The Useful Tech

FREE FIELD GUIDE · 2026

The iOS File Management Fix List

Five fixes, one decision table, and the settings Apple buried three menus deep.

INSIDE

- The Preview app fix
- Search that finds nothing
- Transfers without iTunes
- Which app to actually buy

START HERE

Before you install anything

Almost every complaint about the iOS Files app has a fix that already exists on your phone. The fixes are just buried in places nobody thinks to look, which is why people spend years working around problems that take ninety seconds to solve.

This list is what I wish someone had handed me in 2017. Work through it top to bottom. By the time you reach the table on the last page, you will know whether you actually need a third party app or whether you were one toggle away the whole time.

> ONE THING TO KNOW FIRST
>
> You cannot make a third party app the system file picker. Other apps will always open Apple's Files interface when they ask you to choose a file. Every fix here works around that, not through it.

HOW EACH FIX IS LAID OUT

The problem	What it looks like when it happens to you.
The fix	The exact steps, in order, with no guessing.
Worth knowing	The catch, the limit, or the better alternative.

01

iOS 26 · Preview

Stop Preview from hijacking every tap

THE PROBLEM

You tap a PDF or an image inside Files and iOS launches a separate Preview app to show it. When you close Preview you land on its own home screen instead of the folder you were standing in, so every file costs you two extra navigation steps.

THE FIX

1. Open the Files app and find any PDF.
2. Press and hold the file until the context menu appears.
3. Tap Open With.
4. Scroll to the very bottom of that list.
5. Select Preview with Quick Look.
6. Repeat once for JPG and once for PNG.

> WORTH KNOWING
>
> This setting is per file type, not global. Doing it for PDF, JPG and PNG covers almost everything you open day to day. Add others as you hit them.

02

iOS 26 · Preview

Or remove Preview entirely

THE PROBLEM

If the per file type toggle is more fiddling than you want, deleting the Preview app makes Files fall back to its built in viewer automatically, which is exactly how iOS 18 and everything before it behaved.

THE FIX

1. Press and hold the Preview app icon on your home screen.
2. Tap Remove App, then Delete App.
3. Open Files and tap any PDF to confirm it now opens in place.

YOU DO NOT LOSE DOCUMENT SCANNING

- Open any folder in the Files app.
- Press and hold on empty space inside that folder.
- Tap Scan Documents and the scan saves straight into that folder.

> WORTH KNOWING
>
> Preview can be reinstalled from the App Store at any time if you decide you want its markup and annotation tools back.

03

Search

Find files that search swears do not exist

THE PROBLEM

You search for a file by its exact name, inside the exact folder it lives in, and Files returns nothing. Swipe down on the home screen, type the same thing into Spotlight, and it appears instantly.

THE FIX

1. Back all the way out to the Browse screen.
2. Run your search from Recents or from On My iPhone rather than from inside a folder.
3. If it still fails, check the other Downloads folder. There is one on the device and one in iCloud Drive, and search does not span both.
4. As a last resort, force a reindex: Browse, then the three dots menu, Edit, toggle On My iPhone off, tap Done, wait a moment, then toggle it back on.

> WORTH KNOWING
>
> This is a workaround, not a repair. If search failing is your single biggest problem, that is the strongest argument for a third party file manager that searches storage directly instead of trusting an index.

04

Storage

Understand why Move does not move

THE PROBLEM

You move a file from On My iPhone to iCloud Drive and the original is still sitting where it was. It looks like the app ignored you. It did not.

THE FIX

1. Treat On My iPhone and iCloud Drive as two separate storage spaces.
2. Move only works inside a single space. Across spaces, iOS always copies.
3. After a cross space move, go back to the source and delete the original yourself.
4. For repeat work, press and hold a selection to get the full menu rather than using the shortcut buttons along the bottom, which guess what you want.

THE OTHER SMALL ONES WORTH KNOWING

- Favourites drop off the list periodically and simply need re-adding.
- Files extracts zip natively but not 7z or rar.
- You can sort by date modified but not date created.

05

Transfers

Get files on and off without iTunes

THE PROBLEM

Copying to an external drive gives you no transfer speed, no useful error message and a progress bar that often lies. Worse, the transfer can cancel if the screen locks. Going the other way from a computer still pushes you toward folder level syncing.

THE FIX

1. Keep the screen awake during large copies. Settings, Display and Brightness, Auto-Lock, Never, and set it back afterwards.
2. For computer to phone, set up a shared folder on the computer, then in Files tap the three dots menu and Connect to Server using the machine's local IP.
3. For a quick one off transfer with no setup, use LocalSend or PairDrop. Both are free, open source, and work between iPhone, Windows, Mac and Linux.
4. Only fall back to the Apple Devices app when nothing else is available.

> WORTH KNOWING
>
> An SMB share is more setup once and far less friction every time after that. If you move files weekly, it is the single highest value thing on this list.

THE SHORT VERSION

Which app solves which problem

Nothing here replaces Files completely, because Files is still the system file picker. Pick based on the one thing that annoys you most.

Search never finds anything

FileBrowser Pro

Searches storage every time instead of trusting an index. One time purchase.

You need network shares and a browser

Documents by Readdle

Fast on large folders, real SMB and SFTP, and a web portal for wireless transfers.

You want files visible in both apps

ES File Explorer

Creates a folder inside Files itself, so Save to Files can target it directly.

Video files with subtitles

ES File Explorer or VLC

The built in Files player will not handle subtitles on most formats.

Moving files between devices

LocalSend or an SMB share

Skips file managers entirely and skips iTunes with them.



The Useful Tech

WHAT'S NEXT

The Files app is one app out of forty.

Every stock iOS app has settings like these buried three menus deep. I write about them every week at The Useful Tech, the number one Apple blog on Medium.

Read The Useful Tech

THREE ISSUES A WEEK · MONDAY, WEDNESDAY, FRIDAY

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