Picking the right [cloud storage solution](https://www.cloudwards.net/best-cloud-storage/) for your Mac can be a challenge. Do you go with Apples’ built-in service iCloud, or do you spend your money on a third-party option? There are so many variables to consider, the choice can be overwhelming. To help you make this crucial decision, we’ve put together a Dropbox vs. iCloud test to give you a strong A/B comparison of both services.

This article goes over the high-level similarities and differences between these two popular cloud storage solutions. If you’d like to get a deeper dive on the features each provide, check out our [iCloud Drive Review](https://www.cloudwards.net/review/icloud-drive/) and our [Dropbox Review](https://www.cloudwards.net/review/dropbox/) for a more granular breakdown of each.

Until recently, this battle wouldn’t have been much of a competition. Dropbox (and other [Dropbox alternatives](https://www.cloudwards.net/top-10-secure-dropbox-alternatives/)) would easily beat out Apple’s built in solution. However, in recent years, iCloud has received several upgrades that makes it more feature rich and useful. So, with introductions out of the way, it’s time to break down each service and see which one comes out on top.

## Dropbox vs iCloud Matchup

For our battle between Dropbox and iCloud, we will put each competitor through six rounds of tests. The winner of each round receives a point toward their total, and the provider with more points at the end of the competition is declared the winner. The rounds focus on features, pricing, usability, syncing and sharing, speed, and last, but most certainly not least, security and privacy.

With six categories, it’s possible that there could be a tie. In that event, we’ll declare the winner based on how strongly each competitor won their respective rounds.

## 1. Features

In this first round, both iCloud and Dropbox will have their general features examined and judged. The features we compare here are those elements of the platform that don’t include file syncing and sharing. Because a cloud storage platform’s main focus is on syncing and sharing, we devote an entire round to that below.

### iCloud

As you’ll see mentioned several times over the course of this competition, [iCloud](https://www.apple.com/icloud/) is designed with a single user in mind. As a result, there are features supported in its competitor that iCloud doesn’t contain. However, Apple’s service still has several tools that users will find appealing. Of those, one of the most compelling is the native integration with the iWork suite of apps.

**[icloud\_pages.png]**

Because [iWork](http://www.apple.com/iwork/) is free on all devices that run an Apple operating system, the potential savings here is dramatic. Being able to complete all of your text, spreadsheet, and presentation-based projects without having to have multiple subscriptions, and or purchasing a separate collection of programs, can’t be understated. In addition to the iWork integration, there are several third-party apps that integrate nicely with iCloud as well including Goodreader, Todo, and iA Writer.

We’ll go into more detail below, but the family sharing options are also a nice addition to iCloud, especially if you have a lot of very camera happy family members.

### Dropbox

Dropbox, with its focus squarely on business and team collaboration is naturally the more feature rich platform. Between selective sync, collaboration tools like Dropbox Paper, watermarking, and integration with Microsoft Office, there is a lot of power behind this particular cloud service.

**[dropbox\_sync\_options.png]**

We particularly enjoy the Rewind feature of Dropbox. The platform supports 30 day (Plus) and 180 day (Professional) file recovery and [version histories](https://www.cloudwards.net/best-cloud-storage-for-versioning/), along with the ability to roll back versions of a file within that time limit, which is important for guarding against [ransomware](https://www.cloudwards.net/ransomware-protection/) attacks. It’s not an infinite amount of time, a feature you’ll find with [Icedrive](https://www.cloudwards.net/goto/36290/icedrive.net), but it’s nonetheless a significant advantage over iCloud.

**[dropbox\_main.png]**

Finally, Dropbox has a robust web preview feature where users can leave comments on specific sections of a previewed file. It’s great for quick collaborations that don’t need a user to completely open a large document or other supported file type.

Ultimately, the difference between the features of iCloud and Dropbox come from the intended customer for the service. iCloud is very much geared for personal use for individuals and families, while Dropbox is designed for businesses and teams. It’s only natural that Dropbox emerges the far superior service for cloud storage features.

### Round: Features

Point for Dropbox

## 2. Pricing

Now that we’ve gone over a few of the unique features to both contestants, let’s take a look at how their pricing plans stack up to each other.

### iCloud

As you’ll see below, iCloud’s pricing is far simpler than Dropbox. There are no team or enterprise plans available, instead there is only the individual plan. Right out of the gate, the simplicity of how Apple prices their proprietary cloud storage service will be far more appealing to most casual users.

Like most cloud solutions, iCloud has a [free plan](https://www.cloudwards.net/the-top-5-cloud-companies-with-large-free-service-plans/). This starter plan comes with 5 GB of storage, which is surprisingly generous considering some of the alternatives. Though not a huge amount of data, 5 GB is perfect for storing basic files like documents and notes.

The next step up provides 50 GB for $0.99 per month. For approximately $12 a year, Apple will increase your iCloud storage by a factor of ten. It’s a remarkably good deal, and great for anyone that primarily uses their computer for basic purposes like music, [photos](https://www.cloudwards.net/best-online-storage-for-photos/), etc….

**[icloud\_pricing.png]**

From there, the next tier costs $2.99 per month, but comes with 200 GB of data. At this level, iCloud is nowhere near the storage capacity that Dropbox provides, but the price is also significantly lower. Additionally, most casual users should find 200 GB pretty sufficient for their needs.

The maximum tier that iCloud supports comes with 2 TB of data for $9.99 a month. Apple recommends this tier for users that plan on using their iCloud account for their whole family. And that branding makes sense, as iCloud is very much designed around personal rather than business use.

Something to keep in mind about these prices as well is that there isn’t an option to pay annually. What you see, in terms of plan pricing, is what you get.

### Dropbox

Dropbox offers a variety of both individual, team, and enterprise pricing plans. The focus of this battle will be on individual plans. Team plans are priced differently and based on the number of seats you need. However, individual plans have three tiers of service. Additionally, the price of the Enterprise plan isn’t shown on the website. Instead, you’ll need to get in [contact](https://experience.dropbox.com/contact) with Dropbox directly to discuss pricing.

The free [Basic](https://www.dropbox.com/basic) plan comes with 2 GB of data. It’s more of a starter kit than anything else. These days, most users will burn through 2 GB in a matter of days. The next available individual tier is the Plus plan. You can subscribe and pay in both monthly and annual instalments. The starting price is $11.99 per month. If you choose to pay annually, the price drops to $9.99 per month. The Plus plan comes with a [2 TB](https://www.cloudwards.net/best-way-to-store-1tb/) (2,000 GB) data limit, which is much more viable for most users.

**[dropbox\_pricing.png]**

The highest available individual plan is the Professional tier. Not only does it come with several additional features, it also has a whopping 3 TB (3,000 GB) data cap. The price is understandably higher. Paying monthly will cost $19.99. If you choose to pay in yearly installments, the price drops to $16.58 a month. For a more detailed breakdown of how the pricing works for Dropbox, make sure to read our [Dropbox pricing](https://www.cloudwards.net/dropbox-pricing/) guide.

A final note about the data limits for Dropbox. While not directly tied to pricing, you can increase your personal storage by referring other users. This applies regardless of what tier you use. Basic plan subscribers receive 500 MB per referral up to a total of 16 GB. While Plus and Professional accounts get a very generous 1 GB per referral up to 32 GB.

Both iCloud and Dropbox provide competitive pricing options. It’s clear from how their plan tiers are structured that Dropbox is geared more toward professional [collaborators](https://www.cloudwards.net/best-cloud-storage-for-collaboration/) rather than families. However, this adds complexity to how they price their product. Though the options aren’t as varied with iCloud, the simplicity of their pricing structure, and the deals you get with each tier are very attractive.

In conclusion, we give this round to iCloud. It’s not a definitive victory, but overall, the simplicity and lower general prices give Apple’s service the edge. If you want a comprehensive look at pricing for cloud storage solutions, make sure to check out our [Cloud Storage Provider Comparison](https://www.cloudwards.net/comparison/).

### Round: Pricing

Point for iCloud

## 3. Usability

If you can’t figure out how to navigate around and find the files you want to sync, it doesn’t really matter what the price or features of a particular cloud storage solution are. That’s why usability is so important. Few things are as frustrating as fighting against an app, trying to figure out some sort of internal logic that isn’t well explained. Fortunately, both Dropbox and iCloud are eminently usable. Let’s take a deeper look at both.

### iCloud

It’s easy to see that iCloud has a slight feature advantage. Being the native cloud storage solution for Apple devices means that every aspect of iCloud is integrated completely into all of your favorite devices. Whether you’re using a Mac, iPad, or iPhone, iCloud comes pre-installed and works automatically.

**[icloud\_settings.png]**

It also means that it gets the same fine-tooth comb treatment that all of Apple’s software gets. Everything is organized cleanly. The icons are clear and colorful. You can tag individual files or folders with several different colors for additional organizational specificity. If you like the way Apple manages how they organize information on your device (and you’re reading this article so we assume that you do), iCloud is intuitive, easy to use and looks right at home with the rest of the apps and software on your Mac.

### Dropbox

Dropbox has undergone an impressive number of refinements to its usability over the years. When it first started, it basically acted like a source-controlled directory on your system that backed-up to Dropbox’s servers. There was slightly more designed web experience if you chose to take advantage of it, but the true value proposition from the beginning was the ability to access all of your cloud files natively from your own machine.

The latest round of updates to the Dropbox platform comes with a much cleaner user interface that can be opened or closed separately from the local directory that sits on your machine. You can manage syncing, sharing, notifications, and much more from this panel, and is a welcome addition to the UX of the platform.

**[dropbox\_web\_interface.png]**

However, Dropbox has one major disadvantage that we’ve already hinted at: It’s not a native service like iCloud is. You have to install Dropbox, create an account, and manage it separately from the rest of your machine. Using iCloud alleviates all of the extra work simply by being natively integrated into your Mac. Despite the recent updates to it’s navigation UI and the features that come with Dropbox, the advantage here is for iCloud.

### Round: Usability

Point for iCloud

## 4. File Syncing and Sharing

For any cloud storage application, your ability to sync and share your online files is one of the most important aspects of the tool. Sure, the ability to back up your data is valuable, but the bread and butter of cloud storage is how it manages the files you keep on it. Because of this, we separate syncing and sharing into its own category. If you only care about backups, we recommend taking a look at applications like [IDrive](https://www.cloudwards.net/review/idrive/) or [Backblaze](https://www.cloudwards.net/review/backblaze/). Okay, let’s see how iCloud and Dropbox stack up next to each other.

### iCloud

As far as syncing options are concerned, iCloud is pretty basic. Though this article focuses on Mac users, it’s good to know that iCloud is also available on Windows 7 and higher machines. However, if you want to take your cloud storage on the go, you will have to use and iPhone or an iPad to get access to the iCloud app.

The actual syncing is functional. Any new file added to iCloud is automatically uploaded to Apple’s servers. It doesn’t support incremental syncing, so if you’re working with large files be confident in the stability of your internet connection.

Additionally, iCloud does not do anything to help control bandwidth consumption. Whether you’re uploading or downloading data, iCloud will use as much bandwidth as is available for the process. Because of this, it can become a bandwidth hog if you’re not careful.

**[icloud\_sharing\_files.png]**

The situation isn’t much more robust for [sharing files](https://www.cloudwards.net/best-cloud-storage-for-sharing/). As mentioned above, iCloud has a nice feature to easily and quickly share files between family members on your iCloud account. This is a great tool that can potentially see a lot of use for families looking to share memories or personal files with each other.

Recent updates have added the ability to [share files and folders](https://www.cloudwards.net/how-to-share-files-online/), which is a massive upgrade on previous versions of the application. For shared files and folders, you have good permissions control for allowing users to view, share, or edit the contents shared with them. You can access iCloud from the web as well, which is nice. So, if you happen to use an Android device, you can still log in to iCloud from the browser of your choice.

**[icloud\_collaboration.png]**

Lastly, iCloud supports real-time collaboration when working on files. This feature is limited only to iWork documents, but it’s great to see Apple expanding the feature set of iCloud.

### Dropbox

Dropbox has two big advantages over iCloud in the syncing department. First off, Dropbox supports [block-level file syncing](https://www.cloudwards.net/block-level-file-copying/). This is wildly useful in the event that you lose internet unexpectedly. Dropbox remembers the progress toward syncing a file, and will pick up from where it left off.

Secondly, users have the ability to control the bandwidth use of uploading and downloading. By default, uploads are bound to 75% of max speed, and downloads start at 100%. Both of these settings are easily changed so you have complete control over how much bandwidth Dropbox takes advantage of while you’re syncing data. If you have any problems syncing with Dropbox or utilizing its features, make sure to check out our guide about [Dropbox not syncing](https://www.cloudwards.net/dropbox-not-syncing/).

**[dropbox\_sharing\_a\_file.png]**

Sharing is where Dropbox truly stands out. Not only does it have native integration with Microsoft Office (check out [how to connect Office to Dropbox](https://www.cloudwards.net/how-to-connect-microsoft-office-365-and-dropbox/)), but it also has collaboration tools by the likes of Dropbox Spaces and [Paper](https://www.cloudwards.net/dropbox-paper/). Though we think [Google Drive](https://www.cloudwards.net/dropbox-paper-vs-google-docs/) has a superior collaboration set up, Dropbox’s offering is better than iCloud. Additionally, Dropbox supports many [small business apps](https://www.cloudwards.net/30-app-ideas-for-your-small-business/) including Adobe, Slack, Asana, and IFTTT. The supported software here exceeds iCloud’s otherwise limited offerings.

**[dropbox\_connected\_apps.png]**

Like iCloud, Dropbox also allows you to manage permissions of the users that you’ve shared files or folders with. You’ll never have to worry about unwanted access to your files. On top of that, you can review who has viewed shared files, though this is only available if you subscribe to the Professional plan.

The main [benefits of storing data](https://www.cloudwards.net/cloud-storage-good-idea/) in the cloud are these programs abilities to sync and share data. And in that department, there really isn’t much of a debate. Despite iCloud’s recent upgrades and expansions, Dropbox still has the clear advantage in this department.

### Round: File Syncing and Sharing

Point for Dropbox

## 5. Speed

Let’s be honest, regardless of what you’re using cloud storage for, the faster your data uploads and downloads, the happier you’ll be. That’s why the speed of a service can have a huge impact on which cloud storage solution you choose.

In general, Dropbox’s servers are located across the United States. For some Enterprise subscribers, there are servers in Germany, Australia, and Japan. Since this article focuses on the Plus and Professional plans, we will assume that the servers we access for the speed test are based in the US.

Apple takes advantage of Amazon’s AWS services for its data storage needs. AWS is located throughout the United States and in some other countries, but again, for the sake of simplicity, we will utilize servers in the United States.

### iCloud

<to be filled out by Ben>

### Dropbox

<to be filled out by Ben>

## 6. Security and Privacy

[Security](https://www.cloudwards.net/which-cloud-storage-has-the-best-security/) might be the second most critical feature in any cloud storage provider. The safety and privacy of your data is vitally important in today’s always connected world. And considering the aggressive habits of governments spying on their citizens (for instance the [Five Eyes](https://www.cloudwards.net/five-eyes/) spy network and the UK’s [Investigatory Powers Act](https://www.computerworld.com/article/3427019/the-snoopers-charter-everything-you-need-to-know-about-the-investigatory-powers-act.html)), the more you can obfuscate the contents of your files the better.

### iCloud

Apple’s iCloud fully supports [TLS/SSL](https://www.cloudwards.net/ssl-vs-tls/) using 128-bit AES. That means your content is completely encrypted while at rest. Though Apple doesn’t go into more detail about the nature of the encryption beyond the 128-bit AES, for the foreseeable future, that level of protection should work well.

It’s unclear if Apple encrypts metadata, though it seems unlikely considering that most cloud platforms that don’t fully support [zero-knowledge encryption](https://www.cloudwards.net/what-exactly-is-zero-knowledge-in-the-cloud-and-how-does-it-work/) leave metadata unencrypted. Speaking of zero-knowledge encryption, iCloud has limited support for it through its Keychain service which functions as a password and credit card manager, but not for most files. And, as is standard, iCloud fully supports [two-factor authentication](https://www.cloudwards.net/what-is-two-factor-authentication/).

### Dropbox

Dropbox, like iCloud, supports TLS/SSL, but it actually uses a 256-bit AES, which gives it a slight advantage in this department. While iCloud Keychain uses [zero-point encryption](https://www.cloudwards.net/best-zero-knowledge-cloud-services/), Dropbox doesn’t utilize the feature at all. Which is unfortunate, especially given that its servers are located in the United States, home of the impressively corrupt—and general enemy of privacy—[US Patriot Act](https://www.cloudwards.net/usa-patriot-act/).

Two-factor authentication is of course supported, which is a mandatory feature. As mentioned before, Professional account subscribers have the ability to review every event related to shared files, which makes it easy to track how your data is being seen and used.

In the end, both iCloud and Dropbox have very similar privacy and security systems. Neither are the best options, but do a decent job of keeping your data secure. We do hope both providers add zero-point security, especially when you consider some of the more discouraging events that have occurred over the years. For instance, when the details of 68,680,741 [Dropbox accounts](http://fortune.com/2016/08/31/dropbox-breach-passwords/) were stolen in 2012, and the iCloud accounts of [several celebrities](http://www.forbes.com/sites/thomasbrewster/2016/03/16/icloud-hacking-jennifer-lawrence-fappening-apple-nude-photo-leaks/#4cb20e757b88) were broken into in 2014. In the end however, the 256-bit AES and event viewer feature of Dropbox gives this particular service a slight edge.

### Round: Security and Privacy

Point for Dropbox

## The Verdict: iCloud vs Dropbox

The battle was fierce, and the competitors both brought their A-games with them. However, there can be only one. iCloud has come a long way since its original debut, but even for Mac users, it’s still not quite at the level of Dropbox. Where it falls the shortest is in its syncing and sharing features, and frankly that is the most fundamental aspect of these types of services.

Keep in mind though the audience for both of these systems. Apple makes it very clear that iCloud is intended more for home and family use (though recent feature upgrades have expanded this), while Dropbox was built from the ground up as a team collaboration tool.

**Overall Winner:** [Dropbox](https://dropbox.com)

What did you think of our comparison? Did we miss anything that would take iCloud over the top? Let us know in the comments, and as always, thanks for reading!

## FAQ

### Is Dropbox Better than iCloud?

Though iCloud is native to Mac devices, and the pricing scheme is simpler to understand and slightly cheaper. The overall feature list, syncing and sharing options, and security makes Dropbox a better value proposition for most users.

### How is Dropbox Different from iCloud?

iCloud comes with every Mac, so you don’t need to worry about installing it or creating a separate account. As a third-party app, there is slightly more overhead to get Dropbox up and running on your machine. However, at a high level, both cloud solutions provide the same basic services.

### Is Dropbox or iCloud Better for Mac Users?

It depends slightly on how you plan on using your cloud services. Casual users that simply want to store photos, videos, and music might be better served going with iCloud. But if you want to utilize your Mac for more business-oriented purposes, Dropbox will overall be your better option.