BILL'S HOME TECH

Home & Small Business Tech Solutions

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Is It My Wi Fi or My Internet? The Wired Speed Test

The five minute test that tells you which problem you actually have — and what to do about each

Plain-English home-network help from:

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SUMMARY

The 60-Second Version

Your Wi Fi (the wireless hop inside your home) and your internet (the line from your provider) are two different things with two different fixes. To tell them apart, plug a computer straight into the router with an Ethernet cable, turn Wi Fi off, and run a speed test at Fast.com. If the wired speed is close to what you pay for but Wi Fi is slow, the problem is your Wi Fi — move the router into the open or add coverage.

If even the wired speed is well below your paid speed, the internet line is the problem, so restart the modem and then call your provider with the numbers in hand.

1 The Short Version

Everything online feels slow or keeps stalling, and the big question is simple: is the problem your Wi Fi inside the house, or is it the internet coming into the house from your provider? Those are two very different problems with two very different fixes, and guessing wrong wastes time and money. The good news is there is one clean test that tells you which it is, and it takes about five minutes.

The trick is to take Wi Fi out of the picture for a moment by plugging a computer straight into the router with a cable, then running a speed test. If the wired speed is good but Wi Fi is slow, the trouble is inside your home and you can fix the Wi Fi. If even the wired speed is slow, the problem is the internet line itself, and that is a call to your provider — not a new router.

- A wired test tells you whether to blame your Wi Fi or your internet line.
- Plug a laptop straight into the router with an Ethernet cable, then test the speed.
- Good wired, bad wireless = fix the Wi Fi. Bad wired = call your internet provider.
- You do not need any special equipment beyond one network cable.

TIP

Write down the speed you are supposed to be getting — it is on your internet bill, usually a number followed by "Mbps" (megabits per second). Having that number in hand turns a vague "it feels slow" into a clear "I pay for this and I'm only getting that," which is exactly what gets a provider to act.

2 Wi Fi and Internet Are Not the Same Thing

People use "the Wi Fi" to mean the whole internet, but they are two separate links in a chain. The internet is the connection that comes into your home from your provider through a cable, a phone line, or fiber. Wi Fi is only the short wireless hop from your router to your devices around the house. A weak link anywhere in that chain makes everything feel slow, but the fix depends entirely on which link is weak.

Think of it like water to your house. The internet line is the water main coming in from the street; your Wi Fi is the pipes and faucets inside. If the main is restricted, every faucet is weak no matter how good your pipes are. If the main is fine but one upstairs faucet barely trickles, the problem is the pipe to that room. The wired test is how you tell the main apart from the pipes.

GOOD TO KNOW

This is why a brand new router sometimes makes no difference at all. If the slow part is the line coming into your home, a better router cannot create speed that was never delivered — it can only share what arrives. Knowing which problem you have saves you from buying the wrong fix.

3 What You'll Need

This test needs almost nothing, and you very likely already have everything. Gather it first so the test goes smoothly.

- A laptop or desktop computer with a network (Ethernet) port, or a cheap USB to Ethernet adapter if it has none.
- One Ethernet cable — the flat or round cable with the wide clip connector; a spare often came with your router.
- Your internet bill or account page, so you know the speed you pay for.
- A couple of quiet minutes when no one is streaming or gaming, so other activity does not skew the test.

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
> Many newer thin laptops no longer have a network port. A small USB to Ethernet adapter costs very little and plugs into a regular USB port, giving you a wired connection for the test. It is a handy thing to own even just for moments like this.

4 Step One: Run a Wi Fi Speed Test First

Before you touch any cables, measure what Wi Fi gives you right now, standing where the device usually lives. This is your "before" number to compare against.

1. On the device, make sure you are on your home Wi Fi and close other apps and browser tabs.
2. Open a web browser and go to a speed test site such as Fast.com or Speedtest.net.
3. Let the test finish — it will show a download number, and often an upload number, both in Mbps.
4. Write down the download number and roughly where you were standing when you ran it.

> **TIP**
> Fast.com is run by Netflix and shows a clean download speed with almost no clutter, which makes it the gentlest option. Speedtest.net shows a little more detail. Either one is fine; the point is just to get a number you can compare.

Rather not do this yourself? I'll come to your home and set it up for you — a flat $99 first visit across Portage County, Ohio and nearby communities. Outside the area? I also help remotely by phone or screen-share. Book at billshometech.com/book or call (330) 200-8042.

5 Step Two: Plug In and Test Again

Now take Wi Fi out of the picture entirely. Connect the computer to the router with the Ethernet cable and run the very same test. Because the cable carries the full speed with no wireless weakness, this number is the truest picture of what your internet line is actually delivering.

1. Plug one end of the Ethernet cable into a numbered port on the back of your router (not the one marked "WAN" or "Internet").
2. Plug the other end into your computer's network port, or into the USB adapter.
3. On the computer, turn Wi Fi off for a moment so it must use the cable.
4. Run the same speed test again and write down this wired download number.

WATCH OUT

Use a router port, not the single port set apart and labeled "WAN" or "Internet" — that one is for the incoming line from your provider and will not give you a connection. If you only have one box and are unsure which port is which, that is a fine moment to pause and call for a hand.

6 Reading Your Two Numbers

With both numbers written down, the answer almost always jumps right out. Compare the wired number to the speed you pay for, and the Wi Fi number to the wired number.

What you see	What it means

Wired is close to the speed you pay for, Wi Fi is much lower	Your internet is fine — the weak link is your Wi Fi (coverage or placement)
Wired is also well below the speed you pay for	The internet line itself is underperforming — call your provider
Both are good, but it still stalls at times	A specific device or too many at once — not a line or Wi Fi fault

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
> "Close" does not mean exact. It is normal for a wired test to land a little under the number on your bill — those are advertised peaks, and a reading within roughly 10–20% is healthy. A wired reading at half your paid speed or less is the real red flag.

7 If the Wired Test Is Slow: It's the Internet Line

If even the wired number is well below what you pay for, your Wi Fi is not the problem — the connection coming into your home is. No router or extender will fix this, because the speed simply is not arriving. This is your provider's job, and you now have the proof to make the call productive.

1. Restart your modem (the box where the line from outside comes in): unplug it, wait 30 seconds, plug it back in, and wait for its lights to settle.
2. Run the wired test once more — a tired modem sometimes recovers with a restart.
3. If it is still slow, call your provider and say plainly: "I pay for X and a computer plugged directly into the modem only gets Y."
4. Ask them to check the line to your home and, if needed, send a technician.

> **WATCH OUT**
> When a wired test proves the line is slow, I'm glad to sit with you on the provider call — having someone who can speak their language and hold them to the number on your bill often turns a run around into a fixed line or a credit.

8 If Only Wi Fi Is Slow: It's Inside Your Home

If the wired test is healthy but Wi Fi is weak, the great news is that you can fix this yourself, and it usually costs nothing. The wireless signal is either being blocked or spread too thin, and small changes make a big difference.

- Move the router out into the open — off the floor, out of a cabinet, away from the TV and microwave.
- Test again standing right next to the router; if that is fast, the problem is distance or walls, not the router.
- For a far room that stays weak, a mesh system (not a cheap extender) is the lasting fix.
- Make sure nearby devices use the faster 5GHz band while far ones use the longer reaching 2.4GHz band.

> **TIP**
>
> Do the simple room by room test: run the Wi Fi speed test in each room and jot the numbers on a sketch of your home. The pattern instantly shows your dead zones and tells you exactly where coverage help is needed.

9 Common Things That Fool the Test

A few everyday situations can make a perfectly healthy connection look bad, so rule these out before you blame your equipment or your provider.

- Someone else streaming, gaming, or updating a device during the test eats into the number.
- A VPN or a work connection can cap your speed — turn it off for the test.
- An old phone or laptop simply cannot reach modern speeds no matter how good the Wi Fi is.
- Testing over Wi Fi from far away and calling it "the internet" — that is a Wi Fi reading, not a line reading.

WATCH OUT

Browser slowness is not the same as a slow connection. If one website crawls but speed tests are fine, the site or your browser is the issue — not your internet. A speed test measures the pipe, not any one faucet.

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10 Set Yourself Up to Test Any Time

Once you have done this once, it is worth keeping the habit and the tools handy so you can settle the "Wi Fi or internet?" question in minutes whenever things feel off.

- Keep one Ethernet cable (and the USB adapter, if you need one) in a drawer near the router.
- Bookmark Fast.com on your computer and phone for a one tap test.
- Note your paid speed and a couple of "good day" readings so you have a baseline to compare against.
- Re test after any provider equipment swap — new boxes sometimes arrive set up poorly.

GOOD TO KNOW

A quick monthly wired test is like checking your tire pressure — a small habit that catches a slow decline before it becomes a frustrating crisis, and gives you solid footing if you ever need to push back on your provider.

11 Download vs. Upload — Why the Test Shows Two Numbers

Most speed tests show a download number and an upload number, and it helps to know which one your trouble is really about. Download is everything coming to you — web pages, streaming video, photos loading. Upload is everything you send out — your face on a video call, photos backing up, a large email leaving. Home plans usually give you far more download than upload, which is normal and fine for most people.

- Buffering video, slow web pages, slow photo loading look at the download number.
- A choppy video call where THEY can't see or hear YOU, or stuck photo backups look at the upload number.
- A tiny upload number is normal on many plans; it only matters if you do a lot of video calls.
- If both numbers are low on a wired test, the line is underperforming overall.

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
>
> This is why a video call can look fine on your end but freeze for the other person — your download (what you receive) is healthy while your upload (what you send) is strained. Knowing to check upload saves a lot of confusion about calls that "only break for the other side."

12 Keep a Simple Speed Logbook

One speed test is a snapshot; a few tests over time tell a story. Jotting down a handful of readings gives you a baseline, so you can tell a real decline from a one off bad moment — and gives you solid ground if you ever need to push your provider.

1. Once a week, at a quiet time, run the wired test and write down the date and the number.
2. Note anything unusual — a storm, a provider equipment swap, new devices in the house.

3. After a few weeks you will see your normal range; a sudden drop below it is a real signal.
4. Keep the log near the router so it is easy to add to.

> **TIP**
> A short written history is quietly powerful. When a provider says "everything looks fine on our end," being able to say "it was 180 every week for a month and dropped to 40 on the 12th" changes the whole conversation in your favor.

13 Quick Answers to Common Questions

A few things come up again and again when people run this test. Here are the short, honest answers.

- "Should I hit my exact plan number?" No — within roughly 10–20% under it, wired, is healthy.
- "My phone is slower than my laptop." Often just a different, older Wi Fi radio — not a fault.
- "It's fast at night but slow at dinnertime." Usually a crowded network or provider congestion, not your gear.
- "Do I need a cable long enough to reach my favorite chair?" No — the wired test is only to check the line; you unplug afterward.

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
> There is no single "fast enough" number for everyone. A couple who streams one show at a time is comfortable on far less than a busy household with several 4K TVs and a gamer. The right question is not "is this fast?" but "is this close to what I'm paying for, and does it do what I need?"

14 When to Call Bill

This test is designed so anyone can do it, and most people come away knowing exactly where the problem lives. But if plugging in a cable feels like a lot, if the numbers are confusing, or if the test points at your Wi Fi and you are not sure how to improve coverage, you do not have to sort it out alone.

I come to you, run the wired test properly, and tell you plainly whether it is your internet line or your home Wi Fi — and then I fix the right thing. If it is the line, I will help you hold your provider to what you pay for. If it is the Wi Fi, I will get your coverage right so every room works.

- The numbers do not make sense, or you want a second opinion before calling your provider.
- The test points at Wi Fi and you want strong coverage in every room done right.
- You would rather not fuss with cables and settings at all.
- Your provider is giving you the run around and you want someone in your corner.

CHEAT SHEET

Everyday Cheat Sheet

Keep this by the router. One wired test tells you what to fix.

I want to...	Do this...
Find my paid speed	Check your internet bill for the number followed by "Mbps"
Test my Wi Fi	On your device, open Fast.com or Speedtest.net and note the download number
Test the real line	Plug a computer into the router with a cable, turn Wi Fi off, re test
Read the result	Good wired + bad Wi Fi = fix Wi Fi. Bad wired = call your provider
Rule out false alarms	No one else streaming, VPN off, use a modern device
Fix slow Wi Fi	Move the router into the open; add mesh for a far room
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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