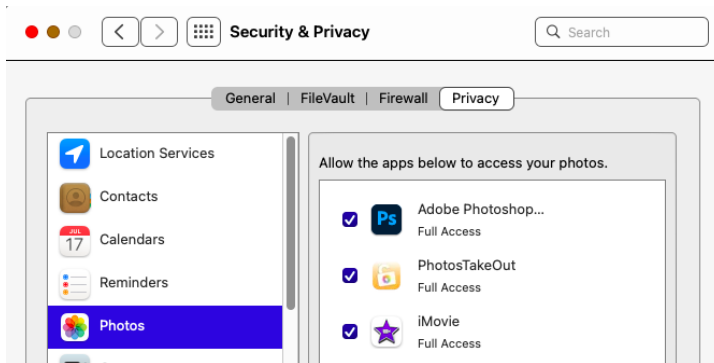


[Joggle](#)
(iOS and Android)

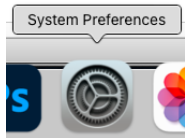
A completely original, mildly cerebral word game inspired by crossword puzzles. Thousands of one-minute puzzles to entertain and exercise your brain. Free. Try it now!

Footnotes

¹ Permissions need to be checked only if you are using macOS Big Sur or later. If Photos Takeout is listed in the right pane as shown below, check mark it to grant Full Access to the Photos Library:

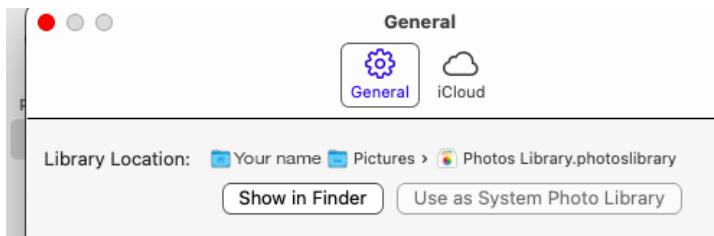


² **System Settings** (macOS Ventura and later) was called System Preferences in older versions of macOS:



³ If you have only one Photos library, then it is the System Photo Library and you don't need to worry about this requirement. If you have multiple Photos libraries, only one of them can be the System Photo Library. Only this one syncs with iCloud and other devices and can support Shared Albums – so if you want to export iCloud-based photos or shared albums, the Source must be the System Photo Library. Also, if you use a non-System Photo Library as the source, the photos containing edits may not export correctly.

If you have more than one library and need to export from one that's not System Photo Library, go to Photos > Settings > General (See below), click to the right of Library Location, navigate to the library and set it as the System Photo Library. This will turn off iCloud, and you may get an alert that any photos that are only in iCloud will be removed from your (iCloud-synced) library. Let it happen. Then set this new System Photo Library as the Source in Photos Takeout and do your export. After it's done, again open Settings and change the System Photo Library back to the original Library. It'll sync with iCloud and photos that were removed will be restored.

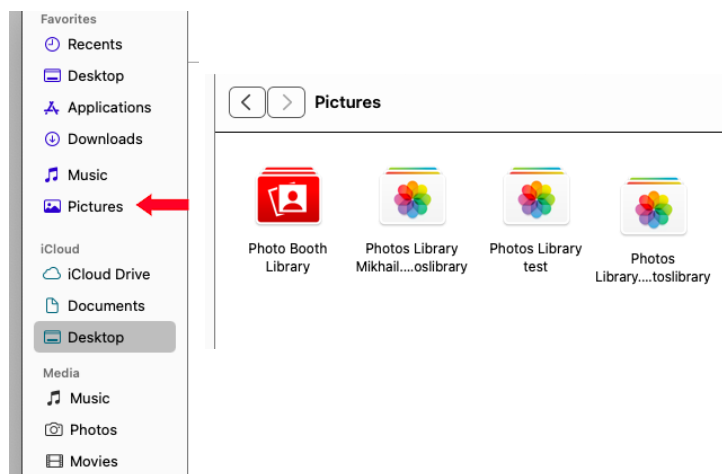


⁴ Are your full resolution photos stored in iCloud and your Mac's set to **Optimize Mac Storage**? If yes, before exporting with Photos Takeout, check the free space on the Mac. Photos Takeout will first download all photos from iCloud to your Photos Library, and then export them to the Destination you've specified. If the Destination is your Mac hard drive, then you need enough free space to download photos from iCloud AND for the export folders. If the Destination is an external drive but the Photos library is on Mac, you still need enough space on the Mac to download photos from iCloud.

Not enough space? Free up space by moving your Photos library to an external drive, as explained [here](#).

⁵ We recommend APFS / Extended Journaled formats throughout this document because they work best with Apple hardware. Don't use FAT32, especially if you have videos, as it has a 4GB file size limit. EXFAT doesn't have the 4GB limit and *may* work. If you must use an EXFAT drive, format it with the Mac's Disk Utility and not on a Windows PC. Don't use NTFS – both MacOS and Windows can read it but MacOS can't write to it. If exporting to an EXFAT drive or NAS, do a small test export to see if files are saved correctly.

⁶ To select the Source Library, navigate to its location on your Mac or external drive. On the Mac, its default location is in the **Pictures** folder (Marked by red arrow below, NOT Media > Photos further down), and its icon is the same as that of the Photos app. Single-click to select it, then click Open. Don't double-click the Library icon – doing so will display the folders within it, which you don't want.



⁷ When you launch Photos Takeout, it opens in Icon View, but you can switch to List View using the little icons in the Years or Albums tabs. List View allows more granular selection of months within years, and reduces the scrolling and searching effort if you have a large number of albums and folders:

