

iPad Basics: Why iTunes is so important / OASIS June 5, 2012

The Really Basic Basics of the iPad's relationship with iTunes: What nobody ever tells you

Q. If I have an iPad, do I need a regular computer, too?

A. Yes and no, depending on which version of the iPad operating system your iPad is using. If it's using a recent "i operating system" (iOS), the iPad does not need to be connected to a computer for anything. You don't need a computer at all. If your iPad is using a version of iOS older than 5, you need to connect it to a PC or Mac running iTunes for updates and for synchronizing anything you're purchased on your computer from iTunes or the App Store. You can find out what version of iOS your iPad is running from the Settings app. Choose General > About and look at Version. Note that version numbers always have minor revisions following dots (periods). You might see a version number listed as 5.1.1, for example.

Q. How can I get the current iOS? How much does it cost?

A. It's free. Your iPad should always be running the latest operating system for improvements in safety if for nothing else. Do not stick with an older version. If your iPad is using a version lower than 5, connect your iPad to your computer and make sure iTunes is running on your PC or Mac. iTunes will automatically check for an update and will show a notice if it finds one. If your iPad is running version 5 or newer, it will update itself through iCloud whenever a new version is available. To check whether your iPad is running the latest version of iOS, open the Settings app and touch iCloud at the left, then Software Update.

Q. If I get updates through the cloud once I have iOS 5, does this mean I can forget about iTunes?

A. No, unless you're a grinch. If you have a companion computer, iTunes is ideal for listening to music and watching video on the computer. And iCloud doesn't give you the fine control over what to sync that you get from iTunes, since it basically syncs by entire categories. This means you might want to connect the computer to your iPad and select what you want to sync manually, then let iCloud sync from that point on.

Q. You mean I have to learn yet another thing just to get my iPad working right?

A. Yep. But it's not hard. When your computer and iPad are connected using the white cable that came with your iPad (or that you bought from the Apple Store after losing the one you had), just make sure iTunes is running and click the iPad icon in the left panel of iTunes on the computer. Then set up your sync options.

The iTunes Store

Q. This "sync" thing with iCloud seems too simple. There must be a catch. If I buy some music or a movie at the iTunes Store using my computer, it will show up on my iPad automatically. Yeah, sure. I've got a bridge to sell you.

A. Sure. Bridges not included.

Q. OK, but if I buy something at the iTunes Store on my iPad, no doubt it won't show up on my computer! There goes Apple, wanting me to buy something twice. Right? This "sink" stuff really stinks.

A. Wrong. iCloud sync -- as in "synchronize," not the thing in your kitchen -- works both ways. That's what the sync operation is all about. Anything you purchased at the iTunes Store on your iPad will be copied to your computer, as long as you check off the appropriate option under Sharing in iTunes.

Q. Even books?

A. Even books. Even though they come from the iBook Store, books you buy are stored in iTunes on a computer. On your iPad, they're stored in iBooks.

Q. I see what Apple's up to now. Those pinko folks want me to pay money for all this music and video and movies and TV shows and books and ... all that stuff. Apple would really show that it cares if it had free stuff at the iTunes Store.

A. It does. Lots of free stuff. There are free songs, free videos, free TV episodes, free books and free movies.

Q. Yeah, just teasers. I'm onto their game.

A. Actually, you're not. The iTunes Store carries hundreds of thousands of podcasts, nearly all free. Podcasts are like radio and TV shows that you can carry around in your iPad and play or view any time you want to. And it has thousands upon thousands of free university lectures, classes, movies and performances, in what's called iTunesU.

Apps, apps, apps

Q. So where do I go to get these "apps" you talk about?

A. You get them from the App Store. You can get apps using your computer (just go to the iTunes Store) or on your iPad (simply touch the App Store icon). Apps you get on your computer automatically show up on your iPad; apps you get on your iPad automatically show up on your computer, if you're using a companion PC or Mac and are using Sharing and iCloud.

Q. And these apps cost a zillion bucks and I won't be able to afford any of them anyway.

A. Most apps cost from 99 cents to \$1.99. A few cost more, and every now and then someone tries to sell an app that costs hundreds of dollars. It's a free market, and there are both buyers and sellers who have no common sense. But we all know that already.

Q. Humph! There are no free apps, then. I know the scam. Charge everyone for everything! Even these 99-cent apps add up if you buy a lot of them.

A. At least 20% of the 600,000 iPad apps are free. That's more than 120,000 free apps to choose from.

Q. Say what?

A. Just look to back and read it again.

Q. I spotted an error. You just said "700,000" when you meant "70,000."

A. 700,000 is the correct number as of summer 2012. Yes, that's a lot of apps.

Why have an App Store anyway?

Q. But can't I just go to Wegmans or Best Buy and get some apps that way? Wouldn't that make sense? The Amurrican way and all that. Easy to get to the store. And my brother-in-law works at a supermarket and probably could, you know, bring some home, if you get the drift.

A. Drift all you want, but we don't encourage theft. As for buying apps from local stores, you can do that, in a way. Many stores sell gift cards for the iTunes Store. You can buy apps with the gift cards. Best Buy sells iTunes gift cards and so does Wegmans.

Q. But I can't buy actual apps from Best Buy?

A. Only from the App Store.

Q. Monopoly! Get the Feds on this right away!

A. No more of a monopoly than any other business. Mobil sells Mobil gasoline and Texaco doesn't sell it.

Q. And Apple did this for what reason? I still smell a monopoly. I knew there was something foul going on.

A. For the same reason Mobil restricts its gas to Mobil stations -- to control the quality and, even more importantly, to maintain responsibility. All apps are checked out before they make it to the store. Apps need to meet Apple's standards just as Mobil gasoline needs to meet Mobil's. Apple forbids X-rated apps, for example. And it doesn't hesitate to remove apps it previously approved if those apps turn out to be harmful to children, just to name one possibility.

Apps worth considering in addition to the ones that come with the iPad

- 100 Cameras: \$1.99 (photo editor specializing in unusual effects)
- Amazon Windowshop: Free (Amazon shopping; exceptionally well designed)
- Bible + 1: Free (extraordinary organization; many versions and languages; bookmarkable note-taking and more)
- Clinometer Level and Slope Finder: \$.99 as of 01/2012 (measures incline angles left and right or up and down)
- Compass-HD: \$.99 (very accurate compass with great looks)
- Download+: \$1.99 (adds file download capability to iPad)
- Dragon Dictation: Free (voice-to-text; notes can be saved, pasted or emailed)
- Find iPhone: Free (also called Find My Phone; locates your iPad or other iDevice on a map)
- Friendly for Facebook: \$.99 (Facebook reading and writing made easy)
- GoodReader: \$4.99 (all-in-one multipurpose app for handling files; essential for power users)
- Google Earth: Free (mapping and location service; tilt your iPad to fly in various directions, climb or dive)
- Hey You Big Text: Free (Sign-making app with huge letters; turns the iPad into a mini-billboard)
- Hidden - Hide Your Private Notes: \$1.99 (Note-storage app with a private area for sensitive items such as passwords and financial data)
- IMDb: Free (Internet Movie Database access; extremely well designed and fascinating)
- Kindle, Nook and Google Books: Free (book-buying and library services; adjuncts for iBooks)
- Newegg: Free (catalog and ordering app for the Newegg discount store, the top-rated discounter in the U.S.)
- Nightstand: \$2.99 (alarm clock, weather app and more)
- Pages: \$9.99 (elegant editing app for normal writing, desktop publishing and anything in between)
- Penultimate: \$.99 (freehand drawing and note taking app; sends notes as PDFs by email)
- Photogene: \$2.99 (most professional of all iPad photo editing apps)
- PhotoToaster: \$1.99 (applies effects to photos; amazingly advanced in many ways)
- Retouch: \$.99 (also called Touch Retouch; powerful photo app for seamlessly filling in any part of the image that was erased)
- ShutterSnitch: \$15.99 (display and catalog app for photos transmitted wirelessly by Eye-Fi memory cards in cameras)
- Skype: Free (audio and video calls to computers, iPhones, iPads and Android devices without charge)
- Slate magazine: Free (political/cultural online magazine with a wide following)
- Web Albums: \$3.99 (best of many Picasa Web Albums viewers)
- WordBook XL: \$2.99 (exceptional dictionary; works only with online connection)
- Wikipanion: Free (superb way to read Wikipedia entries; great search and link-following)
- Zite: Free (personalized news and features magazine, updated for your interest areas constantly)