

What is the Cloud?





What is the cloud and how can it help you learn?

More than ever we're being told that the future of technology is in the cloud - cloud computing, cloud storage, cloud synchronisation, to name just a few. The concept is simultaneously simple and complex - in its essence, it's putting data online in remote storage centres, rather than on your own computer. At the same time, how this is done and its implications are rather more complex.

What uses the cloud?

You've probably already used a cloud computing service today without realising it! You might have stored a file in OneDrive, synchronised with Dropbox or used Google Drive's advanced editing features. All of these are actions which require a synchronisation between your device and the servers where your data is stored. Whenever you've backed up your files to a file depository site, that's cloud storage.

Additionally, if you've used our [School Jotter](#) learning platform, that's in the cloud too! Website editing via the Site backend takes advantage of cloud features by allowing easy, remote editing - it's no longer the case that you have to manually create and upload web pages. We take care of the hosting and site management so you can use services like our Learn VLE, our Merits rewards system or our Blog collaboration platform.

How does it work?

The cloud is something which has gone hand in hand with the availability of fast, high-quality Internet, the ability to instantly upload and download files being crucial to its popularity. While you can do everything manually and upload files through your browser, it can be much easier (and safer) to have your files synchronise automatically.

The program you're using (such as OneDrive, Google Drive or Dropbox) is able to automatically detect new files and changes, synchronising with the remote server as well as any other locations your files might be stored - you can then access your files from anywhere.

Is it safe?

It's a common concern that storing files online is unsafe, with dangers of being hacked or your data being scanned and viewed. While these are legitimate concerns, anyone who follows **simple password practice** should be absolutely fine, with your data kept secure, encrypted and accessible only by you. In fact, it's potentially even more secure than being store offline - it's much easier to lose an unencrypted USB stick than it is to lose a website! Even backing up your data to external hard drives in your own house is potentially vulnerable to loss - a burglary or a fire and it's gone.

How can it help me learn?

We at Webanywhere are big proponents of elearning, and cloud computing is absolutely central to this. The ability to log into your website or VLE from any device is one of the biggest benefits of cloud access, and with Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) growing every year it's crucial that your content be available to all on as many platforms as possible.

We can also help you by blending this approach with your file storage, both School Jotter and Moodle offer OneDrive integration. This gives you a single point of sign-on for all of your files, and aids in cloud access, as well as taking advantage of the advanced extensibility available in both environments. The collaboration and sharing facilities afforded by apps such as Blog, Learn or our OneDrive integration can really boost the effectiveness of group work and various other activities.

Conclusion

It's important that we don't passively accept the cloud as a vaguely understood concept - something that "happens online but doesn't really matter". Its potential for learning, growth and security is huge, and it's crucial that we harness this and incorporate it into our lives. The benefits are manifold on both the personal and the public levels - whether you're keeping your photos secure or taking advantage of the sharing features in services such as Office 365, you're enjoying the benefits of the cloud.

About Webanywhere

Since 2003, Webanywhere has provided website services and e-learning solutions to help schools communicate, collaborate and promote themselves online. As a provider of websites, VLEs, design services and e-learning content, Webanywhere is also recognised by leading organisations. Webanywhere is an approved supplier to the UK Government Procurement Service,



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