

# Is RAW or JPEG the best format for photos?

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When making the leap to DSLR or mirrorless cameras, you are faced with the option to continue taking photos as JPEG or convert to RAW files. But which format is the best option to use? In this article, **TipsMake.com** will compare RAW and JPEG to help you make a decision.

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## What is a RAW file?



You can consider RAW files to be digital negatives or just like what you had before you took photos into a dark room. The RAW file contains all the data in the image for you to process later.

RAW files are not in the standard format. The closest is Adobe's DNG format. This is not the format used by Nikon, Canon or Sony cameras. Some cameras shoot in RAW format, but most don't.

RAW files require specialized programs to view or edit them. The two programs Adobe, Lightroom and Photoshop, are the most famous examples. Darktable and RawTherapee are two free options that people can use without restrictions or registration. The following two options are also publicly available, so anyone can see how the applications are created and made their own modifications.

## **Why do many photographers love RAW?**

Many people absolutely love RAW. Some even state why you should shoot in RAW. Here are some of the big reasons why the RAW format has so many supporters.

### **RAW files store more data**

RAW files store all the data the camera captures when you take a picture. These files are considered lossless formats, just like WAV or FLAC audio files. When shooting in RAW format, you retain all the details that the camera captures.

### **RAW files are better for editing**

Since RAW files are not yet processed, your job is to process them. You can take all the data that the camera stores and see what an image can become. This freedom allows you to restore details from bright or dark areas of an image.

Technically, you do not edit existing images. Instead, you tell the computer how to organize the data you have collected to create the image.

## **You keep the original image data**

The image editor that works with RAW files is also called the non-destructive image editor. The reason is because they do not make changes to the original file. They save any edits you make to a separate file and when you're done, you export your image to another format (most likely JPEG). Note, non-destructive editors can also retain the original JPEG files, but other image processing programs do not.

## **Disadvantages of RAW files**



RAW files are great, but they are not without drawbacks.

### **RAW files have a slower workflow**

You must convert the RAW files into another format before you can send them to the printer, hand them to family members via email or share them with social media followers.

This means you have to sit in front of the computer, wait for images to be imported, edited and they wait for them to export to another format. Over time, you can speed up the process, but it can still be as fast as the image ready to use right after you exit the camera.

### **You need to know how to handle RAW images**

To get the most out of RAW formats, you need to know how to handle images using a program like Darktable. That means understanding different photography concepts such as exposure, white balance and dynamic range.

The image editor you selected can automatically adjust aspects of the image. If you do not make your own adjustments, you may be able to choose processor settings designed and tested by the camera manufacturer. And if the image viewer supports RAW files, you might find that all those untreated images look pretty dull.

### **RAW files require more storage space**

RAW files store all the data the camera has taken, so using them is similar to saving all images as JPEG at the highest image quality and resolution settings (but still larger a little). If you choose to install RAW + JPEG to save images simultaneously in both formats, then you will use more space on your memory card, computer or cloud storage account.

You will have to spend more time waiting for the files to be transferred and as a result may need to spend more money.

## **What is JPEG?**

JPEG stands for Joint Photographic Experts Group. This is the group that created the JPEG standard in 1992.

Since then, JPEG format has become the standard for capturing and sharing digital photos. Point and shoot cameras, smartphones and flip phones all store images in this format. When viewing an image in a web browser, chances are you are looking for a JPEG file. All images included in this post are JPEG.

## **Reasons to love JPEG**



There are many reasons why JPEG files are commonly used everywhere.

### **JPEG is ready for use**

JPEG files are ready to view, print and share from the moment you capture them. The camera does all the processing for you. JPEG is the equivalent of taking a photo with a Polaroid camera and having a photo you can give to others in seconds. Except for JPEG, you can take high quality photos for use in art galleries or on billboards.

### **JPEG can be opened anywhere**

When saving photos as JPEG, you can rest assured knowing you can view them on any device, with whatever program you want. This gives you more freedom to choose any favorite manager or image processing program, including many programs designed for RAW files. The same is true for those who receive your photos.

## **JPEG is a better option for taking snapshots**

When working in a performance or sporting event, you may find yourself inclined to shoot with JPEG, even if it is not your favorite choice. That's partly because large RAW files take longer to save to a memory card. If you take a few pictures in succession, the camera may have trouble trying to save all those images. You may miss the shots you want to take in those precious moments.

## **Why don't everyone choose JPEG?**



JPEG is so popular, there are a few main reasons why many photographers don't trust this format in their workflows.

### **JPEG is a lossy format**

JPEG is easy to share and open anywhere, including on the web. That means JPEG creates the right balance between creating a beautiful image and a small file. But also because images are compressed, you can reduce their quality.

### **JPEG does not store all data**

JPEG cannot store all the information that the camera is capable of capturing. This format cannot store multiple colors, so you may notice differences in shades or tones compared to what you might see in the RAW version. Images taken in JPEG format may also lose extra detail in the extremely bright or dark parts of an image.

## **JPEG is handled by the camera**

JPEG is a complete version of an image. While it is possible to edit JPEGs, you will make permanent changes to the file unless you save it as a new copy. Some changes can be made without actively manipulating the image.

## **RAW vs. JPEG: Which format is the best option?**

So which one is the best option? RAW or JPEG? That depends on many factors. Why do you take photos, where to take them, and under what conditions?

For example, if you're taking a concert photo to print in a magazine, you might want to shoot in RAW format. Unfavorable lighting conditions may require you to process the image manually to get any good shots. But if you're taking photos of fast-paced events, moving animals or kids running around, then you can appreciate what you get with JPEG.

Also, if sitting in front of your computer and fine-tuning your images makes you feel uncomfortable, choose JPEG. But if that's your favorite part, choose RAW.

Finally, if you want to take great photos, there are more important aspects to the file format you choose. First, you need to master the essentials, such as learning how to compose a photo.

Wish you take lots of beautiful photos!

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