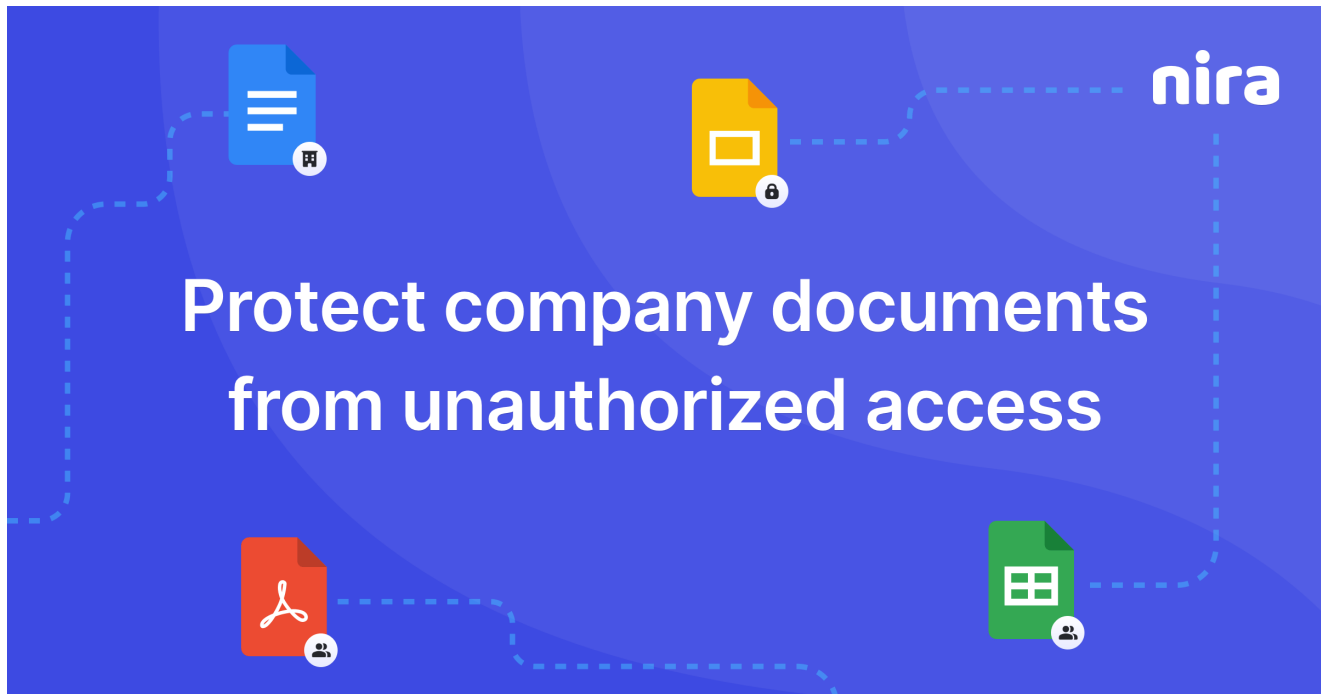


The Beginner's Guide to Dropbox Smart Sync

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When you choose a cloud storage service like Dropbox, you may be looking for an easy way to make automatic backup copies of your most important data, keeping a copy of your files safe in a different location than your physical computer.

You also may choose Dropbox because it gives you an easy way to share files among your co-workers and business clients, allowing collaboration on files and projects from anywhere.

But there's another aspect of Dropbox that you may not know about that can help you maintain storage space on your computer's hard drive. If you find that your hard drive is close to full, you can use the Dropbox Smart Sync feature to move files off the hard drive and into the cloud only.

This can be an invaluable tool for freeing up hard drive space, whether you just need extra space for a few hours, a few days, or permanently. We'll help you learn everything you need to know to take advantage of Smart Sync.

What Is Dropbox Smart Sync?

With Dropbox Smart Sync, users are able to free up space on the physical hard drive on the computer by making certain files online only. This means the copy of the file that's stored on the hard drive will move to the cloud, becoming part of your Dropbox account.

Smart Sync will maintain a list of the online only files, and the list will be visible on your hard drive, including all of the pertinent data about the file. It will look as though the file is still stored on your local hard drive, even though it only exists in the cloud. Once you click on the file to open it, Dropbox Smart Sync will download it immediately to your hard drive, making the file local again.

Making Use of Smart Sync

Smart Sync is a handy feature to use for a number of reasons, including:

- **Improving performance:** Once your hard drive becomes around 90% full or more, you may notice significant computer performance issues, which means using Smart Sync to free up space may let your computer regain some of the speed and reliability it had previously.
- **Moving old files:** When you haven't opened certain files for a few months, you probably don't need them on a regular basis. By moving these files to cloud only storage with Smart Sync, you'll be able to keep a copy of the file without needing it on your local hard drive.
- **Track shared files:** When you are using Dropbox File Request, and you have received many files from other people, you may not want to store these files on your hard drive, where they will take up a lot of space. Using Smart Sync keeps a copy of them for you online only.
- **Better organization:** With Smart Sync, you'll remove clutter from your hard drive, which may make it easier for you to remain organized. This lack of clutter may allow you to find certain files on the hard drive faster.
- **Immediate access:** Best of all, when you need access to one of these files that is online only, you can gain access to it quickly, as long as you have an Internet connection. If you are trying to store these old files on a portable hard drive, it will take you far longer to track down the portable drive and file the file than it will when using Smart Sync.

Understand that Dropbox Smart Sync is only available to customers who have subscribed to one of the paying tiers of the service, including Plus, Professional, or any of the business tiers (Standard, Advanced, or Enterprise). If you are using the free Basic version of Dropbox, you will not have access to Smart Sync.

Are There Downsides to Dropbox Smart Sync?

There are a few drawbacks with Smart Sync, but they may not really affect you, depending on how you are using the cloud storage app. Some of the potential drawbacks with Smart Sync include:

- **Internet connection:** If you do not have an Internet connection available, you will not be able to grab the files from your cloud account. Now, how many times will you actually need one of these files when you don't have an Internet connection available? We're guessing it will not be all that often, but this rare possibility may give you pause about using Smart Sync instead of a portable hard drive.
- **Damaged Dropbox.exe file:** If the Dropbox.exe file on your computer has damage, you will lose access to your online only files with Smart Sync, which uses a routine that relies on the Dropbox.exe file.
- **Picking the right files:** It can take a bit of time to go through your hard drive and figure out which files you would like to move to online only status with Dropbox Smart Sync. To save time, you may want to allow Smart Sync to automatically make the choices about which files to make online only, but this can cause issues too, should the automatic feature select files that you would prefer to keep locally stored.
- **Software incompatibilities:** With some types of software, you may find that the files you have moved to Dropbox Smart Sync are regularly downloaded back to your hard drive without your permission. Certain types of software may expect to find certain files on the hard drive, so they will force a download if this file is online only.

Dropbox Smart Sync Vs. Selective Sync

Even though they have similar names and perform similar functions, Smart Sync and Selective Sync are different offerings within Dropbox. You can choose to use either one, but you should take the time to determine which one will better meet your needs.

What Is Selective Sync?

Selective Sync does the same basic thing as Smart Sync, as it removes files from your physical hard drive, moving them to online only storage within your Dropbox cloud storage account. However, Selective Sync is a bit more restrictive than Smart Sync in terms of the amount of control you have over the process.

The primary differences between Dropbox Selective Sync and Smart Sync include:

- **Available in free version:** You'll be able to use Selective Sync with any version of Dropbox, including the Basic free version. Smart Sync is only available to those who use a paid subscription tier.

- **Folders only:** With Selective Sync, you'll place the files you want to move off your hard drive in a specific folder, and Dropbox Selective Sync takes care of moving the files to the cloud. With Smart Sync, you have the option of selecting individual files or folders to become online only, regardless of where they exist on the hard drive.
- **Not visible:** The files you have moved to the cloud in Selective Sync are not visible on the hard drive. Unless you open your Dropbox account, you will not be able to see these files. With Smart Sync, the Dropbox app leaves a "placeholder" for the online only file on your hard drive, so you can see the information about the file as part of your hard drive's data, even though it no longer exists on the hard drive. When you click on it to try to open it, Dropbox.exe will download it for you.
- **No automatic storing:** Smart Sync will automatically select files to move to online only storage, if desired, while Selective Sync does not have this option, meaning you must select the files to move to online only yourself. (Smart Sync does allow you to pick the files yourself, if desired.)

Choosing When to Use Selective Sync

Ultimately, it may be better to use Selective Sync for files that you rarely need access to or use. Because there is no placeholder for the Selective Sync files maintained on your physical hard drive, it takes a few extra steps to gain access to those files, should you ever need them, versus the single step with Smart Sync.

How to Change Your Smart Sync Settings

Once you have the Dropbox app stored on your local computer, you will have the ability to begin using Smart Sync. Here are some of the different ways to use Smart Sync.

Selecting Individual Files for Online Only

Start by clicking the Dropbox icon in the system tray in Windows or in the menu bar on a Mac computer, followed by clicking on the folder icon in the upper right corner of the menu that pops up from the system tray. In the subsequent window, find the file or folder that you want to make online only with Smart Sync.

Right-click on the file or folder. In the popup menu, left click on Smart Sync, followed by Online Only.

Setting Up Automatic Smart Sync

If you would like to have Smart Sync automatically determine which files will become online only, you can set up this feature. Through this feature, Dropbox will automatically make files that you do not access for a few months online only.

Start by clicking on the Dropbox icon in the system tray or menu bar. In the popup menu, click on your avatar. Then click Preferences, followed by the Sync tab.

Look for Save Hard Drive Space Automatically, and turn this feature on. Now Smart Sync will move unused files to the online only status.

Make Newly Added Files Online Only

You can follow a similar procedure to make any files that you add to Dropbox.com as online only. (This means that Dropbox will not download a copy of those files to your local hard drive when it does the synching between the hard drive and the cloud.)

Click the Dropbox icon in the system tray and then click your avatar. Click Preferences, followed by the Sync tab. Look for Files Added on Web Default and click on the dropdown menu next to it. Then click Online Only. (You may not be able to select Online Only if you have previously set up Automatic Smart Sync, as these two features may mimic each other.)

Understanding the Smart Sync Icons

When you are using Dropbox Smart Sync, the files on your hard drive will have different icon markings that alert you to their current status. Understanding these icons can help you determine at a glance the status of files.

- **Stored locally:** A green circle icon with a white checkmark inside indicates a file stored on the local hard drive.
- **Online only:** A gray circle with a black cloud icon inside indicates a file that's online only with Smart Sync, meaning you are seeing a placeholder for the file.
- **Mixed folder:** If a folder contains both locally stored and online only files and folders, the icon will have a green outline of a white circle with a green checkmark inside.

How to Get Your Business Team to Use Smart Sync

As an administrator for your Dropbox Business team, you have a minimal ability to control how the team will use Smart Sync through the default settings. However, understand that if any member of the team decides to change his or her local computer settings, this will override any default settings you create.

Smart Sync Default Settings

Under the default settings for Business users of Smart Sync, any new files added to the computer will be made online only.

If you want to change the default settings for the team members, sign in to your administrative account with Dropbox. Click Settings, followed by Smart Sync. Then select local synching of the files.

Individual team members can choose to make their individual computers locally synched, if they would prefer that setting to the default online only setting.

As an administrator, you cannot create individual settings for different team members. You only can create a default setting for Smart Sync across the entire team, and then individual team members can change the settings for their own computers.