Google Drive & Google Docs

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How to Use Google Drive

Tips, Tricks, and Best Practices for using Google Drive

Of all the cloud storage and file synchronization services available, Google Drive is arguably the best. The idea behind it is simple: place or create a file in Drive and so long as you have access to the internet (or download the offline Chrome extension), you can view and edit files on any compatible device. Sure, Google isn't the only company offering this kind of service, but given its seamless integration with other Google services and its simple set of collaboration tools, Drive easily stands out from the pack.

In fact, it's probably one of the easiest cloud services to start using. So, rather than providing you with every detail under the sun, this guide offers a brief introduction to the Drive interface, allowing you to better navigate and use the suite. We've also included a few tips to help you get the most out of Google's freemium offering.

Getting Started

Accessing Google Drive
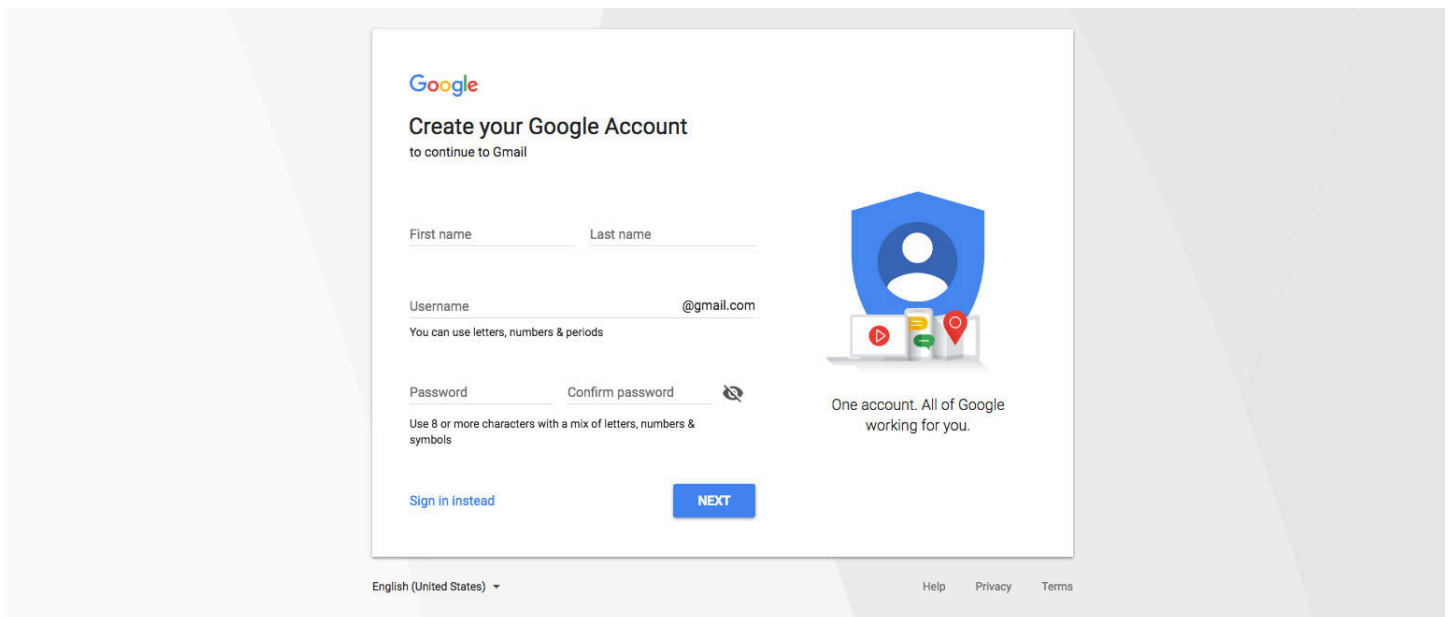
Step 1: If you don't have one already, you'll need to get a Google Account before proceeding with Drive. It's free to sign up, and doing so will give you easy, synchronized access to all of Google's services.[1]

- Note: you do **not** need a gmail email address to have a Google Account. You are able to use any email address when creating a Google Account. Click here for more information on how to set up a Google Account without a gmail email address.

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[1] You'll need to pay a fee if you want more than 15GB of storage, but whether you choose to do so will not affect your ability to use the service. Downloading Google Chrome doesn't hurt either, given the popular web browser features a number of extensions and tools that integrate well with Drive.

Step 2: Once you've signed up (or logged into your existing account), you can access Drive via your browser or the dedicated mobile app, which is currently available for both Android and iOS.

Navigating

Once signed into Drive, click the New button in the upper-left corner; on the mobile app, press the blue circle with the plus sign in the lower-right corner. This opens a menu that will allow you to create or upload a file to Drive. You can make a spreadsheet, word document, slideshow presentation, form, drawing, and a bunch of other things via third-party apps.
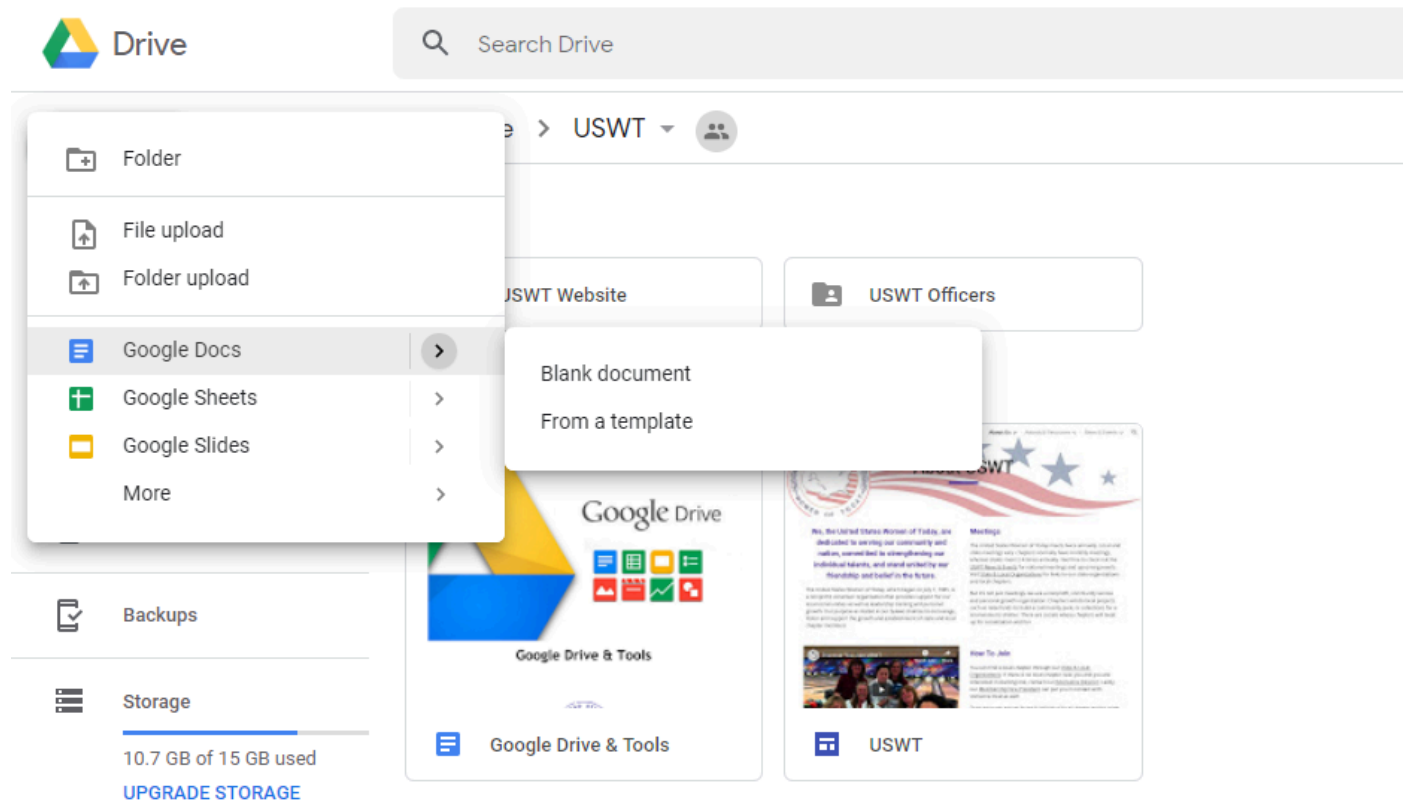
We won't go in-depth on how to use each of these free programs here, but here are a few tips for learning how to use these services quickly:

Tip 1: The buttons across Drive are pretty straightforward, but if you're ever unsure of what one does, just hover over it with your mouse. A pop-up window should appear explaining the function of the button.

Tip 2: If you've ever used Microsoft Office (i.e., Excel, Word, or PowerPoint) then Google's Sheets, Docs, and Slides software should look familiar. They operate in a similar manner, and are arguably more intuitive. You won't find as many advanced features as in Microsoft's software, but Drive is free, so that's to be expected.

Tip 3: While you can go to the main Docs, Sheets, or Slides page to see all the files of that type in a single place, creating folders might be a better way to keep organized. To create a folder, click the New button in the

upper-left corner, select Folder, and name the file directory. Then, simply drag your file(s) into the folder of your own choosing from the main Drive page.

Tip 4: You can also star files you'll want to access later by clicking Add star in that item's menu, though, keep in mind that they can only be viewed by the person who added them and not by those who you've shared a particular item with.

Tip 5: Another way to quickly find an item in your Drive is by utilizing the Search Drive function; on the top of every page is a field where you can search for a file using its name or file type. If you press the downward-facing arrow in this field or More search tools, you can specify even further, and search for files based on a specific criteria, such as the date or who you've shared the file with.

Getting the Most Out of Google Drive

Uploading and Sharing Files

Drive is great for personal use, but what sets it apart from other cloud services is its powerful collaboration tools. If you need to work remotely with someone on a project, you can share a document with them and make changes together in real time.
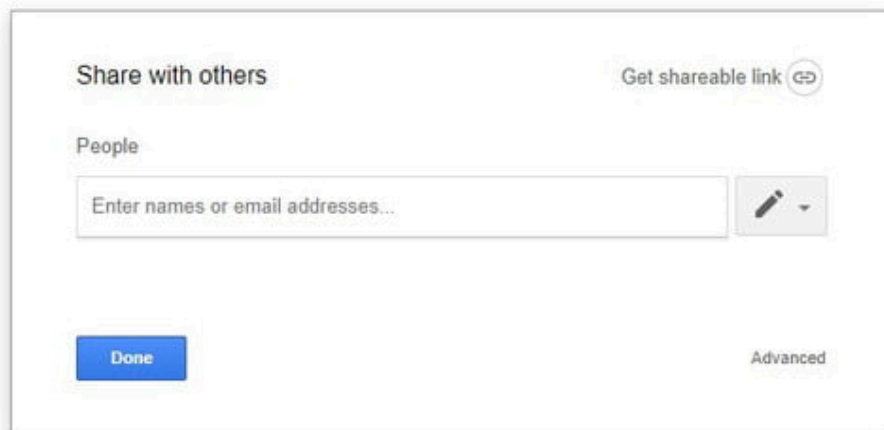
To upload a file to Drive, click the Upload files button under New or My Drive and select a file from your computer. **NOTE:** you can also open Windows Explorer and drag & drop a file into the Google Drive.

To share a file after you've created it, click the Share button in the upper-right corner, add your collaborators using their email addresses, and click the blue Done button at the bottom of the window. Once they've been granted access, the document should show up under the Shared with me tab in their Drive dashboard, and a link to the shared document will also be sent to their email inbox.

You can use the shareable link in the upper-right corner of the Share with others menu to send the file via text or another messaging service.

Whilst inside a shared document, you can see who else is currently editing it by looking in the top-right corner of the window. Collaborator names will be displayed in different colors (or with their account picture), so you can easily tell them apart. Just hover your cursor over any color to see who it represents.

Sharing Multiple Files at Once

Need to share a bunch of files all at once? Rather than sharing each file individually, you can move them into a folder and share that folder. Everyone you share the folder with will have access to all the files inside of it.
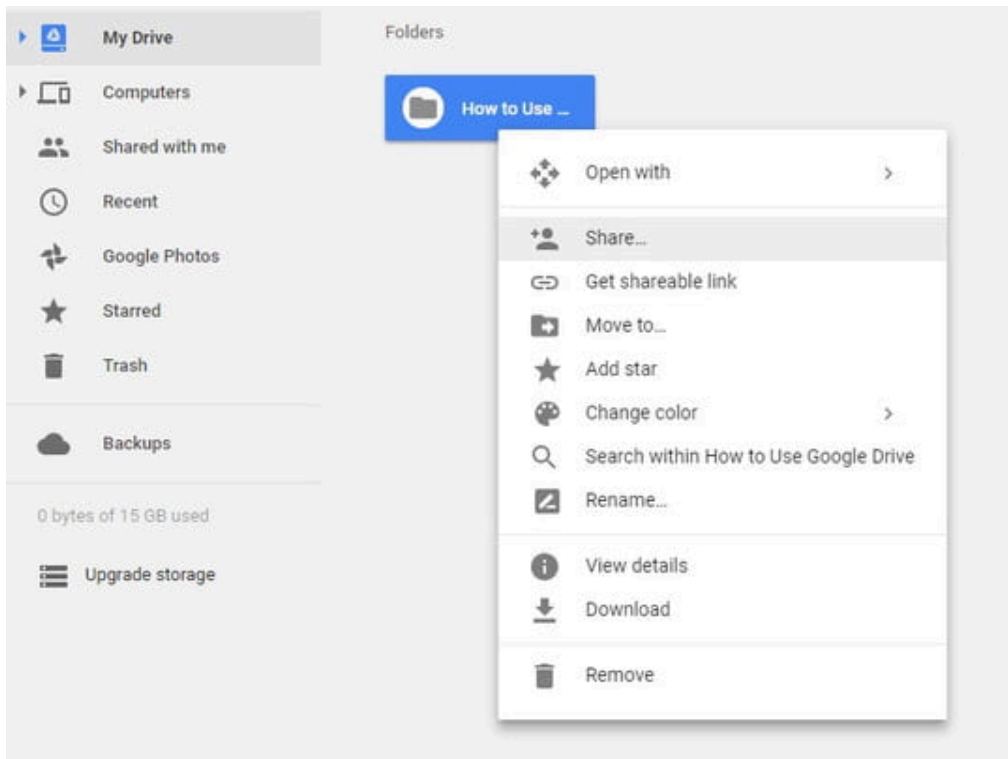
To share your documents with other people, click the blue Share button in the upper-right corner of the doc you wish to share. The button will be wedged between your picture — assuming you've added one to your Google account — and the comments icon. Afterward, invite other users by entering the appropriate email address in the resulting window.

People you share with can either edit, view, or comment on a document depending on what permissions you grant them. This can be changed by tapping the menu directly to the right of the empty address field. If you want to share the document with people using something other than email, click Get shareable link at the top of the Share window. A link will then appear directly beneath (it will also be copied to your clipboard).

If you click the Advanced button in the lower-right corner of this window, you can also share the file via Gmail, Google+, Facebook, or Twitter, but this will require you to make your document public. Google Docs sets the privacy settings to Private by default, but you can always click the blue Change button in the middle of the Advanced window (under "Who can access") to adjust your privacy settings.

Use the Comment and Chat Functions

With Google apps, you can watch in real time as other people make changes to a document. By clicking the Comments button in the upper-right corner of your screen, you or anyone else who is in the document can start a discussion about your project. You can also see which users are currently looking at the document using the series of circles located to the left of the Comment button. If no one besides you is looking at a given page, nothing will appear here.

You can also set it so that you receive notifications when people make changes to the document, or when someone mentions your name or interacts with one of your comments. This can be a very useful tool for collaborating with large groups of people or a group that's not in the same physical space. If for some reason you don't want users to be given the option to add comments to a given document, you can also change the editing mode (more on that in the next section).

Converting Documents Created with Other Programs

Need to share a document with co-workers or friends so they can collaborate on it, but you already have the file in another, similar program? No need to fret. As long as the documents are in the correct format, most files can easily be converted into Google Docs, which can then be shared and edited collaboratively.

To do this, just upload the desired file and open it in Drive. Next, click the File menu and choose Open with…. Depending on the file type, Google will suggest the appropriate program to open it with. Below are the file formats that can currently be converted into Google Drive.

Documents	Spreadsheets	Presentations	Drawings	OCR
.doc	.xls	.ppt	.wmf	.jpg
.docx	.xlsx	.pps		.gif
.html	.ods	.pptx		.png
plain text (.txt)	.csv			.pdf
.rtf	.tsv			
	.txt			
	.tab			

Try Out A Different File Type

Google Drive has more to offer than just text documents. Slides, for instance, is Google's version of Microsoft PowerPoint, while Sheets is the company's take on Microsoft Excel. While not always as extensive as Office 365 in terms of functionality, the G Suite is a useful and convenient way to create content online, and is free to use once you have a Google account.

How to Use Google Docs

New to Google Docs?

Google Drive offers a large buffet of productivity apps and features free of charge. Learning the ins and outs of Google's answer to Word can take time, however, assuming you have no idea how to navigate the suite. There's no need to fret, however! This guide will walk you through the many facets of Google Docs, so you can create a document, collaborate with others, and edit your work in no time. Read on for all the details, or check out our guide on how to use Google Drive if you're looking to make the most of Google's entire arsenal.
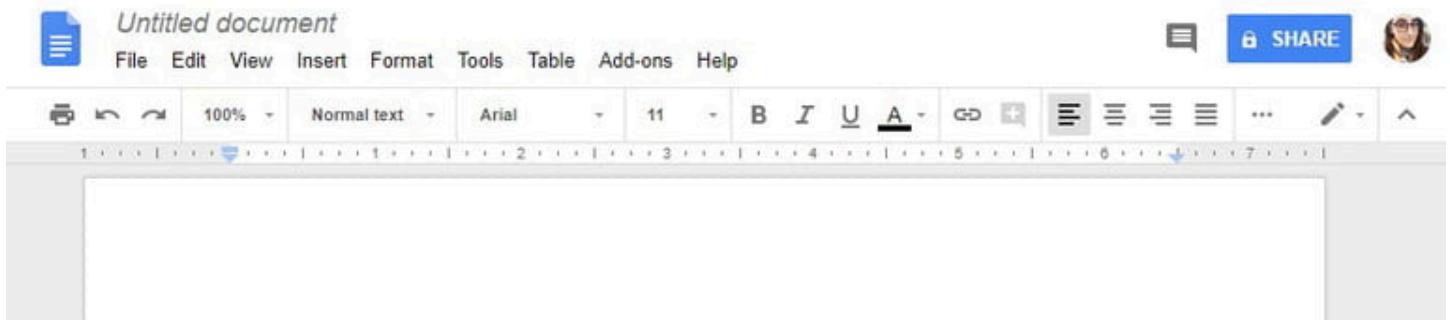
Launching Google Docs

There are several ways to access Google Docs, depending on your device. You can download the app from the App Store or Google Play, or click the Apps icon in the upper-right corner of the Google homepage (represented by nine squares). You must then click the Docs button — you may have to click More in the pop-up menu to see it.

Alternatively, you can navigate to Google Drive and select Docs within the My Drive menu at the top, or select Docs after you've clicked New on the right-hand side of the page. The last option is to navigate directly to Google Docs. Once you've launched the web app, you'll be ready to create a document.

Creating A Document

To make a new document, click the blank page with a blue addition sign inside it, which is located the upper-left corner of the main Google Docs page. If you can't find this menu, scroll up or click the red arrow in the lower-left corner of your screen.

If you are creating a document from Drive, selecting Google Docs after hitting New will automatically create a blank document. If you click the small, right-facing arrow next to Google Docs, you can even choose to create a new document based on a provided template. There are a variety to choose from, including résumés, business letters, and a selection of third-party templates. You can even upload an existing .doc or .docx file to your Drive by clicking New, followed by File Upload.

Start Working

Once you've created a document, you can get to work. Click Untitled document in the upper-left corner to add a title to your document. You can also adjust the font type, text size, and much more via the toolbar at the top of the page. Clicking the three horizontal dots near the right side of the page will bring up some additional formatting options. If you can't see your title or the menu bar at the top of the page, those options may be hidden. If that's the case, click the downward-facing arrow in the upper-right corner to display them.

Since you're working within your browser, any changes made to your document will be saved automatically. If you look to the right of the Help option at the top of the screen, you should either see Saving… or All changes saved in Drive. Wait for the second message to appear before exiting out, just to ensure all your work has been saved. To show the Version History of the doc at hand, click Saving… or All changes saved in Drive, which will allow you to review the changes.

Get to Know the Various Editing Modes

Located directly beneath the Share button are options for viewing, suggesting edits, and editing documents. While the Editing option lets you make edits, Suggesting and Viewing allow you to suggest edits and view or print your document, respectively. The Suggesting option is similar to the Track Changes function in Word, and will denote any changes made to the document in green. This gives other users the option to approve or delete these edits before they become a part of the final document. Even if you're not using the Suggesting mode, you can always view a document's revision history by going to File > Version history > See revision history.