

The Beginner's Guide to Google Docs



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If you're just getting started with Google Docs, its extensive features and add-ons can be a little overwhelming. Here are some tips to help you get started with this powerful alternative to Microsoft Word.

What is Google Docs?

If you've heard of Google Docs before, feel free to skip ahead. If you've never heard of it before, here's a crash course on what you need to know. We'll go over the basics and get you brushed up with what Google Docs is and how you can get started right away.

Google Docs is a free, web-based word processor offered by Google as part of its complete office suite—Google Drive—to compete with Microsoft Office. The other main services included in the cloud-based suite are Sheets (Excel) and Slides (Powerpoint).

RELATED: [What is G Suite, Anyway?](#)

Google Docs is available on all devices and platforms; all you need is an internet connection and a web browser (or, in the case of mobile, the applicable apps). Google does the rest and handles the brunt of the heavy lifting while it runs the software in the cloud.

Docs supports several different file types, including [.doc](#), [.docx](#), [.txt](#), [.rtf](#), and [.odt](#), making it easy to view and convert Microsoft Office files directly from Google Drive.

And since Docs is an online word processor, you can share and collaborate with multiple people on the same document, tracking revisions, changes, and suggestions all in real time.

Have you heard enough? Let's get started.

How To Sign Up for an Account

The first thing you'll need to do before you can use Google Docs is a sign up for a Google account (an @gmail account). If you already have an account, feel free to move on to the next section. If not, we'll go over the simple way to create a Google account and get you set up with Docs.

Head over to accounts.google.com, click on “Create Account,” and then “For Myself.”



Sign in

Use your Google Account

Email or phone

[Forgot email?](#)

Not your computer? Use Guest mode to sign in privately.

[Learn more](#)

[Create account](#)

1
For myself

2
To manage my business

On the next page, you'll need to provide some information to create an account, like first and last names, username, and password.



Create your Google Account

First name

Last name

Username

@gmail.com

You can use letters, numbers & periods

[Use my current email address instead](#)

Password

Confirm



Use 8 or more characters with a mix of letters, numbers & symbols

[Sign in instead](#)

Next

Also, you have to verify your phone number to make sure you're an actual human and not a bot.



Verifying your phone number

For your security, Google wants to make sure that it's really you. Google will send a text message with a 6-digit verification code. *Standard rates apply*

Phone number



[Back](#)

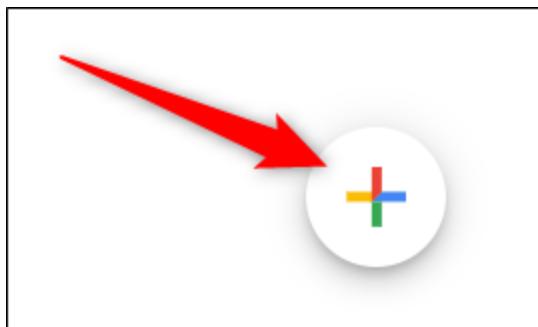
Next

Your personal info is private and safe

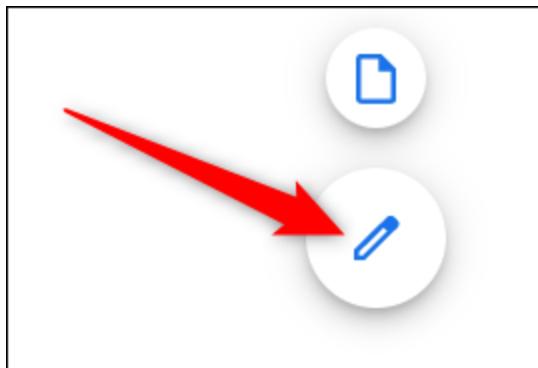
After you verify your phone number, the subsequent pages require you to provide a recovery email address, date of birth, and gender, as well as agreeing to the privacy statement and terms of service. Finish that, and you're the proud new owner of a Google account.

How to Create a Blank Document

Now that you have a Google account, it's time to create your first document. Head on over to [Google Docs](#) and place the cursor on the multi-colored "+" icon in the bottom right corner.

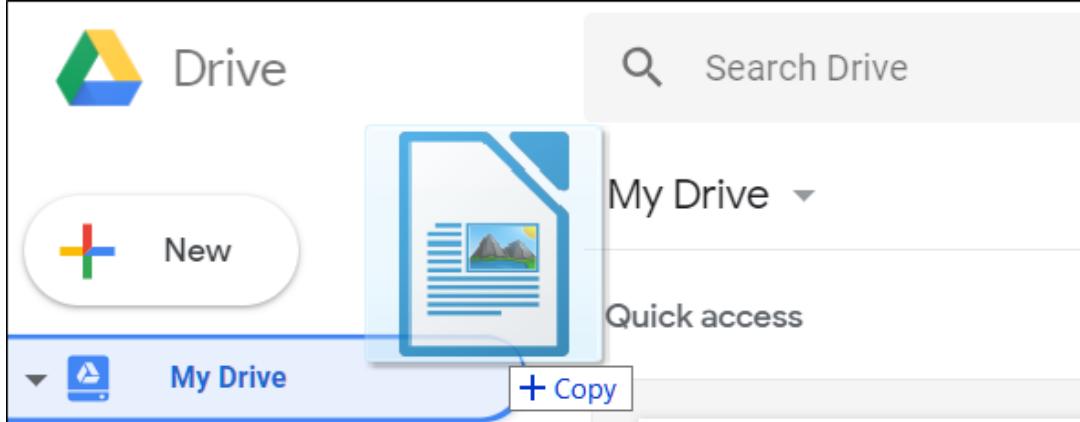


The + turns into a blue pencil icon; click on it.



Chrome Pro Tip: If you're using Google Chrome, you can type docs.new into the Omnibox and hit Enter to automatically create and open a new blank document.

How to Import a Microsoft Word Document

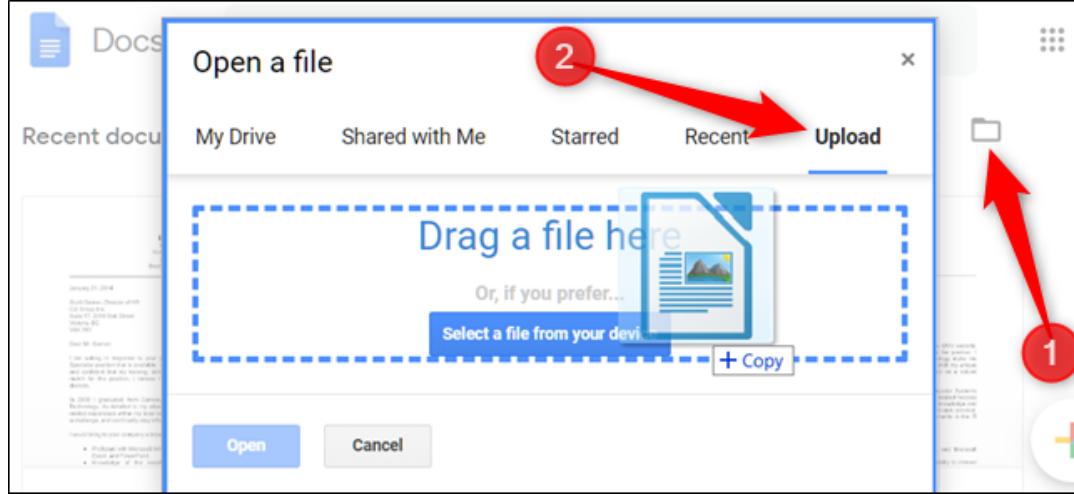


Even if you're new to Google Docs, you might already have a collection of Microsoft Word files you'd like to be able to use. If that's the case, then you'll have to [upload all your Word documents](#) before you can view them. While it might not support some of the more advanced features and formatting of some Word documents, it works pretty well.

When you import a Word document, you can use either Google Docs or [Drive](#) to upload your files. Both methods let you drag and drop a file from your computer directly into the web browser for easy uploads. Your Drive houses all of your uploaded files, but for convenience's sake, when you head to the Docs homepage, it only shows you document-type files.

The screenshot shows the Google Docs interface. At the top, there are navigation icons for 'Docs', 'Search', and a user profile. Below that, there are two tabs: 'Recent documents' and 'Owned by anyone'. Under 'Recent documents', there are three items: 'Untitled document' (opened 22:08), 'Episode 2' (opened 22:07), and 'My Super Cool Word Doc' (opened 22:07). The 'My Super Cool Word Doc' item has a preview window showing its contents. At the bottom, there is a note about document security and a large 'New' button.

From the Google Docs homepage, click the folder icon in the top right, then click the "Upload" tab.



Once the Word file uploads, Docs opens it automatically, ready for you to start to edit, share, and collaborate.

To open a Word document that you want to edit, click the file with the blue 'W' next to the filename from your Google Docs homepage.

Click either view the Word file or edit it in Docs.

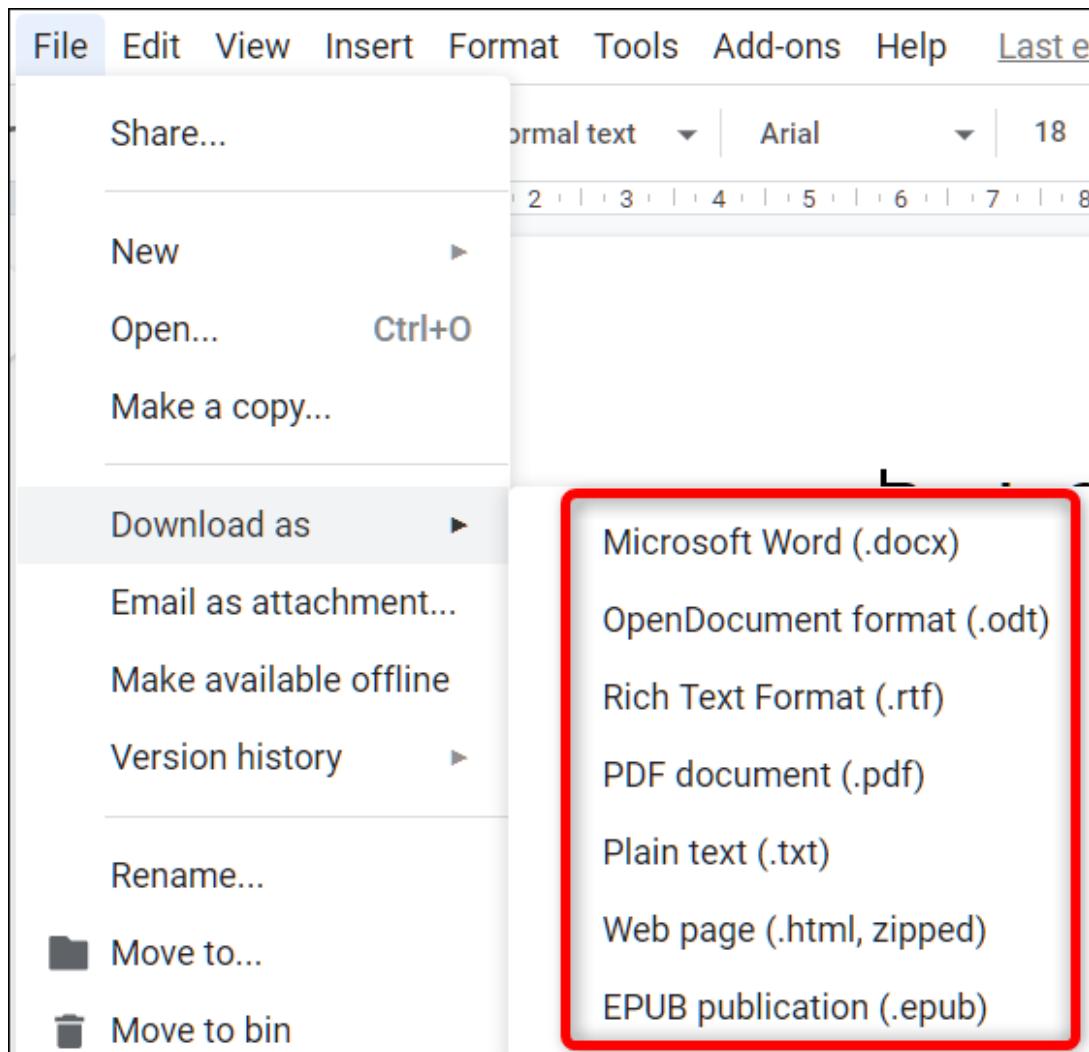
Open Word file

You can open this in view-only mode or edit in Google Docs.

 VIEW ONLY

 EDIT IN GOOGLE DOCS

When you finish with the document, you can download your document back into DOCX, or PDF, ODT, TXT, HTML, or EPUB format. Click File > Download As then click on the desired format, and it will download directly to where files save from your browser.



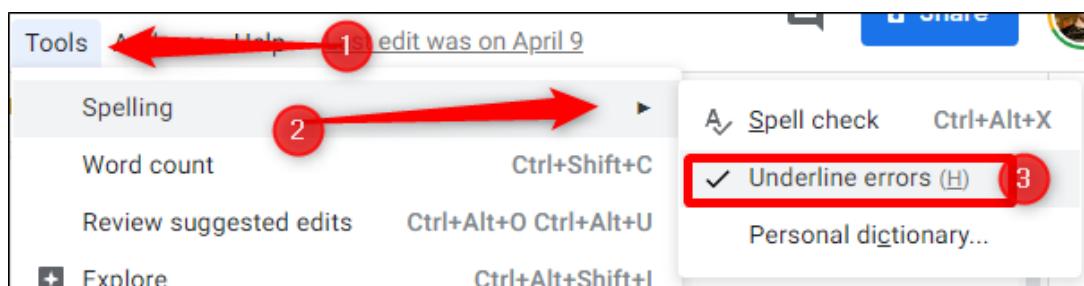
RELATED: [How to Import a Word Document into Google Docs](#)

How to Check Your Spelling in Google Docs

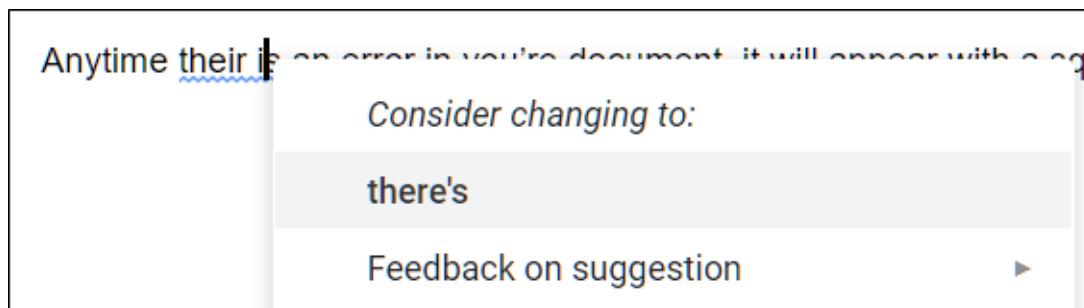
A screenshot of the Google Docs interface. The top bar shows 'Untitled document' and standard file menu options like File, Edit, View, Insert, Format, Tools, Add-ons, Help, and Share. Below the toolbar is a row of icons for bold, italic, underline, etc., followed by a zoom slider set at 100%, a font dropdown set to 'Normal text', a font size dropdown set to 'Arial' and '11', and a paragraph style dropdown set to '...'. A horizontal scroll bar is visible below these controls. The main document area contains the text 'Anytime their is an error in you're document, it will appear with a squiggly red line underneath it.' where 'their' and 'you're' are underlined with red squiggly lines.

Now that you have a few documents, it's time to make sure your [spelling and grammar are correct](#). Docs comes equipped with a spell-checker all ready to go for you—any time you misspell something, it underlines the error with a squiggly line, prompting you to make a change.

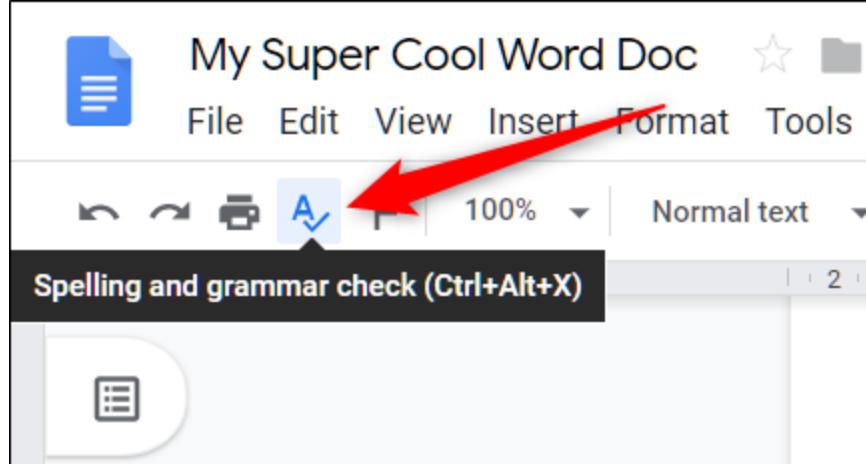
This should be on by default, but you can make sure in Tools > Spelling > Underline Errors.



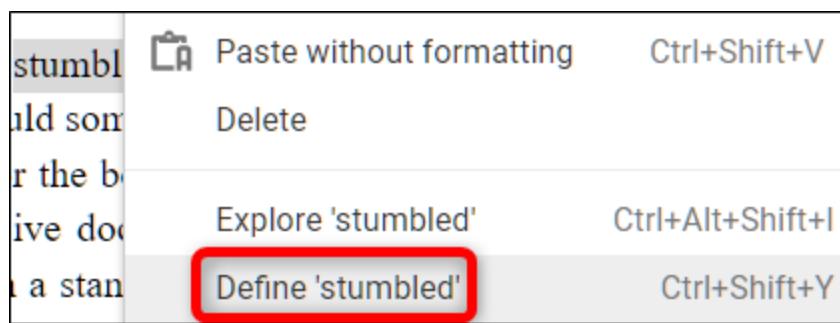
To see spelling corrections and suggestions, right-click the word with the line underneath. Alternatively, or press Ctrl+Alt+X (Windows) or Command+Alt+X (Mac) to open the Spell Check and Grammar tool.



Another way to access the spell check is to click the icon with an A and checkmark. This enables the tool and parses your document for spelling and grammar.



Along with a spell checker, Google Docs comes loaded with a built-in dictionary and thesaurus. All you have to do is highlight a word, right-click on it, then click "Define [word]."



While this should get you started, we have [a deeper dive into Docs' spelling and grammar checker](#) if you want more info.

RELATED: [How to Check Your Spelling in Google Docs](#)

How to Collaborate on Documents with Others

Share with others

Get shareable link 

Link sharing on [Learn more](#)

Anyone with the link can view ▾

Copy link

OFF - only specific people can access

Anyone with the link can edit

Anyone with the link can comment

Anyone with the link can view

More...

Done

Advanced

One of the best features of Google Docs is the ability to [generate a shareable link](#) that lets anyone with it to either view, suggest edits, or edit your document. Instead of sending a file back and forth between collaborators, you can make edits and suggestions all at once, as if you were all huddled over the same computer in real time. The only difference is that each person has their own text entry cursor to use on their personal computer.

From the document you want to share, click on the blue button “Share” to choose how and with whom you want to send a link to your file. You can enter email addresses manually or click “Get sharable link” in the top corner to hand out the invitation yourself.

Share with others

Get shareable link 

People

Enter names or email addresses...

Done

Advanced

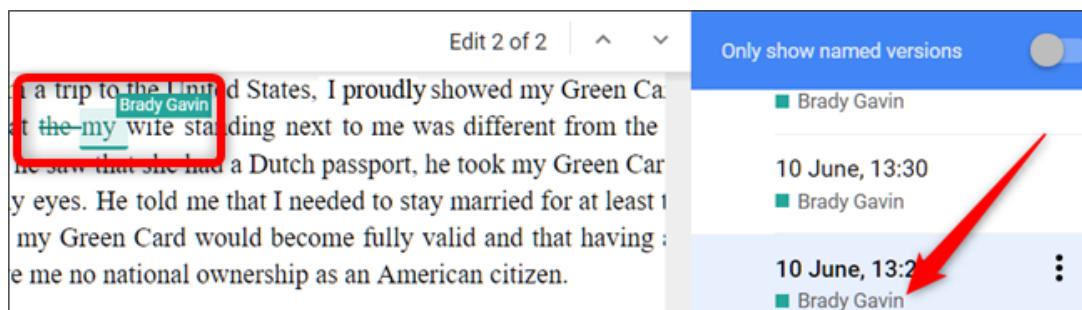
From the drop-down menu, you can edit how much power the shared user(s) have over the file when you select one of these options:

- **Off:** Sharing is disabled. If you've previously shared a link with others, it will no longer work and revokes any permissions they once had.
- **Anyone with the link can edit:** Gives the shared users full read/write access. They still can't delete it from your Drive, though—this is just for the contents of the file.
- **Anyone with the link can comment:** Allows shared users to leave comments if desired—this is great for team projects.
- **Anyone with the link can view:** Shared users can view the file, but can't edit it in any way. This is the default action when you share a file, and the best option if you're trying to share a file for download.

You can do a lot more with these shareable links, which also work with other Drive files and on mobile. For a deeper look at how these links work and how to generate them, [check out our post](#).

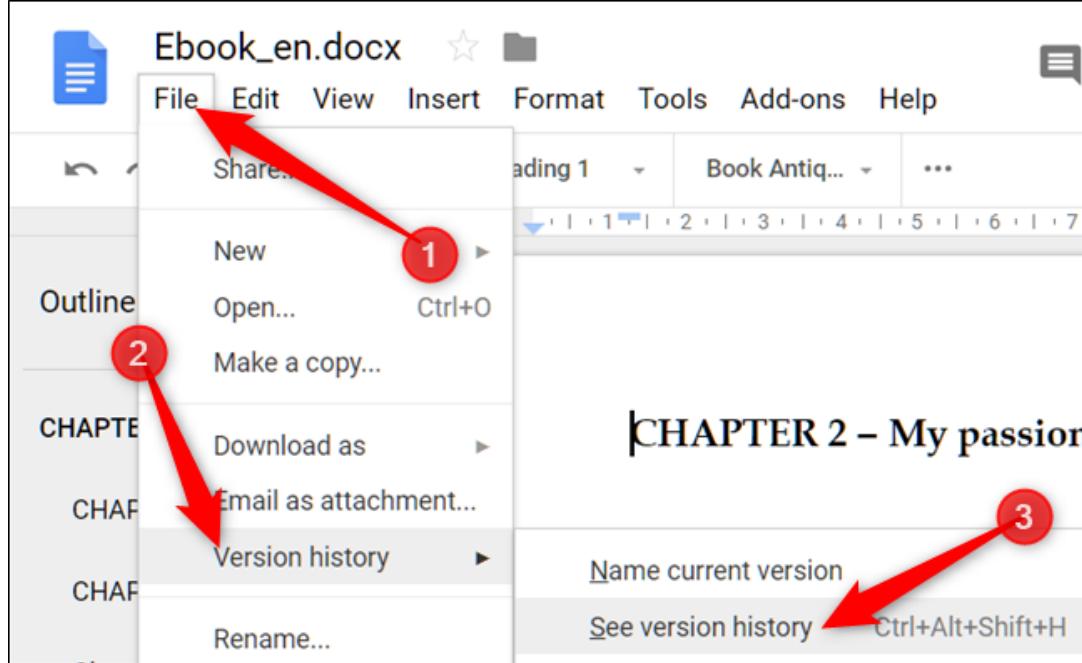
RELATED: [How to Create Shareable Download Links for Files on Google Drive](#)

How to See All the Recent Changes to a Document



When you share documents with others, it's difficult to keep track of all the small changes that happen if you're not present. For that, there's [revision history](#). Google Docs keeps track of all the changes that occur in a document and groups them into periods, keeping the clutter down. You can even revert a file to any of the previous versions listed in the history with the click of a mouse.

You can view a list of all recent changes by clicking File > Version History > See Version History.



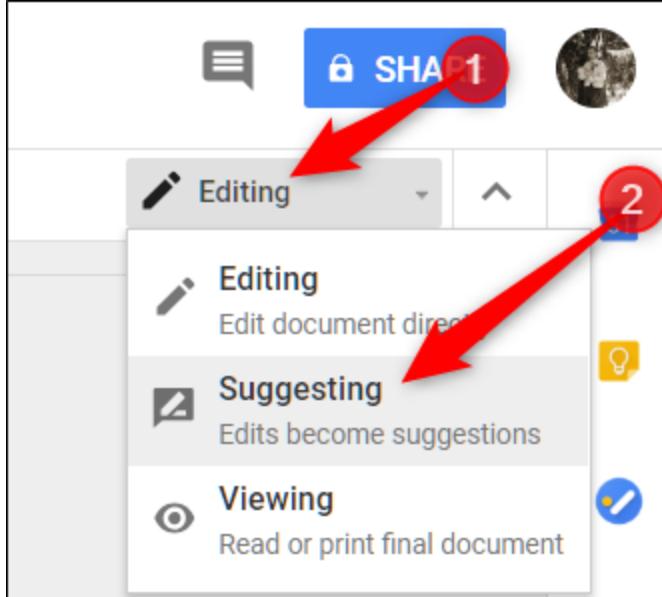
RELATED: [How to See Recent Changes to Your Google Docs, Sheets, or Slides File](#)

How to Suggest an Edit to a Document

A screenshot of a Google Docs document titled "Introduction". A portion of the text "There is no one who loves pain itself. ~~lorem ipsum dolor sit amet~~" is highlighted with a red box. To the right, a "Replace" dialog box is open, showing a suggestion from "Brady Gavin" at 13:20 Today. The suggestion reads: "Replace: \"lorem ipsum dolor sit amet\" with \"There is no one who loves pain itself\"". A red box highlights this dialog box.

If you're the owner of a document and would prefer for collaborators to have to [suggest edits to your file](#) (instead of directly edit them), you can set the access permission to "Suggestions." This lets others make an edit to a document without the worry of others messing about in your file. When a collaborator makes an edit, the owner receives an email notification regarding the suggested edit and can choose to keep or discard the change.

If you look up at the top right of the document window, you'll see your current state. If you see "Suggesting" then you're good to go. If you see "Editing" or "Viewing" then click that button and then click the "Suggesting" option.



RELATED: [How to Suggest an Edit in Google Docs](#)

How to Find the Word and Page Count

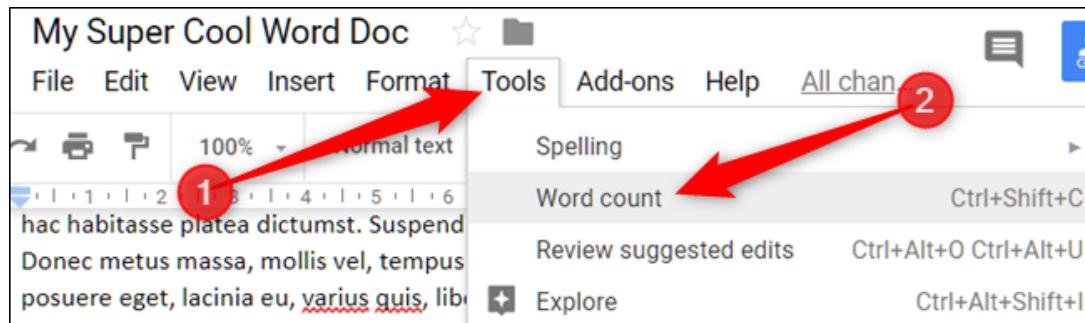
A screenshot of the 'Word count' dialog box in Google Docs. The box lists the following statistics:

Pages	13
Words	6480
Characters	44373
Characters excluding spaces	37980

A blue 'Close' button is at the bottom left. Below the dialog, a portion of the document text is visible: 'lipiscing augue. Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipis'.

By default, Google Docs doesn't display the word or page count, but it's [easy to check them without a manual count](#). So, if you have a strict word limit for an assignment or like to keep track of the amount you write, you can see the details to your labors with the word count. You can even highlight text from any paragraph to check how many words there are in the selection.

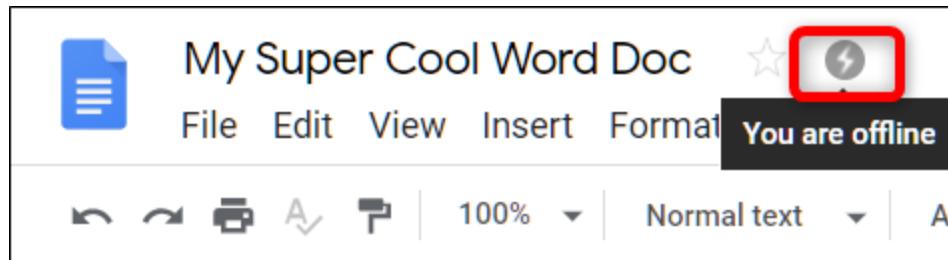
To view your document's word/page count, click Tools > Word Count, or press Ctrl+Shift+C on Windows and Command+Shift+C on Mac.



You can also find the word count for a specific string of text by highlighting it, and jumping back into Tools > Word Count (or using the key combo).

RELATED: [How to Find the Page and Word Count in Google Docs](#)

How to Use Google Docs Offline



What happens if you need to access Google Docs but don't have an internet connection? Although Google Docs is a web-based product, that [doesn't mean you can't use it offline](#). You need to download an extension for Chrome and make sure you enable the file for offline use beforehand. Any changes you make to the file update the next time you connect to the internet.

After you download the [official extension for Chrome](#), go to Google Docs' homepage and in the top left corner, click the Hamburger menu > Settings. Once here, toggle "Offline" to the On position, then click "OK."

Settings

Language

English

Always show right-to-left controls

Offline

Create, open and edit your recent Google Docs files on this device while offline.

Not recommended on public or shared computers. [Learn more](#)

Templates

Display recent templates on home screens

Activity dashboard

Show your view history

[Learn more](#)

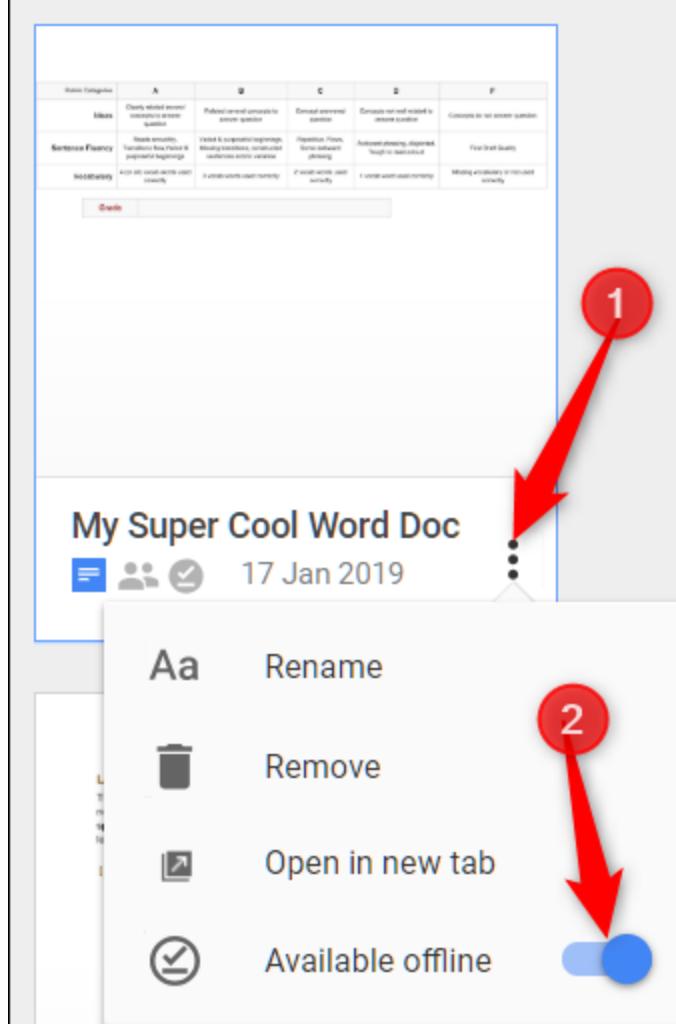


1

OK

2

To save storage space on your local machine, Google only downloads and makes the most recently accessed files available offline. To manually enable a file, click the three dots icon, then toggle “Available Offline” to On.



RELATED: [How to Use Google Docs Offline](#)

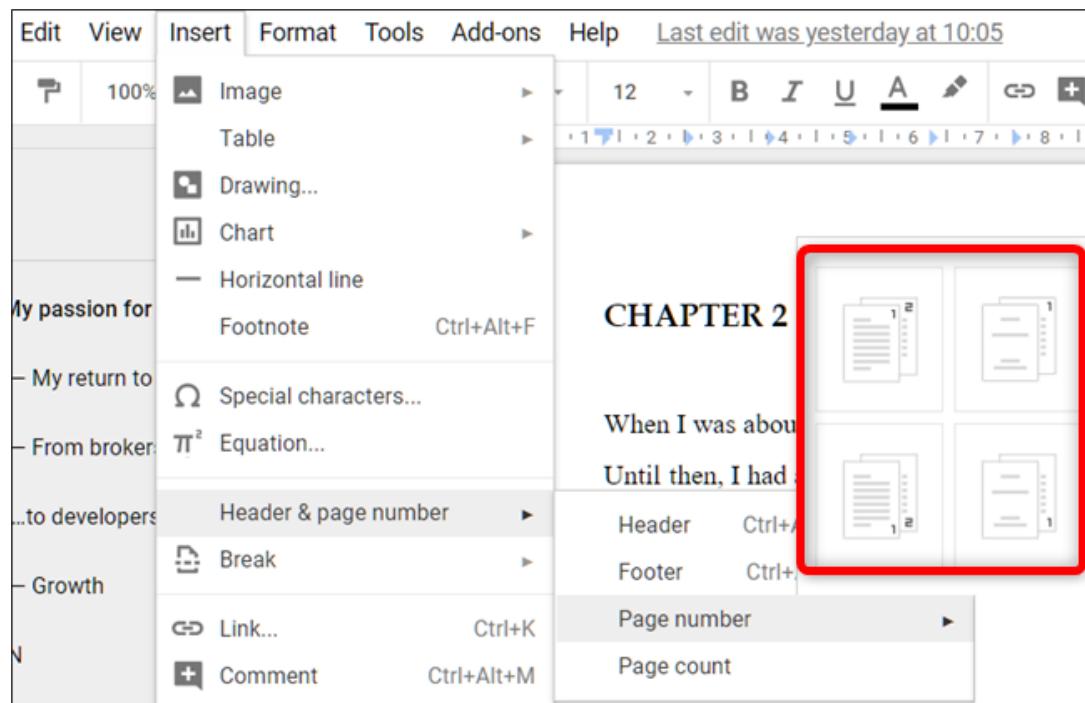
How to Add Page Numbers to a Document

The screenshot shows a Microsoft Word document with a toolbar at the top. The text in the document reads: "vel, auctor ac, accumsan id, felis. Pellentesque cursus sagittis felis. Pellentesque porttitor, velit lacinia egestas auctor, diam eros tempus arcu, nec vulputate augue magna vel risus. Cras non magna vel ante adipiscing rhoncus. Vivamus a mi. Morbi neque. Aliquam erat volutpat. Integer ultrices lobortis eros." In the bottom right corner of the page, the page number "3" is displayed. A red box highlights this page number. On the far right, there is a vertical ribbon with icons for "31", "Optic", and a magnifying glass.

Page numbers are a visual tool used to show the reader what page they're currently on. They also help you organize physical sheets of paper and place them in the proper order (you know—if you print them). Google Docs doesn't

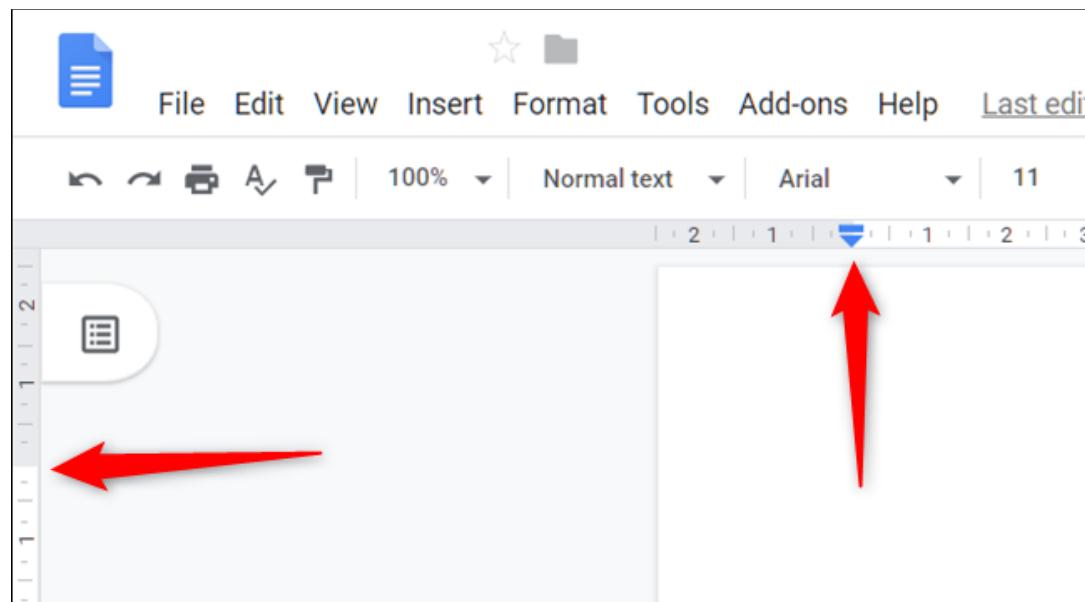
automatically generate page numbers in files, you have to [add them manually](#), but it's easy to add them to the header or footer of your document.

To add a page number to all pages, click Insert > Header & Page Number > Page Number. You'll see a pop-up window where you can choose a page number style.



RELATED: [How to Add Page Numbers to Google Docs](#)

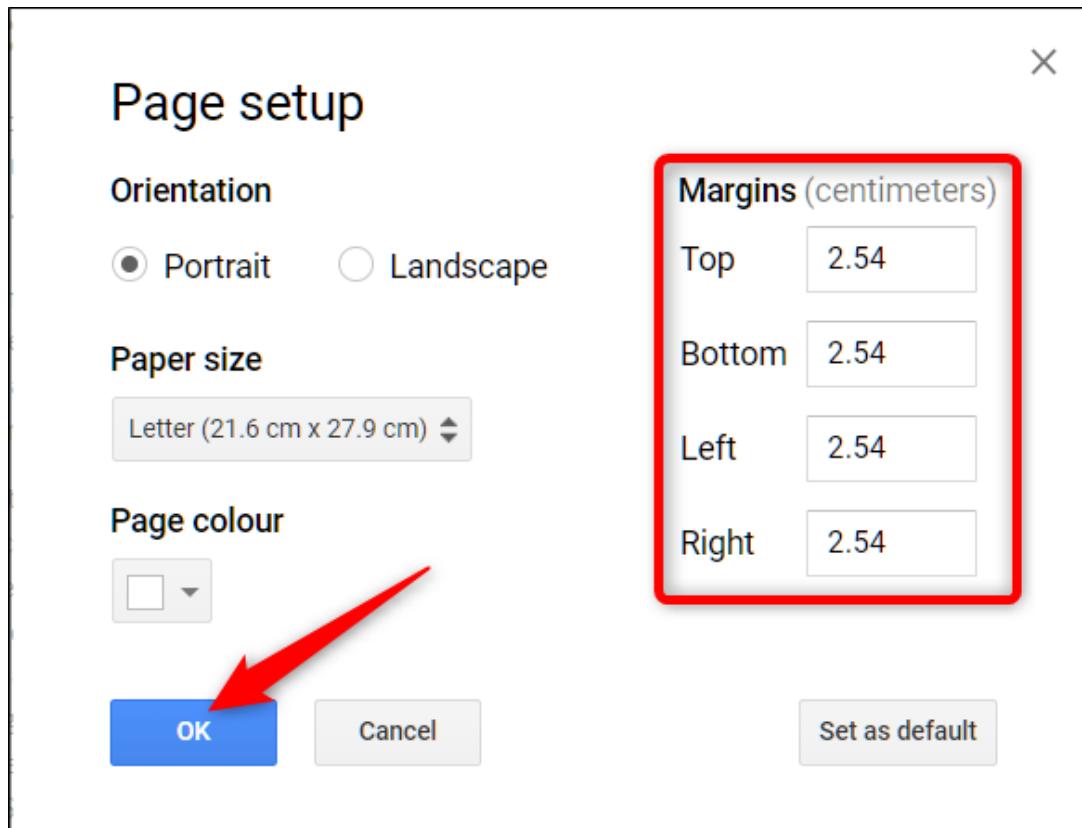
How to Control Margins in Google Docs



Margins are the white space that borders your document on all sides. Because margins create an invisible border, when you decrease the margin

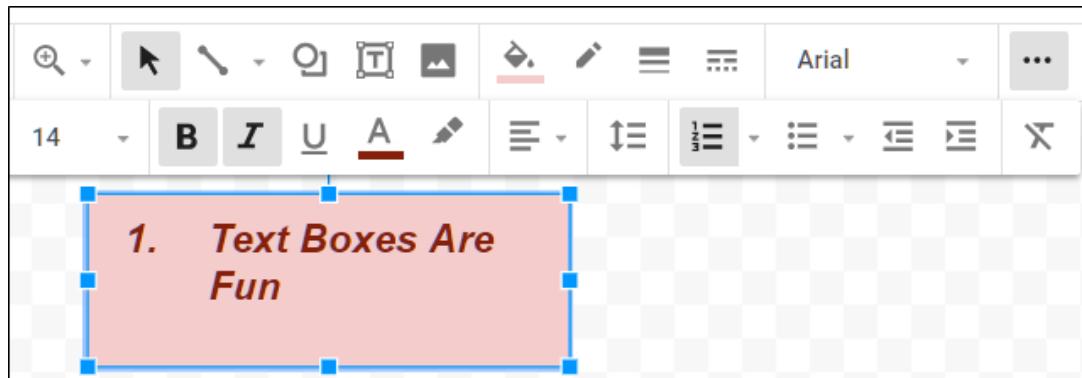
size, you increase the amount of usable space on the page. If you need to change the amount of space on the edges of all a file's pages, then you need to [manage its margins](#) with the ruler along the side and top of the document.

If you'd rather enter the margins manually, click File > Page Setup, enter the amount of white space you want to see on each side, then click "OK."



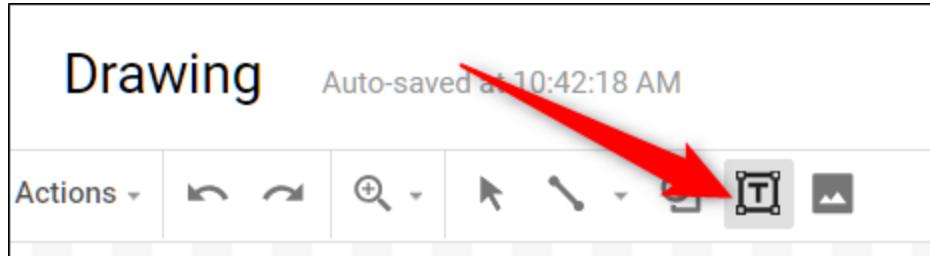
RELATED: [How to Control Margins in Google Docs](#)

How to Add a Text Box to a Document

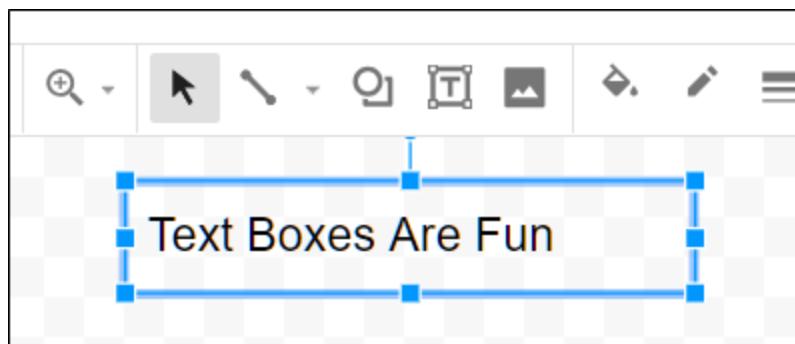


[Adding text boxes](#) to Google Docs is a great way to highlight pertinent information and draw attention to specific elements of a document. However, to create one isn't a straightforward process and is hidden in an unlikely place: from the Drawing feature.

To access the Drawing menu, go to Insert > Drawing and click the text box icon in the menu bar.



Now, click and drag your mouse to create a text box in the space provided, and then add your desired text.



Click "Save & Close" to insert the text box into your document when finished.

RELATED: [How to Add a Text Box in Google Docs](#)

How to Add a Table of Contents

A screenshot of the Google Docs Table of Contents feature. It shows a hierarchical list of chapters and their corresponding page numbers. The list includes: Introduction (1), Chapter 1 (2), Chapter 2 (3), Chapter 3 (4), Chapter 4 (6), Chapter 5 (7), Chapter 5.1 (8), Chapter 5.2 (8), Chapter 6 (9), and Conclusion (11). Below the list is a button labeled "#heading=h.daxcuhr15y0 – Change | Remove".

Introduction	1
Chapter 1	2
Chapter 2	3
Chapter 3	4
Chapter 4	6
Chapter 5	7
Chapter 5.1	8
Chapter 5.2	8
Chapter 6	9
Conclusion	11

#heading=h.daxcuhr15y0 – Change | Remove

Introduction

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A table of contents is a way to [show readers each topic/chapter listed](#) in the document. This feature automatically generates one and uses links that jump to each section when clicked. So if you have a large document, this lets anyone quickly access specific parts without the need to scroll through the whole thing.

Click Insert > Table of Contents, and then click on either of the two options provided. The first option is a plain-text table of contents with numbers on the right side intended for printed documents. The second option doesn't use page numbers but instead inserts hyperlinks that jump to the noted section for documents to view online.

Cool Word Doc

View Insert Format Tools Add-ons Help All changes

100% **24** B

Image Table Drawing... Chart Horizontal line Footnote Ctrl+Alt+F

Special characters... Equation... Header & page number Break Link... Ctrl+K Comment Ctrl+Alt+M Bookmark Table of contents

Table of contents

1 2 3 4 5

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11

Note that to create an automatically generated table of contents that links to specific sections of your document, you must format each chapter—or title—using Google Docs' built-in header styles. This lets Docs know how to populate the table and add clickable links.

A screenshot of a Google Docs interface. At the top, there's a ribbon with tabs for Insert, Format, Tools, and Add-ons. Below the ribbon, the font is set to Calibri. A dropdown menu shows "Heading 1" selected. The main content area contains the text "Title" and "Subtitle" in a dark blue font. Below them is a list of headings: "Heading 1", "Heading 2", "Heading 3", and "Heading 4". The "Heading 1" item is highlighted with a red rectangular border. The rest of the content area is mostly obscured by a large, semi-transparent watermark-like background.

RELATED: [How to Create a Table of Contents in Google Docs](#)

The Best Google Docs Add-ons



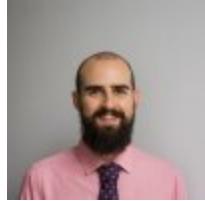
Now that you've learned all the basics to Google Docs, you can become a true power user with the addition of add-ons. [Add-ons](#) are a lot like extensions for web browsers but are specific to Google Docs and let you gain additional features from third-party developers. You can install tools to

increase productivity with additional proofreaders, document signing apps, an in-document translator, and even a rubric creator for teachers.

RELATED: [The Best Google Docs Add-Ons](#)

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BRADY GAVIN

Brady Gavin has been immersed in technology for 15 years and has written over 150 detailed tutorials and explainers. He's covered everything from Windows 10 registry hacks to Chrome browser tips. Brady has a diploma in Computer Science from Camosun College in Victoria, BC. [READ FULL BIO »](#)

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