



Google Photos: 12 Steps to Success



About the videos: when you watch the videos linked in this course, be aware that they were recorded at various times throughout the last few years. Google Photos is always changing, especially the location of menu items. For example, in the video, you may see “Settings” under a 3-line menu at top left, when it is now under the account button in top right. You may need to hunt a bit for the right option, but the video is still teaching a valid concept. If you are a [GeeksOnTour.com premium member](https://www.geekson.com), you can ask any question on our Q&A page.

Step 1: Your Google Account

Why this step is SO important.

What exactly IS Google Photos? Well, it's actually many things, but primarily it is a storage location for all of your private photos and videos. It is storage, in the cloud (aka online, aka on the Internet), provided by Google. When your photos and videos are stored in Google Photos, they are for your eyes only. You must know your Google Account username and password in order to gain access.

This lesson steps you thru how to verify that you do know the correct username and password, and how to protect your account against accidentally losing access.

Without your Google account username and password, Google Photos is of no use to you.

Watch video: [569.GP-Google Account for Google Photos](#)

- **Were you successful at signing in to Google with your account's username and password?** This is so important! Some people successfully install Google Photos on their phones because their Google account is already set up on their phones. Then, when they get a new phone, they don't know their password and they are unable to see their photos. Don't let that happen to you!
- Did you verify that your Google account has a good "recovery phone number" and "recovery email?" If you ever forget your password, you may be locked out of your Google Account. When you click "Forgot Password" Google can send a code to your phone or your email, making it easy to reset your password and recover your account. If this information is not provided, you could get locked out of your account completely.
- When you opened [Photos.Google.com](https://photos.google.com) did you see any of your photos there? If you ever used Picasa Web Albums or Google Plus photos, any photos uploaded will now

Step 2: Install the Google Photos App

Getting Google Photos started on your mobile device

All you need to do to get started is install the free Google Photos app on your phone. For Android phones and tablets, you get it using the Play Store. For some Android devices Google Photos may have come pre-installed. Check in a folder called Google, it may be there already.

For iPhones and iPads, you'll get the app from the App store.

When you first open the app, whether on iOS or Android, you will see 3 settings:

1. Google Account - this is where you'll specify the account (username and password) where you want your photos stored.
2. Upload size: Original or Storage Saver (we recommend Storage Saver)
3. Use Cellular Data: Yes or No

Watch video [496.GP-Install on Android](#)

Watch video [497.GP-Install on iOS](#)

Step 3: Upload Progress

Watch your photos get uploaded

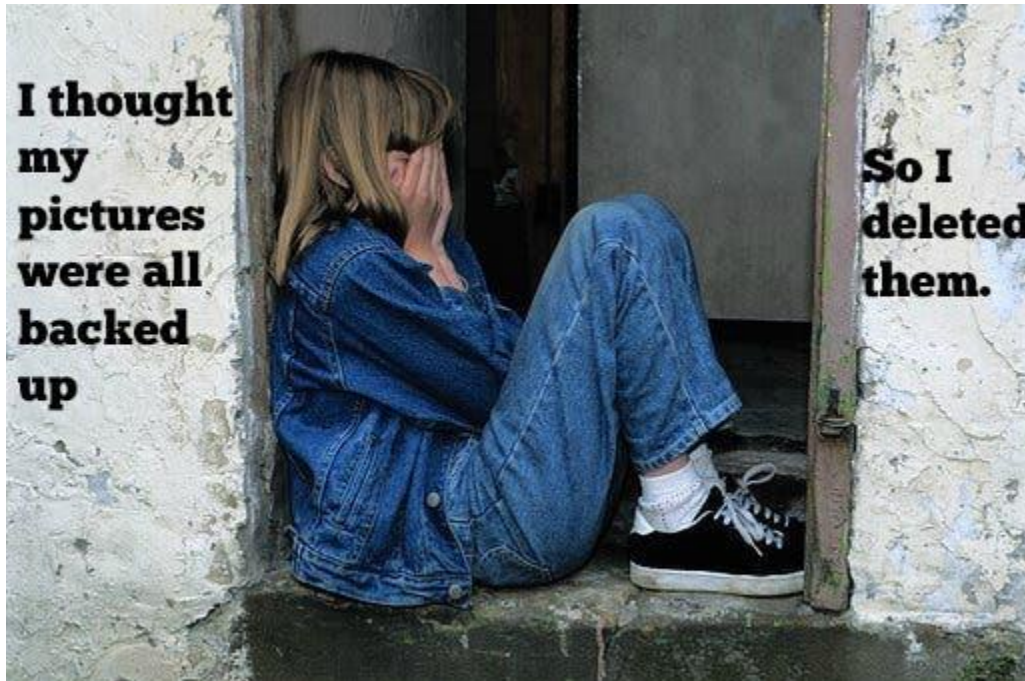
When you first install the Google Photos app on your phone or tablet, you will be able to see all the photos on your phone right away. That does NOT mean that they have been backed up (aka UPloded) to your Google Photos account yet. Backing up takes time. It also takes WiFi. If your phone is not connected to a WiFi network, your photos won't get uploaded, unless you changed the default setting and allowed uploading using your cellular data.

You see, the Google Photos app is a photo viewer as well as an uploader. It sees the photos that are stored on your device even if those photos have not been uploaded (backed up) to Google Photos. The most heartbreaking mistake I hear people make is when they delete photos thinking they are all backed up when that is not the case.

Don't make this mistake that I know others have made:

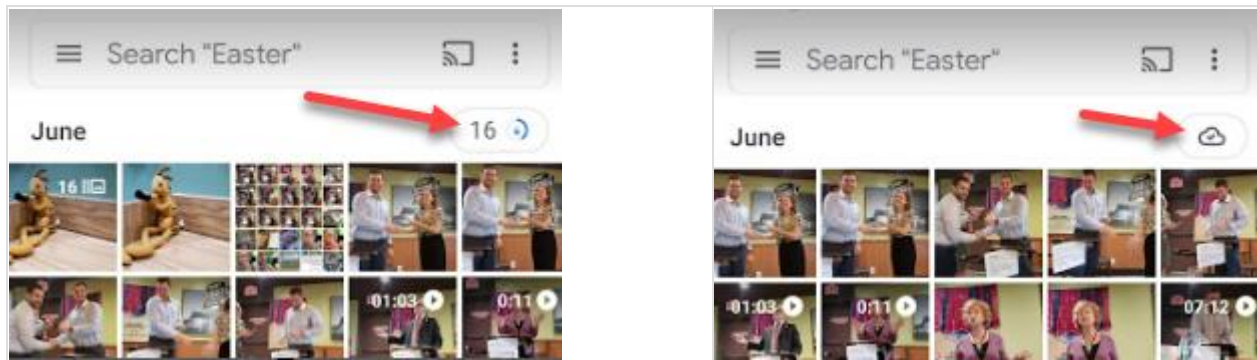
1. They installed Google Photos on their phone
2. Then they opened the app and saw all their pictures. They mistakenly thought that all photos and videos were "in" Google Photos. They think the backup took place instantly.
3. So then they opened the native photos/gallery app on their phone and deleted all the photos to free up space on their phone.

They have just deleted their one and only copy of all their photos!



To avoid this from happening to you, you need to watch the photos' upload progress. Open the Google Photos app and look at the top of the photo library screen. If you see a number it means that those photos are in process of being backed up. When the upload is completed, you will see the cloud with the checkmark.

You should also check to see that your newly uploaded photos are visible using the Web browser on a computer: [Photos.Google.com](https://photos.google.com)

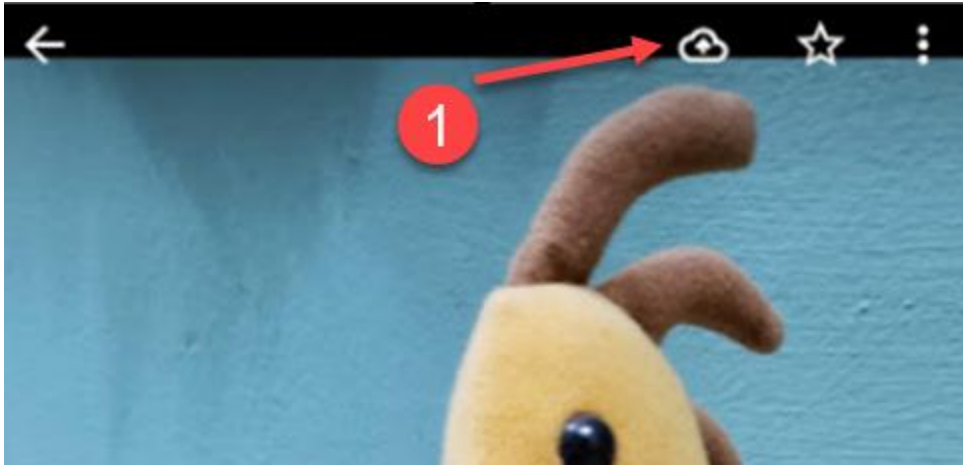


You may also see messages here, like "Waiting for WiFi." The goal is to see the cloud with the checkmark, "Backup Complete."

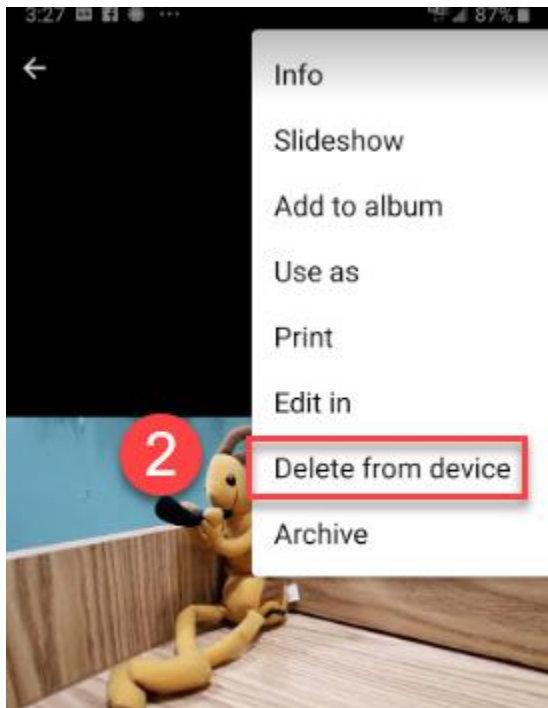
How do you know where a photo is stored?

When you view any given image using your Google Photos, there are 3 possibilities of where it is stored:

1. Only on the device (not yet uploaded)
2. On the device AND in the cloud (it has successfully been backed up)
3. Only in the cloud not on this device

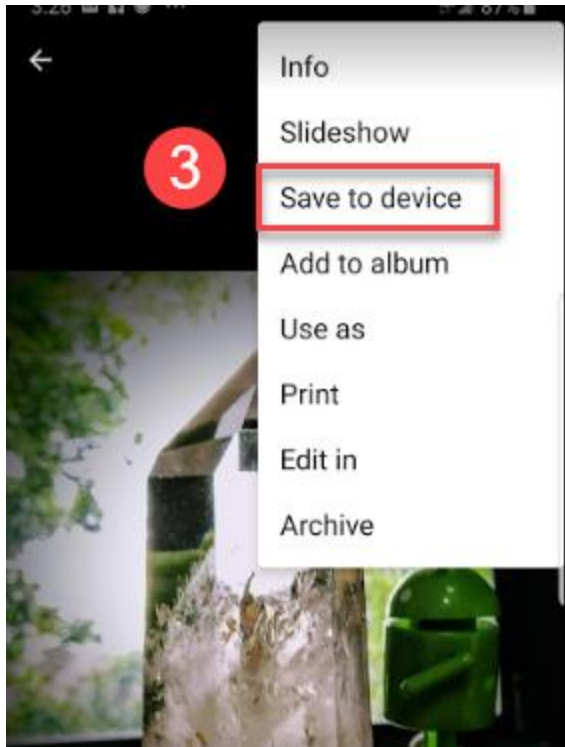


The cloud icon with the up arrow is how you can manually upload a photo. If you see that icon, it means the photo is on this device, and it has not yet been uploaded. .

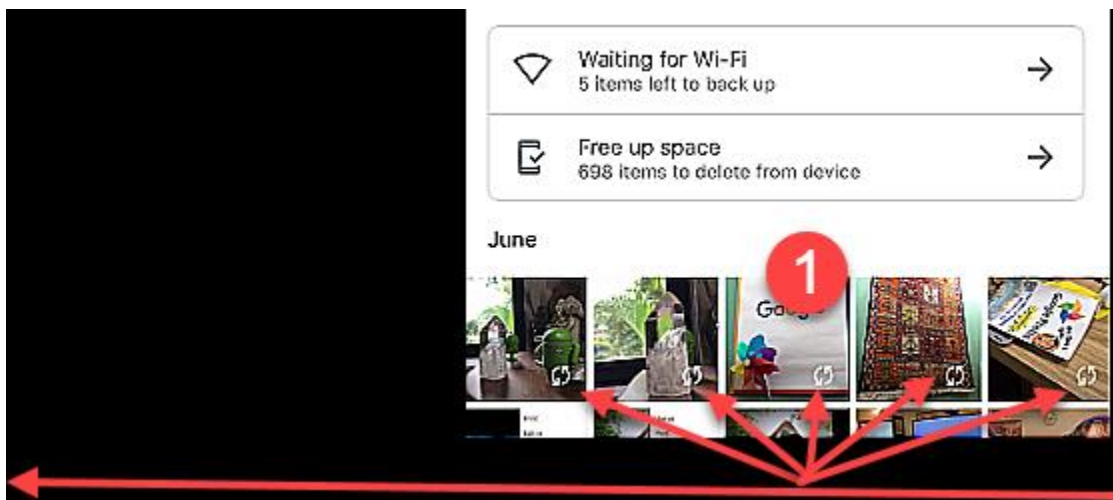


iOS: If you tap the 3-dot menu at the top right and see "Delete from device" appear as a choice, that means the photo is on the device AND in the cloud. It has been successfully uploaded and may now be deleted from the device.

Android: If you tap the 3-dot menu (or swipe up on photo) you will see "Delete from Device" for any photo that is on the device. When you tap it, if the photo is stored only on device, you will see a warning: "***Item not backed up. Permanently delete from device?***"



If you tap the 3-dot menu at the top right, or swipe up on the photo and see "Save to device" appear as a choice, that means the photo is in the cloud and not on the device. Either it was not taken with this device, or the device copy had previously been removed.



iOS only: if you see the circular arrow in the lower right of a photo, it means that photo is on this device and it has not been uploaded to the cloud. It is waiting to be uploaded. If you drag down on the screen it should open up the message area at the top to tell you why. "Waiting for Wi-Fi"

Note: The Google Photos app must be open for the uploading to happen.

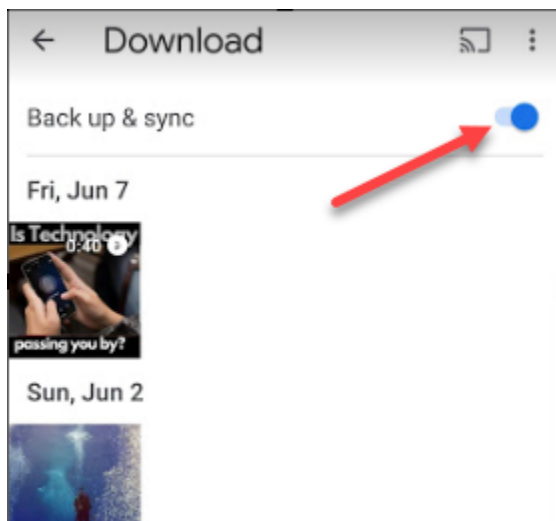
Step 4: Android only - Device Folders

How to include device folders in Google Photos

On Android phones, pictures and videos can be stored in many different folders. By default, Google Photos is only backing up the one folder used by the camera on your phone. If you take screenshots, they may be stored in a folder called "screenshots." If you download pictures you received in text messages, they may be in a folder called Download, or one called Texts. If you save pictures from Instagram, they are probably in a folder called Instagram.

If you want folders besides the camera to be included in your Google Photos library, you need to do the following:

1. Open the Google Photos app
2. Tap the library tab at the bottom
3. Choose Photos on device – View all
4. Find the folder you want to include and tap it (e.g. the Download folder)
5. Turn on Backup and Sync for that folder



From now on, the photos in that device folder will be included in the Google Photos backup process and be seen in the photo library.

Step 5: iOS only - iCloud Photos

What is iCloud Photos?

iCloud is Apple's cloud storage service. iCloud Photos is the setting that will upload all photos from your iPhone (or iPad) to iCloud and keep them in sync with all your other apple devices.

To view what photos are stored in your iCloud photos, use a computer and go to [iCloud.com](https://www.icloud.com). Sign in with your AppleID username and password. You should see the photos icon. Open that to see the photos that are stored in your iCloud account.



Note: even though you can see your photos at iCloud.com, that's it. There is no editing available or other tools. You need to use a mobile device, or the Photos app on your Mac.

Should the setting be on or off?

First you need to know if you have that setting turned on or not.

1. On your iPhone, select Settings
2. Photos - iCloud Photos: is it on?
3. If it is on, is the box checked for Optimize iPhone Storage?



Should the setting be on or off?

iCloud Photos is doing essentially the same thing that Google Photos is doing - backing up your photos. Having two backups sounds like a good thing right? So you could leave them both on, but you need to know a couple of things.

1. **Having both on will take up more space** on your phone - because they each use their own method of displaying the little thumbnails of photos and using the phone's cache for displaying them. If you have plenty of room on your phone, you're fine, otherwise I recommend you turn it off.
2. **You can't delete photos** from the phone when iCloud Photos is on. If you delete a photo from your device using any method, iCloud will notice that it's gone and sync that deletion thru to all your other apple devices using iCloud.
3. Since they work differently in regards to deleting photos, I recommend that you not have both of them on. **Choose one** to do your backups and learn what it does. Obviously, I recommend choosing Google Photos.

If the setting is on, leave it on until the Google Photos backup is complete, then you can turn it off if you like. Turning it off will stop the photo backups from going to iCloud without removing the photos and videos that are already there. Turning it off will also remove the photos from your device - if Optimize iPhone Storage is on. Optimize phone storage means to keep the original in the cloud and replace the device copy with a tiny, thumbnail if needed.

Learn more ...

- [Apple support help page on setting up and using iCloud Photos](#)
- [Article: My iPhone is full of photos, can Google Photos help?](#)
- [Article: Google Photos vs iCloud Photos](#)

Step 6: Free Up Space

Don't delete photos until you understand this

If your phone is getting full, Google Photos can free up space by removing photos from your device that have already been backed up to the cloud. Do this by using the Google Photos Free Up Space command:

1. From account button menu – under Account storage, you should see xxx items to delete from this device. Tap there to free up space
2. It will report to you the number of photos that will be deleted, if it looks right and you're sure that's what you want to do, tap Delete (999) otherwise, tap Cancel

Note: you should have a second backup of your photos before removing them from your phone. See Step 7

Note: DO NOT delete photos, or use the Free Up Space command if you're on an iPhone and you have iCloud Photos turned on. The deletion will be synced to iCloud and your photos will be removed from all Apple devices.

This is because of the difference in philosophies between Apple and Google. Google's job is to copy all your photos to the cloud - period. The cloud is the master library of all photos. Apple's job is to keep all your Apple devices in Sync - add a photo to one device, it's added to all others. Delete a photo from one device and it's deleted from all others.

Google's philosophy:



Apple's philosophy:



Using Free Up Space on iPhone

Watch video [472.GP-Free Up Space on your iPhone](#)

Free up space on Android

Watch video [739.GP-Free up space on Android](#)

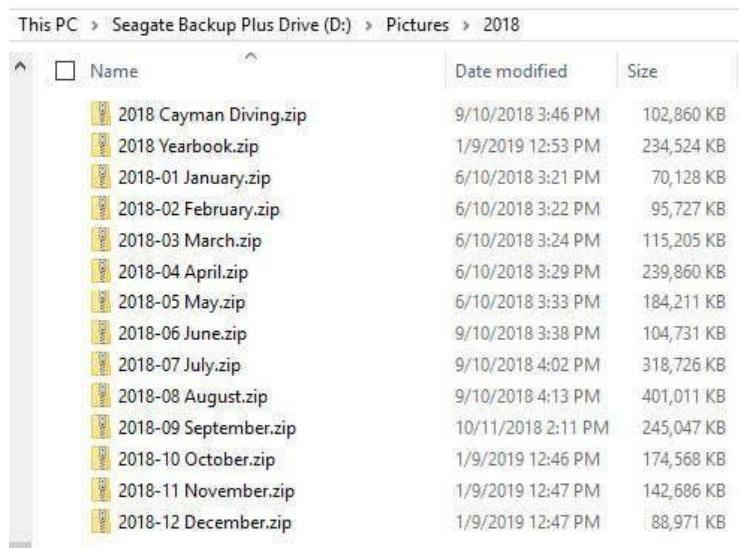
Step 7: Backup to a 2d location - a true backup

Download your albums

I take hundreds of pictures every month. I put my best 50-80 into an album for that month. I like to know that those 50-80 best pictures are on my computer also organized by month. I accomplish this by downloading the albums from Google Photos to my computer.

Using Google Photos, you can select an album, click the 3-dot menu and choose Download All. This will put the pictures on your computer's hard drive in whatever folder you specify. It will be in Zip file format using the name of the album as the file name. You will need to unzip it to see the pictures. You will also find that any metadata like dates, location, and descriptions that were modified while online have not made the trip.

At the end of the year, this is what the folder looks like on my external hard drive. I can rest easy knowing that, even if the Internet disappears, I have my albums of my best photos safe on a hard drive.



Name	Date modified	Size
2018 Cayman Diving.zip	9/10/2018 3:46 PM	102,860 KB
2018 Yearbook.zip	1/9/2019 12:53 PM	234,524 KB
2018-01 January.zip	6/10/2018 3:21 PM	70,128 KB
2018-02 February.zip	6/10/2018 3:22 PM	95,727 KB
2018-03 March.zip	6/10/2018 3:24 PM	115,205 KB
2018-04 April.zip	6/10/2018 3:29 PM	239,860 KB
2018-05 May.zip	6/10/2018 3:33 PM	184,211 KB
2018-06 June.zip	9/10/2018 3:38 PM	104,731 KB
2018-07 July.zip	9/10/2018 4:02 PM	318,726 KB
2018-08 August.zip	9/10/2018 4:13 PM	401,011 KB
2018-09 September.zip	10/11/2018 2:11 PM	245,047 KB
2018-10 October.zip	1/9/2019 12:46 PM	174,568 KB
2018-11 November.zip	1/9/2019 12:47 PM	142,686 KB
2018-12 December.zip	1/9/2019 12:47 PM	88,971 KB

Here's the video that shows how to download from Google Photos to your computer. Watch Video: [574.GP-Download from Google Photos to Computer](#)

Backing up to a second cloud storage service

Watch video [571.GP-Backup Google Photos to OneDrive](#)

Learn More

Article: [Google Photos is NOT a "Backup" of Your Photos](#)

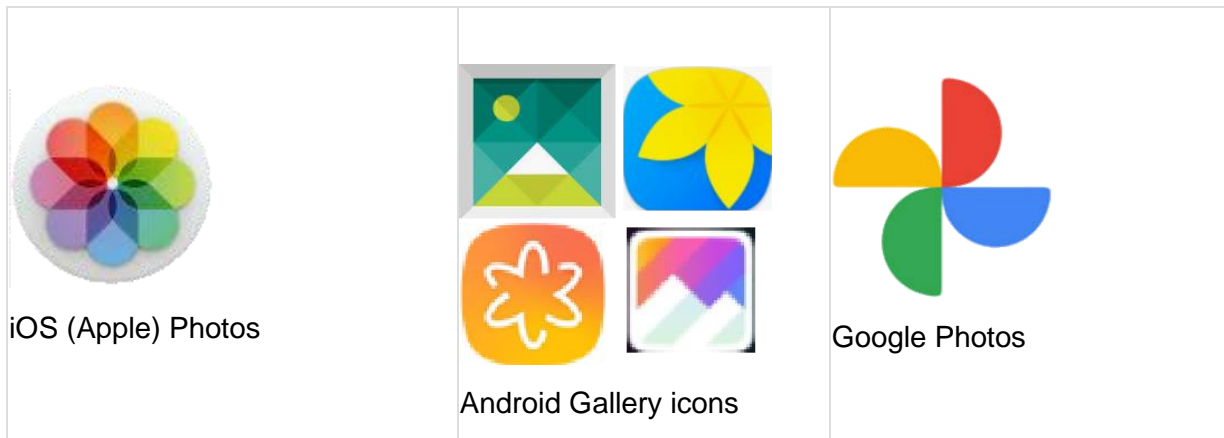
Article: [Google Photos: Don't assume your photos are getting backed up](#)

Google Help Article: [Download photos or videos to your device](#) note: this article refers to using Google Drive functionality that is discontinued as of July 10, 2019

Step 8: Stop using Gallery or Apple Photos

Google Photos is a complete replacement for your native Photos or Gallery app

Every smartphone comes with a native app for viewing, editing, and sharing your photos. On iPhone it's just called Photos. Many types of Android phone come with an app called Gallery. Some Android phones use Google Photos as their native Gallery app.



All these apps give you the ability to browse the photos on your phone, view them, edit them, delete, and share them. Google Photos also uploads them to your Google Photos library, then you can use Google Photos to browse, view, edit, delete, and share any of your lifetime of photos - not just the ones on the phone.

We think Google Photos is the best photo gallery app and it is the one you should learn and use all the time. You cannot uninstall the native photo gallery app, but how about moving the icon to the last screen. Get it out of sight so you're not tempted to use it.

Deleting photos using Google Photos

- **Trashcan** in Google Photos means that photo is trash - it will be deleted from everywhere, both the on-device copy and the cloud copy
- **3-dot menu or swipe up on photo, Delete Device copy:** This will leave the cloud copy in place, your Google Photos copy, but remove the photo from your device, thus freeing up that space. Realize, if you are using the recommended "Storage Saver" quality for your Google Photos upload size, and you delete the device copy - you have deleted your original and only have the Storage Saver copy.
- **Free Up Space:** this is a special command in Google Photos under the 3-line menu that will remove ALL photos from your device that have already been uploaded to your Google Account in the cloud.

Deleting photos using the native photos/gallery app

- The native app only has access to the photos stored on the device. So, deleting with that app cannot delete photos in your Google Photos account. The problem with using this method is that you could delete photos from your device that have not yet been uploaded to Google Photos. You could be deleting your only copy.
- iCloud: if you use the iOS Photos app to delete photos AND you have iCloud photos turned on you will be deleting the device copy AND the iCloud copy

Only one reason to use the native app

Some of the native apps have features that Google Photos doesn't have. For example, iOS Photos can turn live photos into a loop video, or a bounce. You can't do that with Google Photos on iPhones. The Android Gallery app has the capability to remove objects from a photo, another feature that Google Photos lacks (except on the Pixel phone.) So, go ahead and use the native app for things you can't do with Google Photos. If you use the native app to add text, and save the resulting photo, Google Photos will see that picture and add it to your library.

Learn more:

[Google's help article on Free Up Space](#) (Android or iOS)

1 hour "Button Show" Episode [208 Why use Google Photos app instead of Apple Photos or Samsung Gallery](#)

Step 9: View photos on computer at Photos.Google.com

On a windows or a Mac computer, there is no Google Photos app. It is a website. Simply open a web browser, preferably Chrome, but Edge or Safari will work also, and go to [Photos.Google.com](https://photos.google.com). Make sure you are signed in with the same Google account username and password as you use on your phone and you should see all the photos in your library.

Once there, you have the same tabs and buttons as on the phone, they are in different positions due to the screen size.

Step 10: Your photos are automatically sorted by date

Your library of photos in Google Photos is one giant stream of photos in order by date taken. The most recent photo will be at the very top. As you scroll down, you're going back in time. The magic of Google Photos is just how fast you can scroll down! I can scroll down from today, to photos 20 years ago just by grabbing the button at the right side of the screen and skimming down in a fraction of a second.

Where this can be confusing is when you upload older photos to your Google Photos library. Say that someone sends you some photos and you don't even know what date they were taken. You upload those photos to your Google Photos library and you don't see them at the top - because they weren't taken today! Since you don't know when they were taken, you can't scroll down and find them either. The solution? Type in the search bar, "recently added." This will put the most recently added photos (the ones from your friend) at the top.

Watch video [592.GP-Sort by date added](#)

Step 11: Create Albums for your best photos

We take thousands of photos with our smartphones these days. People will tell you to delete all but your best, but we think that's just too hard. It's much easier to just pick your best – put them in albums – and don't worry about the rest.

Watch video [527.GP-Making Albums with Google Photos](#)

Step 12: Learn more

There's so much more to Google Photos than just storing your lifetime of photos. You can use the mobile app and website to edit photos, make creations, share, and more.

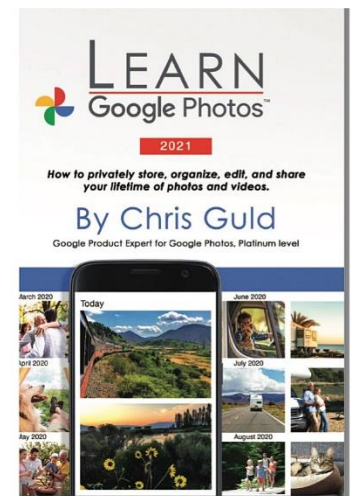
Watch video [643.GP-Quick Tour of Google Photos](#)

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