



An Extended Guide · No. 1930

Combine, Split & Shrink PDFs — Free Tools That Aren't Traps

Merge, extract, and shrink PDFs
safely — without risky upload sites

Tech Made Simple — Service Made Personal

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! The trap to avoid first

Those 'free online PDF' websites that ask you to upload your file are the real danger here — your private documents end up on a stranger's server, and some sites are outright scams. This guide sticks to safe tools on your own computer.

Merge, split, and shrink PDFs — safely

Sooner or later you'll want to combine two PDFs into one, pull a single page out, or shrink a file that's too big to email. All of this is easy and free — the only trick is doing it without falling for a sketchy website.

I'm Bill, from Bill's Home Tech in Portage County. The web is full of 'free PDF converter' sites, and many are traps. I'll show you the safe, free ways to handle PDFs, mostly using tools already on your computer.

We'll cover combining, splitting, and shrinking, plus how to spot the dangerous sites so your private documents stay private. No downloads of questionable software, no uploading your tax return to who-knows-where.

The whole guide, on one page

If these stick, you can handle PDFs safely and free.

- ❑ Mac owners: Preview (built in) can combine, split, and shrink PDFs — no download needed.
- ❑ Windows owners: 'Print to PDF' combines or extracts pages, and free trusted tools cover the rest.
- ❑ To shrink a PDF, look for a 'reduce file size' or 'save as smaller' option.
- ❑ NEVER upload sensitive documents to an unknown 'free PDF' website.
- ❑ If a site asks for your email or payment to download your own file, leave.
- ❑ When in doubt, use your computer's own tools, not a website.

✓ Your computer can usually do it

Before searching for an online tool, check what your own computer offers. Mac Preview and Windows' built-in PDF printing handle most PDF jobs, safely and free.

Why 'free online PDF' sites can be traps

Let's start with the warning, because it's the most important part of this whole guide.

Search for 'combine PDF' and you'll get dozens of websites offering to do it free. The catch: they work by having you upload your file to their server. For a grocery list, fine. For your tax return, medical records, or anything with your Social Security or bank details, that's your private information sitting on a stranger's computer — and you've no idea what they do with it.

Worse, some of these sites are outright scams: they'll process your file, then demand an email sign-up or a payment to let you download the result, or quietly install junk. The genuinely free, safe tools don't make you jump through those hoops.

! Private documents stay on your computer

The rule that keeps you safe: never upload a document with personal details to a website you don't know. Use your own computer's tools for anything private.

How to spot a trap site

If you ever do consider an online tool, these warning signs tell you to close the tab.

- **It wants your email or an account** just to download your own finished file.
- **It asks for payment** after processing, having said it was free.
- **Pushy pop-ups or 'your PC is infected' warnings** — always fake, always a trap.
- **A 'Download' button surrounded by bigger fake download buttons** that are really ads.
- **It asks you to install software** to do a simple PDF task your computer already handles.

Any one of these is reason enough to leave. The safe approach sidesteps all of it: use the tools on your own machine, which never upload your file anywhere or demand anything.

✓ Free should be truly free

Genuinely free tools don't hold your file hostage behind a sign-up or a payment. If one does, it was never really free — close it.

Combining PDFs on a Mac

Mac owners have it easiest — the built-in Preview app merges PDFs beautifully, with nothing to download.

- ❑ Open the first PDF in Preview.
- ❑ Show the page thumbnails down the side (View menu > Thumbnails).
- ❑ Drag the second PDF file right into that thumbnail strip, where you want its pages.
- ❑ The pages merge into one document.
- ❑ Use File > Export as PDF to save the combined file with a new name.

That's it — two or more PDFs become one, all on your own computer, nothing uploaded. You can also rearrange pages by dragging the thumbnails, and delete a page by selecting its thumbnail and pressing Delete.

✓ Thumbnails are the secret on a Mac

Preview's thumbnail strip is where the magic happens — drag files in to combine, drag pages around to reorder, delete pages with a tap. It's wonderfully hands-on.

Combining PDFs on Windows

Windows doesn't have a one-click merge built in, but there's a safe free path — and a trustworthy free program if you do it often.

The built-in trick: if you can open your PDFs and 'print' them, choosing 'Microsoft Print to PDF' as the printer saves them back as PDFs — useful for extracting or re-saving pages. For true merging, a well-known free program like the PDF tools built into many free office suites, or a reputable free app, handles it cleanly on your own computer.

The key is sticking to trusted, well-reviewed free software downloaded from its official site — not a random website you upload to. If you're unsure which program is safe, that's exactly the kind of thing worth a quick check before installing.

★ I'll recommend a safe free tool

There are good, genuinely free PDF programs for Windows — and some sketchy ones. Rather than guess, call me at (330) 200-8042 and I'll point you to one I trust.

Splitting: pulling one page out

Often you don't need the whole document — just one page to send. Here's how to extract it safely.

On a Mac, open the PDF in Preview, show the thumbnails, select the page (or pages) you want, and use File > Export or drag that thumbnail to your desktop to make a new PDF of just those pages. Quick and private.

On Windows, open the PDF, choose Print, pick 'Microsoft Print to PDF' as the printer, and in the page range box type just the page you want (say, page 3). It 'prints' only that page into a new PDF file. No website, no upload.

✓ Print-to-PDF is a quiet workhorse

On Windows, 'printing' to PDF with a page range is a safe, built-in way to pull out exactly the pages you need — all on your own computer.

Shrinking a PDF that's too big to email

Email often rejects files over a certain size. Here's how to slim a bulky PDF down, safely.

Big PDFs are usually big because of photos or scanned pages. On a Mac, open it in Preview, choose File > Export, and pick the 'Reduce File Size' option (a Quartz filter) before saving — it shrinks the images and the file. Check the result still looks clear enough for your needs.

On Windows, a reputable free PDF program will offer a 'compress' or 'reduce size' choice. If a document is just scanned pages you need to email, even re-saving it can help. The goal is getting under your email's size limit without uploading to a stranger.

! Shrinking trades size for sharpness

Reducing a PDF's size makes its pictures a little less crisp. Check the shrunk copy is still readable before sending — and keep the full-size original for your records.

If you truly must use an online tool

Sometimes there's no built-in way and you need a website. Here's how to do it with the least risk.

- **Only for non-private files** — a recipe, a public flyer, never your tax return or medical records.
- **Stick to well-known names** you've heard of or that come recommended, not the first search ad.
- **Watch for the fake download buttons** — the real one is usually plain and small amid flashy ads.
- **Never install anything** a PDF site tells you to, and never enter payment or passwords.
- **Delete the file from the site** afterward if it offers the option.

Even then, prefer your own computer's tools whenever they can do the job. A website should be the last resort, used only for documents you wouldn't mind a stranger seeing.

★ Not sure if a site is safe?

If you're ever uncertain whether a PDF website is trustworthy, don't risk it — send me the task at (330) 200-8042 and I'll either point you to a safe tool or just do it for you.

Two kinds of readers, two sets of needs

The easiest safe path depends on whether you're on a Mac or a Windows PC. Find yours below.

If you're on a Mac

You're in luck — Preview, already installed, does nearly everything: combine, split, reorder, delete pages, and shrink. No downloads, nothing uploaded.

- Combine by dragging PDFs into the thumbnail strip.
- Split by exporting selected thumbnail pages.
- Shrink via Export's 'Reduce File Size' option.
- It all stays on your Mac — completely private.

If you're on Windows

You've got 'Print to PDF' built in for extracting and re-saving, plus trusted free programs for true merging and shrinking.

- Use 'Microsoft Print to PDF' to pull out pages by range.
- Install one reputable free PDF tool for combining and compressing.
- Download it only from its official site.
- Avoid upload-your-file websites for anything private.

★ Mac or Windows, I'll set you up safely

I'll show you the safe, free way to handle PDFs on your particular computer, so you never have to trust a sketchy website. Call (330) 200-8042.

Reordering and deleting pages

Combining often comes with a little tidying — putting pages in order and removing ones you don't need.

On a Mac, Preview's thumbnail strip lets you drag pages into any order and delete an unwanted one by selecting it and pressing Delete. It's as easy as shuffling papers on a desk, and you see the result instantly.

On Windows, a good free PDF program offers the same — drag to reorder, select and remove. If you only need a few pages in a certain order, you can also just print those pages in that order to a new PDF. Either way, no website required.

✓ Tidy before you save

Get your pages in the right order and remove the extras before exporting the final PDF. Then your combined file is clean and ready to send in one go.

Turning paper into a PDF

Often the PDFs you want to combine start as paper. Your phone is a surprisingly good scanner.

Both iPhones (in the Notes or Files app) and Android phones (in Google Drive) can scan a document to PDF using the camera — point, capture, and it straightens and crops automatically. The result is a tidy PDF you can email to yourself and then combine or shrink on the computer.

This keeps everything on your own devices: scan on the phone, combine on the computer, nothing uploaded to a stranger. For folks without a dedicated scanner, it's a free, private way to get paper into PDF form.

★ I'll show you the phone-scanner trick

Scanning documents with your phone is a genuinely useful skill, and it pairs perfectly with PDF combining. Happy to show you. Call (330) 200-8042.

Common mistakes, and how to avoid them

A few missteps cause most PDF grief — and one of them is a real privacy risk.

- **Uploading private files** to an unknown website — the big one; use your own computer.
- **Clicking a fake 'Download' button** that's really an ad — look for the plain, small real one.
- **Installing junk** a PDF site insists you need — you almost never do.
- **Shrinking too far** so the document becomes blurry — check it's still readable.
- **Saving over the original** — keep the full-size, complete version and save edits as a copy.

! The privacy mistake is the costly one

The other mistakes waste time; uploading a private document to a stranger can expose your personal details. Keep anything sensitive on your own machine.

Always keep the original

Whenever you combine, split, or shrink, save the result as a new file and keep the originals. Here's why it matters.

A shrunk PDF has lower-quality images; a split one has only some pages; a combined one is a new arrangement. If you save over your originals, you can't get the full quality or the missing pages back. Saving as a new copy means you always have the pristine source to go back to.

Give your new files clear names — 'Tax docs combined,' 'Report page 3 only,' 'Brochure small for email' — and keep them tidy in your Documents folder alongside the originals. A little naming discipline saves confusion later.

✓ New copy, clear name

Combine, split, or shrink into a newly named file, never over the original. Then you keep both the source and the result, each easy to tell apart.

This is safer and easier than it looks

If PDFs have felt like a minefield of suspicious websites, let me put you at ease.

Nearly everything you'll want to do with a PDF can be done with the tools already on your computer, free and private. The suspicious websites aren't necessary — they're just loud. Once you know your own machine can do the job, the whole topic relaxes.

Start with a simple, non-private PDF to practice combining or splitting. You'll see how quick and safe it is, and you'll never feel pressured to upload a sensitive document to a stranger again.

★ A quick lesson covers it

Handling PDFs safely is a short, confidence-building lesson. I'll show you the tools on your own computer and which websites to avoid. Call (330) 200-8042.

Questions to ask yourself

A few answers keep you on the safe, easy path.

Q: Does this document have private details?

If yes, keep it on your own computer — never upload it to an unknown website. That's the golden rule.

Q: Am I on a Mac or Windows?

Mac: Preview does almost everything built in. Windows: use Print-to-PDF and one trusted free program.

Q: Do I just need to send it?

If it's too big to email, shrink it; if you only need part, split it. Both can be done without a website.

Q: Is this site asking for my email or payment?

Then leave — genuinely free tools don't hold your file hostage behind a sign-up or a charge.

✓ Private means your computer only

Let one question guide you: is this private? If so, your own computer's tools, always — never an upload site.

A few more worth answering

These come up as folks start handling PDFs.

Q: How do I combine two PDFs for free?

On a Mac, drag one into the other's thumbnail strip in Preview. On Windows, use a trusted free PDF program. Both keep your files on your own computer.

Q: How do I make a PDF smaller to email?

On a Mac, Export with 'Reduce File Size.' On Windows, use a reputable free tool's 'compress' option. Check it's still readable, and keep the original.

Q: How do I pull out just one page?

On a Mac, export the selected thumbnail page. On Windows, print to PDF with just that page's number in the range box.

Q: Are online PDF tools ever okay?

Only for non-private files, only well-known ones, and never installing what they tell you to. For anything sensitive, use your own computer.

★ Got a PDF puzzle?

Call or text me at (330) 200-8042. PDF tasks are quick to handle safely once you know the built-in tools — and I'll steer you clear of the traps.

The whole thing, recapped

Here's handling PDFs safely as a short routine.

- ❑ First ask: is this private? If so, computer-only, no upload sites.
- ❑ Mac: use Preview to combine (drag thumbnails), split (export pages), shrink (Reduce File Size).
- ❑ Windows: use Print-to-PDF for pages, plus one trusted free program for merging and shrinking.
- ❑ Scan paper to PDF with your phone if you need to.
- ❑ Save results as new, clearly named files; keep the originals.
- ❑ If any site demands email, payment, or installs, leave it.

Follow that and you'll merge, split, and shrink PDFs with confidence — free, private, and trap-free.

✓ Your computer first, always

The whole guide in four words: use your own computer. It does nearly every PDF job safely, and keeps your documents yours.

Common Questions

The questions I hear most about combining, splitting, and shrinking PDFs.

Q: What's the safest way to combine PDFs?

Use the tools on your own computer — Preview on a Mac (drag files into the thumbnail strip) or a trusted free program on Windows. They never upload your file anywhere.

Q: Why shouldn't I use free online PDF sites?

Because they have you upload your document to a stranger's server, which is risky for anything private, and some are scams that demand payment or install junk. Use your own computer instead.

Q: How do I shrink a PDF to email it?

On a Mac, Export with 'Reduce File Size'; on Windows, use a reputable free tool's compress option. Check the result is still clear, and keep your full-size original.

Q: How can I tell a trap website?

It asks for your email or payment to download your own file, shows fake download buttons or 'virus' pop-ups, or tells you to install software. Any of those — leave.

★ Want help the safe way?

I'll show you the free, private tools on your own computer and which sites to steer clear of. Call or text me at (330) 200-8042.

The bottom line

Here's the heart of it in a few sentences.

You can combine, split, and shrink PDFs for free using the tools already on your computer — Preview on a Mac, Print-to-PDF plus a trusted free program on Windows. None of these upload your file anywhere, so your private documents stay private.

The one real danger is the crowd of 'free online PDF' websites that have you upload your file to a stranger. Avoid them for anything sensitive, watch for their email-and-payment traps, and lean on your own machine instead. Do that, and PDFs become easy and safe.

✓ Free, private, trap-free

The safe approach is also the easy one: your own computer's tools do the job without ever sending your documents off to who-knows-where.

You're now ahead of the scammers

A closing thought, because this topic trips up so many good people.

The reason those trap websites exist is that PDFs feel mysterious, so folks reach for the first site they find. Now you know your own computer handles the job, and you know the warning signs of a bad site. That knowledge alone puts you well ahead of the traps.

So the next time you need to combine a few pages or shrink a file to email, you'll reach for Preview or your trusted tool with confidence — and your private documents will stay exactly where they belong: with you.

★ And I'm here if you want a hand

Whether it's one tricky PDF or learning the whole routine, call or text me at (330) 200-8042. We'll keep it simple and safe.

You don't have to do this alone

You just have to remember that a friendly, patient person is one call away.

I hope this guide made combining, splitting, and shrinking PDFs safely feel a little less daunting and a lot more doable. Keep it in a drawer with your other home papers, come back to a page whenever you need it, and don't worry about memorizing anything.

When you'd rather have a hand, that's exactly what I do. I come to your home, work at your pace, and never make you feel rushed or silly for asking. A first visit is a flat \$99, and for the parts that don't need me on-site — installing Office, sorting out a sign-in, setting up a document — I can often help right on your screen for \$49. Every visit comes with a 30-day, come-back-free guarantee.

★ Bill's Home Tech — real help, close to home

Call or text me at (330) 200-8042, or visit BillsHomeTech.com. Serving Atwater and all of Portage County. 30+ years of patient, plain-English tech help — and if you're ever not 100% happy with a visit, I'll make it right or refund it. That's a promise. — Bill

Safe, Free PDF Tools

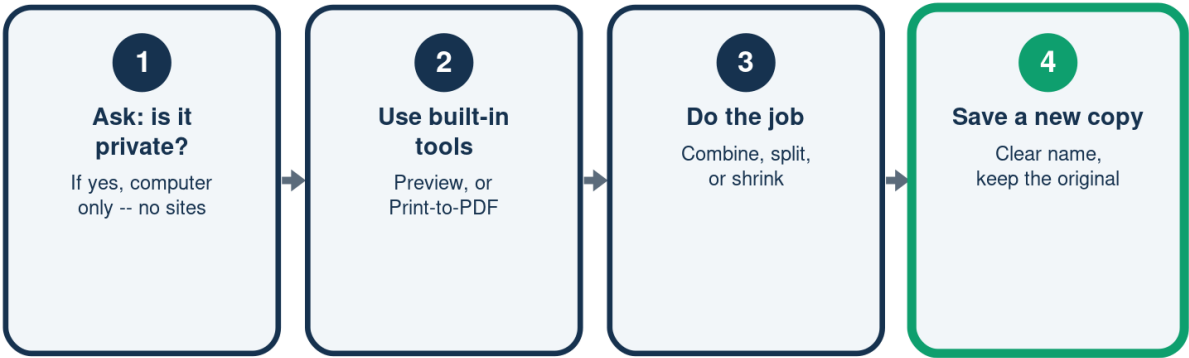
On your own computer -- nothing uploaded

	On	Does
Mac Preview	Built in	Combine/split/shrink
Win Print-to-PDF	Built in	Extract, re-save
Trusted free app	Official site	Merge, compress
Phone scanner	Notes/Drive	Paper to PDF

Your own computer handles nearly every PDF job -- safely and free.

The Safe PDF Routine

Four calm steps



Private means your own computer -- never an upload site.

Warning Signs of a Trap Site

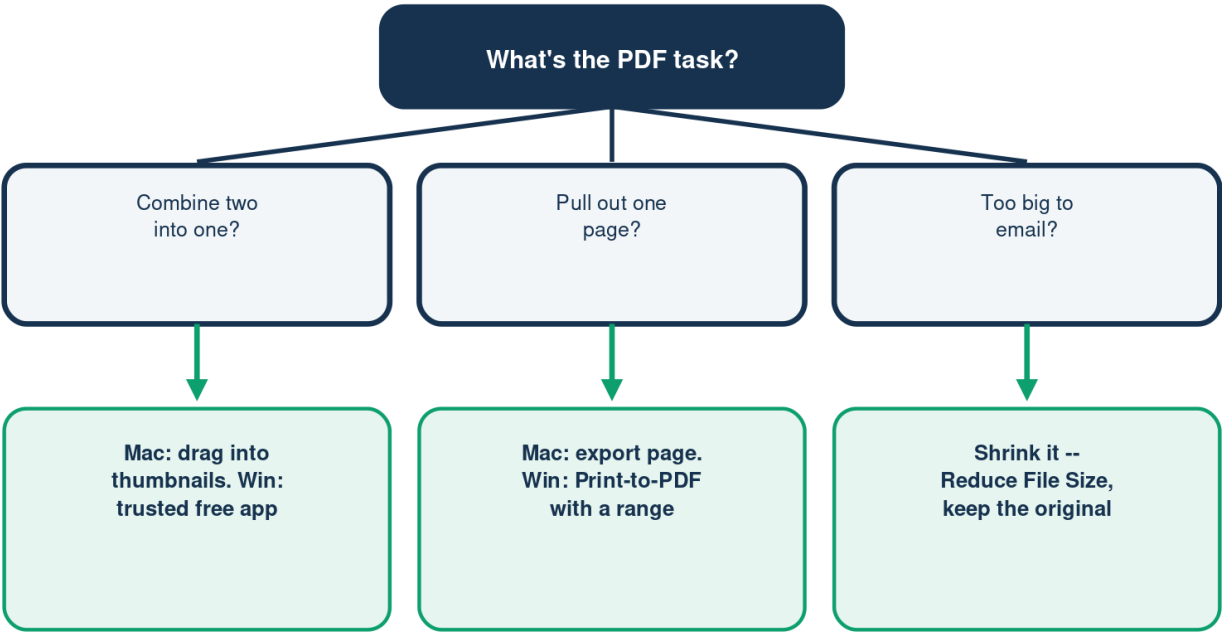
Any one means leave

	Red flag	What it means
Wants your email	To release	your own file
Asks for payment	After saying	it was free
Fake download buttons	Big ads	hiding the real one
'Install this'	Junk you	don't need

Genuinely free tools never hold your file hostage -- close these.

What Do You Need to Do?

Pick the safe method



Never upload a private document to an unknown website.

Illustration - a schematic, not to scale. Your setup may differ.



Need a Real Person?

You do not have to remember all of it.
You just have to remember you can call.
Friendly, in-home tech help -- I come to you.

BILL'S PROMISE

If you are not 100% happy with a visit, I will
make it right -- or refund it. No awkwardness,
no fine print. That is how I would want to be treated.

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Bill@BillsHomeTech.com · Mon–Sat 9:00 AM – 7:30 PM

— Bill

Prefer help without a visit?

Bill can screen-share and fix many things remotely — a flat \$49, free for Support Plan members.



A Note From Bill

A quick note from Bill.

I write these guides to make home tech a little less frustrating, and I do my best to keep every step accurate and up to date. Still, every home, device, and setup is a bit different, so I can't promise a guide will match yours exactly or fix your particular problem. These guides are for general information only — they're not professional, legal, or financial advice, and they don't replace your device's own manual or the manufacturer's instructions. Please go slow, use your own good judgment, and use everything here at your own risk. If a step involves electrical wiring, a gas appliance, a water heater, plumbing, or climbing a ladder — or if anything just doesn't feel safe — please stop and call a licensed professional (or give me a call at 330-200-8042). Bill's Home Tech and Bill Davis can't be responsible for any damage, data loss, or injury that comes from using these guides. Thanks for reading, and stay safe out there.

— *Bill*



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