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In and Out Of Office: Putting iPads To Work

By WALTER S. MOSSBERG



While it can perform many of the functions of a PC or Mac, [Apple's iPad](#)— including the new iPad 2—lacks two of the most common and frequently used features of a traditional computer. It has no standard USB port for connecting a flash drive or external hard disk, so you can't move files into and out of it from these devices. And it doesn't have a systemwide, user-accessible file system like those on traditional computers.



The iPad lacks a USB port and can't accept a flash drive or external hard disk. So how do you get your files on it? Walt Mossberg gives a primer for retrieving Microsoft Office files or Adobe PDFs from a computer or cloud services.

These omissions have led many readers to ask me how you get files—especially Microsoft Office files and PDFs—into and out of iPads. They have bolstered the contention that the popular tablet is really just a "consumption device," not a productivity tool.

So, here's a brief primer on how to get such documents into and out of an iPad, and how to view, edit and create them on the tablet. This isn't an in-depth product review, though I've tested every product and method I will mention here. It's merely a quick, practical guide to how to work with documents on an iPad.

Before we start, let me mention some caveats. First, to get the most out of documents on the iPad, you have to download add-on apps. Second, while many of these apps can store and organize files, those file systems are silos within the apps. Third, these apps often lack full fidelity with Office on a PC or Mac, especially for complex documents. Fonts and layouts may be changed, and none of the apps I tested was able to display revision histories in Office documents.

Finally, unless you buy an add-on keyboard, typing on an iPad isn't as easy for many people as on a regular computer. For instance, I wouldn't want to type a 30-page legal brief on an iPad. But you can use an iPad with Office documents and PDFs.

Creating and Editing Files

Microsoft hasn't built a version of Microsoft Office for the iPad. But several companies make office suites for the tablet that aim to emulate Office by allowing you to create and export Office-compatible documents, and to import and edit documents created in Office on PCs and Macs.



Apple

Three faces of creating iPad documents: From left, Keynote, Pages and Numbers apps running on an iPad 2

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Apple hasn't publicized it much, and you have to scroll down in iTunes to see it.

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If you have an app like Quickoffice installed that allows saving or organizing documents, or editing them, the email pop-up menu becomes even more useful. In addition to the Quick Look option, it gives you an "Open In..." option that lets you move the document to an app of your choice, where you can store it permanently, or even edit it, if the app allows for that. This "Open In..." option also appears in various apps other than email, so you can move documents from one app to another.

Wireless File Transfers

There are some iPad apps available that allow you to move documents wirelessly if your computer and iPad are on the same Wi-Fi network. One that I have used successfully is called Air Sharing and costs \$2.99. It mounts your iPad on your computer as if it were an external drive, and allows you to drag files between your computer and iPad.

Cloud-Based File Transfers

If you back up your PC or Mac files to a cloud-based remote service, like SugarSync, Dropbox, or Apple's own iDisk, many of these services provide iPad apps that allow you to fetch the files to your iPad, or, in some cases, upload files from your iPad to these services. These apps typically allow you only to view or perhaps store the files on the iPad, but some include the "Open in..." feature to let you move the file to another app where you can edit it.

The three most notable of these are Quickoffice Connect, which costs \$15; Documents To Go, which comes in two versions costing \$10 and \$17; and Apple's Pages, Numbers and Keynote, which cost \$10 each.

All of these apps are more limited than Office on a PC, but I have found they worked pretty well. All have their own internal file-storage system, and each can be connected to cloud-based services, or can open email attachments or receive wired file transfers from iTunes.

Wired File Transfers

When you plug an iPad into one of the recent versions of Apple's iTunes program on your computer, and select the iPad icon in the left column, a section appears at the bottom of the Apps tab that is called File Sharing. This module lists all the apps on your iPad that can handle various kinds of documents, and shows you what files they contain. You can then add files from your computer to one of the listed apps, or save the files to your computer, using buttons labeled Add or "Save to...." Even veteran iTunes users may not know about this feature, because

Viewing Email Attachments

Out of the box, the iPad allows you to view a wide variety of documents attached to emails. If somebody emails you a Microsoft Office file, a PDF file, or other common types of files, you get an icon in the email, and, if you tap and hold your finger on the icon, a pop-up menu appears that allows you to view it in full-screen mode, a function called Quick Look. Just this week, I used this method to review and catch an error in a Microsoft Word document I received from a colleague while riding in a New York taxi with an iPad.

Sophisticated File Viewers

Some apps for the iPad let you store large numbers of different types of files, view them and even annotate them. My favorite, GoodReader, is a \$4.99 app that handles all the Microsoft Office file types, plus PDFs and more.

Mossberg's Mailbox

Mossberg's Mailbox: [The iPad 2](#)

GoodReader even lets you type notes on, or draw on, PDFs, and then save and email the annotated version. It also allows you to organize files into folders and rename them. And it lets you retrieve files from cloud-based services, without having to

switch to a separate app provided by those services. Among the cloud services it supports are Google Docs, Dropbox, SugarSync and iDisk.

Bottom Line

It's perfectly fair to criticize Apple for leaving out a USB port and a shared file system. The company is reputed to be working on a cloud-based file sharing system that may alleviate these omissions. But, even today, you can work with common file types on an iPad, if you know how.

—Watch a video with Walt Mossberg on transferring files to an iPad at WSJ.com/PersonalTech. Find all of his columns and videos at the All Things Digital website, walt.allthingsd.com.

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