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Apple's [App Store](#) has been around for 17 years, and there's a rich history and a wealth of apps to discover. Here's what you need to know, and how to get started with it.

While the [iPhone](#) first hit the market in June 2007, the iOS App Store was not released until July 10, 2008. At launch, it featured 500 applications, which included landmark titles for the time like

Bejeweled and social media apps like Facebook and MySpace Mobile.

Apple would later launch the [Mac App Store](#), with it first surfacing on January 6, 2011, as part of a free Mac OS X 10.6.6 update.

At its peak in 2017, the iOS App Store held an impressive 2.2 million apps. However, Apple later began pruning old, outdated, or 32-bit apps. According to Apple, it has removed 2.3 million apps in total for being obsolete or incompatible with newer operating systems.

Currently, the app store has over 1.8 million across 175 different storefronts in more than 40 languages.

App Store fees and controversies

In most countries, iPhone and [iPad](#) owners are not able to install apps that do not appear on their devices in the App Store without using Xcode, or unless the device is jailbroken. Jailbreaking is the practice of exploiting a flaw to remove restrictions imposed by the device's manufacturer.

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This means that if a developer wants to make their app available for the iPhone or iPad, for the most part, they'll need to distribute it through the App Store. To distribute it through the App Store, they'll need to pay a 30% fee for each sale and any subsequent sales on in-app purchases (IAP).

The 30% isn't a hard rule, either. Smaller developers who make under \$1 million a year can qualify for a reduction to 15% for IAP.

Additionally, if an app is subscription-based, the developer pays a 30% commission fee in the first year but drops to 15% in subsequent years.

This fee applies to digital goods and services only. If you're purchasing physical services or goods, such as buying something from Amazon or getting DoorDash deliveries or Uber rides, the developer does not have to pay the 30% fee.

There are some digital goods that the fee doesn't apply to. "Reader" apps — those used to consume previously purchased content such as news, books, music, and video — are also exempt from App Store fees on that content.

Many developers who are subjected to the 30% fee feel as though this is unfair. Many want the fees severely reduced, if not removed altogether. Additionally, many developers want Apple to allow its users to install from third-party resources.

Apple has pointed out that maintaining the App Store and security costs money. The 30% fee is meant to offset the cost of upkeep of the App Store.

Apple has also said that it does not want to allow its customers to install apps outside the App Store. It claims that it presents a safety risk for users as the company can not see whether or not an app may have malicious code or prohibited content.

Third-party app stores

Much to Apple's chagrin, The European Union passed the Digital Markets Act [in November 2022](#). While many things were covered by the DMA, one of the biggest changes was how it required Apple to provide alternative methods for obtaining apps outside of its own App Store.

The deadline to comply was March 6, 2024, and while Apple did make its displeasure known in [a lengthy whitepaper](#), it did comply. Though, [the changes](#) weren't quite as robust as many developers — and iPhone owners — were hoping.

Apple still doesn't allow iPhone owners to download App Packages — or .IPAs — from anywhere. Apps still need to be notarized and come from sources that Apple trusts.

Developers who want to host their apps outside the App Store must qualify for a massive line of credit. The line of credit must come from an A-rated financial institution valued at one million euros or more — Apple says this is "to guarantee support for your developers and users."

And, even if all the prerequisites are met, the developers can only provide their apps to those who live within the European Union — just [27 countries](#).

The first third-party App Store to go live on the iPhone was AltStore PAL, an alternative app store that promises to help distribute "indie" apps at a low-cost yearly

fee. It launched on April 17, 2024, and featured a handful of apps, including [the Delta emulator](#).

The iPad got its own third-party app stores [in September 2024](#).

App Store interface

If you're already familiar with other Apple apps, such as Music and Podcasts, chances are you'll pick up the App Store pretty easily. It looks a little overwhelming at first blush, but it's simple once you spend a few minutes with it.

Let's take a moment to explore the interface to see what to expect from within the app. When browsing on iOS and [iPadOS](#), the App Store is split into various tabs, which are:

Today

The Today tab is a great jumping-off point if you're unsure what you're looking for. Maybe you're bored and want to see what's available.

This curated page of apps shows you what's currently big or what may be of interest to those browsing the app store. For example, in October, it is not uncommon for Apple to highlight basketball apps, such as NBA apps.

Games

Almost 14% of all apps on the App Store are games, so it makes sense that Apple has a dedicated tab specifically for games. This is where you'll find suggestions for both free and paid games.

Apps

While your iPhone and iPad are great for gaming, they're also great tools in general. The Apps section is designed to highlight exceptionally notable apps, apps that are popular at the moment, and apps that fall under Apple-selected categories.

Arcade

Apple Arcade is Apple's pay-once, play-all-you-want gaming subscription. [Apple Arcade](#) was launched in 2019 and designed to give mobile gamers a way to enjoy quality games without worrying about in-game advertisements or in-app purchases.

Apple Arcade features more than 200 games across dozens of categories. Many games work on the iPhone, iPad, Mac, [Apple TV](#), and some even work on the [Apple Vision Pro](#).

To play Apple Arcade games, you'll need to have an active subscription. Currently, subscriptions cost \$6.99 per month or \$49.99 annually.

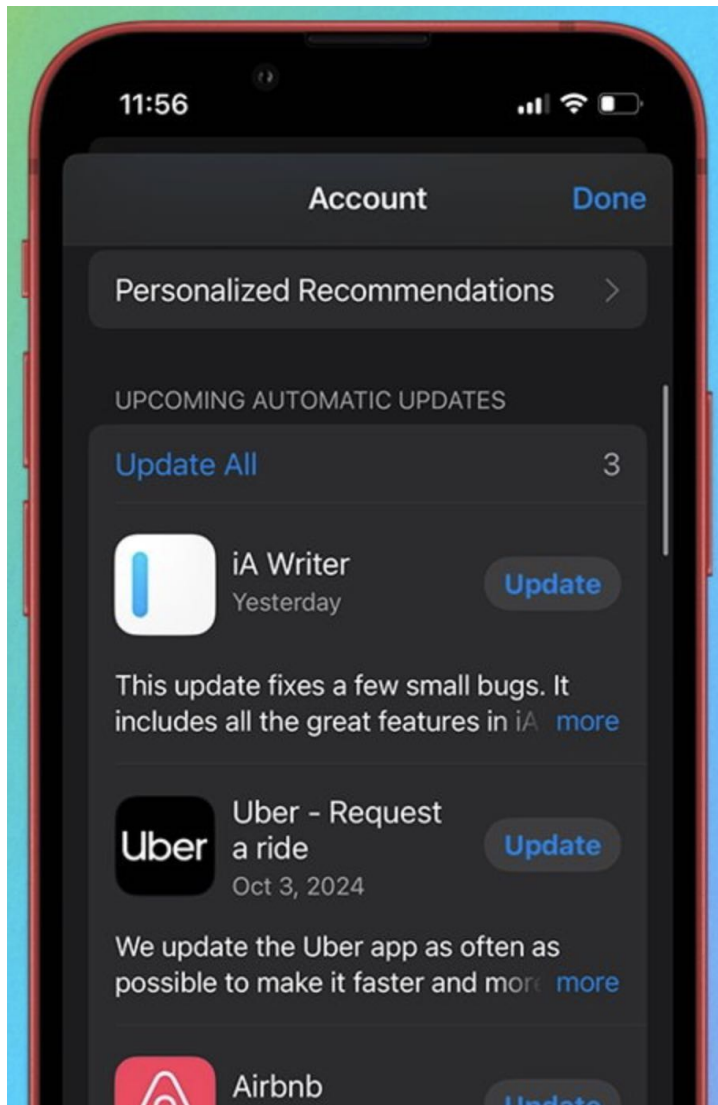
This Arcade is where you'll find what games Apple has on offer.

Search

A lot of the time, you might already know the app you're looking for. If that's the case, you can head to the App Store Search tab and search for it.

This is also a great place to keyword search. For example, if you're interested in journaling apps, typing "Journal" will bring up all the apps that fit that description.

Keeping apps updated



Once you've got the apps you want, keeping them updated is a good idea. Fortunately, your device will regularly check to see if you have any apps to update and update them for you.

However, you still might want to check to see if you've got any apps that need to be updated. Here's how to do that.