



FREE SYSTEM · NO EMAIL REQUIRED

Files, backups, and not losing a job.

The file pipeline, the 3-2-1 rule, and a naming convention that means future-you can find any frame in ten seconds. Boring on purpose.

Every photographer who has lost a card has a story about the drive home. This is the ten minutes of setup that means you never get one. None of it is clever. All of it is the difference between a business and a hobby with invoices.

The file pipeline

Same five stages, same folder structure, every single project, so future-you can find anything in under ten seconds:

STAGE	WHAT HAPPENS	FOLDER
Ingest	Copy off the cards. Never move, never cut. Verify before you format anything.	01 - raw
Cull	Pick the keepers. This is where hours go, so do it once, properly.	02 - selects
Edit	Project files, versions, work in progress.	03 - work
Deliver	Finished exports, named for the client, ready to upload.	04 - final
Archive	The whole thing, closed, moved to the archive drive.	05 - archive

The 3-2-1 backup rule

Three copies of anything that matters, on two different kinds of media, with one copy offsite. It is non-negotiable from the day someone first pays you. Client work you lose is a client you lose, and possibly a lawsuit you gain.

COPY	WHERE	WHEN
1— Working	The fast drive you actually edit from	At ingest
2— Local backup	A second physical drive, different make if you can	Same day as the shoot
3— Offsite	Cloud, or a drive that lives somewhere else entirely	Within the week

THE DRIVE-HOME RULE

Back up before you leave the building. Two cards, or card plus a portable drive, **before the car**. A single copy on a card in your pocket is not a backup, it is a coin flip. This is the one habit that has saved more jobs than any piece of gear ever made.

A naming convention that survives four years

Date first, so things sort chronologically. Client second. Job third. All lowercase, hyphens not spaces, no special characters that break on someone else's machine.

THING	PATTERN	EXAMPLE
Project folder	YYYY-MM-DD_client_job	2026-09-19_taylor_navy-chief
Delivered photo	client-job-###.jpg	taylor-navy-chief-042.jpg
Delivered film	client-job-vN.mp4	taylor-navy-chief-recap-v3.mp4
Vertical cut	client-job-vert-N.mp4	taylor-navy-chief-vert-2.mp4
Signed paperwork	YYYY-MM-DD_client_contract.pdf	2026-08-24_taylor_contract.pdf

Never name anything final. You will end up with final - final - v2 - USE - THIS, and so will your client. Use version numbers.

What to keep, and for how long

WHAT	KEEP FOR	WHY
Delivered finals	Forever, they are small	Portfolio, reprints, the client who lost their copy
Selects	2 to 3 years	Re-edits, a client coming back for more
Full raw footage	6 to 12 months, then decide	Enormous. Keep it for jobs that could recur.
Signed contracts and releases	Forever	The day you need one, you really need one
Invoices	7 years, or whatever your accountant says	Tax

The end-of-job checklist

- ☐ Cards copied and verified before leaving the building
- ☐ Second local copy made the same day
- ☐ Offsite copy running within the week
- ☐ Project folder named correctly, all five stages present
- ☐ Finals exported and named by version, not by feeling
- ☐ Signed contract and any releases filed with the project
- ☐ Invoice sent the same day as delivery
- ☐ Cards formatted in camera, not on the computer, only after all three copies exist
- ☐ Project moved to archive and removed from the working drive

Test a restore once a year. A backup you have never restored from is a theory. Pull one old job back from the archive and open it. It takes twenty minutes and it is the only way to know the system works.