

## OneDrive, Dropbox, Google Drive and Box: Which cloud storage service is right for you?

If you're ready to take the plunge into storing your files, photos and more in the cloud but need help deciding which service is right for your needs and wallet, we've got you covered with our in-depth cloud storage comparison.



Storing your files in the cloud has many advantages. You can view your files from any phone, tablet or computer that's connected to the Internet, and the cloud can also provide backup for files so they'll never disappear if your phone gets lost or your computer crashes. Using the cloud is a no-brainer, but picking which service to use is a bit more difficult.

For that reason, I've compiled a guide to the most popular cloud storage services, covering how they work and their strengths and weaknesses. I've also highlighted some lesser-known options if you want to get away from the mainstream.

## Cloud storage comparison

	OneDrive	Dropbox	Google Drive	Box	Amazon Cloud Drive
File size restrictions?	10GB	10GB with website, none with Dropbox apps	5TB	250MB for free plan, 5GB for paid personal plan	2GB*
Free storage?	5GB**	2GB	15GB	10GB	No***
Can I earn extra free storage?	No**	Yes	No	No	No
Paid plans	\$2/month for 50GB**	\$10/month for 1TB	\$2/month 100GB, \$10/month for 1TB	\$10/month for 100GB	\$12/year for unlimited photos, \$60/year for unlimited files
OSes supported	Windows, Mac, Android, iOS, Windows Phone	Windows, Mac, Linux, Android, iOS, Windows Phone, BlackBerry, Kindle Fire	Windows, Mac, Android, iOS	Windows, Mac, Android, iOS, Windows Phone, BlackBerry	Windows, Mac, Android, iOS, Kindle Fire

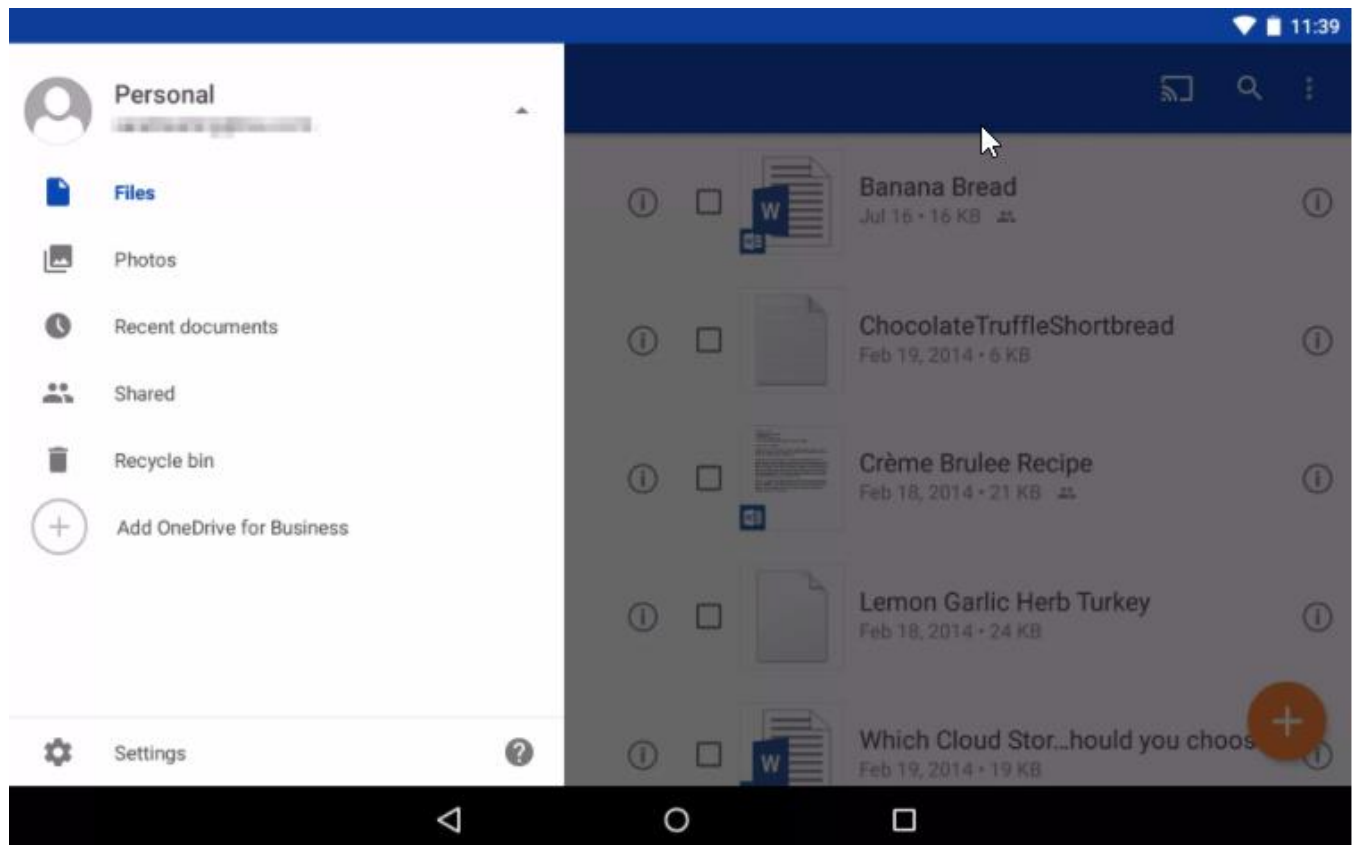
\*There is no file size limit with desktop apps.

\*\*In early 2016, Microsoft will change its free storage from 15GB to 5GB and offer a \$2 per month for 50GB paid plan instead of its earlier offerings. It will also no longer let you earn free storage.

\*\*\*Amazon Cloud Drive offers limited free storage with an Amazon Prime subscription.

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Before we get started, just a note about Apple's iCloud Drive. I didn't include it here because the service is not available for Android and it's really meant to be used within the Apple ecosystem, meaning if you use Mac computers and iOS devices together. If you do use mostly Apple products, it's a solid choice for cloud storage. For a full run-down of its features, pricing and availability, check out [CNET's guide to Apple iCloud Drive](#).



## OneDrive

First up is OneDrive, Microsoft's storage option. Those who use Windows 8 and 10 have OneDrive built into their operating system, where it shows up in the file explorer next to all of the files on your computer's hard drive. However, anyone can use it on the Web, by downloading a desktop app for Mac and earlier versions of Windows, or the OneDrive Android, iOS, Windows Phone and Xbox apps.

You can store any kind of file in the service, including photos, video and documents, and then access them from any of your Windows PCs or mobile devices. The service organizes your files by type for you, so it's easy to find what you need.

The Android, iOS and Windows Phone apps all have automatic photo uploads, meaning that when you shoot a photo with your phone, it's automatically saved to your account. OneDrive's biggest strength is that it

works closely with Microsoft Office apps, such as Word or PowerPoint, so when you launch one of those applications you'll see a list of recent documents saved to OneDrive. If you have an Office 365 subscription and open a document saved in OneDrive, you can collaborate on it in real time with other people. You'll even be able to see the changes they make as they make them.

Microsoft is hoping that OneDrive will be *the* place where you store your photos, and the company is working on technology that will eventually sort all of the photos you take based on how important and meaningful they are. For instance, if you take a photo of your kids, a picture of a special meal and a shot of your parking space so you can find your car later, OneDrive would be able to understand the importance of each picture, save the ones it thinks are the most useful, and trash the rest. That's still big-picture stuff for OneDrive, but it gives you an idea of the direction Microsoft is moving in. In late 2015, Microsoft made an announcement that it would no longer offer unlimited cloud storage to Office 365 subscribers. Instead, they are limited to 1TB. Additionally, beginning in early 2016, the 100GB and 200GB paid storage plans will be discontinued, replaced with a 50GB for \$1.99 per month plan. You will no longer get extra space if you allow the OneDrive apps to automatically backup photos on your phone. Finally, anyone with a

Microsoft account will only get 5GB of free storage, instead of 15GB. We will update this guide in 2016 when those changes are made.

## Where it excels

Works seamlessly with Windows devices because it's built in to the Windows operating system.

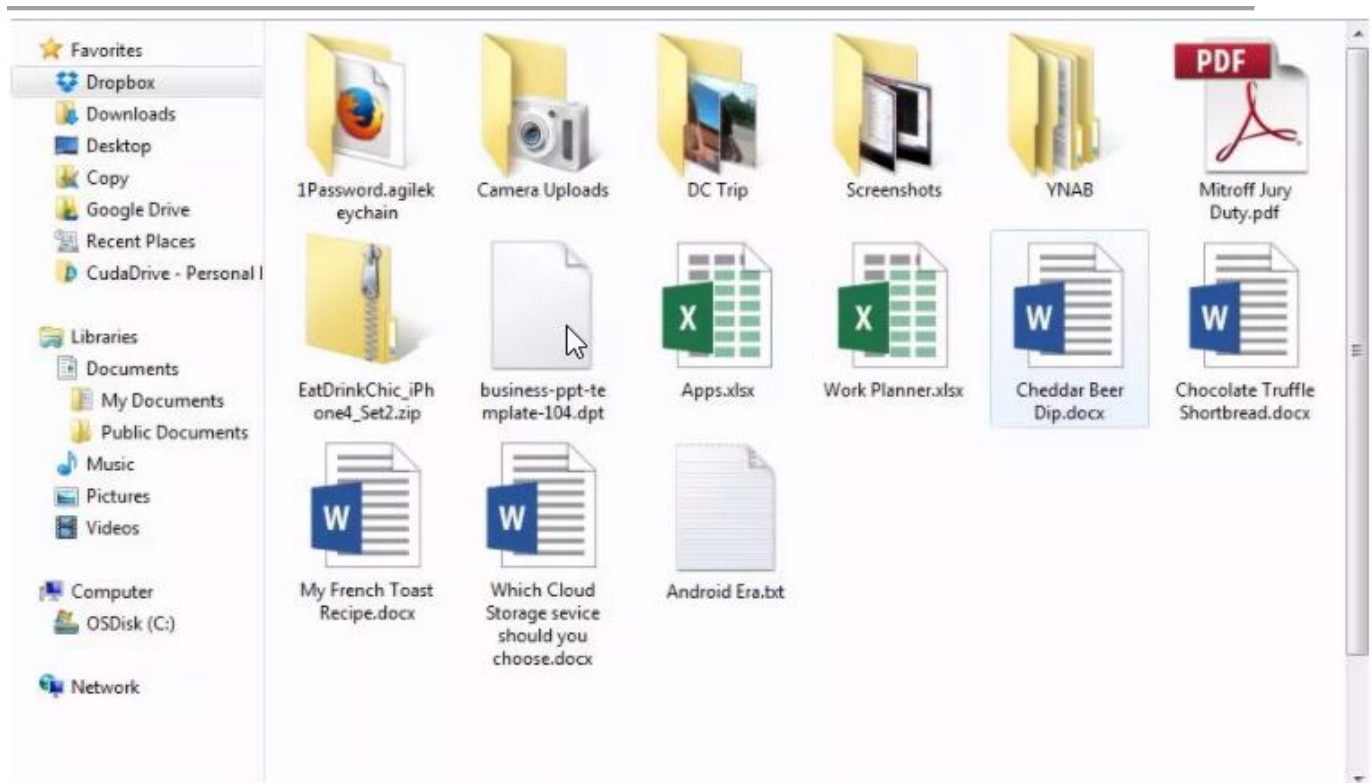
It's easy to open and edit files from OneDrive in Microsoft's other applications, such as Word or Excel.

Signing up for OneDrive gets you a Microsoft account, which gives you access to Outlook, Xbox Live, and other Microsoft services.

## Where it falls flat

OneDrive's automatic file organization doesn't always put files in the correct folders.

Best for: If you have a Windows PC, tablet and phone, and need to get to your files from any device with little effort.



## Dropbox

Dropbox is a favorite in the cloud storage world because it's reliable, easy to use, and a breeze to set up. Your files live in the cloud and you can get to them at any time from Dropbox's website, desktop applications for Mac, Windows and Linux (Ubuntu, Debian, Fedora or compile your own), or the iOS, Android, BlackBerry and Kindle Fire mobile apps.

You can store any kind of file in Dropbox, by either uploading to the website or adding it with the desktop apps. Those apps live in your file system so that you can easily move files from your computer to the cloud and vice versa by dragging and dropping them into your Dropbox folder. The service automatically and quickly syncs your files across all of your devices, so you

can access everything, everywhere. There is no size limit on files you upload to Dropbox with the desktop or mobile apps, but larger files can take several hours to upload, depending on your connection speed.

Dropbox gets a lot of praise for its clean design, and rightfully so. Though I am not a fan of Dropbox's website because the design is very basic and it doesn't give you many options to view and organize your files, its mobile apps and desktop apps are beautiful and easy to navigate.

Dropbox gives its users plenty of opportunities to get extra storage to beef up the paltry 2GB you get when you sign up. If you participate in the quick Getting Started tutorial, you get 250MB. Turn on the automatic photo upload feature on any of the mobile apps to get 3GB of extra space (you can get only 3GB total, not per device). You can earn 500MB for each friend you refer to Dropbox who actually signs up for the service, up to 16GB total, or 32 referrals.

## **Where it excels**

Dropbox works equally well on PCs and Macs, Android and iOS.

The service is so simple and elegantly designed, that it's easy for anyone to master.

Its desktop applications seamlessly blend with your computer's file system.

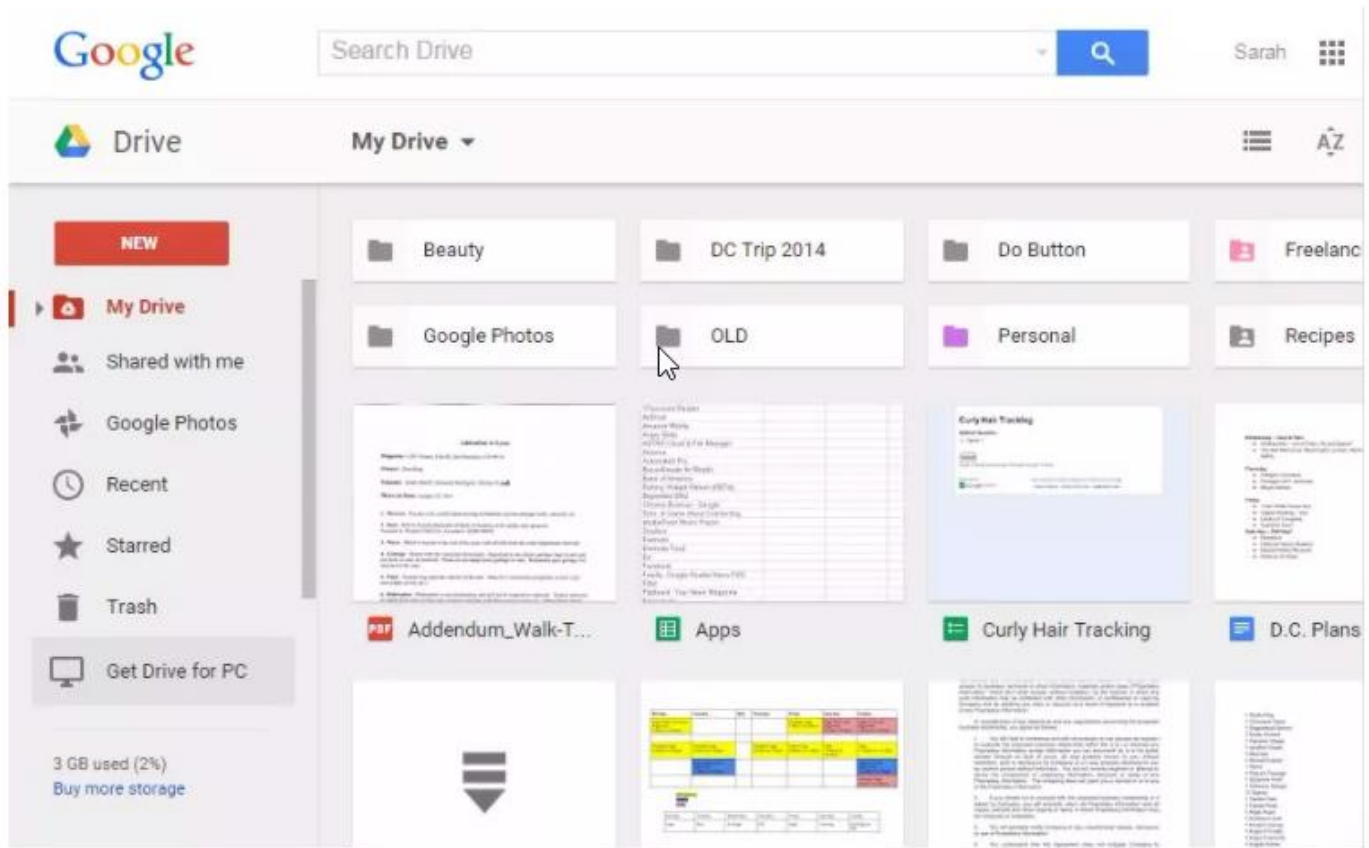
## **Where it falls flat**

Dropbox's website doesn't let you control how your files are displayed.

Best for: Simple sharing when you use tons of different kinds of devices.

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## Google Drive

Google combines a complete set of office tools with cloud storage in Drive. You get a little bit of everything with this service, including a word processor, spreadsheet application, and presentation builder, plus 15GB of free storage space.

If you already have a Google account, you can already access Google Drive. You just have to head to [drive.google.com](https://drive.google.com) and enable the service. You get 15GB of storage for anything you upload to Drive, including photos, videos, documents, Photoshop files and more. However, you have to share that 15GB with your Gmail account, photos you upload to Google+, and any documents you create in Google Drive.

While you can access any of your files from the Drive Web site, you can also download the Drive desktop app for Mac and PC to manage your files from

your computer. You can organize all of your files in the desktop app, and they'll sync with the cloud so you can get to them anywhere.

Drive is built into Google's Web-based operating system Chromium, so if you have a Chromebook, Google Drive is your best cloud storage option. Like other cloud storage services, Drive has apps for iOS and Android for viewing and managing your files from your phone.

Google Drive has the benefit of a built-in office suite, where you can edit documents, spreadsheets, and presentations, even if you created the document in another program. The service also has a large collection of extras, such as third-party apps that can send faxes or sign documents.

Google also recently introduced Google Photos, an online photo locker, where you can organize photos into albums. Google Photos is built into Drive in a separate tab, but you're really better off going straight to [googlephotos.com](http://googlephotos.com) to see and organize photos. However, you don't need to download the Google Photos app on your phone or tablet to back pictures you take there. The Google Drive app can take care of that.

What I like most about Google Drive is that you can drag and drop files into the Drive Web site and they'll be uploaded automatically. You can also preview attachments from Gmail in Google Drive, and save those files to your cloud.

## **Where it excels**

Google Drive requires very little setup if you already have a Google account. If you use Gmail, it's easy to save attachments from your e-mail directly to Drive with just a few clicks.

The app can automatically back up your photos on its own, without the need for the separate Google Photos app.

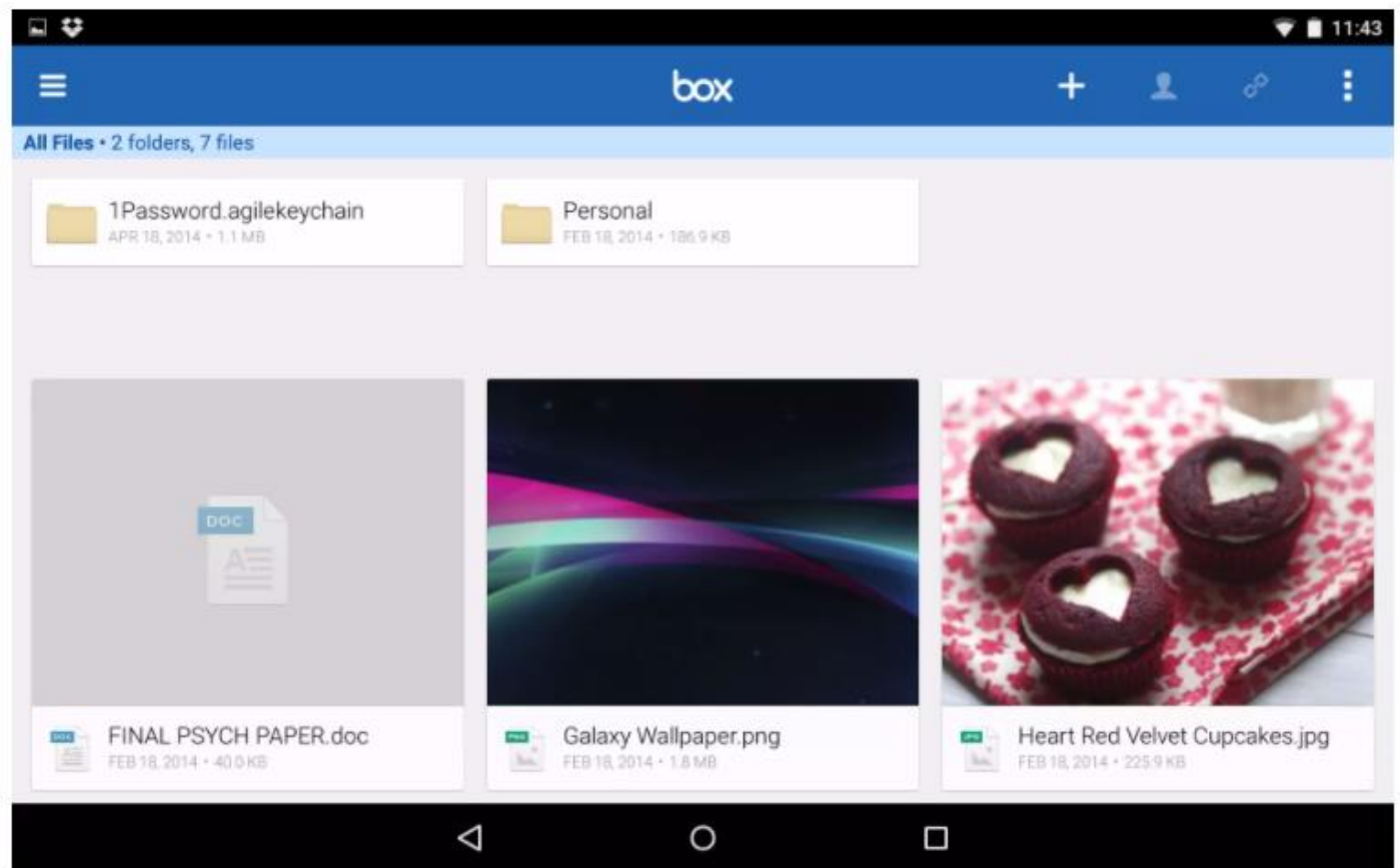
## **Where it falls flat**

If you use Google Drive's tools to create documents, spreadsheets or presentations, you must export those files to edit them in another program.



You have to share your storage space with Gmail, so if you're inbox is overflowing, you'll get less cloud storage space.

Best for: Google diehards, or anyone who wants a few office tools with their cloud storage.



## Box

Anyone can sign up for a free individual account on [Box](#), but the service's endless list of sharing and privacy features were built specifically for business and IT users. Beyond the basic cloud storage setup, where you can store just about any kind of file, Box lets you share files with colleagues, assign tasks, leave comments on someone's work, and get notifications when a file changes.

You can preview files from Box's website and even create basic text documents in Box. Like other cloud storage services, you can download a desktop app and sync your files between your hard drive and the cloud.

Box also gives you a lot of control over the privacy of your files. For example, you can decide who in your business can view and open specific folders and files, as well as who can edit and upload documents. You can even password-protect individual files and set expiration dates for shared folders. Business users can also connect other apps, such as Salesforce and NetSuite, so that you can easily save documents to Box. There are also plug-ins for Microsoft Office and Adobe Lightroom that let you open and edit files saved to Box from those applications.

## **Where it excels**

Box comes with tons of tools for businesses, including collaboration and file privacy control.

## **Where it falls flat**

The service's endless list of sharing and privacy features can be lost on someone who's just using the service for personal storage.

Because of all those features, it can feel overwhelming to navigate the Box website if you're only trying to manage a few files and folders.

Best for: Teams of employees working together on projects, and large companies that need a place to securely share documents with everyone.

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The screenshot shows the Amazon Cloud Drive interface. At the top, there are tabs for "All Files" and "Photos & Videos". The user is logged in as "Hello, Sarah". The Amazon Cloud Drive logo is in the top right. Below the navigation bar, there is a search bar with a plus icon and a search icon. The main content area displays a table of files:

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	File Name	Date Added ▼	Size
	Pictures	2 hours ago	
	2011-02-26 15.27.13.jpg	2 hours ago	6.3 MB
	2011-02-25 06.28.51.jpg	2 hours ago	7.2 MB
	Android Era.txt	2 hours ago	6.4 KB
	zteblades601.jpg	2 hours ago	198.5 KB
	Withings Activite for Androi...	2 hours ago	1.1 MB
	Screenshot_2015-02-13-05-...	2 hours ago	2 MB

At the bottom of the interface, there is a dark navigation bar with icons for folder, link, cloud, text, share, and trash.

Amazon Cloud Drive's website.

## Amazon Cloud Drive

Amazon already sells you nearly anything under the sun, and it wants to be the place you store all of your music, photos, videos and other files too. Amazon Cloud Drive has been around for a few years, but the company introduced new storage plans in March 2015; one just for photos and one for all other kinds of files.

Neither plan is free, but both have three-month trials. Unlimited Photos is available for free for all Amazon Prime members or anyone with a Fire

device. If you don't have a Prime subscription or a Fire phone or tablet, you'll need to pay \$12 per month for the storage.

True to its name, Unlimited Photos gets you unlimited storage for your photos (GIF, JPEG, BMP, TIFF and so on) and 5GB of free storage for other file types, including videos, PDFs and documents.

Unlimited Everything gets you storage for an unlimited number of files of any type, for \$60 per year. There is no limit for how many files you can upload, but each file needs to be under 2GB unless you use the Cloud Drive desktop apps.

The Cloud Drive desktop apps are available for PC and Mac, and let you upload or download files. However, unlike other cloud storage services, the Amazon Cloud Drive app doesn't let you view your files from a folder on your computer. You can upload individual files and download your entire library, but if you want to view them or make changes, you'll need to go to Amazon's website.

Amazon Cloud Drive has apps for iOS and [Android](#) with automatic upload so videos and photos you take with your phone get saved to the cloud right after you shoot them. The service is also baked into Amazon's Fire tablets and phone.

## **Where it excels**

If you already have an Amazon account, you don't need to sign up for a new service, you can simply sign into Cloud Drive.

## **Where it falls flat**

The desktop app doesn't work with your file system, you can only use it upload or download files.

You can only view and manage files from the Cloud Drive website, but you cannot upload files larger than 2GB there.

Best for: Anyone with an Amazon Fire tablet or Fire phone, because it's part of the operating system. Unlimited Photos is good for Amazon Prime members, because you get it for free as part of that subscription.

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## Extra cloud options

Of course, OneDrive, Dropbox, Google Drive and Box aren't your only options for cloud storage.

One is SugarSync, a Dropbox-like alternative with apps for every mobile platform. The catch is that after your 90-day free trial, where you can play around with 5GB of storage, you need to pay at \$7.50 per month for 60GB to keep using the service (you can upgrade to more storage for extra money).

There's also Space Monkey, which has an entirely different take on cloud storage. For \$200, you buy a 2-terabyte (TB) hard drive from the company. You get to use 1TB of the drive's space to store any and all of your files as a local backup. Your files also get encrypted and broken into bits that are sent to other Space Monkey users' hard drives, so that you can access your files from another computer or mobile device. That's where that extra 1TB of space on your drive comes in -- it's used to store bits of other people's files. The service is free for the first year, then costs \$49 per year to keep storing your files in the cloud.