



CLOUD STORAGE

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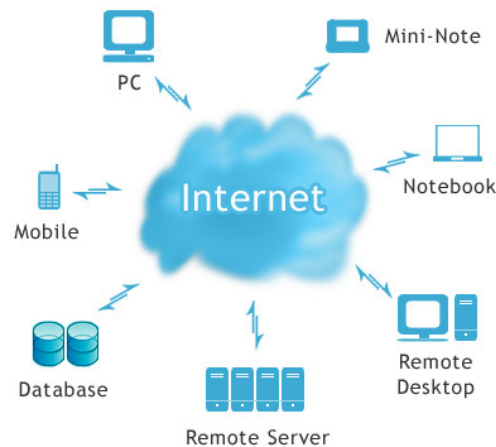
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INTRODUCTION

What is Cloud Storage?

Cloud storage means different things to different people. For our purposes, it refers to online storage of files, allowing them to be accessed from any computer or internet-enabled device. The files are stored on physical servers and remotely accessed via the internet. This allows you to access, and often edit and update, your files from any device with an internet connection and web browser. Some servers include desktop clients that, in addition to keeping your files on the cloud, synchronize the files on your computers to allow access to your data without a constant connection to the internet.



What Should I Use it For?

- Backing up your files.
- Synching your files between multiple locations, allowing you to access and edit your files from any computer. For example, you might install Dropbox on your home computer, your laptop, and your work computer, so that you can edit documents kept in your synched folders without having to carry around a flash drive with the files.
- Sharing files with others. You can generally share a link to a specific file or folder stored in the cloud.
- Collaborating with others. Many cloud storage services allow multiple people to work on a single file (though generally not editing it at the same time). This tends to be much easier than emailing files back and forth between everyone in the group whenever a change is made.

CLOUD STORAGE OPTIONS

There are several cloud storage options available, many of them free. A few commonly referenced services are discussed below, followed by a list of additional services you might want to look into. There is a fair amount of variety in the types of services offered, so make sure that a cloud storage company provides the services you need before committing to them.

Commonly Referenced

Dropbox

Dropbox is one of the most popular cloud storage services. A free account comes with 2 GB of storage, which can be expanded by referring others to Dropbox and by purchasing additional space. In addition to a web interface that allows you to upload and download files between your Dropbox and any computer with an internet connection, you can install a desktop application that keeps a local copy of your Dropbox on your computer. This allows you to work on files locally, without being connected to the internet. Next time you connect to the internet, your work will automatically be synched with your online folder and any other computers on which you have configured Dropbox.

Sharing folders or individual files is easy, and you can choose to make anything available publicly or just to certain other people. When you share a folder with another Dropbox user, each of you is able to modify files and add new files to the folder. In this way Dropbox serves as a collaboration tool, allowing multiple people to work on a single document. It eliminates the confusion of multiple versions of files being emailed back and forth.

Unlike some cloud storage services, Dropbox supports all file formats. Any file type found on your computer can be uploaded to your Dropbox account.

Dropbox website:

<http://www.dropbox.com>

Free storage space:

- 2 GB

Advantages:

- Keeps local copies of files.
- Maintains synched copies of your files of all your computers.
- Easily share files or folders.
- Supports all file formats.

Disadvantages:

- Relatively small amount of storage space.

iCloud

Apple's cloud storage service, iCloud, is good for a very specific user. If you use only Apple products and the iWork software, this may be a good fit. Seamless integration with the latest version of Mac OS X and iOS-based devices (such as the iPhone and iPad) makes it very easy to set up and use. For example, if you use the Pages software and have iCloud set up, any Pages document you save will be automatically uploaded to the iCloud. In addition to storing your photos, iTunes music, and iWork documents, this service synchs your email, contacts, calendars, bookmarks, and other data between your computers and mobile devices.

There are some very serious limitations, however. The number of file formats supported is minimal. While Microsoft Office files such as Word and Excel can be uploaded, the process for doing so is rather tedious. Many other file formats are simply not supported at all. Basically, if you use any non-Apple software, you'll be better off using a different service.

iCloud website:

<http://www.icloud.com>

Free storage space:

- 5 GB

Advantages:

- Seamless integration with Apple products.
- Synchs email, calendars, and other data.
- Great additional features.

Disadvantages:

- Requires iWork software.
- Limited file formats allowed.

iCloud, despite these limitations, does have some very useful features. A couple of these are:

- Photo Stream

When a photo is taken on a device with Photo Stream enabled, it is automatically uploaded to the iCloud servers; from there, it is automatically pushed to the rest of the user's registered devices. So when you take a photo with your iPhone, it automatically shows up on your iPad and Macbook, for example.

- Find my iPhone

A user can see their iPhone's approximate location on a map (along with a circle showing the radius depicting the margin of error), display a message or play a sound on the device (even if it is set to silent), change the password on the device, and remotely erase its contents.

- iOS device backup and restore

This feature allows users the option to back up iOS devices (such as the iPhone) online. This means that they can be restored from online backup without connecting the device to a computer.

Amazon Cloud Drive

Amazon has become a leader in large-scale commercial cloud storage. Amazon Cloud Drive is their basic consumer cloud storage service, which is quite different. It is focused on music storage and playback, but also allows users to upload and download any other files. Amazon provides an MP3 uploader to upload your music to your Cloud Drive, and Amazon Cloud Player is an application available for Windows, MacOS, and Android mobile devices. There is also a useful web-based photo gallery for viewing pictures stored on the Cloud Drive.

Because of the limited functionality of the desktop applications, uploading and downloading files other than MP3s must be done via the web interface, which can be a lot more time consuming. There is also no automatic synching of your files—documents with changes must be individually copied to or from the Cloud Drive and any other places where you want to store them.

Cloud Drive website:

<http://www.amazon.com/clouddrive/learnmore>

Free storage space:

- 5 GB

Advantages:

- Music streaming features.
- Supports all file formats.

Disadvantages:

- Does not synch files between the Cloud Drive and your computer.
- Limited desktop application features.

Google Drive

Expected to launch this week (April 23-27), Google Drive is Google's entry into the cloud storage market. This service will most likely work in a very similar way to Dropbox, but with more storage (5 GB free). Users will be able to access their files on their desktop computer, mobile phone, tablet, or via the web. Files will be synched between devices, and will be able to be shared with other users. A potentially powerful feature of Google Drive is its integration with Google Docs, allowing you to use any web browser to edit files stored in the cloud.

Because it has not yet been released, and Google tends to be very secretive about new products before they are officially announced, all information about this service is speculative at this point. Nevertheless, there seems to be general consensus about the type of service which will be offered.

Google Drive website:

<http://drive.google.com>
(likely address; not yet launched)

Free storage space:

- 5 GB

Advantages:

- Keeps local copies of files.
- Maintains synched copies of your files of all your computers.
- Easily share files or folders.
- Supports all file formats.
- Integration with Google Docs.

Disadvantages:

- To be discovered.

Other Cloud Storage Services

Box

<http://www.box.com/>

Windows Live SkyDrive

<http://skydrive.live.com/>

SugarSync

<http://www.sugarsync.com/>

JustCloud

<http://www.justcloud.com/>

YouSendIt

<http://www.yousendit.com/>

Cloud Storage Reviews and Resources

Top 5 Free Cloud Storage Options

<http://techsplurge.com/910/top-5-free-cloud-storage-options/>

Brief summaries of several cloud storage options.

Let's Talk About Cloud Storage

<http://blog.synology.com/blog/?p=593>

An extensive blog post dealing with the topic of cloud storage, focusing on a few specific services.

2012 Best Online Storage Service Comparisons and Reviews

<http://online-storage-service-review.toptenreviews.com/>

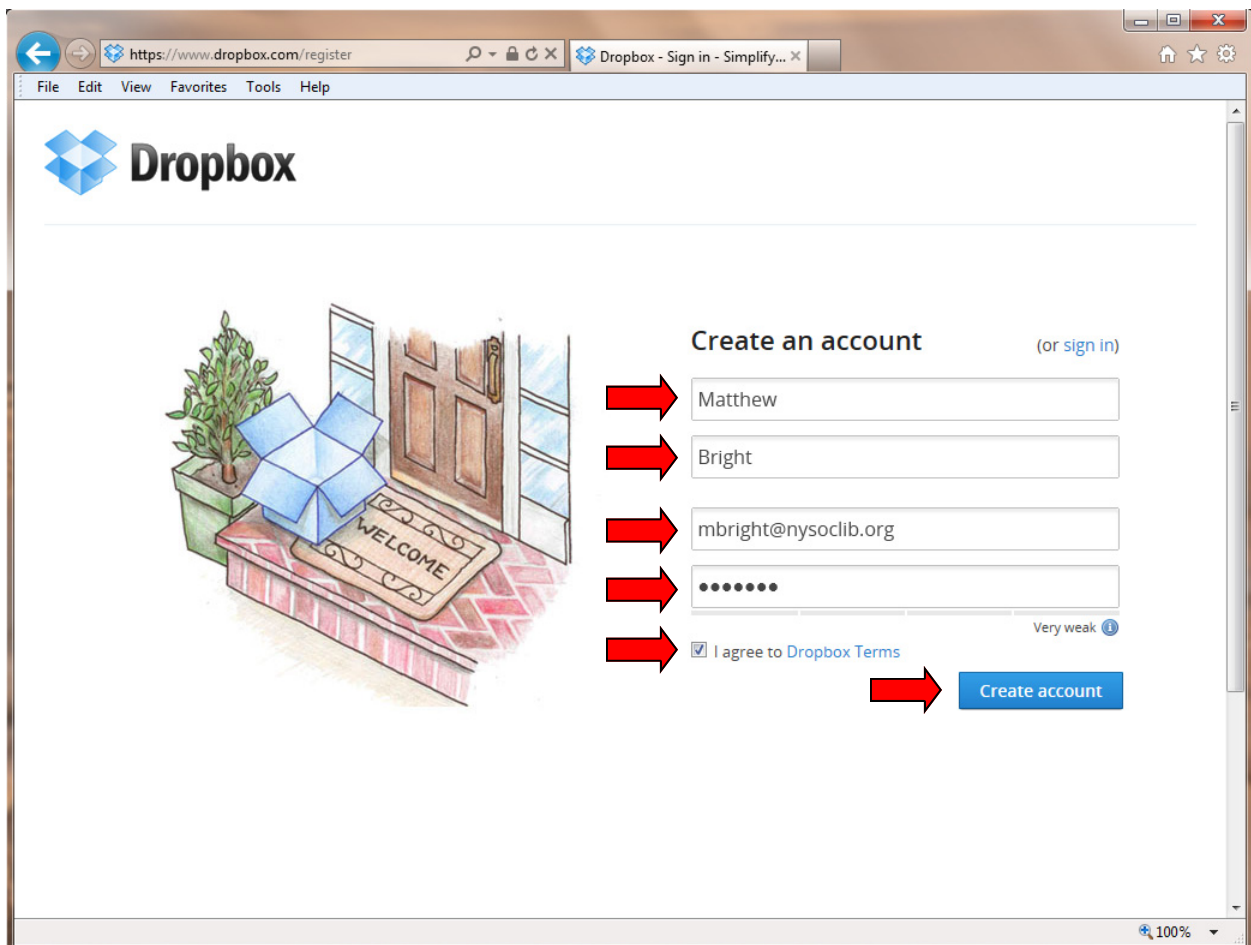
A good comparison table of some of the major players in cloud storage.

USING CLOUD STORAGE: DROPBOX

This is a guide to setting up and using the cloud storage service Dropbox. It covers the basics, but there are more advanced features and uses for Dropbox that you can find out about in the resources listed at the end of this guide. Similar guides can be found for other cloud storage services on the internet.

Setting Up Your Account

To create a new Dropbox user account for yourself, go to <http://www.dropbox.com/register>, or just go to the main Dropbox page and choose “Create an account” from the “Sign in” dropdown menu. Provide your name and email address, create a password for the account, and check the box to agree to the Dropbox terms of service. Then click the “Create account” button. That’s all there is to it! You’ll then be directed to download the desktop application. You’ll also receive a confirmation email.



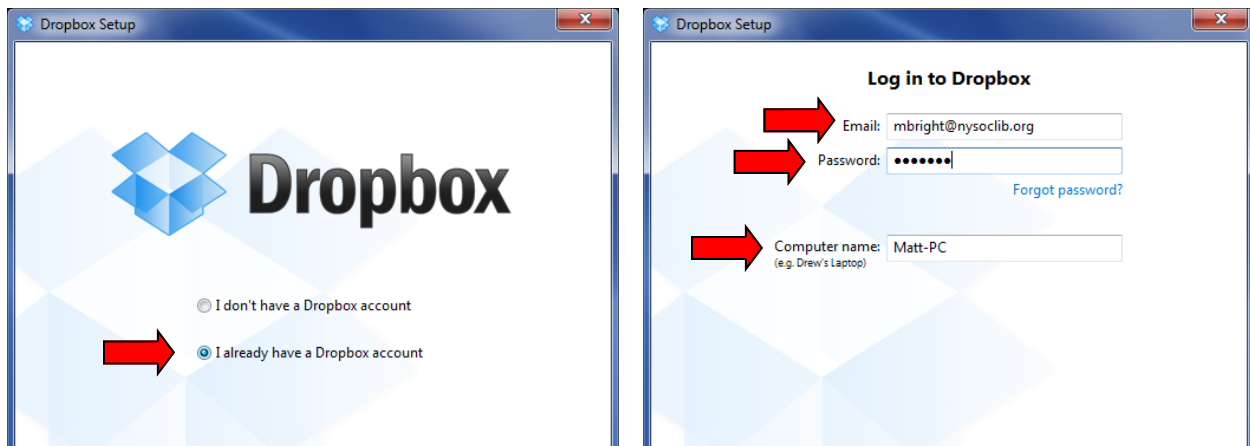
Installing Dropbox

On Windows

The Dropbox software download should begin automatically once you register an account. If you already have an account, or want to install it on additional computers, simply click on the “Download Dropbox” button at <http://www.dropbox.com>. When asked what to do with the download, choose “Run”.

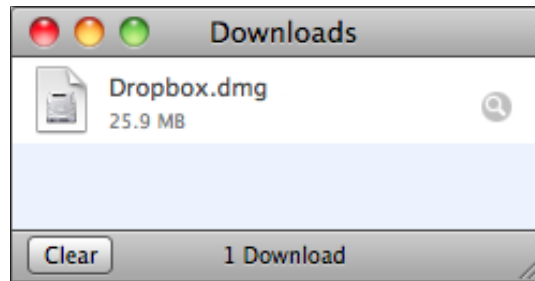


When the download has completed, the installation begins and guides you through the process. When prompted, select “I already have a Dropbox account”. You will then be asked to log in, using your email address and password that you chose earlier. The computer name is to identify which computer is making changes or adding files to your Dropbox; choose a name that makes sense to you, like “Matthew’s PC”. When asked whether you want do a typical or advanced setup, choose “Typical”. The installation completes, and gives you the option to open your Dropbox folder upon completion.



On Mac

Installing Dropbox on a Mac is very similar to the procedure for Windows. Your download should begin automatically when you complete your Dropbox registration as a new user. If you already have an account, or want to install it on additional computers, simply click on the “Download Dropbox” button at the bottom of the main page at <http://www.dropbox.com>. Once the download has completed, open “Dropbox.dmg” from your Downloads folder.



In the Dropbox Installer window, just drag the “Dropbox” icon over the “Applications” icon.



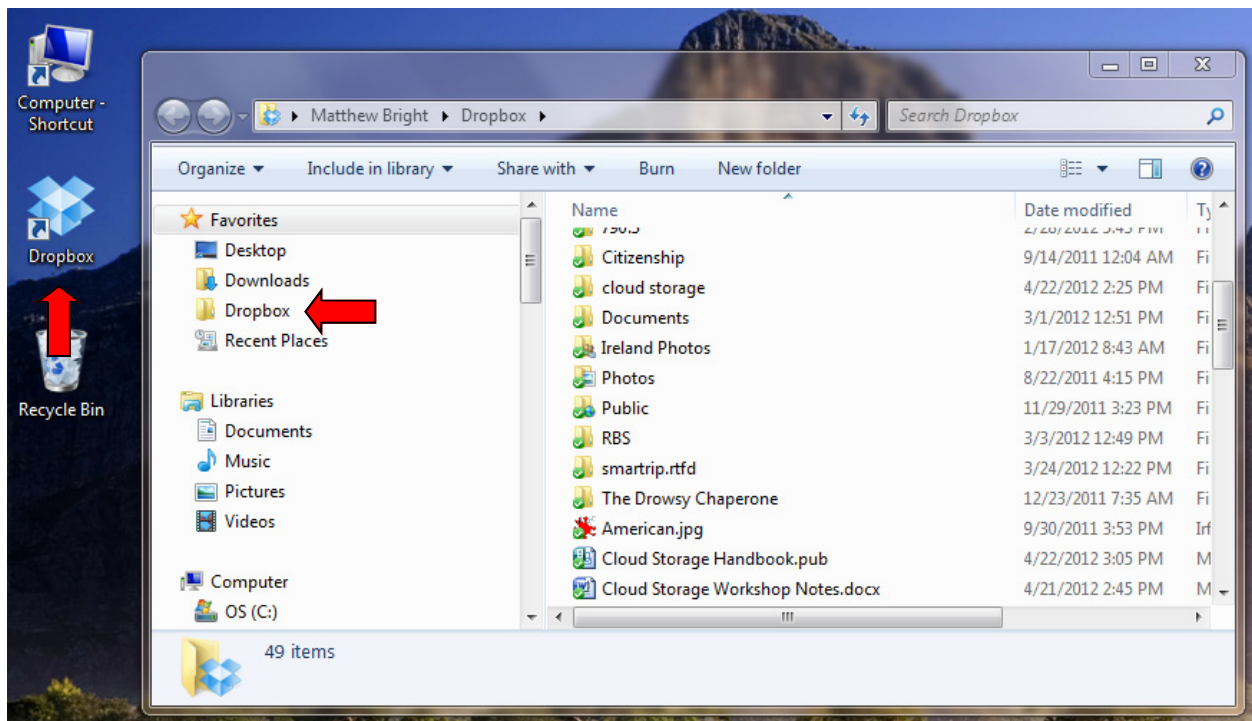
Double-click on the Dropbox icon in your Applications folder, or launch it using the Launchpad on the dock. When you open Dropbox for the first time, you will be guided through the rest of the installation process. When prompted, select “I already have a Dropbox account”. You will then be asked to log in, using your email address and password that you chose earlier. The computer name is to identify which computer is making changes or adding files to your Dropbox; choose a name that makes sense to you, like “Matthew’s Mac”. When asked whether you want do a typical or advanced setup, choose “Typical”. You’ll then be ready to go with an active Dropbox folder.



Using Dropbox

Getting Started

Once you have installed the Dropbox application on your computer, you will find a shortcut to your Dropbox folder on your desktop. This folder is also usually accessible in the list of common locations on the left hand side of most “Open” and “Save” windows. Your Dropbox folder works just like any other folder on your computer, except that anything you place in there is automatically uploaded to the cloud and synced with any other computers and devices on which you have Dropbox installed.



You can copy files to and from your Dropbox folder just like any other folder. Use the cut, copy, and paste commands, or simply drag and drop. The Dropbox folder is stored on your hard drive, so the files stored in it are always available—even if you do not have an internet connection or close your Dropbox account. It is best to keep a single copy of your working files on your computer, so it is better to keep documents and images that you might want to edit on multiple computers within your Dropbox folder rather than your regular Documents or Pictures folders to avoid confusion over which version you are updating.

Special Dropbox Folders

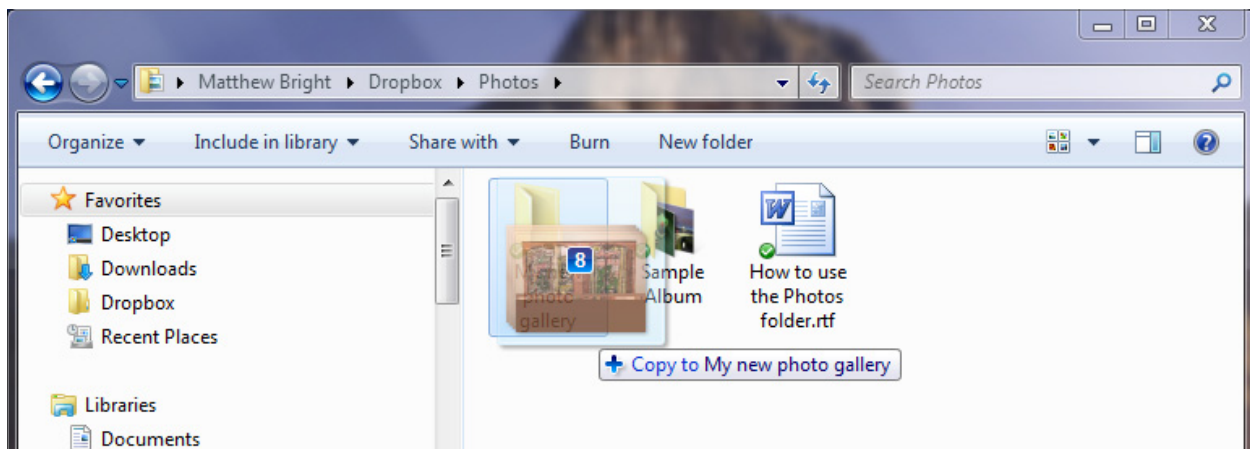
Included in your Dropbox folder when you first create your account are two special folders: Photos and Public. Each of them contains a document explaining how to use that special folder, and the Photos folder also includes a sample photo gallery.

Photo Galleries

Subfolders within the Photos folder are automatically turned into photo galleries by Dropbox, making it easy to view and share your photos with others via the web. Simply create a new subfolder for your gallery (right-click within the Photos folder and select “New > Folder”) and copy your photos into that subfolder.

Tip for Mac users:

If you do not have a mouse with a right mouse button, tap your trackpad with two fingers or hold down the Control key while clicking to bring up the menu of options.



You can then right-click on the folder, choose “Dropbox,” and select “Copy Public Gallery Link” to copy the public link to the clipboard, which you can then paste into emails, a Facebook status update, etc.

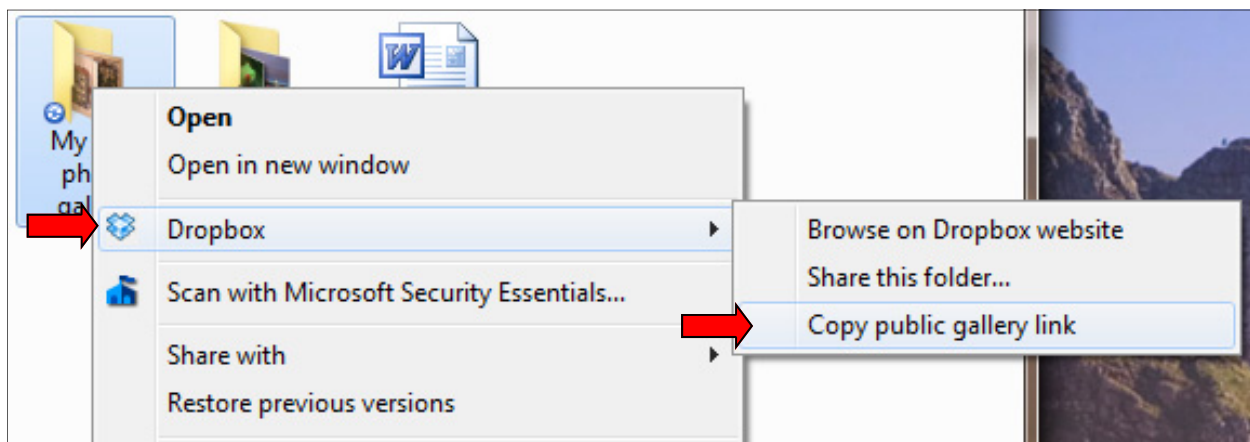
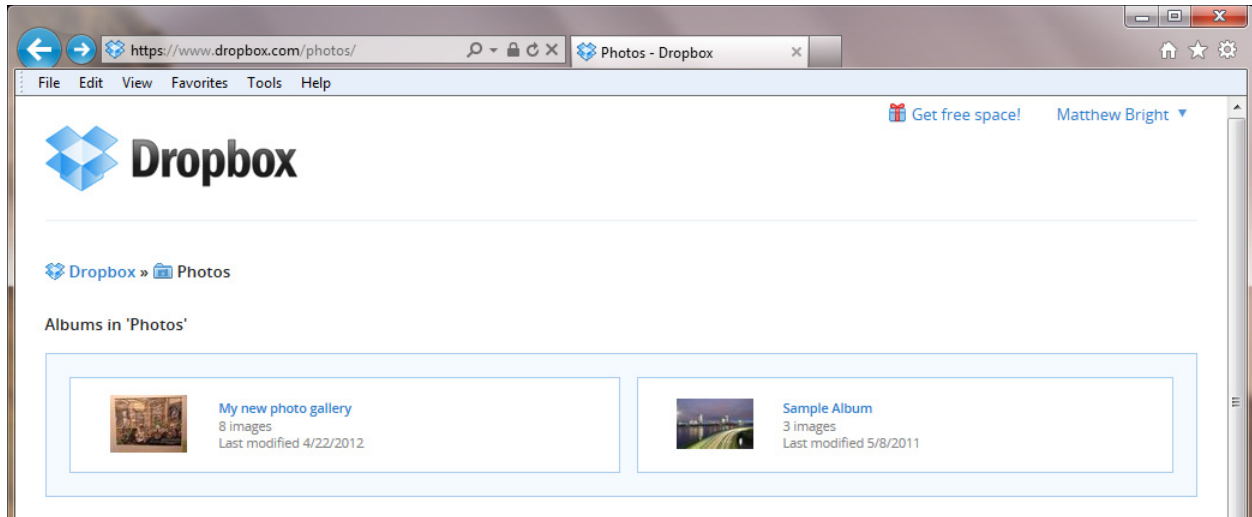
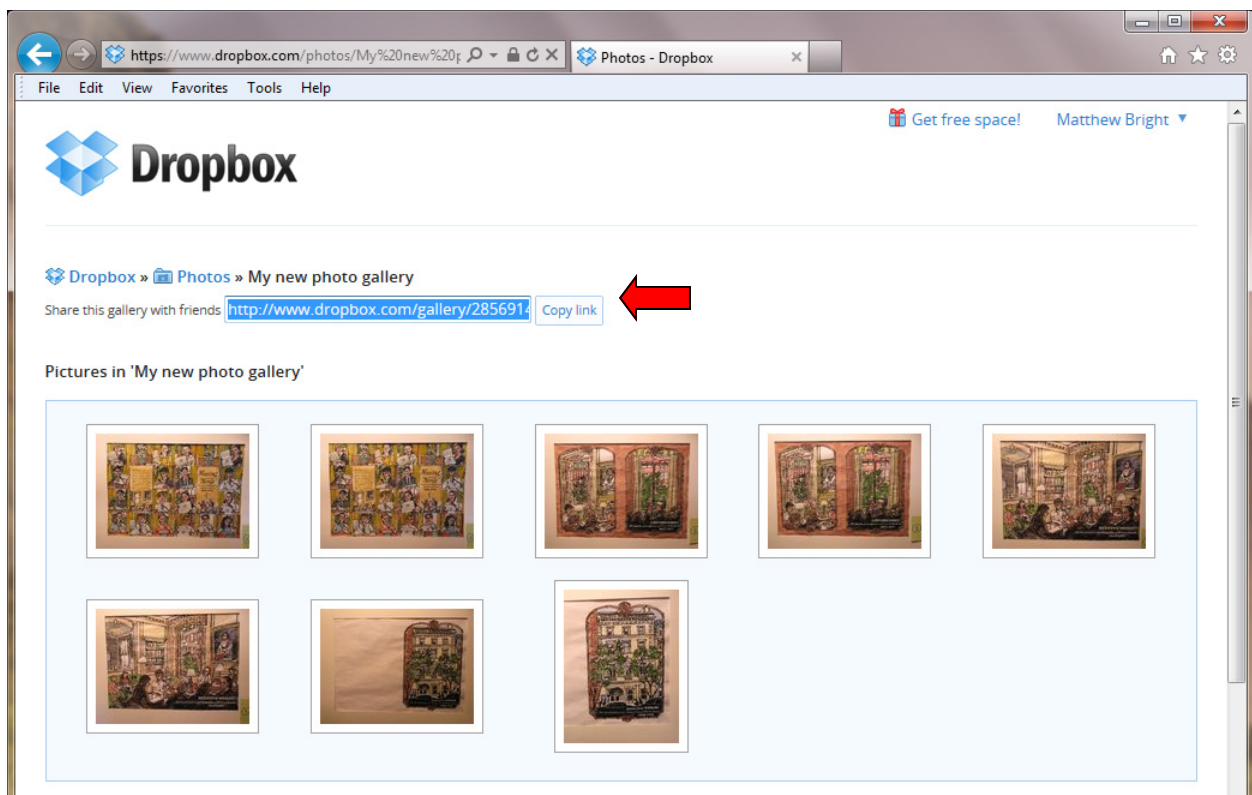


Photo Galleries (continued)

You can also go to <http://www.dropbox.com/photos> to view your album and get the public link to the album that you can share with anyone. Once you have logged into your account, you can view all your photo galleries.

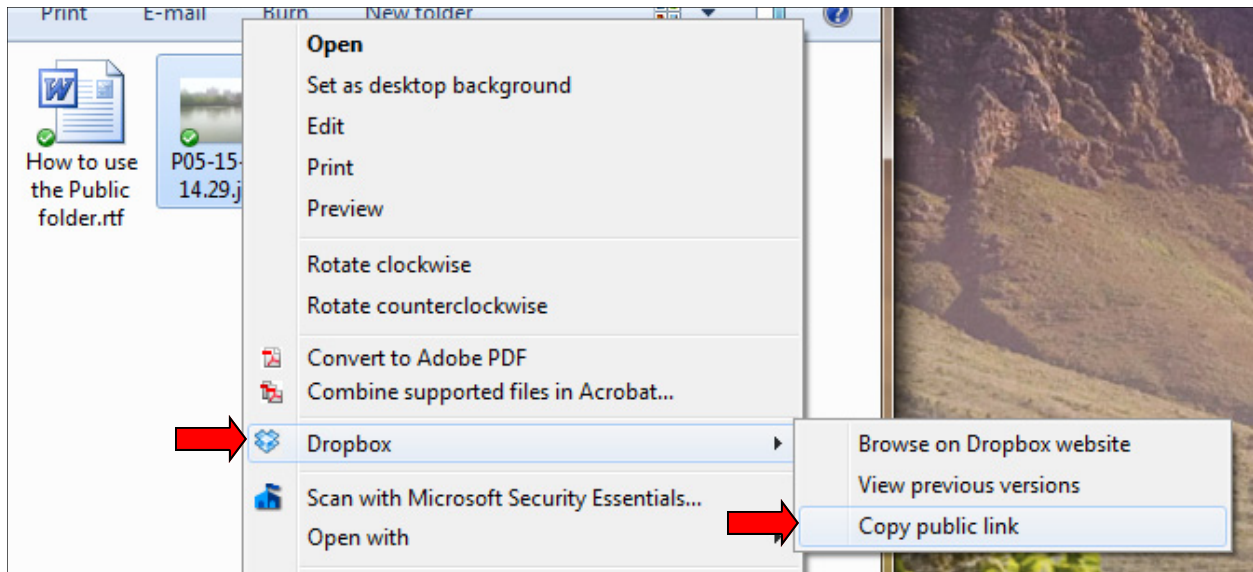


Once you open a photo gallery, the public link to the gallery is shown near the top of the page. You can also view your gallery the same way everyone else will be able to, clicking on the images and playing a slideshow of the gallery.



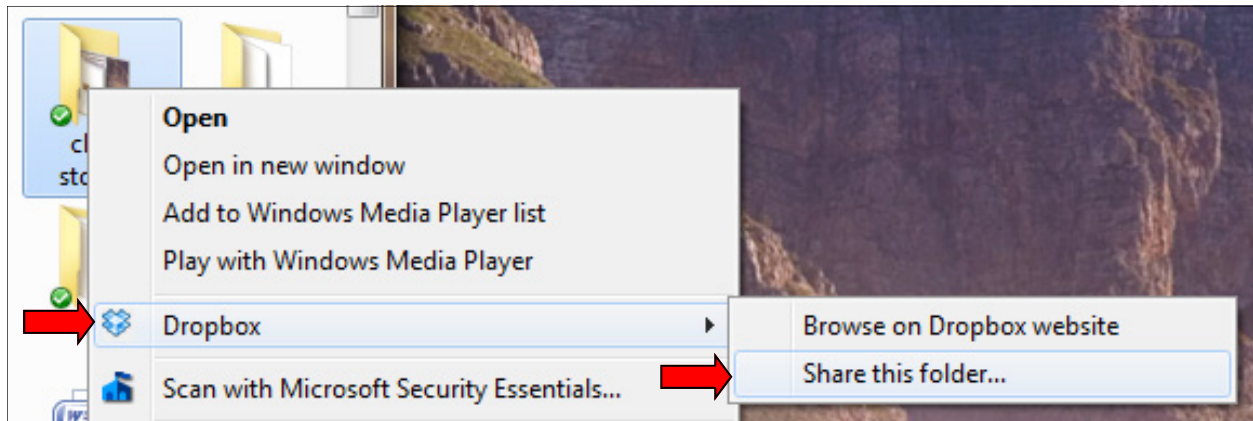
The Public Folder

This folder makes it easy to share individual files publicly. Any file placed in this folder will have a specific public link (in the same way that photo galleries do). Drag a file to the Public folder, then then right-click on the file, choose “Dropbox,” and select “Copy Public Link” to copy the public link to the clipboard. You can only link to specific files within the Public folder, and not entire folders.



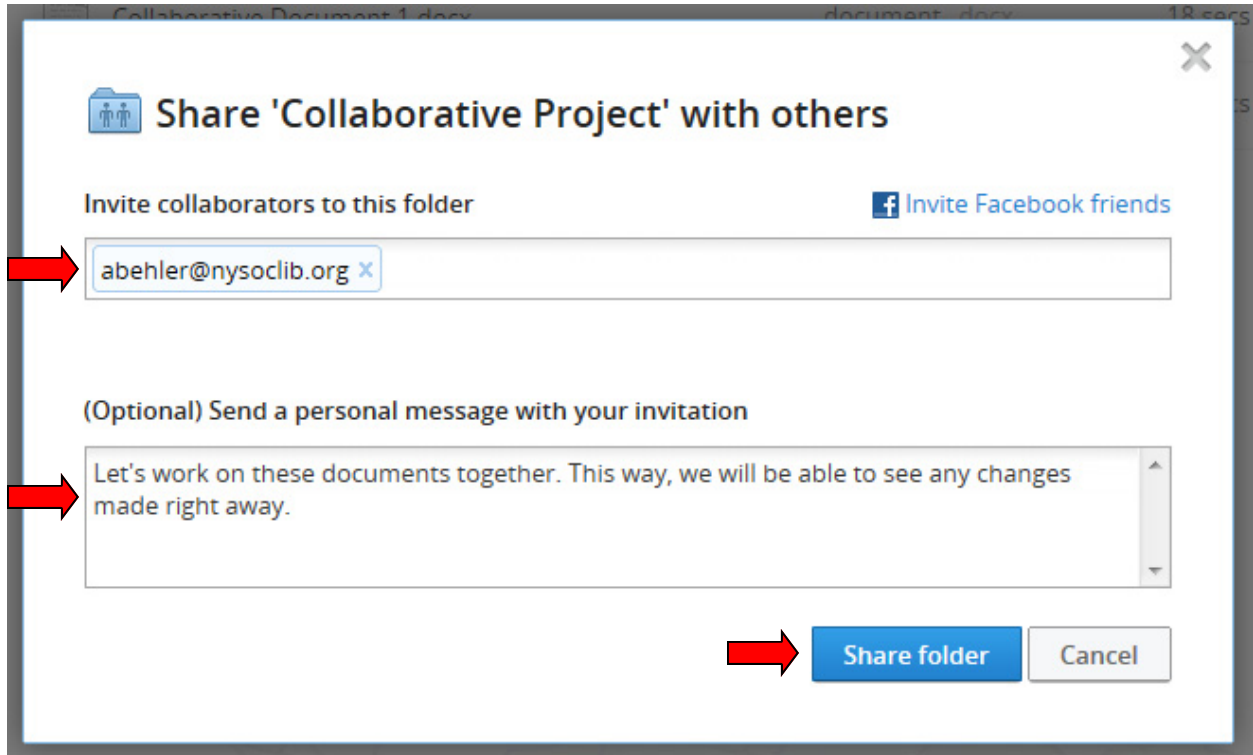
Sharing Folders with Other Dropbox Users

A powerful feature of Dropbox is the ability to share a folder with other Dropbox users. This allows multiple people to edit a single document, keeping the most recent changes synched between all the Dropbox accounts it is shared on. In your Dropbox folder, right-click on the subfolder you want to share, choose “Dropbox,” and select “Share this folder...”. The Dropbox web site will open, asking you for more information on who to share the folder with.



Sharing Folders with Other Dropbox Users (continued)

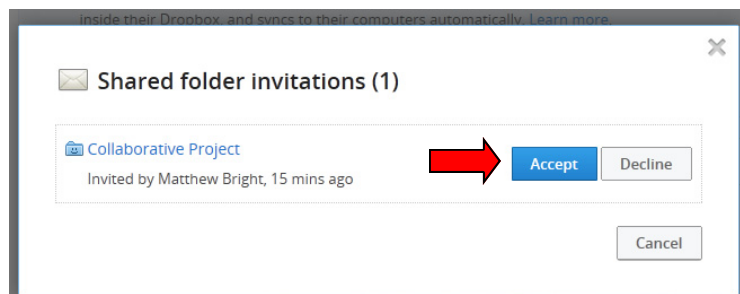
Enter the email addresses of those you want to share the folder with. You may also include a message telling them what you are sharing with them and why.



If the person you are sharing the folder with does not have Dropbox, they will have to create an account. If they already have Dropbox, they must approve the shared folder. Once they have approved the collaboration, this folder will automatically be created in their Dropbox folder, along with any files in it.

Joining Another User's Shared Folder

You must be invited in order to join another user's shared folder. Once you receive the email that a folder has been shared, click the link and log in to your web Dropbox account if you are not already logged in. You will then be prompted to accept or deny the shared folder. Click "Accept" and it will be added to your Dropbox.



Dropbox on the iPad

Installing the Dropbox App

Open the App Store by touching the icon at the bottom of the screen, then search for “Dropbox”. The Dropbox app should be the first result, and is free. Tap on the “+ Free” button, then “Install app.” You may be prompted for your Apple ID password. The app will download and the icon will become available when the download is complete. Touch the icon to open the app.



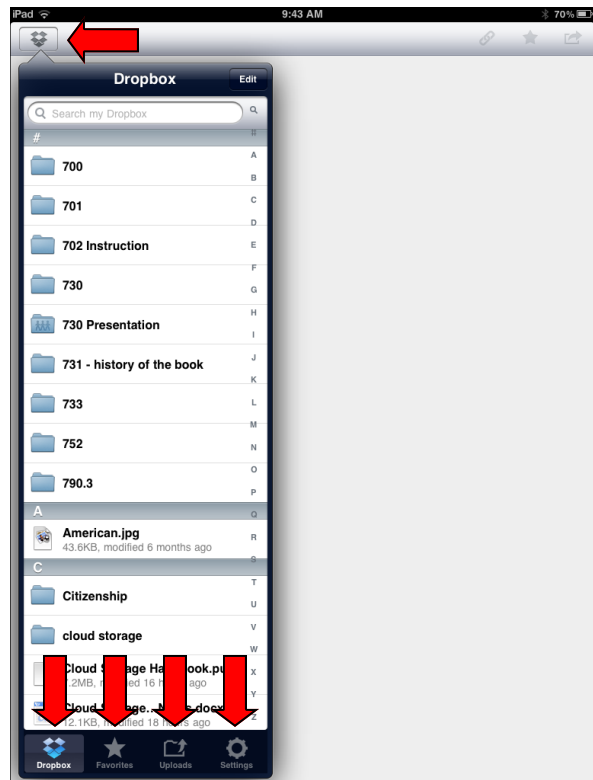
Using the Dropbox App

Navigating the App

When you first open the Dropbox app, you will be prompted for your Dropbox account information. Once you log in, the main Dropbox screen appears. Touch the box in the top left corner to view the files in your dropbox and to access other features.

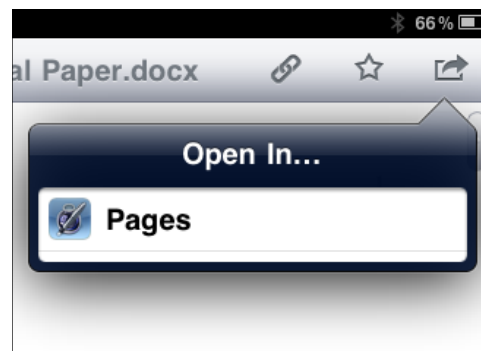
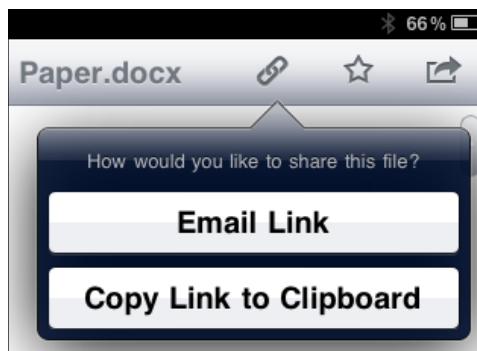
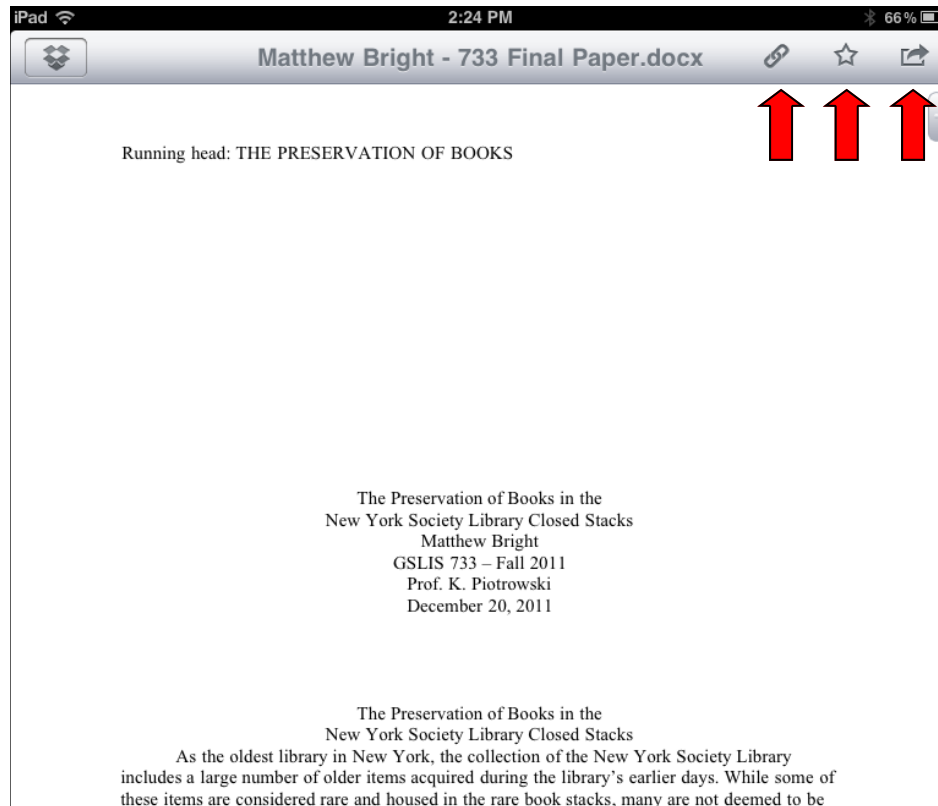
The icons at the bottom of the screen allow you to view your favorites, upload files from your iPad, and change Dropbox settings.

You can navigate your folders, and view most documents and images within the Dropbox app by simply touching the file name in the list.



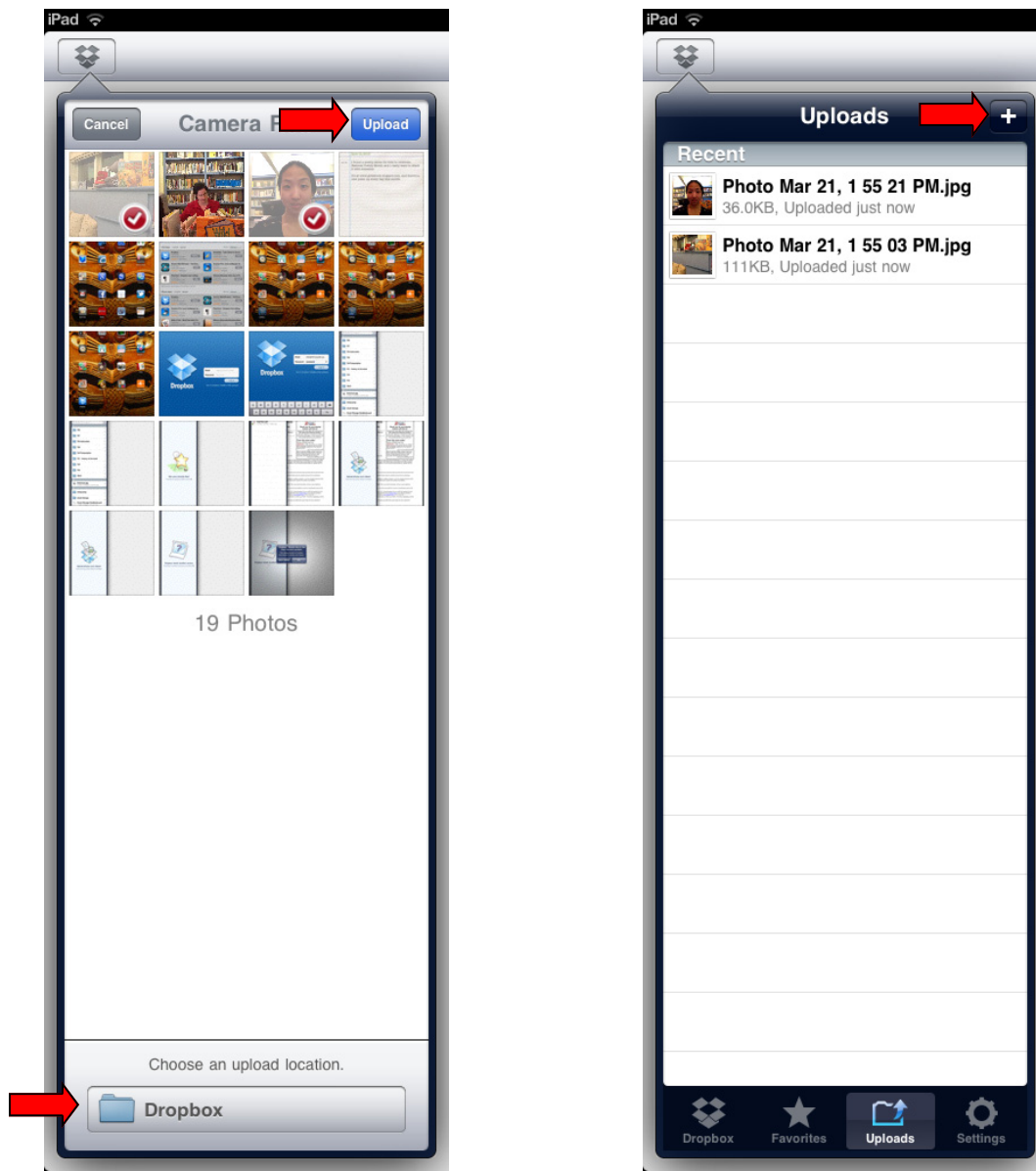
Working with files

Opening a file in Dropbox allows you to view it within the app, and also provides a few options with the buttons in the top right corner of the screen. The link button allows you to share the file with others by sending an email with the link, or by copying the link to the clipboard. The star button saves the file to the iPad, allowing you to access it even when there is no internet connection available. The third button, “open,” allows you to open the document for editing (if you have an app that supports the file format of the document), or save an image to the iPad photo library.



Uploading files

A limitation of the Dropbox app is that it only allows you to upload pictures and videos. To upload pictures, tap the “Upload” button at the bottom of the screen. You will have to authorize location access. Once you do so, your camera roll is displayed, and you can select multiple images to upload. You may choose a specific upload location and place these files within a subfolder by tapping the button at the bottom of the screen. Then tap “Upload” at the top, and your files will be uploaded to your Dropbox. In addition to appearing in your main Dropbox folders, these files will also appear as recent uploads within the uploads tab. To upload additional files, tap the plus-sign button in the top right corner of the uploads tab.



Additional Dropbox Help

The online help for Dropbox is very useful, and explains in simple steps how to use the different Dropbox features. The additional websites below may also be helpful.

Dropbox Online Help

<http://www.dropbox.com/help>

The Dropbox Blog

<http://blog.dropbox.com/>

The official Dropbox blog has information about new features.

User Guide to Dropbox Shared Folders

<http://www.howtogeek.com/howto/16310/user-guide-to-dropbox-shared-folders/>

A more extensive guide to shared folders, providing information on how to be notified when a change is made and how to see the shared folder's history.

The Ultimate Dropbox Toolkit & Guide

<http://web.appstorm.net/roundups/data-management-roundups/the-ultimate-dropbox-toolkit-guide/>

Some tips and tricks for getting the most out of Dropbox. Some of these are rather advanced.

20+ Advanced Dropbox Hacks

<http://storecrowd.com/blog/dropbox-hacks/>

Some more tips and tricks for getting the most out of Dropbox. Some of these are rather advanced.