

5-8-2013

## Product Review: GoodReader or PDF Reader Pro: Which Is Better for Reading and Annotating?

Laura Pope Robbins  
Dowling College, poperobl@erau.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://commons.erau.edu/publication>



Part of the [Higher Education Commons](#), [Scholarly Communication Commons](#), and the [Scholarly Publishing Commons](#)

---

### Scholarly Commons Citation

Pope Robbins, L. (2013). Product Review: GoodReader or PDF Reader Pro: Which Is Better for Reading and Annotating?. *The Charleston Advisor*, (July 2013). <https://doi.org/10.5260/chara.15.1.5>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Scholarly Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Publications by an authorized administrator of Scholarly Commons. For more information, please contact [commons@erau.edu](mailto:commons@erau.edu).



ADVISOR REVIEWS—COMPARATIVE REVIEW

# GoodReader or PDF Reader Pro: Which Is Better for Reading and Annotating?

doi:10.5260/chara.15.1.5

Date of Review: May 8, 2013

<p>GoodReader Composite Score: ★★★★★ 1/2</p> <p>PDF Reader Pro Composite Score: ★★★ 1/2</p>	<p><b>Reviewed by: Laura Pope Robbins</b>                  Dowling College                  150 Idle Hour Boulevard                  Oakdale, NY 11769                  &lt;pope-rol@dowling.edu&gt;</p>
---	--

## Abstract

Today’s researchers are extremely mobile and are looking for ways to read and annotate documents when not in their offices. GoodReader and PDF Reader Pro are two apps that provide that capability for iPad users. Both apps can read multiple file formats and provide file management tools like rename, move, and delete. As well, they can both be linked to multiple cloud services to upload and download files. Neither app is integrated with an online bibliographic manager at this point, but since both can use Dropbox, which can be integrated with Zotero or Mendeley, this is not a problem. Additionally, both apps provide similar annotation tools, such as highlighting, underlining, strikethroughs, typed notes, sticky notes, and freehand drawing. With such similarities it would seem that a researcher could use either app, and indeed both are very useful, but there are distinctive differences between them. Choosing between them depends upon what features a researcher would need and use.

## Pricing Options

### GOODREADER

GoodReader is available for \$4.99 from the iTunes store for individual use. It is not available for Android devices. There is also a GoodReader for Good app (free) that is for enterprise users and government agencies who requires enhanced security. This version of GoodReader necessitates that users contact the developers before downloading to obtain an activation key.

### PDF READER PRO

Individual users may purchase this app for \$5.99 from Apple’s iTunes store. It is not currently available for Android devices.

## Product Description

In an increasingly mobile world, people are looking for ways to read and annotate documents while on the go. Additionally, libraries are attempting to move their patrons from printing or copying reserve documents to reading them online by creating electronic reserves. One way to meet both of those needs is by using iPads with appropriate apps installed. Two such apps that provide reading and annotating capabilities are GoodReader and PDF Reader Pro.

### GOODREADER

GoodReader is an app that, as its name implies, is a reader, a file manager, plain text editor, and a PDF annotator. Additionally, it can read and store .doc, .ppt, .xls, iWork ‘08/’09, .html, .rtf, .jpg, audio files, and video files. It cannot read e-books, but for every other file type it is invaluable.

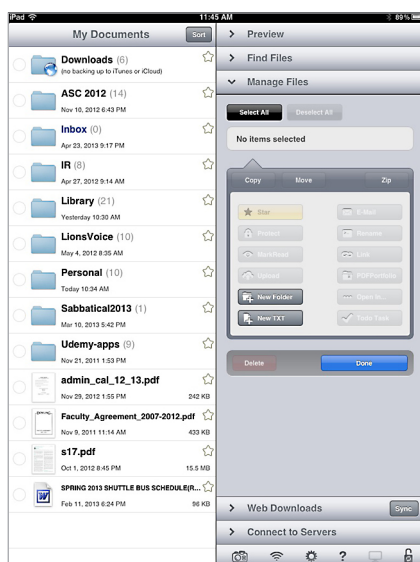
As a document manager, GoodReader allows you to set up any number of file folders, move documents between folders, and rename documents. It syncs with a variety of online file storage sites, including Dropbox, Google Drive, Skydrive, SugarSync, box.net, WebDAV, FTP, SFTP, mail servers, and, of course, iCloud. It can download documents from the internet easily by either cutting and pasting URLs



## “At a Glance” Comparative Review Scores

The maximum number of stars in each category is 5.

	GoodReader	PDF Reader Pro
Composite	★★★★★ 1/2	★★★★ 1/2
Content	★★★★★ 1/2	★★★★ 1/2
User Interface/ Searchability	★★★★★	★★★★ 1/2
Pricing	★★★★★	★★★★★
Contract Options	N/A	N/A



**FIGURE 1 GoodReader Interface**

or using the integrated browser. Additionally, files can be shared via Wi-Fi between GoodReader users or synced to a computer using iTunes.

GoodReader is also a PDF annotation app. For those documents which GoodReader cannot annotate, there is the ubiquitous Open In feature to move it to an appropriate app for that purpose.

### PDF READER PRO

This app by YUYAO allows a user to read and annotate PDFs, fill in PDF forms as well as sign them, convert Microsoft Office documents and text files to PDF, and organize documents.

As a file manager, PDF Reader Pro can create file folders, rename documents, move files between folders, and upload them to online file storage systems. Connections can be set up to Dropbox, iCloud, SugarSync, iDisk, and box.net, as well as FTP and WebDAV. It is also possible to share documents with a computer over Wi-Fi as well as through iTunes. Documents can be downloaded using a URL downloader or the integrated browser.

PDF Reader Pro also contains a scanning feature that allows the creation of PDF documents using the iPad's built-in camera.

## Critical Evaluation

In today's world, being able to read and annotate documents while away from the office is becoming more and more of a necessity. Additionally, libraries are finding that they need to encourage their patrons to go paperless. Providing an iPad with reserve material on it that allows patrons to get their annotations off it easily is one way to make that possible. Such apps can also be used to provide mobile document "rooms." To decide between GoodReader and PDF Reader Pro, the researcher must compare each component to see which will suit his needs best.

### INTERFACE

GoodReader's interface focuses on functionality, so on first glance it is not very appealing (Figure 1). Folders and documents are listed down the left side with document management options on the right.



**FIGURE 2 PDF Reader Pro Interface**

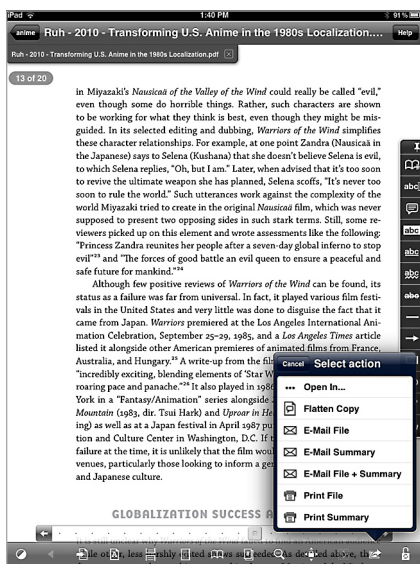
Documents are displayed using both a document-specific image as well as the file name. Size of the document is indicated as well as the date added to GoodReader. The menus on the right (Preview, Find, Manage, Downloads, Connect) can be opened or minimized by touching the menu name. Only one menu can be displayed at a time. However, settings, help, and Wi-Fi connectivity are always displayed on the bottom of the right-hand side of this initial screen.

The interface for PDF Reader Pro tries to combine functionality with attractiveness (Figure 2). In doing so, it does not provide the researcher with all of the information that he can obtain from GoodReader. Documents can be listed by document name or by icon. Only in the document listing can a person see all of the information that can be found easily in GoodReader, such as the date added, size, and full title. Though the icon or preview view is more attractive, document titles are cut off and the size of the document is missing. In this app, documents are listed on the right with only import options listed on the left. Along the top of the right-hand side, there are icons for searching, changing the document view, adding a new folder, and editing the current list.

### TRANSFERRING FILES AND SYNCING

Both apps can transfer files from multiple online storage sites. However, GoodReader provides the ability to automatically sync individual files and folders to a cloud storage service. GoodReader provides two different types of syncing, normal and download-only. Normal sync keeps the contents of the file on the iPad identical to what is on the server. A download-only sync is a way to distribute a frequently updated document between a group of people. Only the initial download of material to the iPad is automatic. After that, the researcher must choose to sync the folder. During the sync, GoodReader will compare the documents on the iPad with the remote server and will only transfer those documents that have been changed or have been added. If GoodReader detects changes to both versions, it will ask how to handle the files giving the individual the ability to rename one of them. Because of this, GoodReader is unable to work with other files while syncing.

PDF Reader Pro does not provide a way to sync entire folders to cloud storage sites. It can sync individual or multiple files, but not a



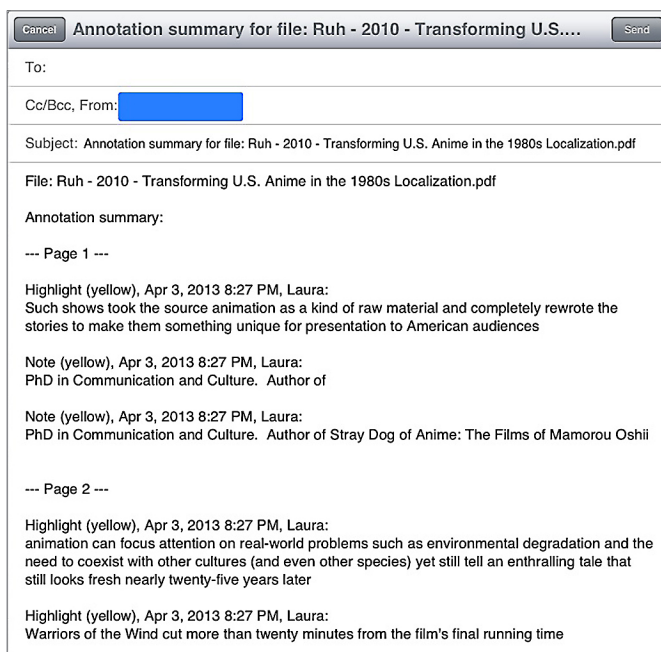
**FIGURE 3 Document with E-mail Options**

folder. Nor does it compare file versions between what is on the iPad and what is on the remote server. In recent tests, this user was unable to connect PDF Reader Pro with Dropbox which had previously worked. Though the app has been updated, as of May 6, it is not utilizing the correct API to access Dropbox. Considering that Dropbox is heavily used by many researchers because it can be integrated with so many services, like Zotero, this is a problem that needs a quick resolution.

The ability to sync an entire folder and to have the app detect changes is vital to researchers. It allows a person to create a folder on a service, like Dropbox, that covers one specific area of research. He can then sync that folder with GoodReader, read his documents, make annotations, and sync them back to Dropbox easily. If he has further integrated Dropbox with a bibliographic utility like Zotero desktop, Zotero can use a plug-in to extract the annotations from the updated files automatically and put them into the notes fields of the appropriate records. This makes doing research a seamless integrated experience.

Both apps can use Wi-Fi for document transfers, but they do so differently. GoodReader can act as a WebDAV server to transfer documents to computers or to other devices that have GoodReader on them. This could be very useful when setting up multiple iPads with the same documents. It would mean that one iPad could be created as the master which would then transfer the necessary files to the other iPads using this connectivity. PDF Reader Pro can also transfer files via Wi-Fi but cannot act as a WebDAV server and so cannot be used as a master.

Both apps provide a URL downloader. However, it is easier to access in GoodReader. Upon selecting the Enter URL option under Web Downloads, GoodReader will automatically paste the last URL copied into the box. PDF Reader Pro opens a Web Downloads page and requires a person to open the URL location box as well as paste the URL into it. However, PDF Reader Pro will allow the user to specify a download folder, making organization slightly easier. GoodReader can be setup so that all downloads go into a download folder from which a researcher can then move the file or can prompt a user to select a folder. Documents downloaded using the integrated



**FIGURE 4 E-mail Showing Annotations**

Web browser are automatically saved to the downloads folder in both GoodReader and PDF Reader Pro, but again this can be changed in GoodReader's settings.

It is also possible to send files via e-mail from within the apps and use the Open In feature to move files from e-mail into either app. For both apps, files opened from Mail will appear in the inbox folder. Both apps allow a person to select files from the initial screen to be emailed or to email from within a document. However, the apps differ in what information is sent via e-mail. For an annotated document, GoodReader provides the options to e-mail the file, the annotations only, or the file and the annotations (Figure 3). This is an excellent feature and would be especially useful if GoodReader and an iPad were being used to provide access to electronic reserves. Students would be able to read the files, make annotations, and then e-mail the annotations to themselves easily without needing to print the file. The one thing to keep in mind, though, is that while the notes are sent and include page numbers, they do not include citations. This is something that a student would have to create for himself in the e-mail that is sent. Additionally, the annotations could be sent to a service like Evernote so that all the notes for a particular class could be kept in one place. PDF Reader Pro does not provide this level of functionality. A person can choose to send either the file or a flattened version of the file which includes the annotations. The problem with the flattened file is that sticky notes cannot be viewed. Being able to send only the annotations makes quoting much simpler in the end (Figure 4).

**ORGANIZATION/FILE MANAGEMENT**

Both GoodReader and PDF Reader Pro provide typical file management options. An individual can rename, move, delete, zip, and unzip files. GoodReader, however, provides additional options. Documents can be marked as read, starred, or have unique links created to them. In general, looking at the document name in GoodReader will indicate whether a file has been read or not. Files that have been opened

are shown in black text. Unread files are displayed in blue. However, there are times when reading may be interrupted, and it can be useful to be able to mark the file as read or unread. Starring only the most important files makes their retrieval simple.

The links are a unique feature that take advantage of the ability to integrate GoodReader with a browser on the iPad. It may be that the folder organization doesn't adequately indicate the contents of the folders. For example, many organizations in higher education go under periodic accreditation reviews. As part of that review process, it is necessary to create a document room. Using the iPad as the "document room" would allow the organization the ability to create Web pages that described the topics covered by the folders in GoodReader with explicit links to the documents themselves. This would keep the documents secure and allow the reviewers to read and review them in more comfort than in a typical conference room.

GoodReader also has the ability to work with PDF Portfolios. While it cannot read the file directly, it can extract the individual PDFs for reading. This is not supported at all in PDF Reader Pro.

## SEARCH

Both GoodReader and PDF Reader Pro have a search function available from the home screen as well as within documents. In GoodReader, using Find Files allows you to search the file names of documents, obtain a list of recently read documents, obtain a list of recently added documents, or retrieve just the starred documents. Searching by name is extremely limited and does not include Boolean or truncated searching. If the search term is not within the file name, it cannot be found. Or if the search term is truncated in the file name, and the researcher inputs the entire term, it will not be found. This can be very frustrating and requires the researcher to use good file organization. The searches that depend upon time can be modified so that recently means one day, two days, three days, one week, two weeks, or one month. PDF Reader Pro's file search works much the same as GoodReader's without the additional options to search by time or specially marked files. There is no Boolean or truncated searching. Filenames must match exactly what is entered.

Searching within an open document is also limited to a straight text match in both apps. Opening a search in PDF Reader Pro is very easy. A person simply touches the screen to activate the controls and uses the magnifying glass icon at the top of the screen. Once a search is input, it will jump to the first instance of the term and highlight it. A person can then use onscreen controls to jump to the term throughout the document, go to the last instance of it, or end the search. It is equally easy to open the search in GoodReader. Simply touch the screen and the search icon will be shown on the bottom of the screen. GoodReader uses the same onscreen controls to jump throughout a document.

Neither app provides the ability to search within annotations. However, since GoodReader will allow a researcher to see a summary of all annotations within a file, this is not as serious a problem (Figure 5). PDF Reader Pro does not provide such ability.

## READING AND ANNOTATING

The main purpose of both of these apps is to create a good reading environment that lends itself to annotating the documents. With this in mind, the researcher must consider what types of files can be read with each app. Both apps can read PDFs as well as Microsoft Office file formats. However, GoodReader has the edge in the reading



FIGURE 5 GoodReader Displaying Annotations

department because it can display more file types including iWork '08/'09, rich text files, image formats, and play audio and video files. GoodReader, though, can only annotate PDF files. It can edit plain text files, but the reader must take care to indicate annotations in some manner. Files that are not PDFs that a researcher would like to annotate must be converted in some other program. There are online sites that can do this, such as Zamzar <<http://www.zamzar.com>> or apps like PDF Provider, but this does require extra steps. PDF Reader Pro has the ability to convert Microsoft Office and text files to PDFs within it. This saves the researcher time and gives it the edge for annotating such documents. However, one thing to note is that Powerpoint slides are not converted so that each slide is a separate page. PDF Reader Pro will convert the file so that some of the slides are cut in half, which can mean text is lost.

Both apps provide a clean distraction-free screen when simply reading. In both apps, a touch to the middle of the screen will bring up the document controls and will hide them again. Another way to bring up the controls is by holding a finger on the screen, but this will bring up only the annotation tools. GoodReader has more reading controls than PDF Reader Pro. In GoodReader, it is a simple matter to change the page layout from one to two pages or to rotate a page within a PDF that is oriented incorrectly. The controls for these types of changes are provided on the bottom of the screen. Additionally, GoodReader has a built-in control to change from day to night reading, making it simple to continue reading in bed without disturbing other people. As well, the reader can choose to crop the excess margins from the screen if he feels they take too much space. GoodReader has built into the screen tap zones that will move the document to the next or previous pages. These tap zones are intuitive to the reader because they are the right and left sides of the displayed page, and they work the same whether the reader is displaying one or two pages at a time. They are also the

same controls that are used when reading e-books. This makes scrolling through a document simple. PDF Reader Pro does not provide such control. Scrolling from page to page requires the reader to drag the page which is clunky.

One option that both apps provide is text reflow. This transcribes the PDF document into a plain text file. In GoodReader, the control to do this is included with the other reading tools on the bottom toolbar. In PDF Reader Pro, the user must select Settings, and then select Text Reflow from the revealed toolbar. In both cases, the reader can continue to read in this mode using arrow buttons provided on the bottom of the screen. It is simple to return to the original PDF using an arrow that is on the top of the screen. Both apps provide a settings control to set the font type and size when reading in this mode. Additionally, GoodReader allows the reader to copy the plain text to the clipboard or change between day and night displays.

GoodReader, as its name implies, is an excellent reading app taking into account the features that individuals are used to having in e-books. For the serious researcher, the ability to annotate files he is reading is a must and both apps provide this ability. Both apps include highlighting, underlining, strikethroughs, as well as drawing on the document with a variety of shapes and colors. Freehand writing and drawing is better in GoodReader, because it provides a wrist protection area that can be opened and closed. Additionally, GoodReader allows a user to zoom in on the area where he is writing. This keeps the writing to a size compatible with the text (Figure 6). However, freehand notes cannot be extracted as can the other types of annotation. GoodReader also provides an eraser tool to use with freehand drawing. This is an excellent additional tool because a user may want to modify only part of a drawing he has created. This is possible in GoodReader but not in PDF Reader Pro.

The first time a person annotates a PDF in PDF Reader Pro the app automatically saves the notes directly on the file. In GoodReader, a person is given the choice to save to the file or to create an annotated copy. This is a little friendlier as it allows the user to keep a clean copy of the document if he wishes to share it with someone without his notes. In both apps, markup can be modified or deleted after it has been created.

Additionally, both apps provide the ability to add a typed note to the documents. These notes can be either a sticky note or displayed as part of the document. A user cannot make changes to font size when creating the note; however, the font size and color can be changed after the note is completed by tapping it. In neither case can the type of font be selected. A user must be careful in using sticky notes if he intends to share the file with someone else. Files that are flattened cannot display the sticky notes unless they are unflattened first. If he is sharing the file with another GoodReader user, this is not a problem

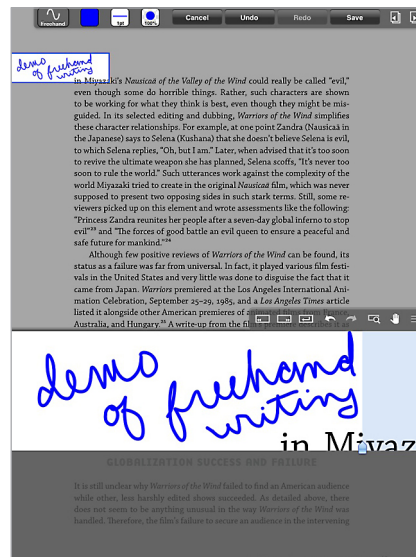


FIGURE 6 Freehand Writing in GoodReader

as long as he has changed the settings to allow unflattening. The only drawback is that the other reader must use GoodReader as well. PDF Reader Pro does not provide a setting to allow unflattening of a file.

PDF Reader Pro does provide two additional tools that GoodReader does not. It has a signature tool and a document stamp. The signature tool allows a user to sign a PDF document. In GoodReader, this could be done by using freehand drawing and flattening the file, so a separate tool is not truly necessary. However, the stamp tool is unique and could come in handy for sharing documents. A sample of the stamps included is: Approved, Draft, Final, Confidential, For Public Release, Sign Here, For Comment, etc.

There are other features that the apps have in common, such as both apps can print documents using air print. As well, they can display documents to external monitors using the VGA output. However, GoodReader can also make use of the iPad 2's native video mirroring and switch between mirroring which shows the full app including controls or the in-app video which displays only the document. Additionally, both apps provide the ability to look up a word in a dictionary, search Google for that term, or jump to an entry in Wikipedia. One feature that PDF Reader Pro provides that GoodReader does not is the ability to use the iPad camera. With that, a person can scan pages and create his own PDF. Additionally, a person can also edit a PDF to remove or reorder pages. While this is a nice feature, scanning documents using the iPad can be tricky.

## Summary

Researchers today are very mobile. From the librarian assisting with hospital rounds, to attending a conference, to reading while commuting, more people are finding they are doing research on the go. To make it as efficient as possible, they need tools that will let them read and annotate their documents in any situation. GoodReader and PDF Reader Pro are two possibilities that can meet those needs. However, GoodReader has the edge. It provides more flexibility in reading documents and has some excellent features that PDF Reader Pro just cannot match. The ability to sync documents with the added bonus of GoodReader's ability to compare the documents so that only

## Contact Information

### Good.iWare

URL: <<http://www.goodreader.com/index.html>>  
<<http://support.goodreader.com/customer/portal/emails/new>>

### YUYAO Mobile Software, Inc.

URL: <<http://www.yuyao.com.tw/>>  
<<http://www.yuyao.com.tw/contactus.html>>



## GoodReader Review Scores Composite: ★★★★★ 1/2

*The maximum number of stars in each category is 5.*

**Content:** ★★★★★ 1/2

GoodReader is an excellent reader with intuitive reading controls and with good annotation tools. The controls for freehand drawing are excellent. The ability to extract annotations for viewing within the reader and for e-mailing separately make this app a good possibility for using an iPad for electronic reserves. It could be improved by providing a selection of fonts for typed notes and by including conversion capabilities.

**User Interface/Searchability:** ★★★★★

The interface is clean and easy to use. While it may not be attractive, it is very functional with easily accessible controls. Where the app falls down is the lack of search features. It relies on straight text matches to find file names as well as words within a document. There is no Boolean or truncated searching which could be useful. The feature that somewhat makes up for this is the ability to search by time or for starred documents.

**Pricing:** ★★★★★

Excellent value that increases by 100% the usefulness of an iPad as a research device.

**Contract Options:** NA

This app is purchased through the iTunes store as a piece of software. The purchase entitles the purchaser to product support from the creator and to future upgrades if Good.iWare provides them.



## PDF Reader Pro Review Scores Composite: ★★★★★ 1/2

*The maximum number of stars in each category is 5.*

**Content:** ★★★★★ 1/2

PDF Reader Pro is a good PDF reader but could provide better reading controls. The annotation tools are good although freehand drawing could be improved. It would be nice if a user could choose to save annotations to a separate document. As well, it would benefit from a way to extract annotations from a document. Like GoodReader a selection of fonts for typed notes would be welcome. Its ability to convert files to PDFs is a welcome tool, but this too could use some work as PowerPoint slides are not converted correctly.

**User Interface/Searchability:** ★★★★★ 1/2

The interface is attractive and intuitive to use. The controls for document reading are fewer and are harder to access because they are included in the settings which are not accessible from within a document. Like GoodReader searching is limited to straight text matches with no Boolean or truncated searching.

**Pricing:** ★★★★★

A little more expensive than GoodReader with fewer features. However, a good value for working with PDF documents and increasing the usefulness of an iPad.

**Contract Options:** NA

This app is purchased through the iTunes store as a piece of software. The purchase entitles the purchaser to product support from the creator and to future upgrades if YUYAO provides them.

modified documents are moved is incalculable. The ability to extract the annotations so that they can be e-mailed separately means that an iPad and GoodReader can be used to provide electronic reserves. The freehand tool in GoodReader is outstanding with its ability to zoom in on an area so that drawings or writings are of similar size to the text makes looking at such notes comfortable.

While GoodReader may not be able to convert files to PDF and may not have as attractive an interface as PDF Reader Pro, it has functionality that cannot be beat.

### Contract Provisions

There are no specific contract provisions for either GoodReader or PDF Reader Pro. Users are instead bound by Apple’s terms of service for both products since they are purchased through iTunes.

### Authentication

GoodReader allows a person to password protect folders or individual documents. A person can also choose to password protect the app itself though this requires special procedures and there are limitations to it. Password protecting the app or individual files and folders uses iOS’s Data Protection API and will encrypt the files. Protected files are not hidden; they are shown with a lock on them. Attempting to open them will result in a password prompt.

PDF Reader Pro has a Private folder that is password protected. Files that a researcher would like to keep secure are placed within this folder. As an additional security measure, the folder can be hidden. Hid-

ing the folder requires enabling the hidden feature and then closing the app completely. While hiding the folder in PDF Reader Pro may make a person feel more secure, the mechanism to hide/unhide it is a little clunky.

### Author’s References

Fenton, William. 2011. “GoodReader for iPad”. Magazine. *PCMag.com*. March 25. <<http://www.pcmag.com/article2/0,2817,2382542,00,asp>>.

Hudson, Brian. 2011. “GoodReader for iPad Review”. Magazine. *148apps.com*. January 3. <<http://www.148apps.com/reviews/goodreader-ipad-review/>>.

Kazza. 2012. “PDF Expert 4 Vs iAnnotate 2.1 Vs Goodreader 3 – 2012 Indepth Review.” <<http://cynicalbabblings.wordpress.com/2012/04/05/PDF-editing-apps-2012-review/>>.

Pappas, Cleo. 2012. “Medical Librarian Rounding with an iPad.” *Library Technology Reports* 48 (8) (November): 22–27. doi:10.5860/ltr.48n8.

### About the Author

**Laura Pope Robbins** is an Associate Professor/Reference Librarian at Dowling College. She holds an MBA in Information Systems Management from Dowling College and an MLS from the University of Washington. She is currently Web Master at Dowling College Library. Her research interests include anime, usability, Web design, Web 2.0, and copyright. During her free time, she is learning and practicing bookbinding. ■



## Subscribe TO *The Charleston Advisor* Today!

*The Charleston Advisor*: Critical Reviews of Web Products for Information Professionals

### Over 500 Reviews Now Included

- Libraries pay less than \$.60 per review
- Publishers pay less than \$1.00 per review

### How Much Are You Spending?

- Web Database and Quarterly Print are now available at the low price of **\$295.00** for libraries; **\$495.00** for all others.

### ORDER YOUR SUBSCRIPTION TODAY.

Order on the Web: [www.charlestonco.com](http://www.charlestonco.com)

### ✓ YES! Enter my Subscription for One Year.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Organization: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City/State/Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone:Fax: \_\_\_\_\_

E-Mail: \_\_\_\_\_

YES. I am interested in being a Reviewer. \_\_\_\_\_

6180 E. Warren Ave., Denver, CO 80222  
Phone: (303) 282-9706 Fax: (303) 282-9743