BILL'S HOME TECH

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How Much Free Space Your Devices Actually Need

Sensible targets for phones, computers, and online accounts — and why headroom matters

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SUMMARY

The 60-Second Version

Devices need a cushion of free space as working room — to unpack updates, make temporary files, and run smoothly — so a device at the edge of full slows down and glitches. The simple rule: keep at least a tenth free and never let it hit bottom. On a phone, keep at least a few gigabytes free (more around update time); on a computer, 10 to 20 gigabytes; online, the free tiers (iCloud 5 GB, Google 15 GB shared) are small, so cleaning up or a tiny plan is normal.

Check free space on each device's Storage screen, and turn on photo backup plus the built-in cleanup tools so the cushion keeps itself.

1 The Short Version

Devices need a cushion of free space to work well. When a phone or computer runs right at the edge of full, it slows down, struggles to update, and can misbehave in small maddening ways. The fix is simply to keep a sensible amount free as a matter of habit.

You do not need to count every gigabyte. A rough rule — keep at least a tenth of the space free, and never let it drop to almost nothing — covers nearly everyone. We will give clear targets for each kind of device so you know what "enough" looks like.

- Devices run poorly when they are nearly full — headroom matters.
- A good rule: keep at least a tenth of the space free.
- Phones, computers, and online accounts each have sensible targets.
- You do not need to obsess — a cushion, not a precise number, is the goal.

WATCH OUT

If you remember only one thing: do not let any device run down to its last scraps of free space. A device scraping the bottom is where nearly all the slowness, failed updates, and odd glitches come from — a little breathing room prevents most of them.

2 Why Free Space Matters at All

It seems reasonable to think you should be able to fill a device right up — you paid for all that space, after all. But a device uses free space as working room: a place to unpack updates, create temporary files, and shuffle things around as it runs. Without that room, everything grinds.

Think of it like a kitchen counter. You can own a large kitchen, but if every inch of counter is covered, you cannot cook. The empty counter is not wasted — it is what makes the kitchen usable. Free space on a device plays exactly the same role.

GOOD TO KNOW

This is why a device can feel slow long before it is completely full. Once the free space drops below a comfortable cushion, the device starts struggling for working room, and you feel it as sluggishness well before you ever see a "full" warning.

3 The Simple Rule of Thumb

If you want one rule that works everywhere, it is this: aim to keep at least ten percent of the total space free, and treat anything near zero as a problem to fix. Ten percent is a floor, not a target to hover at — more is better, but below it things start to suffer.

On a smaller device the percentage can feel tight, so there is also a plain-number version: try to keep at least a few gigabytes free on a phone or computer at all times. Between the percentage and the few-gigabyte floor, you have a safe cushion.

> *Keep at least a tenth free, and never let it hit the bottom. That one habit prevents most of the trouble a full device causes.*

4 How Much a Phone Needs

Phones feel the squeeze of low space quickly, especially around updates and the camera. A comfortable cushion keeps the camera saving, updates installing, and apps running smoothly.

- Keep at least a few gigabytes free for everyday smoothness.
- Around update time, you may need several gigabytes free for it to install.
- If free space keeps dropping to near zero, turn on photo backup so pictures stop hoarding room.
- A phone that is always nearly full is the usual reason the camera suddenly "can't save."

GOOD TO KNOW

The single biggest space user on a phone is almost always photos and videos. Keeping them backed up to iCloud or Google Photos, with the phone holding lighter copies, is the most reliable way to keep a healthy cushion without giving anything up.

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5 How Much a Computer Needs

Computers need more absolute room than phones, both because their files are larger and because big updates need space to install. A fuller cushion keeps a computer quick and lets major updates land without a fuss.

- Aim to keep at least 10 to 20 gigabytes free on the main drive.
- Windows feature updates in particular need several gigabytes of working room.
- A drive that is nearly full is a common hidden cause of a slow computer.
- If you cannot keep that much free, it may be a sign to move files off or upgrade the drive.

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
>
> On a computer with a smaller drive, hitting the free-space floor is common, and moving photos and documents to a cloud service or an external drive is the usual cure — it keeps the files while freeing the working room the computer needs.

6 How Much Online Storage You Need

Online storage — iCloud or Google — works a little differently, because here "full" mainly stops backups and photo syncing rather than slowing a device. The target is simply enough room to hold your backup and your growing photo library.

Service	Free tier	When you likely need more
iCloud (Apple)	5 GB	Almost everyone with photos — 5 GB is tiny
Google (Photos/Drive/Gmail)	15 GB shared	Once years of photos or big emails build up

Because the free online tiers are small, running out is normal and not a sign you have done anything wrong. The question there is less "how much to keep free" and more "clean up or move to a small plan," which our other guides cover.

7 How to Check Your Free Space

Knowing where to look takes the mystery out of it. Each device shows its free space plainly once you know the path.

1. iPhone: Settings, General, iPhone Storage — free space shows at the top.
2. Android: Settings, Storage — it shows used and free.
3. Mac: Apple menu, System Settings, General, Storage.
4. Windows: Settings, System, Storage.
5. Online: iCloud in Settings (your name, iCloud); Google at one.google.com/storage.

WATCH OUT

Glance at your free space now and then, not just when a warning appears. Catching it as it drops toward the floor — rather than after it hits bottom — lets you free a little room calmly instead of in a crisis when the camera stops working.

8 What Happens When It Gets Too Full

It helps to recognize the warning signs of a device running short, because they are easy to mistake for the device "getting old" or "wearing out" when the real cause is simply a lack of room.

- The camera suddenly cannot save a photo or video.
- Updates fail, stall, or refuse to start.
- Apps crash, freeze, or close themselves.
- Everything feels slow and heavy, even simple tasks.
- Backups quietly stop running.

GOOD TO KNOW

If several of these are happening at once, low space is very likely the common cause — and freeing a cushion of room often clears all of them together, which is why checking free space is such a good first move.

9 A Few Myths, Cleared Up

There is a lot of folklore about free space, and some of it leads people astray. Here are the common myths and the plain truth.

- Myth: you should fill a device right up to get your money's worth. Truth: it needs working room to run well.
- Myth: a "cleaner" app is needed to manage free space. Truth: the built-in tools do it safely for free.
- Myth: deleting apps is the best way to free room. Truth: photos and videos are usually the far bigger win.
- Myth: more free space makes a device faster and faster. Truth: past a healthy cushion, extra room does not add speed.

WATCH OUT

That last myth cuts both ways: you do not need to keep a device nearly empty, either. Once you have a healthy cushion, emptying it further gains you nothing — so clear to a comfortable level and then stop worrying about it.

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10 Keep the Right Amount Free, Automatically

The easiest way to hold a healthy cushion is to let the device help, so you are not constantly managing it by hand. A few one-time settings do most of the work.

- Turn on photo backup with "optimize" so photos stop hoarding device space.

- Turn on the automatic cleanup tools (Windows Storage Sense; Mac Storage recommendations).
- Set the trash to empty itself after 30 days.
- Glance at your free space every month or two to catch a slow creep.

> **WATCH OUT**
>
> With photo backup and the automatic cleanup tools switched on, most people never have to think about free space again — the device quietly keeps its own cushion. Setting those up once is the whole game.

11 Why Phones and Computers Differ

You may wonder why the free-space targets are different for a phone and a computer. It comes down to the size of the things each one handles and how they update. A computer's files, programs, and updates are simply larger, so it needs more absolute room to shuffle them around.

A phone, by contrast, works in smaller pieces, so a few gigabytes of headroom goes further — except around a system update, when it briefly needs much more. That is why the phone target is "a few gigabytes, more at update time" while the computer target is a steadier ten to twenty. Both are really saying the same thing: leave enough working room for the biggest job the device does.

- Computers handle larger files and updates, so they need more free room.
- Phones get by on less, except briefly during a system update.
- Both targets exist to leave room for the device's biggest single task.
- In both cases, the enemy is running right down to empty.

12 What to Do the Moment You Get Low

Catching a device as it approaches the floor — rather than after it hits bottom — lets you act calmly. If a glance shows your free space getting thin, a few quick moves restore the cushion before anything starts failing.

1. Delete a few large videos you no longer need (back them up first) — the fastest way to free a lot.
2. Empty the photo trash and any download folders.
3. Offload or remove an app or two you do not use.
4. Confirm photo backup is on, so pictures stop refilling the space.

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
>
> The difference between a calm fix and a crisis is usually just timing. Act when you are getting low and it is a two-minute tidy; wait until the camera stops saving on a special occasion and it is a scramble. A monthly glance is what keeps it calm.

13 Free Space and Speed: the Honest Truth

There is a persistent belief that more free space always means a faster device, which leads people to keep a device nearly empty needlessly. The honest truth is more nuanced, and knowing it saves you effort.

Below a healthy cushion, free space and speed are closely linked — a device starved of room genuinely slows down, and freeing space genuinely helps. But above that cushion, adding more free space does nothing for speed. So the goal is to reach a comfortable level of free space and then stop; emptying further is wasted effort.

> *Free space helps speed only up to a point. Reach a healthy cushion, then stop — past that, an emptier device is not a faster one.*

14 When to Call Bill

These targets and habits keep most devices in healthy shape, and you can apply them yourself. But if a device keeps hitting the floor no matter what you clear, if it is slow or failing to update even with room free, or if you would simply like it set up to manage its own space, there is no need to keep watching the gauge.

I come to you, check the free space on all your devices, free a healthy cushion safely, and switch on the backups and cleanup tools that keep it that way — so your devices stay quick and reliable without you having to monitor them. You get sensible headroom and one less thing to worry about.

- A device keeps running out of room no matter what you clear.
- It is slow or failing to update even with some space free.
- You want photos backed up so they stop eating your cushion.
- You would like everything set to manage its own space automatically.

CHEAT SHEET

Everyday Cheat Sheet

Keep this handy. Aim for a cushion, not a precise number.

I want to…	Do this…
Know the rule	Keep at least a tenth free; never hit the bottom
Target on a phone	At least a few GB free (more around update time)
Target on a computer	At least 10–20 GB free on the main drive
Know online tiers	iCloud 5 GB free; Google 15 GB shared — both small
Check free space	Phone/computer Storage screens; online account pages
Keep the cushion	Turn on photo backup and the automatic cleanup tools
Get help	Call Bill: (330) 200-8042

BEFORE YOU GO

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 results.

HOW I CAN HELP

Your Visit — and My Promise

You don't have to remember all of it — just that a friendly, patient person is one call away, whenever you'd rather have a hand.

KEY SPECS

In your home — $99 flat for the first visit, no contracts and no surprises, with a 30-day come-back-free follow-up. In-home visits cover Portage County, Ohio and nearby communities.
Outside the area? Remotely — $49 for a screen-share session (free for Support Plan members, $39/mo), refundable if I can't fix it — and credited toward a visit if you'd rather have me in person. Book either at billshometech.com/book.

GOOD TO KNOW

My promise — If you're not 100% satisfied with your visit, I'll come back at no charge, or refund the full $99. No questions, no awkwardness. That's how I'd want to be treated.

Whenever you're ready, I'll come to your home anywhere in Portage County, Ohio and nearby communities, at your pace. Too far for a house call? I also help remotely. Book at billshometech.com/book or call (330) 200-8042. — Bill

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