

Putting Your Files in the Cloud

by David Parker

As a teacher without my own classroom, I used to struggle with organizing my computer files on the several computers I used throughout the day. Moving from my personal laptop to a work desktop, and then to a classroom computer proved very difficult. I would forget to save new drafts, lose videos and photos I had taken, and leave my personal files unsecured on public computers. I needed a place to keep my personal files secure on every computer I used.

Luckily, there are several services that allow me to do just that—by storing my files in the “cloud” for free. I used to store my files on a flash drive, the small storage device that connects to a computer’s USB port. Then, one moment of forgetfulness resulted in a year’s worth of files left in the back of a taxi. These services give me access to my files on any computer with an Internet connection.

There are many options for online file storage, including OneDrive, Google Drive, iCloud, and Dropbox. Though these services offer the same basic file storage service with access through the Web and smartphone apps, there are a number of different features between them. Here’s a rundown of the pros and cons about the most popular services, with a focus on what’s useful for teachers.

Apple iCloud <https://www.icloud.com>

Pros: Synchronizes files on iPhone and iPad; uses your current Apple ID account; backs up files and media purchased on iTunes Store; stores photos and videos through Photo Stream

Cons: Only works on Apple computers and devices; only offers 5 GB of free storage; storage space is used up quickly with large iPhone or iPad backup files; doesn’t work well with non-Apple products and software

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

Pros: Simple to use; acts like a normal computer folder that synchronizes files to the Web; works well with any type of file; automatically uploads photos and videos from your mobile device

Cons: Only offers 2 GB of free storage space; fewer sharing features than the others

Google Drive <https://drive.google.com>

Pros: Offers 15 GB of free storage space; integrates with Google Docs and Gmail; uses your current Google account; synchronizes files on your computer with the Web; lets you share photos and videos on Google + and YouTube

Cons: Doesn’t always work well with non-Google products and software

Microsoft OneDrive <http://onedrive.live.com>

Pros: Offers 7 GB of free storage space; integrates with Windows and the newest version of Microsoft Office

Cons: Doesn’t integrate with older versions of Office—users need to create a Microsoft account

No matter which cloud service you choose or what your teaching situation is, you’ll feel much better knowing that your valuable school files are backed up on the Web.

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