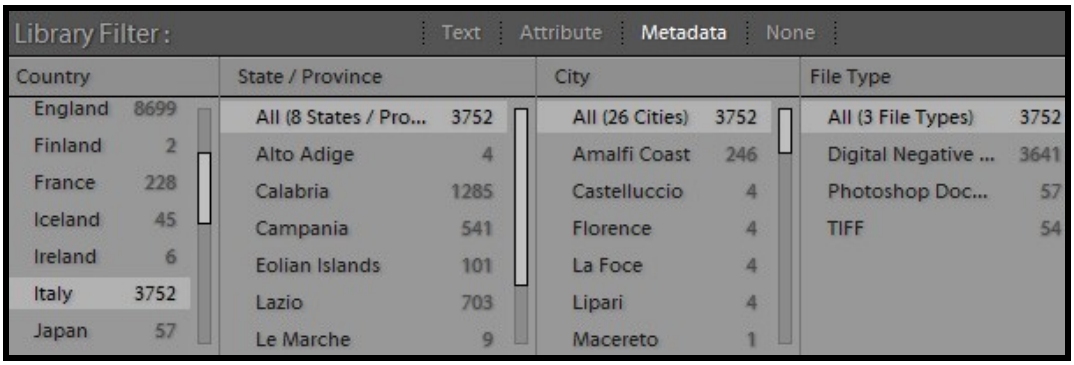
Workflow smart collections



The Library Filter is a bit like iTunes and lets you drill down into your catalogue

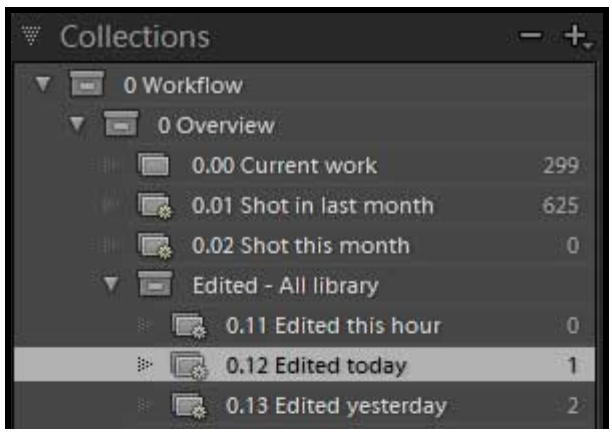
When you have a library of many thousands of pictures, finding the ones you might need is clearly a very important feature. The more quickly you can do this, the more time you'll have left for perfecting them for the print, slideshow, or whatever other creative way you'll enjoy them.

So two of my favourite features of Lightroom have always been:

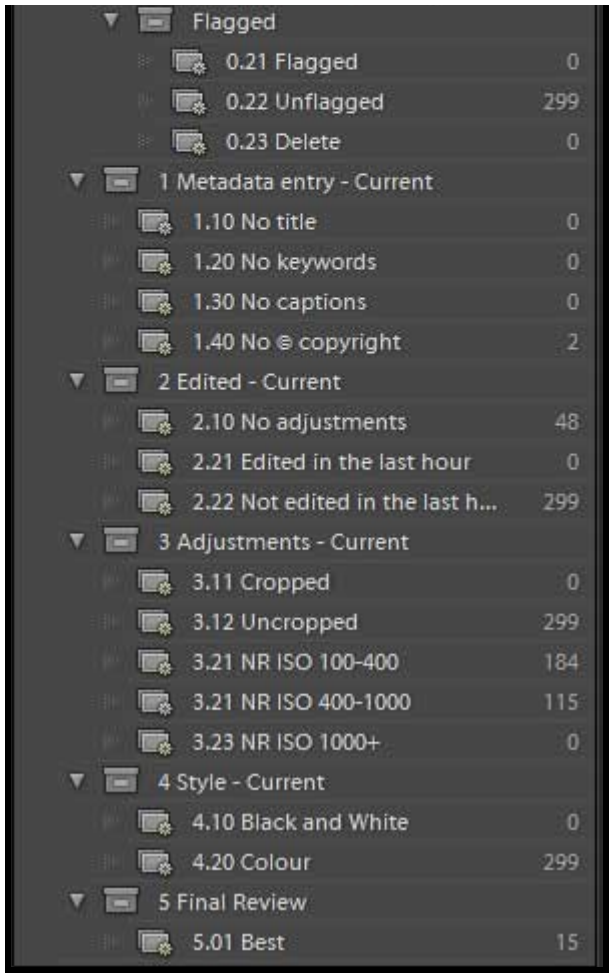
- Smart Collections when you know exactly what you're looking for
- Library Filter panel (right) when you're exploring the pictures and your questions change as you see what's there

Library Filter panel's iTunes-style columns are more useful when you're looking around your catalogue, hacking your way into unknown territory and discovering what's there. You don't have a clear aim in mind, and your search criteria are changing as you discover how you previously tagged your pictures (it's like slicing and dicing with Excel pivot tables or Cognos). But the thing is, I don't normally need to explore my catalogue – I know, pretty well, what I want to find.

So I've happily settled down to using Smart Collections almost all the time, and visit the Library Filter panel only for quick filtering by star rating, flag, coloured label, or master/virtual (though more often than not, I'll apply these quick filters through the Filmstrip).



- While the Library Filter panel menu does let you save your search criteria as a preset, presets are displayed in a long and unhelpful list.
- You can easily work with a large number of Smart Collections, group them in multi-level families, and mix them with Dumb Collections too.
- A filter doesn't remember any output settings, while a Collection stores the last Print, Slideshow or Web settings applied to it.



So the Filter panel is fine for temporary filtering, chopping and changing whatever rating or flag values are visible, while the various types of Collection let you organize, categorize, and group picture.

It makes obvious sense to invest time learning their nuances and then applying them as ingeniously as possible.

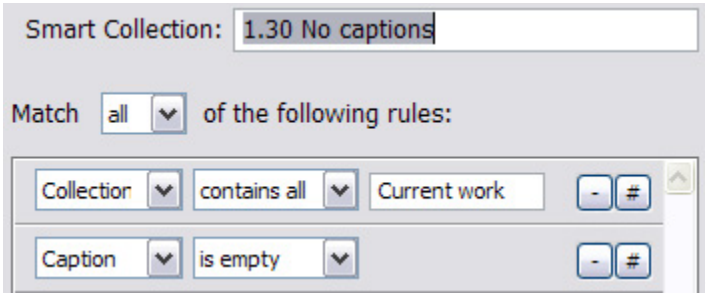
The Workflow Smart Collection

As an example, here's how I now manage new work.

My objective is to see at a glance what's been done and what I've got to do next. For instance, I want to be confident every picture has my copyright and know that I've added descriptive metadata like keywords. Likewise I want to be sure I've adjusted all the pictures without eyeballing the badges on a few hundred thumbnails, and I want the catalogue to help point out pictures which need special attention. In other words, I want to introduce some quality control and what is known in manufacturing as "progress chasing":

- The key is a single Dumb Collection, called "0.00 Current work" into which I drag the pictures I want to process (the 0.00 is there to assist sorting).
- Then a series of Smart Collections check for images containing "Current work" in the Collection name, and then target more specific criteria.

So for example smart collection “1.30 No Captions” checks for pictures that are in “Current work” but where there’s nothing in the caption field. Here it’s zero, so I know I’ve entered captions for every picture.



On the other hand, 1.40 No Copyright shows me that for some reason I’ve overlooked two pictures in “Current work”. I can see straight away if there’s any missing metadata in my shoot.

You can, to a limited extent, apply the same technique to Develop adjustments too. The caveat is because, unlike Aperture, unfortunately Lightroom still won’t let you target individual adjustments. Imagine how this might have a practical use – a Smart Collection that helps you identify any ISO1000+ images where the Luminance and Color Noise settings are still set to zero. All you can do is what I have done – identify high ISO images and remind yourself that you might want to treat those pictures as a group.

That’s how it works. In practice, it’s very simple – after a weekend away, I clear out any existing items from this Collection and drag in the newest pictures. The Smart Collections recalculate automatically and I always can see what’s done and what needs attention. If “Current work” has existing items which still need work, I can move them to another Dumb Collection “Last week’s work” so that my Smart Collections don’t pick them up.

Download

If you want to try this out, you can build up such a Smart Collection structure yourself – or save yourself a load of time by saving it from here.

This zip file contains a small “Workflow” catalogue which you can bring into your own working catalogue:

1. In your catalogue, choose File > Import from Another Catalogue (in LR2 and Lr3 this is File > Import as Catalog)
2. Point to my Workflow.lrcat file (it’s a LR3 catalogue so you may get a message about upgrading the catalogue)

3. Import the single JPEG file (you can delete it afterwards)
4. Look in the Collections panel, and the workflow smart collections should be there in all their glory.

They obviously took me a bit of time to get right, so you can always say “thanks” or “grazie” or “yeah buddy that’s f***ing cool” via my Amazon wish list.