

SKILL BUILDING: A Step-by-Step Guide for Downloading and Selecting Apps

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The following offers a “how-to” guide on the technical aspects of screening and downloading apps and is current at the time of publication. As suggested above, apps and other computer programs are not regulated, are constantly changing, and are rarely supported by peer-reviewed empirical data. Clinical judgment must be used to determine if apps should become part of your practice.

The most popular app download platforms are the Apple App Store, the Google Play Store, and the Amazon Appstore. Apple’s apps are only compatible with Apple products such as the iPhone, iPad, and iPod Touch. Apple controls most aspects of the App Store, and in order for a developer to offer their app through the app store, the app must be vetted by Apple. It is important to note that none of the apps are evaluated based on medical or clinical guidelines, rather solely for entry into the App Store. On the other hand, the Google Play Store and the Amazon Appstore are exclusively for devices running on Google’s Android operating system, such as phones (i.e. Samsung, HTC), Android tablets, and the Amazon Kindle. Android operating code is open source, meaning that the original code is available to the public for use and modification.

Costs: Data fees often apply for downloading and running apps, so check with your mobile carrier before purchasing to determine costs. These fees can often be avoided by establishing a Wi-Fi network. There is often a small cost for each app downloaded (typically ranging .99 cents to \$5.00 for individual developers, to upwards of \$50 or \$100 for well-established textbooks and computer programs that are converted to apps). Additional costs include “in-app” purchases (e.g., buying content not available in the original download) that can be selected by anyone using the device. This feature can often be turned off to avoid unexpected charges. Apps can also cause serious harm to your computer, tablet or mobile device (intentionally or unintentionally), and caution must be used, including reading permissions, requirements, and reviews carefully.

Downloading Apps by Platform (Apple, Android):

APPLE (i.e., iPhone, iPad): There are two ways to download apps onto smartphone devices. The first is to download them directly to the phone via the Mac App Store. Alternatively, iTunes on a computer can be used to access the App Store and download the app to the computer and then to a phone. Read reviews and screenshots to help determine whether you would like to download the app. As

of now, you cannot test-drive Apple apps before purchase.

App Store Via iPhone, iPad, or iPod Touch

1. On your phone/tablet, search for and select the App Store app icon. If this is your first time opening the App Store, iTunes will prompt set up of an Apple ID with a valid e-mail address. Users planning on purchasing paid apps will be asked to input their credit card information; however, this information is not necessary to create an Apple ID.
2. Once the account has been set up and verified, you will be prompted to login, which will bring up a menu of various options, including ringtones, music, and the App Store. Select the App Store. You may choose from one of the “New and Noteworthy” or “What’s Hot” apps, or search for desired apps by name or category.
3. Once you find your desired app, click on the icon and select the “Buy App” or “Free” button, both of which will prompt a download. You may be asked to re-enter your Apple ID and password.
4. A new icon depicting the download of the selected app will be displayed onscreen, along with a progress bar. Once the app has been downloaded, it will be marked with a “New” tag that disappears once the app has been opened. New apps are usually downloaded to the first available space on the user’s app lineup, but the user can always search for the app by name.

App Store Via iTunes on Personal Computer:

1. Search for and click on the iTunes icon on the computer.
2. In iTunes, select iTunes Store from the top right corner, then select App Store from the tabs that appear at the top center. A list of “New and Noteworthy” and “What’s New” apps will appear, and you can choose to view apps for either iPhone or iPad by changing the tab in the top center. You can also search for specific apps from the search bar in the top right corner of iTunes.
3. Once you find the app you would like to download, you must click on the “Free” or “Buy App” icon underneath the app. You will be prompted to enter your Apple ID and password and to confirm the purchase.
4. The app will begin downloading, and once download is complete, the app can be found in the App tab of the iTunes Library. If using an iPhone or iPad, the next time the device is connected to the computer via a USB cable, the app will be automatically transferred to the phone or tablet.

ANDROID: Most android apps are purchased using the Google Play Store or Amazon Appstore.

Google Play Store Via Android Device

For Google Play, users must sign up via Google Wallet with a Gmail account if they plan to purchase paid apps. For more detailed assistance, you can go to <https://support.google.com/>.

Google Play Store via Personal Computer

1. Input play.google.com into a web browser.
2. Select the Apps icon on the left of the webpage. Here the user can search for apps as well as browse “Play Picks” or “Apps recommended for you” based on previous downloads.
3. Once you have found an app you would like to download, you can select either a yellow “Install” button or add the app to your wishlist for later download. You will then be informed of app permissions and asked to select your device.
4. Click “Install” again. The app will now automatically be downloaded to your device, assuming the device is connected to a mobile service provider or WiFi.

Amazon Appstore

The Amazon Appstore can be used to purchase apps for Android devices such as phones and tablets that use Android (e.g. Samsung, Motorola, Amazon Kindle). Users must create a free Amazon account.

1. Users may browse the Amazon Appstore at <http://www.amazon.com/appstore> using their phone or computer. Download the Appstore itself, which is required for mobile usage.
2. Users can search, browse, and select to download

“Today’s Free App of the Day,” as well as test-drive thousands of apps before downloading or buying them.

3. Click “Install” when prompted.

Apps downloaded on the computer will automatically sync to the Amazon “Appstore” application on the Android phone. All downloaded apps are stored in a Cloud file in the MyApps section of the Amazon Appstore. Thus, you can quickly reinstall items if needed. It is important to note that some apps only run when there is an active data or internet connection, which may involve additional fees and may not run when a connection is not available (e.g., airplanes).

Get Started: Once downloaded, open the app and begin using. Explore the settings and features to determine if the app is right for you and your clinic. Practice using the app before recommending to patients. Risk to confidentiality and electronic data will also need to be considered. Continue to monitor for updates, reading changes in permissions each time.

Take-Home Summary:

Although not without risk, downloading and exploring clinically-focused apps may enhance patient care. Some patients may expect this experience. Learn which apps work best for your practice based on your personal research. Determine which apps are approved by reputable medical organizations.

About the Author

Mirjana Jovic, MD, is a post-graduate year 4 adult psychiatry resident at the University of Massachusetts Medical School. Dr. Jovic's clinical interests include college mental health, the comorbidity between psychiatric illness and disordered eating, and autism. She is interested in the interplay between psychiatry and technology and has published a review of mobile weight loss apps, as well as presented at several national conferences on the topic of social media and its role in psychiatric education.