

A Quick Guide

For Importing Your Old Video Tapes

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Table of Contents

1. Overview
2. Are your tapes analog or digital?
3. Getting started basics
4. What you need to import your tapes?
5. What is compression?
6. Watching and editing your videos
7. Conclusion
8. Resources (links to stuff you may need to buy)

Overview

This is your basic guide to help you capture your favorite memories from all those old tapes, like your VHS, Hi8, Digital8, MiniDV and HDV tapes. You will learn how to easily capture them to your computer and/or external hard drives. We're going to focus on the consumer versions of cameras and technologies and skip a few older formats that had lower use, like Betamax.

Tape size comparison

VHS
(1980 - 1990)



Hi8
(1990 - 1995)



MiniDV
(1995 - 2007)



Are your tapes analog or digital?

First, you need to know if your tapes are analog (slightly older) or digital format. The equipment you need to capture these videos differ for each format. See the list below for what tapes are in each format. The years represented are the time period when the camera was at their height of use and to give you an idea of what camera you owned.

Analog tapes require a hardware device to convert (or transcode) from the analog to digital format, where as digital tapes can be captured straight to your computer without an analog to digital converter. See the “Steps & Equipment to Capture Your Tapes Section”.

Tape name & years it was typically used	Format	Find your tape!
VHS (1980 - 1990)	Analog	
Hi8 - Video8 (1990 - 1995)	Analog	

<p>Digital8 - D8 (2000-2004)</p>	<p>Digital</p>	
<p>MiniDV (1995 - 2007)</p>	<p>Digital</p>	
<p>DVCAM (1998 - 2007)</p>	<p>Digital</p>	
<p>HDV (2004 - 2008)</p>	<p>Digital*</p>	

*This is the only tape that recorded in high definition, all other tapes record in standard definition.

Getting Started Basics

When importing your old tapes, there are some basic steps you need to know so you can enjoy the amazing process of seeing all your old moments that have been stuck on those tapes come back into your life.

Capturing the videos can only be done in REAL TIME, meaning all your tapes need to be played at normal speed, then captured to your computer or external hard drive. This means TWO THINGS, capturing the videos take a while because each videotape can contain 60-90 minutes of video AND you need a device to play the tape, like your camera. Don't worry, we're going to tell you everything you need to make this important process as easy as possible.

What you need to import your tapes?

For both analog and digital tapes, you need a player to transmit the video, which is a camera or a deck device. In addition, if you are capturing analog tapes, you'll need to purchase or borrow a hardware device that converts the analog format to digital. If your tapes are already digital, then all you need are the right cables to connect your camera to your computer.

No matter what type of tape format you have, we've put together the best steps to help you capture tapes to your computer (find your tapes in the list below):

[Watch Getting Started Video for MiniDV](#)

VHS

1. Your tapes
2. A VHS camera or VCR machine
3. An Analog to Digital converter (I recommend Elgato, [buy from Amazon.](#))
4. Capture software (I recommend using the software that comes with the Elgato hardware)
5. A computer (this example is for Macs)
6. USB connector on the computer (the Elgato device connects to the computer's USB port)
7. An external hard drive

Hi8 or Video8

1. Your tapes
2. A Hi8 camera or Digital8 camera
3. An Analog to Digital converter (I recommend Elgato, [buy from Amazon.](#))
4. Capture software (I recommend using the software that comes with the Elgato hardware)
5. A computer (this example is for Macs)
6. USB connector on the computer (the Elgato device connects to the computer's USB port)

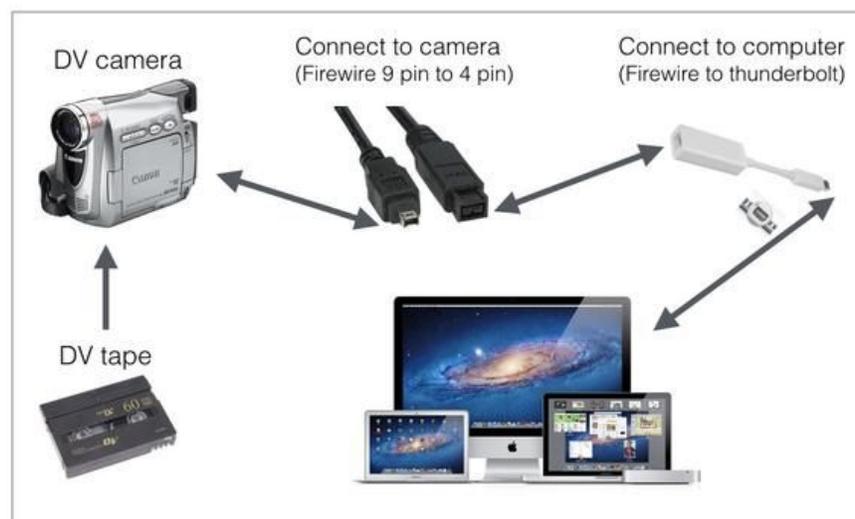
7. An external hard drive

Digital8 or D8

1. Your tapes
2. A Digital8 camera
3. Capture software (I recommend using [LifeFlix](#) for Mac computers)
4. A computer (this example is for Macs)
5. A firewire cable that connects your camera directly to your computer (See Mac Connection guide for more information, [click here](#))
6. An external hard drive

MiniDV (see diagram below)

1. Your tapes
2. A MiniDV camera (See more information on how to get a camera, [click here](#))
3. Capture software (I recommend using [LifeFlix](#) for Mac computers)
4. A computer (this example is for Macs)
5. A firewire cable that connects your camera directly to your computer (See Mac Connection guide for more information, [click here](#))
6. A Firewire (camera connector) to Thunderbolt (computer connector) adapter
 - a. Firewire (IEEE 1394 9 Pin to 4 Pin) [Buy on Amazon.](#)
 - b. Apple Firewire to Thunderbolt adapter. [Buy on Amazon](#)
7. An external hard drive



HDV & DVCAM

Same as MiniDV process.

What is compression?

Here is a very basic overview of compression to help you make a decision of what type of compression to use when capturing and archiving your important video memories.

Compression for both still images and video images is an essential technology that allows us to better view, store, and share images. In a very general sense, compression on images is just what the word means, which is to compress or make an image smaller. If we interacted with images in their “RAW” form, our hard drives would fill up and it would be nearly impossible to stream videos to our fancy new TVs. Every day you see JPG and PNG photos, which are both compression formats, and all videos on Netflix and YouTube are compressed.

Digital stills and video images are made up of pixels, or individual dots that represent different colors. When they are put together they form the images we see. These pixels make up data bits that make up the file size, or the MB/GB's. For example standard definition video has 640 pixels horizontally and 480 pixels vertically (640 x 480), whereas HD video has 1920 pixels horizontally and 1080 vertically (1920 x 1080). That is why HD video is much larger and takes up more hard drive space.

The goal for the incredible engineers that develop compression techniques is to reduce the size of the video file but not change how the original image looks to the eye. Modern compression algorithms are amazing, making it nearly impossible to see the difference between the RAW image and the compressed image.

What is the best format to save your taped videos long term?

Our recommendation is to use the MP4 or MPEG 4 compression technology on your taped videos. As an example, YouTube uses MP4 and we think they know what they're doing.

Using DV or MiniDV tapes as an example, if you visually compare the original DV files from the tapes and the same files compressed with MP4, they are indistinguishable but the file size is 1/10 smaller. I have uploaded a DV file and a MP4 compressed file for your to compare the two. [See examples here.](#)

The two programs I recommend in this guide, Elgato and LifeFlix both use MP4 compression when importing your tapes.

Watching and editing your videos

Many of you may want to capture the videos off your tapes because you're worried about them degrading and losing your memories forever, although this is true (tapes last about 10-15 years), the main reason we do this is because we want to watch them whenever we can, right?

One of the reasons I recommend LifeFlix for importing your videos is it automatically loads all the individual clips into a visual catalog to easily watch, share, trim, and combine video clips into home movies.

If you want a little more power or more editing and effect features, I recommend using iMovie on the Mac, it's by far the easiest editing tool on the market.

Conclusion

Capturing your own tapes can be a little time consuming, but in the end it's totally worth it. I've found that if you dedicate a weekend and use good software, you can capture all your old videos in one big chunk. Programs like LifeFlix are designed to make batch capture or importing dozens of tapes easy and hassle-free. At the end of the day, nothing beats seeing your lost video memories of your kids, weddings, and all those special events worth remembering - and LifeFlix is the perfect tool to help you take that walk down memory lane again.

Tape size comparison

Resources

Equipment

- Analog to digital converter (for Analog cameras and VCR players); [Buy on Amazon](#).
- Firewire cable (9 pin to 4 pin). [Buy on Amazon](#).
- Firewire to Thunderbolt adapter. [Buy on Amazon](#).
- Don't have a MiniDV camera? [Learn more here](#).

Videos

- Getting started importing MiniDV tapes. [Watch now](#).
- Importing MiniDV tapes directly to a hard drive. [Watch now](#).

