

# *Lightroom Classic* **Keyword Cookbook**

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*A practical guide to keywording an analog film archive*

## **Environment**

MacBook Air M5 · Lightroom Classic · Negative Lab Pro  
Foundation List 2.0.1 (adapted) · Synology NAS

April 2026

*Companion document to the Analog Film Workflow Cookbook*

## 1. The Principle: Why Keywords Matter for Film

My catalog is small compared to a digital shooter's. With 40-plus rolls at roughly 13 frames each, I have around 500–600 images. I could find anything by scrolling. But keywording isn't really about finding images today — it's about three things:

- **Future retrieval.** When I have 150 rolls, scrolling stops working. Structure now saves pain later.
- **Project curation.** When selecting images for a zine volume, filtering by subject, location, and mood narrows my candidates faster than visual memory alone.
- **Embedded metadata.** Keywords travel with exports. Flickr, portfolio sites, and print services can read them. My work carries its own context.

### The guiding question

If I come back to this catalog in two years, what would I type into the search bar to find this image? That's what my keywords should answer.

## 2. The Foundation List: What to Keep, What to Prune

The Foundation List 2.0.1 contains 1,786 keywords organized into five top-level categories. It was designed for high-volume digital photographers who shoot everything from weddings to wildlife. For an analog landscape and architectural photographer, most of it is dead weight.

Category	Verdict	Rationale
[~ATTRIBUTE]	Prune hard	Keep Element (sky, water, earth, fire, smoke), Material (stone, concrete, glass, metal, wood), Season, Time of Day. Delete Action, Age, Characteristic, Emotion, Gender, Number, Relationship — I'm not shooting portraits or events.
[~PHOTOGRAPHY]	Mostly keep	Treatment (black and white, color image), Setting (exterior, interior), Type of Photography, Effect (long exposure, reflection, silhouette). Delete Angle of View, Framing — those categories serve portrait/commercial work.
[~WHAT]	Prune hard	This is 1,400 keywords. Keep Structures & Architecture, Land, Natural Phenomenon, Water Elements, Plant (top level only), and the handful of subjects I actually photograph. Delete the other 1,200+ keywords (gemstones, fish species, sports, professions, body parts).
[~WHERE]	Replace	The template is empty. Build my own location hierarchy: USA > Washington, USA > Utah > Zion, Germany > Dorsten, etc. Only locations I've actually shot.
[~WHO]	Minimal	Delete Client. Keep People as a flat keyword if needed. I rarely photograph identifiable individuals.

**Pruning principle**

Delete any keyword I cannot imagine applying to at least three images in my existing archive. If I've never photographed it and don't plan to, it's clutter. I can always add keywords later — I cannot easily undo the cognitive overhead of a bloated list.

## 3. My Keyword Architecture

The adapted structure merges the Foundation List's taxonomy with my NLP metadata and practice-specific needs. Here is the target hierarchy. Items marked with an asterisk (\*) are ones to add that the Foundation List does not provide.

### 3.1 [~ATTRIBUTE] — What describes the scene

Subcategory	Keywords to keep
[~Element]	sky, nightsky, water, earth, dust, fire, smoke, air, light*, shadow*, fog*, mist*, cloud*, snow*, ice*
[~Material]	stone*, sandstone*, brick, concrete, glass, metal, wood*, adobe, asphalt, gravel, rust*
[~Season]	spring, summer, autumn, winter
[~Time of Day]	dawn, morning, afternoon, dusk, evening, golden hour*, blue hour*, night
[~Condition]*	decay*, abandoned*, ruin*, overgrown*, weathered*, eroded*

The [~Condition] subcategory is not in the Foundation List but is essential for my work — a significant portion of my archive documents structures in states of decay (Gerhart Hauptmann Realschule, Mayhew Lodge, the Juel Farmhouse). Add it as a custom subcategory.

### 3.2 [~PHOTOGRAPHY] — How the image was made

**Overlap with NLP metadata**

My NLP presets already record camera, lens, film stock, format, and scan method. Do not duplicate these as keywords. The [~PHOTOGRAPHY] keywords cover aesthetic and compositional properties that NLP does not track.

Subcategory	Keywords to keep
[~Treatment]	black and white, color image
[~Setting]	exterior, interior
[~Effect]	long exposure, reflection, silhouette, bokeh, vignette

<b>[~Type of Photography]</b>	landscape photography, architectural photography, street photography, abstract photography, rural photography, urban photography
<b>[~Filter]*</b>	yellow filter*, red filter*, CPL filter*

The [~Filter] subcategory is my own addition. Filter choice is a creative decision that shapes the tonal character of the negative — it belongs in keywords, not just in my head. This is especially useful for B&W work where filter choice is invisible in the final image but critical to understanding how it was made.

### 3.3 [~WHAT] — The subject

This is where I prune hardest. The Foundation List has over 1,400 keywords here. I need maybe 80–100.

Subcategory	Keywords to keep
<b>[~Structures]</b>	bridge, building, cabin*, barn*, castle, cemetery, chapel, church, column, dome, door, doorway*, entrance*, facade, fence, floor, fountain, gate, graveyard, house, lighthouse, memorial, monastery, monument, pillar, roof, ruin, stairs, temple, threshold*, tower, wall, window, arch*
<b>[~Land]</b>	canyon, cave, cliff, desert, dune, field, forest, gorge, hill, meadow, mesa*, mountain, peak, plateau, ridge, rock, slope, valley, trail*, path*, butte*
<b>[~Natural Phenomenon]</b>	cloud, fog, frost, haze, lightning, rain, rainbow, snow, storm, sunrise, sunset, wind
<b>[~Water Elements]</b>	bay, beach, coast, creek, harbor, island, lake, ocean, pond, puddle*, reef, river, sea, shore, stream, waterfall, wave, wetland
<b>[~Plant]</b>	flower, grass, tree, bush, cactus*, fern, moss, vine, wildflower*
<b>[~Object]</b>	Keep only what I've actually photographed: sign*, bench*, boat, fence, lamp*, post*, telephone booth*, mailbox*, etc. Add as I encounter them.
<b>[~Thoroughfare]</b>	road, highway, path, street, alley, sidewalk, track, crossing*

### 3.4 [~WHERE] — Location hierarchy

Build this from my actual shooting locations. Use a Country > State/Region > Place structure. Add new locations as I shoot them, not speculatively.

Level	Examples
<b>Country</b>	USA, Germany
<b>State / Region</b>	Washington, Utah, Arizona, Oregon, Nordrhein-Westfalen
<b>Place</b>	Zion National Park, Grand Canyon, Sedona, Redmond, Dorsten, Columbia River Gorge, Fairhaven, Whidbey Island, Oak Creek Canyon
<b>Specific site (optional)</b>	Cathedral Rock, Courthouse Butte, Mayhew Lodge, Gerhart Hauptmann Realschule, Juel Farmhouse, Bear Creek

### Hierarchical keywords

Lightroom's keyword hierarchy means applying "Cathedral Rock" automatically includes "Sedona," "Arizona," and "USA" in searches and exports (if "Include on Export" and the parent keywords are set to export). Structure the tree correctly once and I never think about it again.

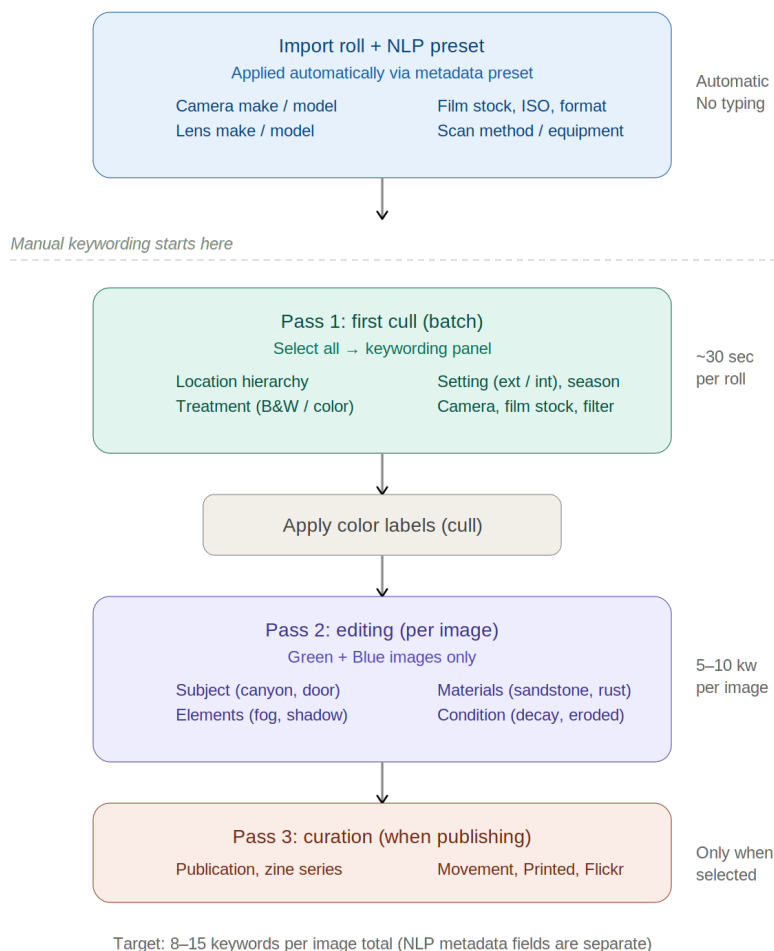
## 3.5 Practice-specific keywords (add these)

These categories don't exist in the Foundation List but are essential to my workflow.

Category	Keywords
<b>Publication*</b>	Blog, Zine, Book, YouTube, LinkedIn (I already have these — keep them)
<b>Zine Series*</b>	The Doors of Perception > Vol 1, Vol 2, Vol 3 (track which images were published in which edition)
<b>Movement*</b>	THRESHOLDS, FRAMES, PASSAGE, AFTER, SEEING, CONFINEMENT, CHARACTER, EXPANSION, The Reducing Valve, The Threshold, As It Is Infinite (track which movement an image belongs to)
<b>Printed*</b>	Printed (I already use this as a keyword to track SAAL orders — keep it)
<b>Flickr*</b>	Flickr Explore* (track Explore-awarded images like R40 011)

## 4. When and How to Keyword

Keywording happens in three passes, integrated into the editing workflow I already follow. The NLP metadata preset handles camera, lens, film, and scan data automatically at import — I never type those. The three manual passes layer on top. Do not create a separate "keywording session" — that guarantees I'll skip it.



## 4.1 Pass 1: During first cull (batch keywords)

When I'm going through a fresh roll applying color labels, add roll-wide keywords at the same time. These are keywords that apply to every frame on the roll.

1. Select all images from the roll
2. Open the Keywording panel in Library module
3. Add location keywords: the place hierarchy (e.g., Cathedral Rock, Sedona, Arizona, USA)
4. Add treatment: black and white or color image
5. Add setting: exterior or interior
6. Add season if known
7. Add film-specific keywords from my existing tree (these may already be applied by NLP presets): format (6x6 or 6x9), Filmstock, ISO

**Batch first, refine later**

Most of these keywords apply to the entire roll. Applying them in batch takes 30 seconds and covers 80% of the keywording work. The per-image pass handles only what varies frame to frame.

**4.2 Pass 2: During editing (per-image keywords)**

When I'm working through Green and Blue labeled images in Develop, switch briefly to Library to add frame-specific keywords. This is where the "What" category earns its keep.

1. What is the primary subject? (canyon, church, door, mountain, trail, etc.)
2. Any notable elements? (cloud, fog, reflection, shadow, etc.)
3. Any notable materials? (sandstone, rust, glass, etc.)
4. Any condition keywords? (abandoned, decay, weathered, eroded)
5. Any effects? (silhouette, long exposure, reflection)
6. Type of photography if not obvious from location (street photography, abstract photography)

Aim for 5–10 frame-specific keywords per image. More than 15 total (including batch keywords) suggests I'm over-tagging. Fewer than 5 total suggests I'm under-tagging.

**4.3 Pass 3: Publication tagging (when applicable)**

When I select an image for a zine, blog post, or print, add the publication and project keywords. This happens during project curation, not during the regular editing workflow.

1. Add the Publication keyword (Zine, Blog, YouTube, etc.)
2. Add the Zine Series and Volume if applicable (The Doors of Perception > Vol 2)
3. Add the Movement keyword if applicable (CONFINEMENT, CHARACTER, etc.)
4. Add Printed after a SAAL order is placed
5. Add Flickr Explore if awarded

**5. Common Mistakes to Avoid**

Mistake	Why it hurts
<b>Duplicating NLP metadata as keywords</b>	Camera, lens, film stock, format, and scan method are already in NLP plugin metadata fields. Adding them as keywords too creates maintenance headaches and sync conflicts.
<b>Keeping the full Foundation List</b>	1,786 keywords in the suggestion dropdown makes keywording slower, not faster. Delete what I don't use. The autocomplete becomes useful only when the list is focused.
<b>Keywording in a separate session</b>	If keywording is a standalone task, it feels like data entry and I'll skip it. Integrate it into culling and editing where I'm already looking at each image.

<b>Subjective or mood keywords</b>	Keywords like “beautiful,” “sad,” “peaceful” are not searchable in any useful way. Stick to concrete, observable subjects. My image titles already carry the poetic weight.
<b>Speculative location keywords</b>	Don’t pre-populate my WHERE hierarchy with places I haven’t shot. Add them when I have images. Empty branches add noise.
<b>Flat keyword lists</b>	Without hierarchy, “Sedona” and “Arizona” are unrelated keywords. With hierarchy, applying “Sedona” automatically includes its parents. Build the tree correctly.

## 6. Keyword vs. NLP Metadata: The Boundary

This is the most common source of confusion. Here is the clean division.

Information	Where it lives	Why
Camera make/model	NLP metadata preset	Applied per roll via preset. Structured EXIF fields.
Lens make/model	NLP metadata preset	Same as camera.
Film stock and ISO	NLP metadata preset + keyword	NLP stores the structured data. The keyword (e.g., Ilford XP2 Super 400) enables quick filtering in Library. This is an acceptable, intentional overlap.
Film format (6x6, 6x9)	NLP metadata preset + keyword	Same rationale as film stock. Quick-filter value justifies the duplication.
Scan method / equipment	NLP metadata preset only	I’m not going to search by scanner model. No keyword needed.
Filter used	Keyword only	NLP has no filter field. This is creative metadata.
Location	Keyword only	NLP has no location field. Keywords with hierarchy.
Subject matter	Keyword only	What’s in the image. Core purpose of keywords.
Publication / project	Keyword only	Tracking where images were used.

### 6.1 NLP export settings

With the keyword hierarchy in place, one NLP setting needs to change. In the NLP export dialog (Export To: Negative Lab Pro), there are two checkboxes under Negative Lab Pro | Metadata:

Setting	Value	Why
<b>Write EXIF Fields with Custom Metadata</b>	<b>ON</b>	This writes camera, lens, film stock, and ISO into standard EXIF fields. This is the clean path — any software can read structured EXIF data.
<b>Automatically Generate Keywords</b>	<b>OFF</b>	When ON, NLP creates its own flat keywords from the metadata fields (e.g., “Pentacoon Six TL,” “Ilford XP2 Super 400”) dumped at the root level of the Keyword List. These duplicate what is now structured under [~CAMERA], [~FILM], and [~LENS]. Two copies of the same keyword — one orphaned, one nested — is the exact mess to avoid.

#### The connection point

NLP handles the structured EXIF metadata (the blue box in the workflow diagram). Keywords for camera, film, and lens come from the keyword hierarchy during Pass 1 batch keywording. Turning off NLP’s auto-keywords prevents duplication between these two layers.

## 6.2 IPTC Title: the other metadata gap

The filename (“Clouds over Deep Time R35-013.jpg”) identifies the image on disk and traces it back to the master TIFF. But the IPTC Title field — the embedded metadata that Flickr, Blurb’s Book Module, portfolio sites, and print services actually read — is currently empty.

Field	Content	Purpose
<b>Filename</b>	Clouds over Deep Time R35-013.jpg	Disk identification + roll traceability. The R##-### suffix is workflow plumbing.
<b>IPTC Title</b>	Clouds over Deep Time	The clean, public-facing name. No roll reference. Travels embedded in the file.

The rule: only titled images get an IPTC Title. When an image earns a name (Blue or Purple labeled, published, printed), write the clean title into the IPTC Title field in Library → Metadata panel. Untitled frames stay empty — not every frame on a roll earns a name, and forcing one would dilute the ones that matter.

This happens naturally during Pass 2 (editing) or Pass 3 (curation) — when naming an image, write the title in two places: the filename (with roll suffix) and the IPTC Title field (without). A few extra seconds per image, and only for keepers.

## 7. Implementation Steps

Do this in one focused session. It takes 30–45 minutes.

## 7.1 Clean up the Foundation List import

1. In Lightroom, go to Metadata > Keyword List (or open the Keyword List panel in Library).
2. Expand [~ATTRIBUTE]. Delete all subcategories except Element, Material, Season, Time of Day. Add [~Condition] with your decay/abandonment keywords.
3. Expand [~PHOTOGRAPHY]. Delete Angle of View and Framing. Keep Treatment, Setting, Effect, Type of Photography. Add [~Filter] with yellow filter, red filter, CPL filter.
4. Expand [~WHAT]. This is the big one. Delete Animal, Art, Body Parts, Celestial Body, Concept, Event, Profession, Sports, and any Object or Transportation subcategories I'll never use. Keep Structures & Architecture, Land, Natural Phenomenon, Water Elements, Plant (pruned), Thoroughfare, and a slim Object list.
5. Replace the empty [~WHERE] template with my actual location hierarchy.
6. Simplify [~WHO] to a flat People keyword. Delete Client.
7. Verify your existing NLP-created keywords (film, format, Filmstock, ISO, Lens, Scan) don't duplicate Foundation List entries. If they do, merge or delete one set. Keep my existing tree for the NLP-preset keywords since those are already wired into your import workflow.
8. Scroll through the Keyword List and delete any orphaned ad-hoc keywords that describe tools rather than images. Lightroom auto-creates a keyword every time I type one into the Keywording panel, so entries like "Negative Lab Pro," "Epson V800," "Lab Scan," or "BookWright" may be sitting at the root level. These describe my processing workflow, not my photographs — delete them. If any are applied to images, Lightroom will warn me; reassign or remove them before deleting.

### The ad-hoc keyword trap

There is no distinction in Lightroom between a keyword I carefully planned and one I typed once on impulse. Both become permanent entries in the Keyword List. After importing the new merged list, any keyword that sits at the root level and does not belong to the new hierarchy is a candidate for deletion. The question to ask: does this keyword describe what is in the image, or what tool I used to make it? If it's a tool, delete it.

### Typo alert

My exported keyword list has "Ilford XP2 Super 400" (lowercase L instead of uppercase I). Fix this in Lightroom: right-click the keyword > Edit Keyword Tag > correct the spelling. This affects all images that use it.

## 7.2 Add practice-specific keywords

Create a new top-level category [~PROJECT]\* (or nest under your existing Publication keyword) for zine series, volumes, and movements. Create [~PRINT]\* or keep Printed as a standalone keyword — either works at your scale.

## 7.3 Container keyword settings ([~] keywords)

Every keyword with a tilde prefix — [~ATTRIBUTE], [~CAMERA], [~Filmstock], [~Condition], etc. — is a container. It exists to organize the hierarchy, not to describe an image. When creating or editing these keywords, use these settings in the Create Keyword Tag dialog:

Setting	Value	Why
<b>Include on Export</b>	<b>OFF</b>	The critical one. Prevents “[~CAMERA]” or “[~WHAT]” from appearing as exported keywords on Flickr, embedded EXIF, or anywhere else.
<b>Export Containing Keywords</b>	ON (default)	Leave on. Harmless at the top level, and the correct default for deeper containers in the hierarchy.
<b>Export Synonyms</b>	ON (default)	No synonyms on containers, so this has no effect. Leave as default.
<b>Person</b>	OFF	Not a person.
<b>Add to selected photos</b>	OFF	Never apply a container keyword to an image.

#### After import: audit all containers

When I import the keyword text file, Lightroom defaults every keyword to “Include on Export: ON.” I need to go through each [~] container after import and uncheck that box. Open the Keyword List panel, right-click each container → Edit Keyword Tag → uncheck Include on Export. This takes a few minutes but I only do it once. The rule is simple: if it has a tilde, export is off.

## 7.4 Leaf keyword settings (actual keywords)

Leaf keywords — the ones I actually apply to images like “sandstone,” “Pentacon Six TL,” or “Cathedral Rock” — use different settings:

Setting	Recommendation
<b>Include on Export</b>	ON for all subject, location, treatment, camera, film, and photography-type keywords. These are the keywords I want traveling with my images.
<b>Export Containing Keywords</b>	ON for parent keywords in location hierarchies (e.g., applying “Sedona” should also export “Arizona” and “USA”). This is the default and should stay on.
<b>Export Synonyms</b>	ON if I use synonyms (e.g., {b&w} as synonym for black and white). Useful for Flickr discoverability.

## 8. Retroactive Keywording: How Far Back?

I have two realistic options:

- **Forward-only.** Apply the new keyword structure to all new rolls from this point. Only keyword older rolls when I revisit them for a project. This is the pragmatic choice.

- **Selective backfill.** Go back and keyword the rolls that matter most: the zine source rolls (R22, R35, R36, R37, R40, R41) and my portfolio selects (Blue-labeled images). Skip Red-labeled reference negatives entirely. This takes a few hours but gives me a searchable core archive.

I would lean toward the selective backfill for Blue and Green images only. My published work and portfolio candidates deserve the metadata investment. Red-labeled originals do not.

## 9. Quick Reference: The Keywording Cheat Sheet

Print this or keep it next to my screen during the first few rolls until the habit is automatic.

When	What to add	How
<b>Import</b>	NLP preset (camera, lens, format, film stock) via Apply During Import	Metadata preset dropdown
<b>First cull</b>	Location hierarchy, treatment (B&W/color), setting (ext/int), season, film format keyword	Select all → Keywording panel → type keywords
<b>Editing</b>	Subject (canyon, door, mountain), elements (cloud, fog), materials (sandstone, rust), condition (abandoned, weathered), effects (reflection, silhouette)	Per image in Library, 5–10 keywords
<b>Curation</b>	Publication, Zine Series/Volume, Movement, Flickr Explore	When selecting for a project
<b>After print</b>	Printed	After SAAL order confirmed

*Total keywords per image target: 8–15. If I'm consistently above 20, I'm over-tagging. If below 5, I'm under-tagging.*

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