The simple way to scan documents with your Android phone
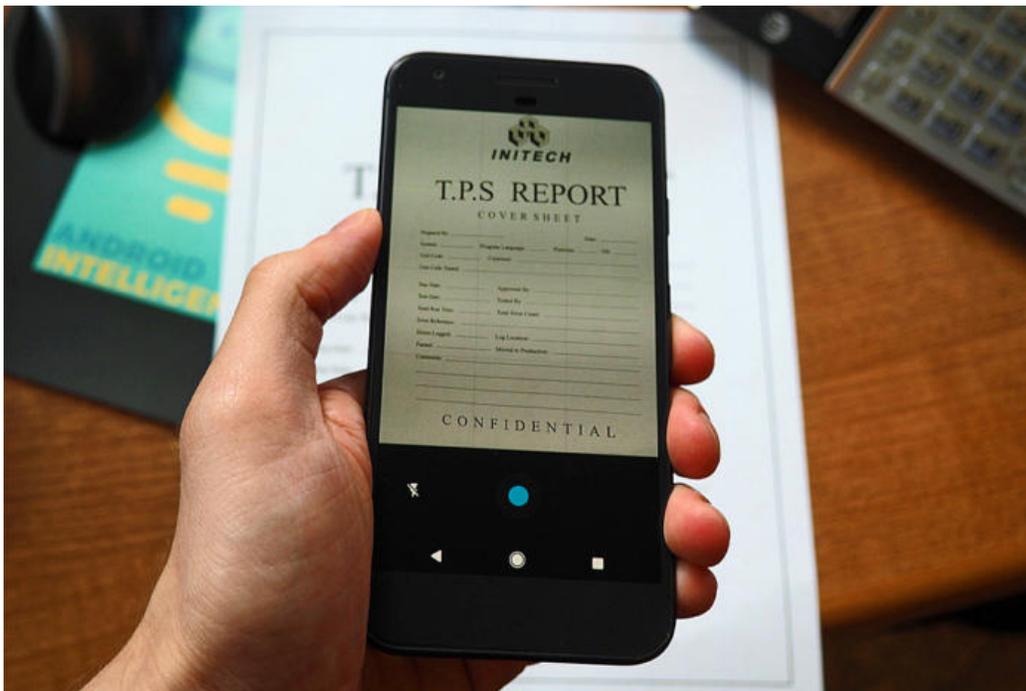
[Android Intelligence](#)

By [JR Raphael](#), Contributing Editor, Computerworld |

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Not your average Android news -- a diverse mix of advice, insight, and analysis with veteran Android journalist JR Raphael. Try it with margarine for a low-cal treat!

Android Intelligence Advice

Two invaluable tools (and plenty of related tips) for the next time you encounter an important piece of paper.

Credit: JR Raphael

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It's kind of astonishing when you stop and think about all the once-cumbersome tasks our smartphones have simplified.

From check depositing to audio recording and even airplane boarding, our tiny pocket computers have truly become all-in-one life organizers and productivity machines. Our phones can do so much, in fact, that I'd wager hardly anyone actually takes advantage of *all* their mobile-productivity powers.

Case in point: One easily overlooked way your phone can save you time and frustration is by serving as a quick 'n' simple on-the-go document scanner. Google actually offers two useful tools for scanning and managing physical papers -- and both can come in quite handy when you find yourself needing to save or share any sort of document, card, or receipt.
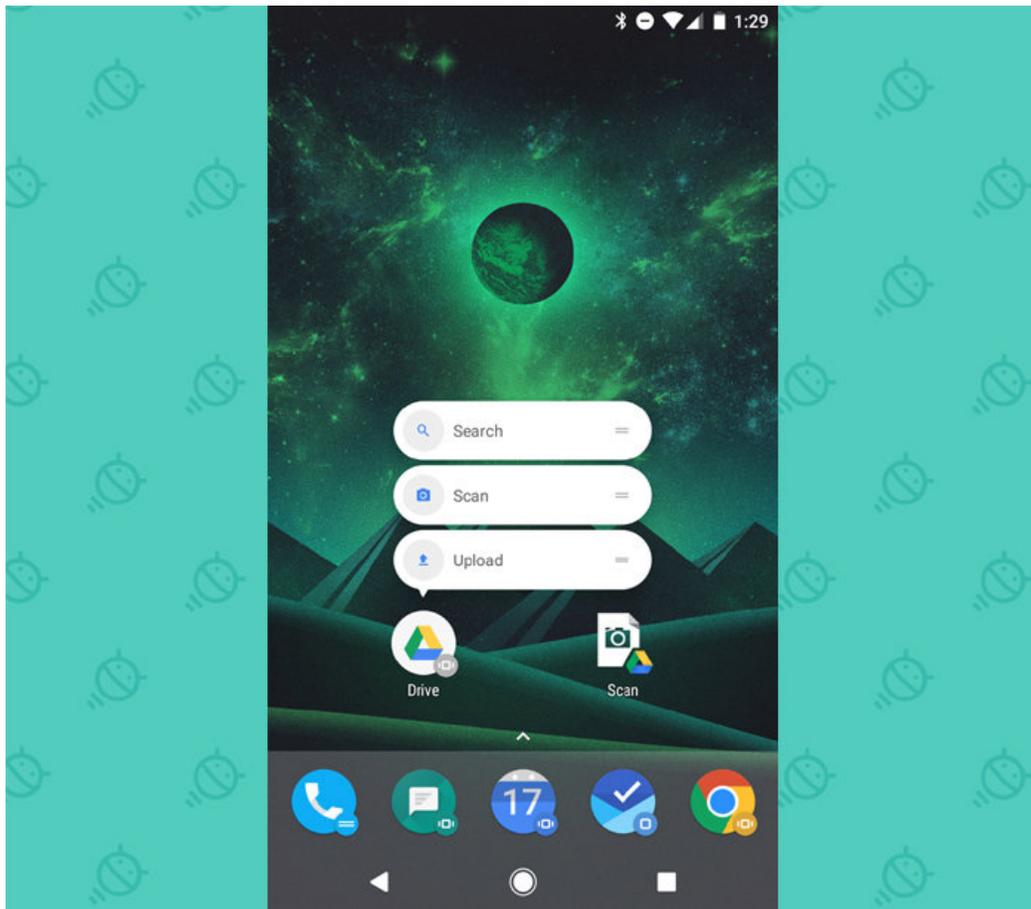
Option #1: The basic document scan

Our first Android scanning method is part of an app that's probably on your phone already: [Google Drive](). Drive has an out-of-sight option for scanning documents via your smartphone's camera and then saving them as PDF files within your cloud storage. You can find it by opening the Drive app and tapping the blue "+" icon in the bottom-right corner and then selecting "Scan."
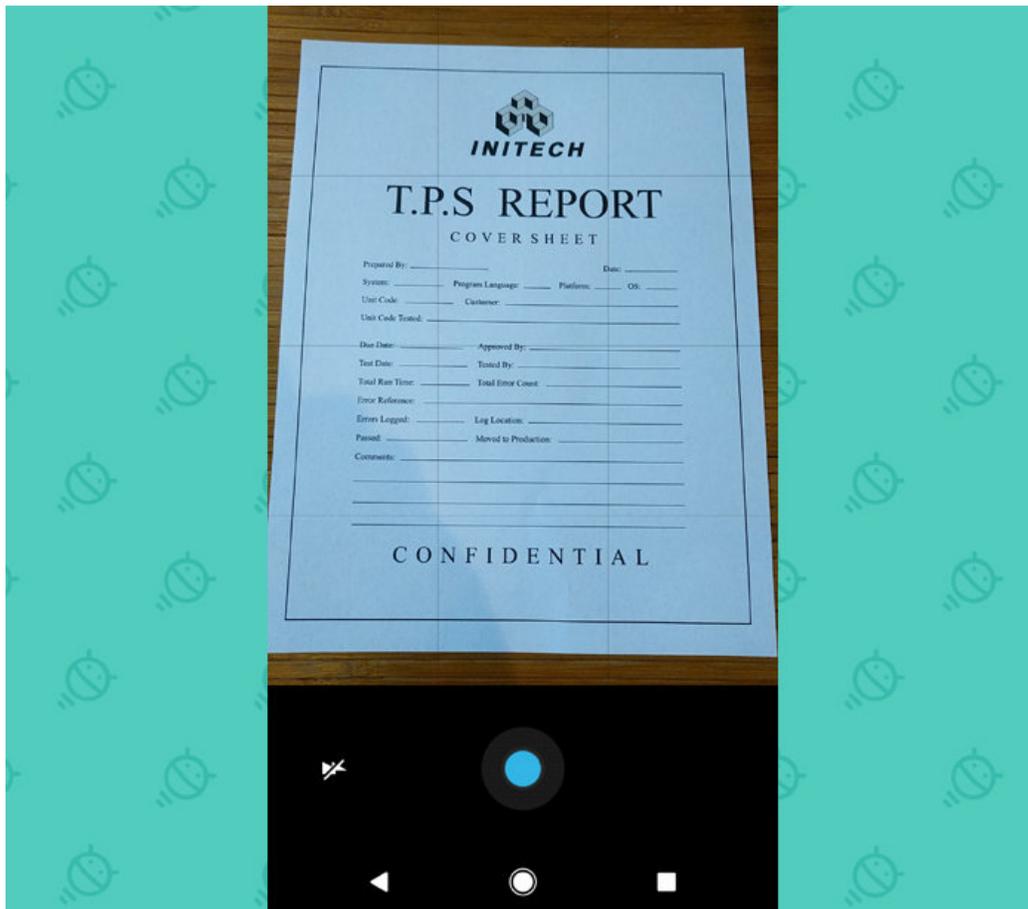
You can also add a direct Scan shortcut onto your home screen by pressing and holding any empty space, selecting Widgets, and then looking for the "Drive Scan" option. If you're using a phone with at least Android 7.1 -- and/or using a [custom launcher]() like [Action Launcher]() or [Nova Launcher]() -- you can also access that same direct shortcut within the *main* Drive icon by pressing and holding it (thanks to Android's convenient but [somewhat confusing App Shortcut system]()).

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However you access it, once you open Drive's Scan command, you'll see what looks like a regular camera interface. Place your paper on a flat surface, line it up in the viewfinder, and tap the shutter button to capture the document.
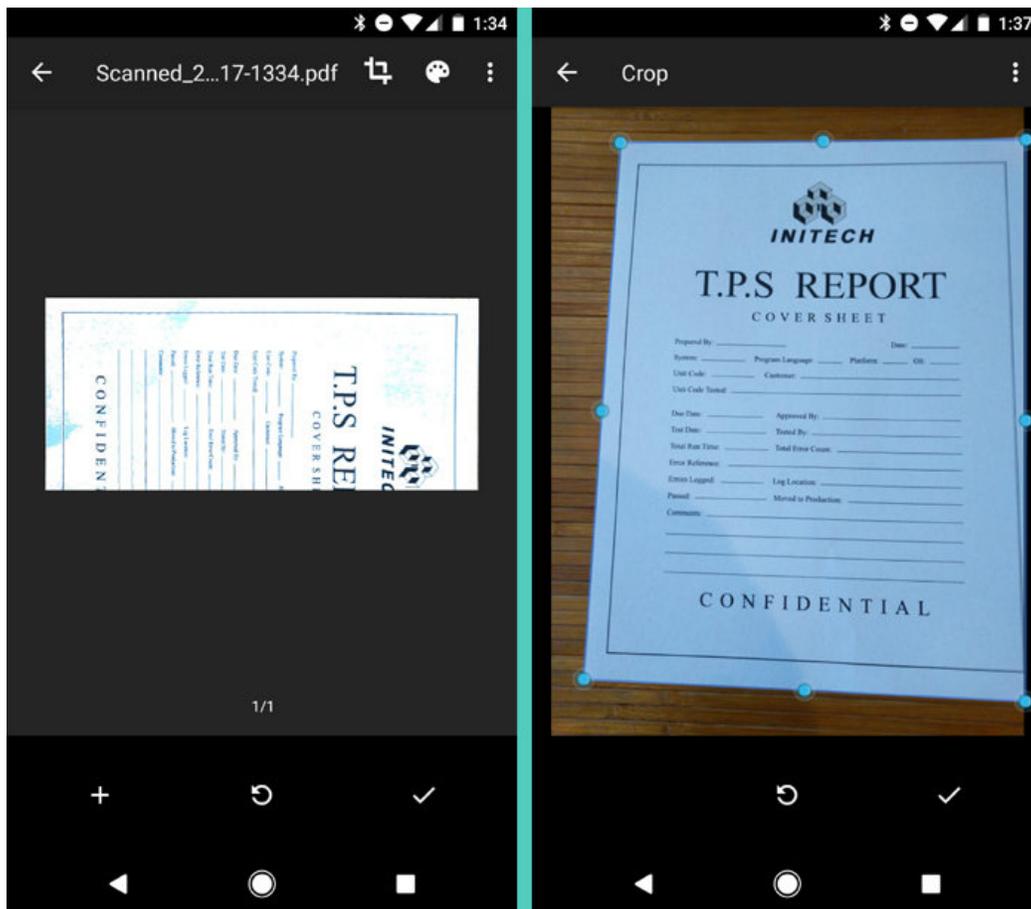
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There's one more possible step: For some reason, Drive sometimes tries and fails to crop a document on its own -- which can result in a cut-off scan. That presumably isn't what you want.

Thankfully, the fix is easy: Tap the crop button (the overlapping "L" shapes) in the top-right area of the screen, then drag the dots on the box until they properly outline your document.

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When you're done, hit the checkmark icon -- and, ta-da: Your scan is complete. Hit the checkmark icon again on the next screen to save the document into your Drive storage, then tap the confirmation notification if you want to share the PDF via email, messaging, or any other process.
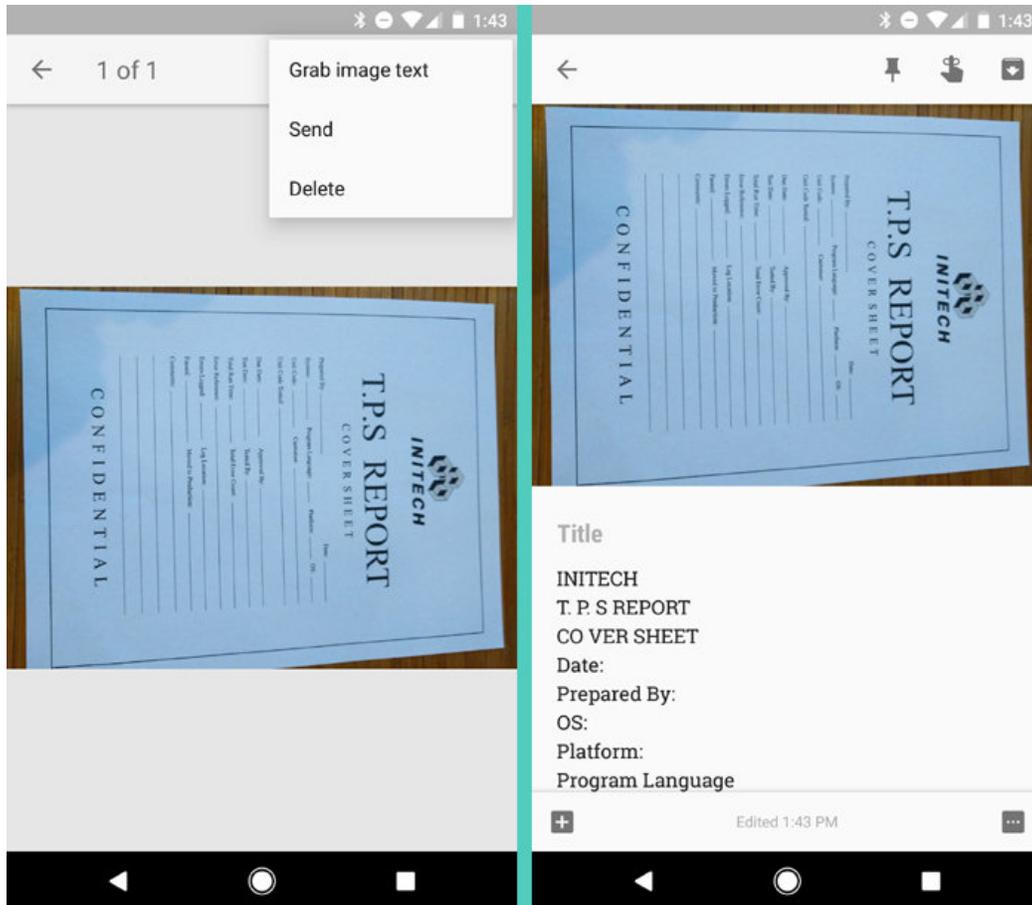
Option #2: The text-grabbing genie

The second simple Android scan method revolves around Google Keep, Google's cross-platform note-taking utility -- and it's noteworthy because it contains the option to extract text from any scanned document and save it as regular text on your phone.

All you've gotta do is open up Keep and tap the camera icon in the lower-right corner (or, if you prefer, use the same App Shortcut method described above to create a new photo note directly from your home screen). Take a photo of your document -- then, once you've saved the note, open it and tap the image you captured.

[See also: 11 ways to get the most out of Google Keep on Android]

In the three-dot menu icon at the top-right corner of the screen, you'll see an option labeled "Grab image text." Tap it, and -- hey, how 'bout that? -- every word from your physical document will appear as text within your note. You can edit it, copy and paste it, or do whatever your sweet little heart desires.

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The bulky in-office scanner will likely play a role in our lives for years to come, but that kind of contraption isn't always convenient or available. When you need to quickly capture a page on the go, these two methods can help you get the job done easily -- and get everything you need in the palm of your hand mere seconds after you begin.

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