The Easiest Ways to Get Ebooks to Students

April 15, 2020 Update.

Welcome to the world of ebooks.

As you may know, there are two ebook formats used on free ebook websites for you and your students to download: epub and mobi. Mobi is for Amazon devices; epub is for everything else.

As you will see in the instructions immediately below, downloading the Amazon format, the mobi files from a free ebook website, adds a layer of difficulty. The students will then have to find the downloads on their Fire tablets. So let's start with the easier of the two, epub.

1. The quickest way is to download an epub file and then email it to students. If they don't have an ereading app on their Chromebooks, the device will prompt them to install one which happens very quickly.
2. Or upload the epub file to a shared Google drive, set the permission for the file to be shared with all users and then email the link to students. See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y8cZqAUIb1c&t=41s for instructions on the Google drive option.
3. If they don't have Gmail addresses needed to use the shared Google drive, ask them to go to the free ebook website ask them to download the epub version for their Chromebooks or Android phones or iPads. As mentioned above, if they don't have an ereading app on their Chromebooks, the device will prompt them to install one which happens very quickly. They will then be able to start reading.

Getting a Kindle Ebook on to your Students' Fire Tablets

Imagine that a classroom teacher is sharing a Kindle ebook with all of his or her students. Or that your neighbor downloaded a Kindle file in mobi format from our web site to share with all the members of the neighborhood association.

1. The easiest way for students with Fire tablets is for your students to download the Kindle file, the one in mobi format, directly from our web site. You would do the same with an ebook from Project Gutenberg, or from Standard Ebooks or any other free ebook site.

The only problems we have seen with using .mobi files on Fire devices is that the files can be hard to find as I found out below.

I just downloaded an ebook in the Kindle or mobi format onto my favorite device, an 8″ Fire tablet. It was so easy. Click on the download button for the mobi file on the Ebooks for Students web site, and then open the file. (The option to open appeared on an 8″ Fire tablet, but not on my 10″ Fire.)

Where did the downloaded ebook go on the Fire tablet?

But where did the ebook go after I closed it? I can't reopen it and continue reading if I can't find it. I couldn't find it in the Documents folder on the Fire tablet. I looked all over the Fire tabs. It did not appear under the Home tab, or the For You tab.

The trick was to look for it through a file manager such as ES File Explorer.

So I dragged the ES File Explorer app to the top of my screen of icons in the Home tab on my Fire tablet, and now I am ready to reopen all the ebooks I have downloaded.

So to be able to see the mobi downloads again from free ebook web site, go to ES File Manager or another file management app. Then work your way through STORAGE>SDCARD>DOWNLOAD. It is like an Easter Egg hunt organized by parents who wanted to make you work hard before you found the chocolate egg.

You will want to advise students to download ES File Explorer from the Kindle Appstore before they download ebooks from free web sites such as Gutenberg or our Ebooks site or other free sites. With ES File Explorer, they will be able to see what they have downloaded on their tablets.

I love my Fire tablet. I think that it is one of the best values out there, but it a Downloads folder in the Home screen is needed so that a separate app will not be needed to see downloads.

2. Another way is to email the ebook file to all the members of the class or group as an attachment. Each student will then open the attachment and save it to his or her computer. Then the student can email the file to his or her Kindle device. There the new file will show up in the Documents folder and will always be there to read.

But how do you find out the email address of your Kindle device? Fortunately, Amazon explains it all here:
https://www.amazon.com/gp/sendtokindle/email
3. A third way is to ask students to connect their Kindle device to a computer in the school library and transfer the file with a USB cable. See instructions here: https://www.amazon.com/gp/help/customer/display.html?nodeId=201829280

The same idea applies to Android devices. We recommend installing a strong ereader app such as Moon Reader before downloading epub files.

Getting Ebook in epub Format to your Students as Easily as Possible

We have described a number of strategies for transfer of epub files below. It repeats some of the information on the first page. The question is which strategy will be the most efficient for you. We have also complied some additional information about how the tablet experience can help your students.

1. Use a Shared Google Drive to Provide Students with Copies of an Ebook

Here is an excellent video describing how you can use a Google Drive for ebook distribution. See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i-zgOb5Nkk0

If students want to read the ebook on their computer, I would recommend that they ignore the epub reader called "Cloud Epub Reader" built into Google Drive. It's ugly with few features. We recommend downloading the epub. Then use Calibre or Google Play Books with the epub file. We discuss these below.

2. Ask your media librarian for help.

If you are working in a large high school, your media librarian is probably familiar with how to distribute ebooks to students. But in a smaller school, you may need to share the books on your own so here are some of our suggestions. We will discuss both the .epub format and the Kindle or .mobi format since your download will give you both to share with students and their parents.
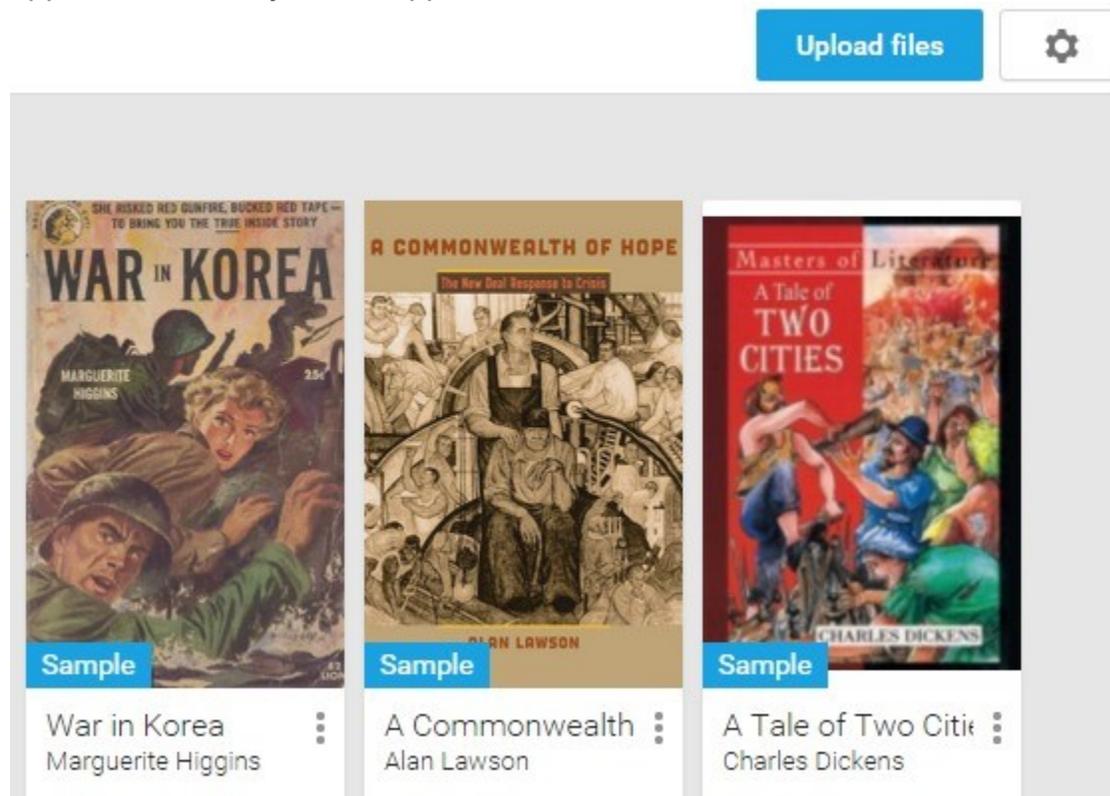
3. Show students how to upload an ebook to Google Play Books.

If you have an email list of your students, you could send each of them a copy of the ebook in the .epub format, and then ask them to upload it in Google Play Books on a computer at home or in the library. This will work well. The Upload feature is obvious and thus easy to use.

Here is an excellent YouTube video on the topic:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y8cZqAUIb1c&t=41s

Of course, your students will all need to have Google accounts, and know how to switch users on a public computer. If they have their own devices, they will need to install the Google Play Book app on their Android or iPad tablet in order to read the books on their tablets.

This uploading of ebooks is done much more easily on a computer than on a tablet. As you can see below, the **Upload** button is conspicuous. After the upload, the ebook will appear in their Play Books app on whatever Android or iPad tablet there are using.

When Schools Reopen, Students Could Sideload Content to an Android tablet from a PC or Mac

If students' email addresses are not available, they can always download ereading apps in a school library with Wifi on to their tablets, and then sideload ebooks on to their tablets from a computer in a library. It is more tedious than the email options, but it works. For more information about this process called sideloading see https://www.52novels.com/sideloading-your-ebooks-to-a-device-or-app/
Here is another look at the same process, and of course there are YouTube videos.

Other features in Google Play Books

The value of note taking

As you probably know the major apps such as Google Play Books, and the Amazon Kindle app offers features which may be useful to your students. In these apps, students can take notes. Here is a video on taking notes in Google Play Books:

How to take notes in Google Play Books.

See Google's instructions for taking notes.

Highlighting material in Google Play Books takes a minute or two to learn.

After you select a word as the starting point of the highlight, you will need to move the blue marker to the end of your highlight. You will then be able to see all your highlighted material and all your notes which you made in your tablet on your computer. And there you can paste these notes and highlights into your writing assignments. Since we strongly encourage students to take notes as they read in order to efficiently write about a book, this ability to copy your notes and highlights from an ebook into a word processor is crucial—the sine qua non of an ereading app. More on this below.

How to pull notes from an ebook into a Writing Assignment

As writing instructors, we often reminded students that if they take notes on where they agree and disagree with an author as they read, part of their papers have been written. They don't need to reread to see where they object to the writer or why they object or agree with the writer.

In Google Play Books, you can open an ebook on your computer, and mouse over Contents at the top right which will turn blue. Then click on Contents. See the three vertical blue bars, then click on their Notes and highlight the notes you want to paste into a Word Processor. Here is more information about using notes from an ebook in Google Play Books. See https://lifehacker.com/google-play-books-can-now-sync-notes-to-google-drive-1718795151

With your notes highlighted on a computer, you can open a could copy them into a Word processor and use your notes in your next writing assignment.

How to Turn on the Read Aloud feature in Google Play Books

As mentioned earlier, for students with reading difficulties, turning on a feature such as reading the book out loud might be helpful. This is how the Google Play Books app handles it. It is very easy to do.

Read more is information in print about the same process.

Our conclusion about Google Play Books, and the Android Tablets where you find often find it.

Ease of Use. We enjoyed the ease of use of uploading ebooks to the Google Play app and the general ease of use in configuring the appearance of the page. Making the fonts, leading (spacing between lines), and margins larger make help struggling readers and all of this is easy to do in Play Books.

And Google Play Books can be installed on inexpensive tablets such as the Samsung Tab A. The Amazon Fire 8″ models are excellent value but do not run Google Play books. And as mentioned earlier, downloads from outside of Amazon will need a file manager such as ES File Manager to be found on your Fire Tablet

It would be interesting to see if providing students with choices of devices before purchases would increase their adoption of these devices. It would also be interesting to see if choices of courses and reading and writing assignments mattered. Would students who had to choose among electives in the humanities be more committed to their work?

And we have included some suggestions about features in software such as Text to Speech (TTS) which may help struggling readers. Finally, since we strongly believe that writing assignments tied to books can motivate reading, we have descriptions of the note taking features in the ereading apps which students can use as complete their writing assignments.

School Wide Distribution of ebooks through Amazon's servers

With Whispercast, teachers and administrators can share ebooks purchased from Amazon, or free ebooks to a large number of tablets at once. With Whispercast, students do not need to be involved in the mechanics of the distribution of the books.

If your tablets or ereaders were purchased from Amazon as part of an educational purchase, you or your school will set up a roster with all of the devices from one purchase order.

See excellent documentation from Amazon about Whispercast at https://whispercast.amazon.com/info/faqs/

You or your media librarian or IT staff will set up an administrator account in Whispercast and then use the purchase number to bring all the devices purchased with that order into a roster of devices. But Whispercast is not limited to IT personnel, or

school administrators. A teacher without an IT background can set up a Whispercast account without a problem.

After this roster of users exists in Whispercast, you can upload ebooks to your roster using that you have purchased from Amazon or public domain titles as long as the ebook is in .mobi format.

Will Whispercast distribute ebooks not purchased on Amazon?

In its documentation, Amazon states that only books purchased on Amazon can be distributed to your students. This is not completely accurate. Ebooks without Digital Rights Management (DRM) such as the ones Ebooks for Students and other vendors are selling can also be distributed through Whispercast. The difference is that these non-Amazon ebooks will appear in the **Documents** category on tablets and ereaders rather than in the **Books** category. Amazon is correct that only ebooks purchased on Amazon will appear in the Books category on users' tablets.

How to Send Documents and Ebooks not purchased on Amazon to Your Students

See Amazon's excellent documentation. A snippet is below.

"You can send documents to Fire tablets, Kindle devices, and Kindle reading apps registered to your Whispercast account. There is no charge for documents sent through Whispercast, since documents are delivered to Users using Wi-Fi (not 3G or 4G).

To upload documents…..

What is another way to distribute ebooks to students or parents through Whispercast if their Kindles or tablets are not registered to the school?

Using Whispercast, you can send a subscription link out to students' or parents' email addresses. When they click on the link, they will join your network on which you can distribute ebooks in .mobi format. After they click on this URL, they will be on your roster if the email address they gave you is associated with a Kindle device or a tablet with a Kindle app.

How does Amazon handle collecting notes taken from ebooks so that these notes can be reused in writing assignments?

As you might expect, Amazon has desktop applications similar to Google's software, where your students can collect their notes and paste them into word processors. Students could download the free Kindle for PC application or the free Kindle for Mac in order to see the notes they have taken while reading an ebook. And these notes can be pasted into a word processor.

Another way is go to https://read.amazon.com/notebook
from where notes and highlights can be pasted. And a student can push in the context of the highlight or note by clicking on Read More
at Location XXX which will open the applications above.

How does Amazon handle Text to Speech (TTS) which may help some readers?

While Amazon has been criticized for abandoning TTS in its ereaders, it is available on tablets such as the 7" Amazon Fire.

But what about the Mercedes-Benz of tablets, the iPad?

How does it handle uploading of ebooks to students, note taking, and pasting of notes into essays, and Text to Speech (TTS) for students
with reading problems? The quality of the text on the screen in the iPad is stunning but so is the price relative to the Amazon
Fire and Android tablets. This cost-benefit decision is best made locally as school districts face a variety of economic environments.

Since your students can install Google Play Books on their iPads, all of our comments for the Play Books app could apply to the iPad also.

How to share ebooks without DRM which you have purchased with your students' iPads?

Your students could go to a designated computer in your school's library, find a folder containing the ebook you want to distribute under your name, and transfer it using a micro usb to usb cable to their iPads.

For students and teachers who have never used iTunes, this strategy may be slow the first time. As this documentation points out, there are a number of steps in iTunes, and it has to be on both computers.

See http://www.galaxie.com/installing-ebooks. But the syncing does work and the books you have selected will appear in iBooks on the target iPad.

How to Turn on Speech on the iPad?
See the Assistive Technology Blog at http://bdmtech.blogspot.com/2014/04/ipad-mini-nexus-7-or-kindle-fire-hdx.html

But what about students who don't have Google accounts or Amazon accounts needed for the Kindle app?

There are a number of functional ereading apps such as Moon Reader, FBreader, CoolReader which are free and can be installed on any tablet with Wifi access. We

especially like Moon Reader since it can be set up to provide a display with the indents which make it look like you are reading a book. When schools reopen, a student can go into your school's library or media room, and then sideload the ebooks from your folder to his or her tablet. Now you will need to email the epub to them or email a link to the epub from a shared Google drive.

See a review of Moon Reader here:
https://www.yahoo.com/tech/moon-reader-review-220655508.html

And then they copy the ebook files from a computer in a library onto their tablets with a usb to micro-usb cable, the same cable used in charging cell phones. This is called sideloading, and we have described it earlier.

The display in Moon Reader can be made to be beautiful. But you will need to do some work in Moon Reader to get great pages. The default is not perfect. To get to the appearance we like, that is, with indented paragraphs and no lines between paragraphs, you will need to go into the Control Bar on the top right, then Visual Options, the Miscellaneous at the bottom, then see the Typesetting Options, and click on INDENT FIRST LINE OF PARAGRAPH, AND another option, TRIM BLANK LINES AND SPACES.

How does the export of notes work in an ereader app such as Moon Readers?

You can export your notes to an email program from the page you are reading by clicking on the MORE OPERATIONS, then the BOOKMARK icon, and click on SHARING to select from a variety of methods of sharing.

Other apps such as FBReader work perfectly well, but the appearance of their pages can't be customized as fully as what Moon Reader offers.

The only danger lurking in Moon Reader is that an unwary user can set off the Scroll feature fairly easily. Please warn students that this feature once activated can be turned off by drawing a finger across the middle of a page.

Feedback Please

Please write us at support@ebooksforstudents.org with your students' reactions to our books, and please include any writing assignments you may have created that require references to the books. We would be happy to credit you with the content if you so desire. Thanks.