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Dropbox Review

A file storage and syncing pioneer

●●●●○ **4.0 Excellent**

By [Michael Muchmore](#) & [Jill Duffy](#)

Updated March 8, 2022



Dropbox

\$9.99 Per Month at Dropbox 

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THE BOTTOM LINE

Dropbox is a simple and reliable service for file-syncing and storage, but you'll pay more for it than if you were to use the storage that comes included with an office suite.

MSRP \$11.99

\$9.99 Per Month Dropbox

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PROS

- ✓ Apps for just about every operating system
- ✓ Supports multiple ways to collaborate

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✓ Excellent support for integrations

CONS

- Free account is skimpy on storage
- Paid accounts are expensive

DROPBOX SPECS

Emphasis	Simplicity, Ease of Use
File Size Limit	2GB
Free Storage	2GB

ALL SPECS ▼

Dropbox is a pioneer among cloud storage and syncing services. It syncs all your digital files and folders so you can access them from any internet-connected device. Hosting your files with Dropbox also means you can share them easily with others. Dropbox has unique tools, such as digital signature features, that distinguish it from competitors. The main drawback is that Dropbox charges a lot more for storage space compared with what you can get if you were to pay for an office suite subscription with Google or Microsoft.

For that reason, Google Drive and Microsoft OneDrive are our Editors' Choice winners in the cloud storage and file-syncing category. They beat Dropbox in value, OS integration, and online editing. Dropbox is still an excellent choice for online storage—especially for those who'd rather not put all their data eggs into the dominant tech players' baskets.

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get with an account—especially a paid account.



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For example, a password manager called Dropbox Passwords is included with all accounts, even the free one (although for Business Standard and Business Advanced accounts, sharing features of the password managers are technically still in beta). Additionally, since Dropbox acquired the digital signing service HelloSign, you can use a paid Dropbox account to e-sign documents and request digital signatures from others. And though Dropbox isn't technically a full-scale online backup service, the app does offer to help you choose important files and folders on your devices to sync and store in the cloud, which you can recover at any time. Paying members can use Dropbox Rewind to restore their files to a state they were in up to 30 days prior (longer for some plan types) in case a computer is ever victimized by ransomware or other attack.

SIMILAR PRODUCTS

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PC EDITORS' CHOICE ●●●●● **5.0 Exemplary**

Microsoft OneDrive

\$0.00

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PC EDITORS' CHOICE ●●●●○ **4.5 Outstanding**

IDrive

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PC EDITORS' CHOICE ●●●●○ **4.0**

Google Drive

Starting at \$6 Per M

See It at Google Workspace

[Read Our Google Drive Review](#)

Price, Storage Allotment, and Upload Limits

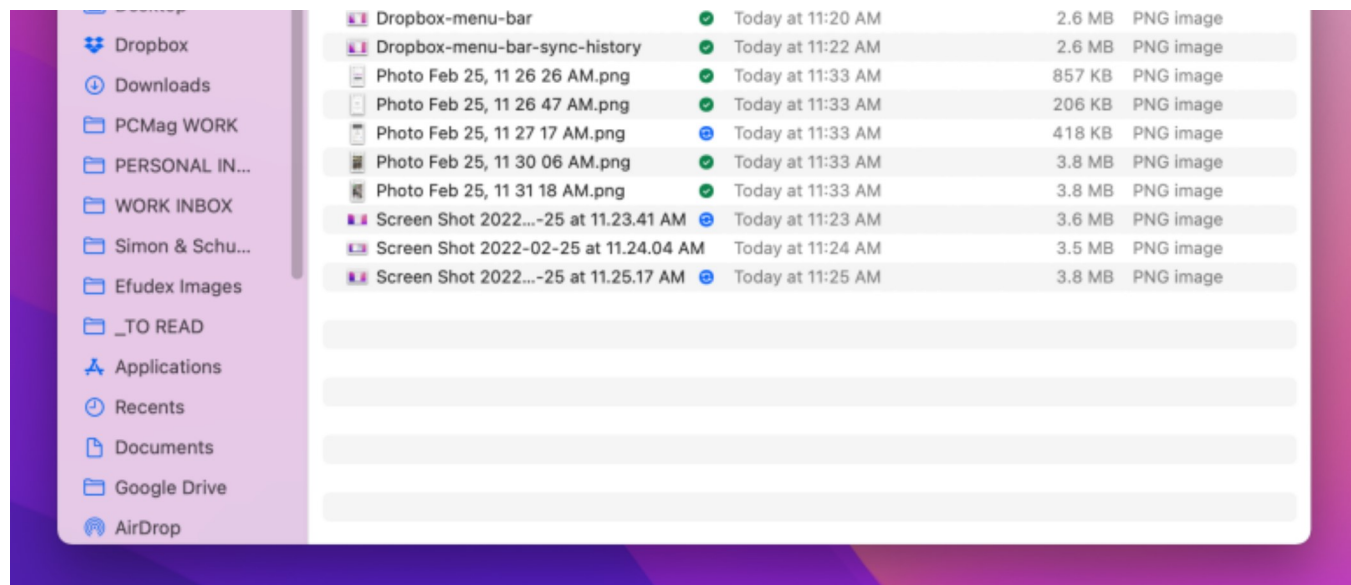
This review focuses on Dropbox for personal use. For the corporate audience, PCMag has a [separate review of Dropbox for Business](#).

All the Dropbox apps are free to download, and there are plenty of them, but storage is limited if you don't pay. The free Basic account provides a meager 2GB. You can earn more space through referrals—an additional 500MB for every friend who joins, up to 16GB—and by completing other actions that Dropbox suggests. Free users may send up to three documents for e-signature per month. Other areas of the service have stricter limitations for free users, however, such as a 100MB size limit per file transfer and no ability to search the content of PDFs uploaded by the Dropbox mobile app scanner.

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When viewing local files that are also saved to Dropbox, icons indicate files that are synced (green with checkmark) and in the process of syncing (blue with two circular arrows).

For those who need more than the free account offers, Dropbox has two more account options for individuals. The Personal Plus account costs \$11.99 per month or \$119.88 per year, and it comes with 2TB of storage. Plus also adds offline file access, remote device wipe, Smart Sync (like OneDrive's Files on Demand), and support for file transfers of up to 2GB in size. Then there's the Personal Family account, which costs \$19.99 per month or \$203.88 per year. It's similar to Personal Plus, with 2TB of space, but you can share the space among a total of six people.

Comparative Pricing

Comparing Dropbox to other similar services, you see that Dropbox's prices are high, and the amount of storage space you get with a free account is low.

Box, for example, gives you 10GB free, five times as much as Dropbox. Be aware, however, that Box limits uploaded files to 250MB each for nonpaying users. OneDrive's free account comes with 5GB of space for US users, which is more than double Dropbox's offering.

Google Drive gives you 15GB to start, but the math gets tricky here. That 15GB is spread across

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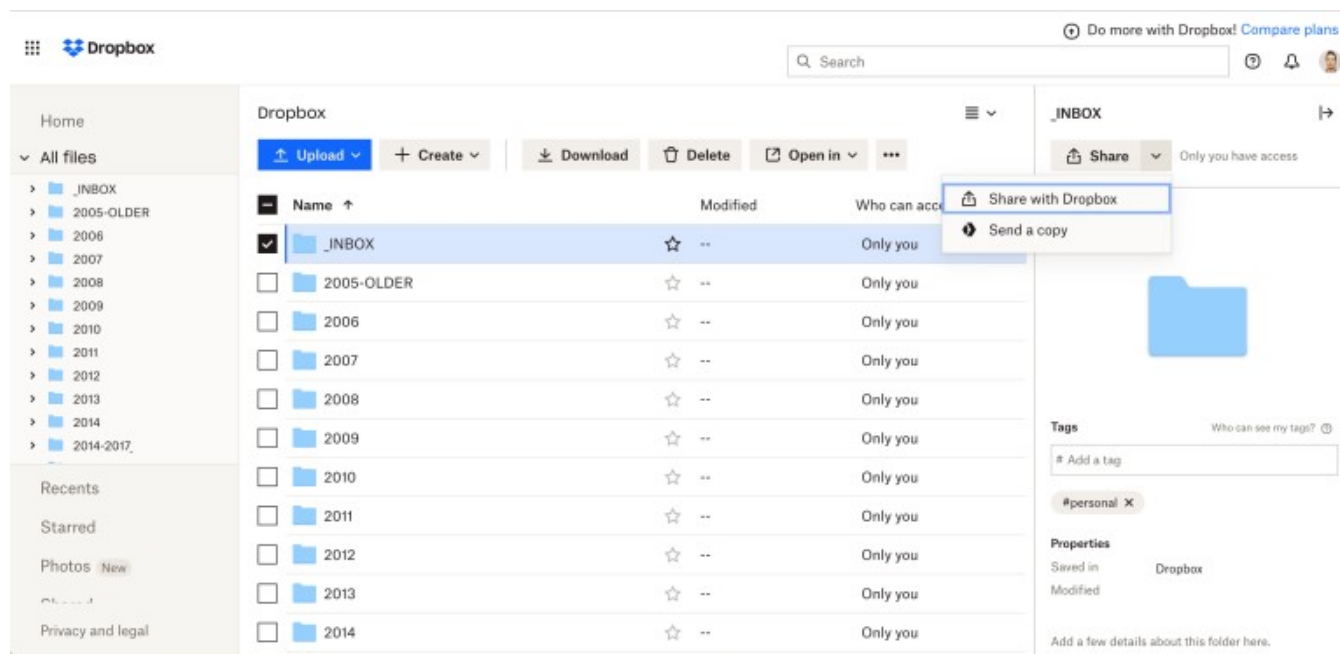
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doesn't count. Read Google's [help page on Drive storage limits](#) for all the confusing details.

If you know you'll have to pay for storage one way or another, one of the best values is [IDrive](#), where a whopping 5TB costs just \$79.50 per year. Google Drive's 2TB account is \$9.99 per month, the same price as Apple iCloud.

Another option is to use the storage space that comes with an [office suite](#) subscription, where the value proposition is also very high. With a Microsoft 365 account, for example, you get 1TB of space on OneDrive for just \$6.99 per month or \$69.99 per year. That plan also gets you a subscription to installable and online Microsoft Office 365 programs, like Word and Excel.

Family plans are another way to maximize value. A \$99-per-year OneDrive Family account gives your group of up to six people 1TB each, along with the Office apps. That's about half the cost and three times as much space compared with Dropbox's family plan.



Supported Apps and Compatibility

Dropbox has been in the file-syncing and storage game for years, and its maturity shows. You

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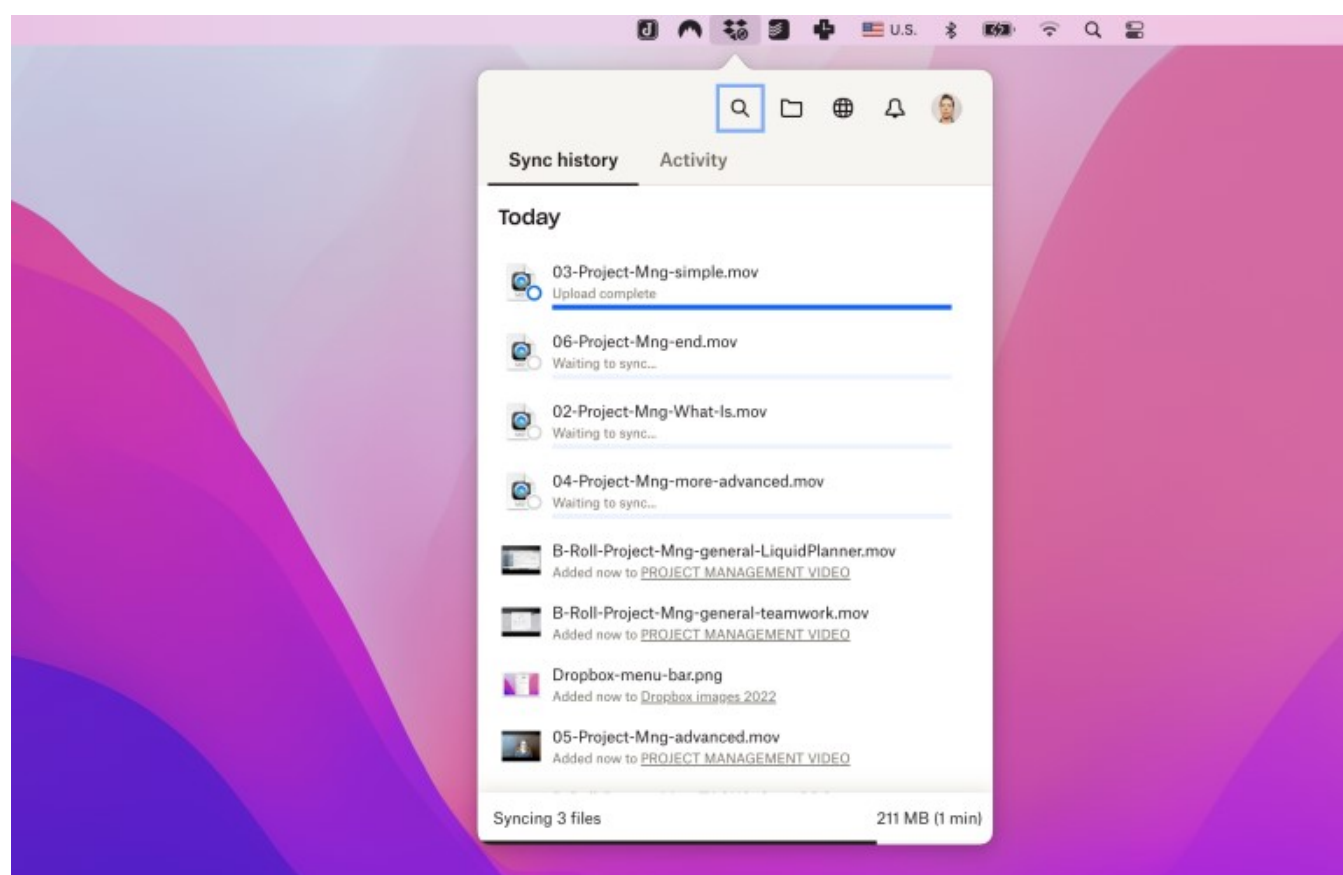
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When installed on a computer, Dropbox works almost invisibly, appearing and working more like a part of your operating system than a separate app. It looks different from other cloud syncing services, such as [SugarSync](#), which has a complete app interface even on the desktop.

Conversely, other cloud storage and syncing services such as OneDrive, iCloud, and Google Drive blend with the OS even more tightly.

One huge perk to using Dropbox is that it integrates with practically every other app and web service out there. Say you have a mobile email client that can integrate with cloud storage services. Dropbox is almost definitely going to be among them. Dropbox also works with automation apps [IFTTT](#) and [Zapier](#), so you can make custom rules for Dropbox to do something with another app when triggered. For example, "When an applicant submits an application through such-and-such app, automatically download a PDF of it to Dropbox." You don't need to know how to code to set up those kinds of interactions.



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Dropbox is available as a download for desktop installation from the company's website and for mobile devices from their respective app stores. The site makes it easy for new users to install Dropbox, because it detects your operating system and automatically suggests the right client.

When you download and install the client, you create a Dropbox account or sign in to an existing one. You can sign in with Apple or Google's sign-in services or use your own email and password. Next, the program creates a folder on your computer called Dropbox. You can choose where to install it or you can accept the default location (you can always move it later).

Once installation finishes, an icon appears in the top menu bar in Mac or system tray in Windows that lets you open your Dropbox folder with just one click. From this same icon, you can also reach your Preferences and Settings to adjust, for example, the folder's location or upload and download speeds.

Dropbox Works Automatically and Invisibly

To use Dropbox, you simply put files in the Dropbox folder and leave them there. Everything else is automatic. Like most other file-syncing and storage services, Dropbox automatically syncs your files everywhere, so they're available on any internet-connected machine where you've installed Dropbox or that has a web browser. Files you save at home automatically show up on your office computer. Photos you upload from the Dropbox iPhone app show up on your laptop at home, and so forth.

There is an option to store your files in the cloud without also storing them on your computer's local hard drive, although it's only available to paying subscribers, not free users. The advantage of using this option, called Smart Sync, is to offload files so that they aren't taking up space locally. When you use Smart Sync, your computer only downloads files when you need to open and work on them.

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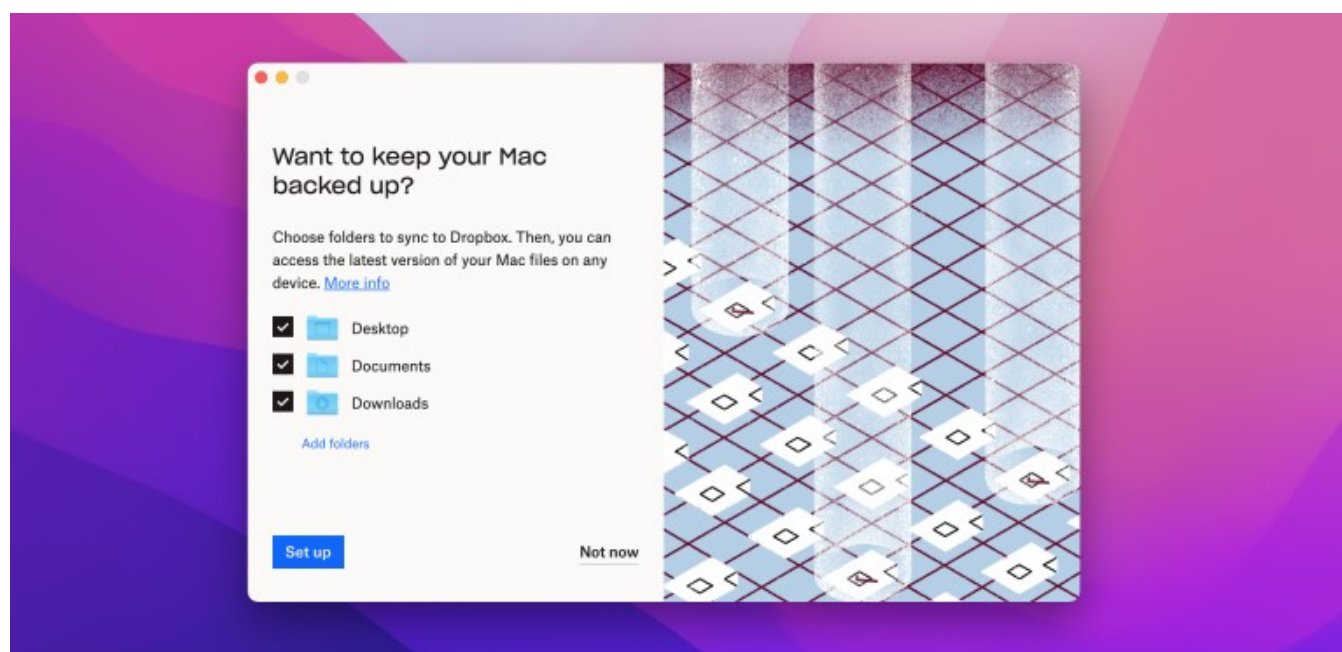
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individuals and Google Workspace users.

Using Dropbox for Backup

Though file syncing services are not the same as online backup services, Dropbox can back up a few folders that do not live inside the service's master folder, such as Documents, Desktop, and Downloads (OneDrive's backup option adds Pictures). If you're already using another service to back up these folders, the Dropbox setup for backing them up will fail. Once you've set up Dropbox to back up any of these folders, you can use the folders as normal, and any files stored in them will be available on the web and in the mobile apps.



If you delete files from your Dropbox folder on your computer, they will also be deleted from all the other devices on which you have Dropbox installed, and from your online Dropbox account. IDrive and SOS Online Backup keep locally deleted files in the cloud forever (usually referred to as archiving) just in case you deleted them by accident. Dropbox does archive deleted files, but only for a limited time. With Dropbox Basic (free), Plus, and Family accounts, you can recover any file or folder deleted in the last 30 days. If you have any other account type, you have 180 days to recover deleted files.

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Security and Privacy

Dropbox uses standard SSL/TLS for transferring files, and data at rest is encrypted using 256-bit Advanced Encryption Standard (AES). You can choose multi-factor authentication using either SMS text messages or an authenticator app on your smartphone.

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Dropbox is based in the US, so it complies with the Department of Commerce's Privacy Shield framework, which guarantees a level of data privacy protection. The company's privacy policy deserves some recognition for being written in clear and simple language. It explains who may have access to your data and under what conditions. The company says it won't sell user information to advertising agencies or third parties. Dropbox also provides a transparency report detailing the number of government requests it receives for information, what type of request was made (for example, a search warrant or a subpoena), and in how many cases Dropbox provided the information or not.

Collaborating Using Dropbox

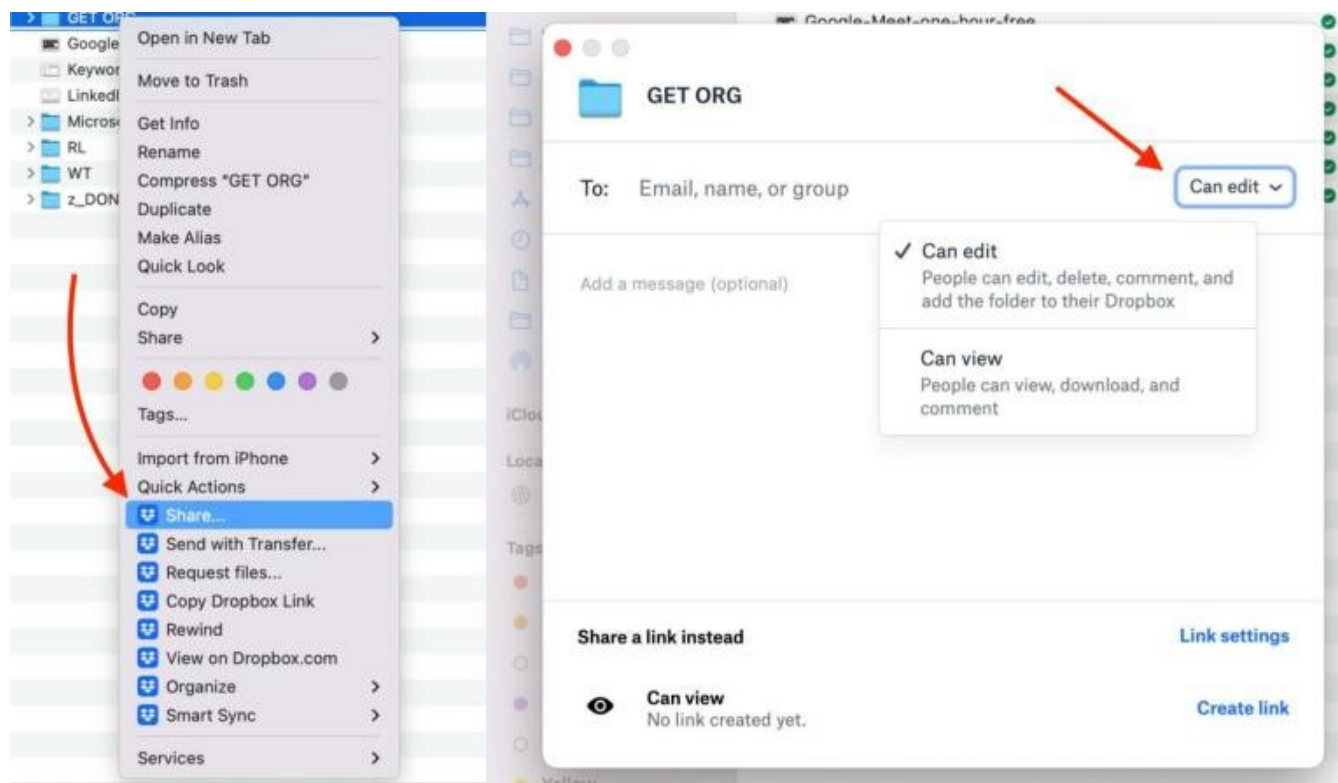
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want or need to work with others on the files they store in the cloud. Dropbox lets you collaborate in two key ways. One is by sharing files and folders. The other is by enabling collaborative authoring, editing, and commenting directly on files that you share.



Collaboration: File Sharing

You can share files and folders with people in a few ways, whether from a computer, mobile device, or by logging in to your Dropbox account from a web browser. The controls for sharing are good for free users and excellent for paying customers.

All Dropbox users have the option to share any file or folder with individuals by emailing them a message with a link. You can choose to give the recipients read-only or edit access to the files. Read-only access does allow the person to download the file, make their own copy, and edit it as they please. But it does not allow them to overwrite your own file.

Another way to share items is to generate a link to specific folders or files that you want to share, which you can send along to others however you like.

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how they share items, such as being able to add an expiration date to a link and to protect shared items with passwords. OneDrive has the same tools and also doesn't give them away for free—but *personal* paid accounts do get these tools from Microsoft, unlike with Dropbox.

If you share a file, Dropbox notifies you when someone accesses it, comments on it, or it has other activity. You get an email that says who did what, and if you have the desktop app installed, you get a notification saying what happened.

One more way to collaborate by file sharing is with File Request. You set up a folder and request that people add files to it; they can't see what anyone else has uploaded. Other services, including Google Drive, also let you share folders, but the permissions work differently. With Google Drive, a collaborator can either have view-only access or editing access. In either case, the person can see all the content in the folder, even if someone else uploaded it.

Collaboration: Authoring, Editing, and Commenting

Dropbox isn't an office suite, so you shouldn't expect it to have all the same advantages that come with Google Workspace or Microsoft Office when it comes to co-authoring and -editing files.

That said, Dropbox can integrate with Microsoft Office products so that you can use, say, Word or Excel to edit a file saved in Dropbox, including collaboratively. A similar integration with Google Workspace means you can create and share Google Docs, Sheets, and Slides in Dropbox.

In addition, Dropbox also has its own built-in collaborative editing tool called Dropbox Paper, which is considerably smaller in scope than an office suite. From right within the Dropbox web app, you can create new Paper documents, and your collaborators can add videos, images, and tables, as well as emojis and stickers.

Dropbox Paper is only available in a web browser and in its own mobile apps. You won't even see your Paper docs in the Dropbox folder on your computer, but a link from the system icon opens

Dropbox is now known as Dropbox Business. It includes a commenting tool for each document, and a search utility.

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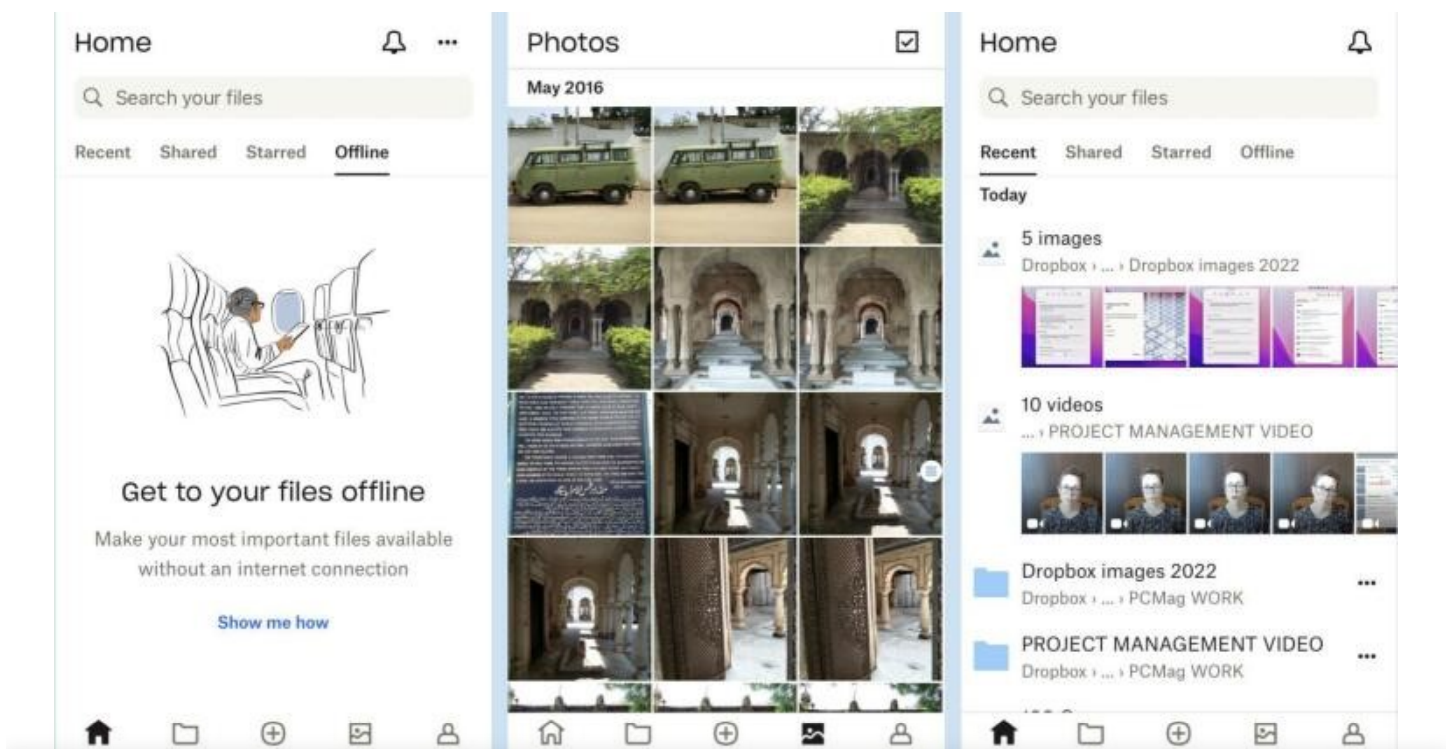
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in question. For example, there's a to-do list option that lets you jot down tasks you need to complete, or tasks for a group of people, where you'd use @name to make the assignments clear.

When you collaborate on a Dropbox Paper document, you don't see the flags showing who's typing; you do see initials and a different-color insertion point for each collaborator, however, as you do in Office Online. A Paper document can be exported to Word, PDF, or markdown (.md) file format. Paper is a modern take on office collaboration, but don't confuse it with a full-scale project management app like Asana.

Additional Features and Integrations

A few years ago, Dropbox acquired the digital signature product HelloSign, and now its tools are integrated into Dropbox. That means you can securely and legally sign documents with an e-signature, as well as send files out with a signature request. With all Paid dropbox plans, you can request and receive up to three signatures per month. To remove that limit, you can upgrade to the Professional + e-Sign plan for a total of \$24.99 per month.



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additional features of convenience included. For example, you can set an option in Dropbox so that it automatically uploads to your account any photos, videos, and screenshots you take with your mobile device. The Dropbox mobile app also includes a built-in scanner so you can scan documents and save them to a folder of your choosing in one fell swoop. You can mark files to save offline, view only images (for when you want to show people photos you've taken and saved to Dropbox, for example), and more.

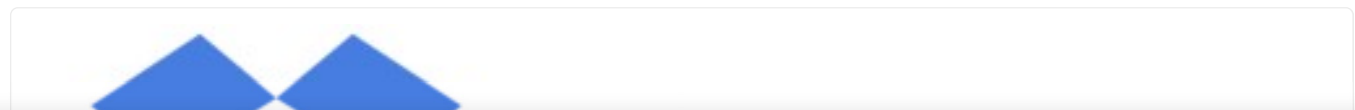
One more strength that Dropbox has is how well it supports other apps. It got into the integration business very early on and has a strong track record of making sure that other popular apps and tools—especially productivity apps—work as close to effortlessly as possible with Dropbox.

Simple and Reliable Syncing, Plus Extras

Dropbox isn't a particularly flashy service. Its appeal, however, is that it works quietly, reliably, and effortlessly in the background. Paid Dropbox accounts include numerous convenience features so that you can share, collaborate, and collect signatures on documents without muss or fuss. Terabyte for terabyte, does it cost more than competitors? Yes. It's also hard to make a convincing case for Dropbox if you're already paying for another storage service, such as Google Drive or OneDrive, by way of being an office suite subscriber. Because of their good value and feature sets, our Editors' Choice winners remain Microsoft OneDrive and Google Drive. If you don't want to store your files with those providers, however, and you don't mind paying a bit more, Dropbox is an excellent alternative that we don't hesitate to recommend.

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PROS

- ✓ Apps for just about every operating system
- ✓ Supports multiple ways to collaborate
- ✓ Good features for paying subscribers

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CONS

- Free account is skimpy on storage
- Paid accounts are expensive

THE BOTTOM LINE

Dropbox is a simple and reliable service for file-syncing and storage, but you'll pay more for it than if you were to use the storage that comes included with an office suite.

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