

Erasing and formatting a memory card

Many digital camera owners don't understand the difference between erasing and formatting a memory card. Both methods of deleting images should be used.

Erasing can be done whenever desired, such as when your card is at full capacity and you need more space on the card.

A memory card should be formatted several times a year, particularly if its performance seems sluggish. Format more often if your camera is used frequently. It's a good idea to make a habit of doing this every time after you download your photos to make sure you have a clean slate upon which to begin. There are no bad effects or downsides of reformatting your memory card extremely often, so don't worry about doing it too often.

Erasing a memory card

When you erase a memory card, individual photos are deleted from their directories on the card. You can erase one image at a time, or erase all images. However, any images that have been designated as protected, won't be removed during the erasure process.

Formatting a memory card

Formatting, on the other hand, deletes all images from a memory card, even the ones that may have been protected. It recreates the file system including new directories and folders where images are saved on the card.

Unlike erasing, formatting improves the overall performance of a card.

Low level formatting

Some digital cameras offer a low level format in addition to the standard format option. With a low level format, all data on the card is deleted. New directories and folders are also recreated during this process. Low level refers to the preferred or most comprehensive method of formatting.

A low-level format of a high speed memory card helps ensure smooth continuous shooting at a constant interval.

In camera, not computer

It's best to erase and format memory cards in the digital camera, not via a computer. If you plan to use a memory card that was previously used in another camera, particularly if it was made by a different manufacturer, format the card in the new camera before taking any shots.

A word of caution: make sure you copied any photo and video files prior to erasing or formatting a card.

Check your camera manual

The reformatting function on the camera is often buried beneath layers and layers of menus, so if it's not immediately obvious, it's probably a good idea to consult the camera's user manual. If you've lost or otherwise misplaced it, then look online for a downloadable version, either at the company website or elsewhere.

Formatting and erasing a memory card is done through the menu. The functions are generally accessed in Playback mode, though they can be accessed in other modes on some cameras. Since the steps vary from camera to camera, check your manual for specific instructions.

TopTip: Even a brand new memory card should be formatted in-camera before using it for the very first time.

Before you begin, make sure that all your photos have been deposited onto a computer so that no information is unnecessarily lost

Make sure that you reformat the card in the camera in which you'll be using it. This is important to make sure that the memory card is optimized for the particular camera. There are occasionally subtle differences between the reformatting software, especially between older and newer cameras, so avoiding these issues altogether is best.

A note: some cameras, especially of the Fuji brand, refer to this instead as "initialization" of the memory card. Don't fret, the steps are exactly the same as for any other camera.

Why does reformatting your memory card help it so much? What reformatting does is to redefine the file structure, keeping it clear of any corruption or the like

which can lead to missing pictures and irritating error messages. This will also help lengthen the lifespan of your memory card: if you never reformat, the size of the memory card will shrink at a quicker rate than if you reformat regularly.

Below are pictures of before and after a format in the camera. As can be seen all the space available on the card has been made available after formatting.

