



An Extended Guide · No. 1938

LibreOffice — The Free Office That Opens Almost Everything

Install it safely, set it to save Word &
Excel formats, and know where it differs

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★ Genuinely free — download only from libreoffice.org

LibreOffice is completely free, forever, with no subscription and no catch. The only rule: get it from the real site, libreoffice.org, which you type yourself — never a 'download' ad. This guide covers installing it safely and using it.

The free office suite that opens almost anything

LibreOffice is a full, free set of office programs — a word processor, a spreadsheet, and more — that opens and saves Word and Excel files and costs nothing, ever. For anyone who balks at a yearly Office fee, it's a genuine, capable answer. Let's get you set up.

I'm Bill, from Bill's Home Tech in Portage County. I set a lot of folks up with LibreOffice when they'd rather not pay for Office, and they're usually delighted. It does what most people need, opens the files others send, and never sends a bill.

We'll cover downloading it safely, the one setting that makes it play nicely with Word and Excel users, and the handful of ways it differs from Microsoft Office — so there are no surprises.

The whole guide, on one page

If these stick, LibreOffice will serve you well and free.

- ❑ LibreOffice is free, with no subscription — download it only from libreoffice.org.
- ❑ Writer is like Word; Calc is like Excel; it opens the files others send you.
- ❑ Set it to save in Word (.docx) and Excel (.xlsx) formats so sharing is easy.
- ❑ It looks a little different from Microsoft Office, but the tools are all there.
- ❑ There are two versions to download — pick the stable one if unsure; both are fine.
- ❑ It's ideal for letters, budgets, and most home tasks at no cost.

✓ The real site is libreoffice.org

Type that address yourself. The genuine LibreOffice is free, so any site asking for payment or pushing a different 'downloader' is not the one you want.

What LibreOffice actually is

Let's start with what you're getting, so you know it's the real deal and not a stripped-down toy.

LibreOffice is a complete office suite, made and kept up by a non-profit community, given away free. It includes Writer (a word processor like Word), Calc (a spreadsheet like Excel), Impress (slideshows like PowerPoint), and a few more. It's been around for years, is widely used, and is thoroughly legitimate.

Crucially, it reads and writes the Microsoft formats — it opens the .docx and .xlsx files people email you, and can save in those formats so they open your files too. So choosing LibreOffice doesn't cut you off from anyone; you can still trade documents with the whole Microsoft-using world.

✓ Free, full, and legitimate

This isn't a trial or a lite version. LibreOffice is a complete, genuine office suite given away by a non-profit — no strings, no expiry.

Downloading it safely

Because 'free office' is a magnet for sketchy sites, getting it from the right place matters. Here's the safe way.

- ❑ Open your web browser and type libreoffice.org yourself — don't search and click an ad.
- ❑ Click the Download section.
- ❑ Choose the version for your computer (Windows or Mac) — the site usually detects it.
- ❑ Download the installer and run it, accepting the standard options.
- ❑ When it finishes, you'll find Writer, Calc, and the others in your programs.

That's the whole install — a few minutes, no payment, no account. Sticking to the official libreoffice.org avoids the fake 'download' sites that bundle junk or charge for what's free. Type the address, and you're safe.

★ I'll install it safely with you

If downloading and installing a program feels nerve-wracking, that's exactly the kind of thing I do — from the right site, with the right choices, in a few minutes. Call (330) 200-8042.

Which version to download

The download page offers two versions, which can be confusing. Here's the simple way to choose.

LibreOffice offers a newer 'Fresh' line (with the latest features) and a slightly older 'Still' line (extra-stable, a bit more tested). Both are free and both work well. If you want maximum reliability and don't need the newest bells and whistles, choose the 'Still' version; if you like having the latest, choose 'Fresh.'

The exact version numbers change over time, so rather than chase a specific number, just pick 'Still' (the recommended-for-most choice) on the download page. The site labels them clearly. For nearly everyone, the stable 'Still' line is the comfortable pick.

✓ Unsure? Pick the stable 'Still' version

When the two options puzzle you, choose the 'Still' (stable) one. It's the recommended choice for most people — rock-solid and perfectly up to date for home use.

The one setting to change right away

By default, LibreOffice saves in its own format. One quick change makes it save in Word and Excel formats instead — so everyone can open your files.

Out of the box, Writer saves as .odt and Calc as .ods — fine, but not what Word-and-Excel users expect. You can set LibreOffice to save in Microsoft formats by default, so your letters come out as .docx and your spreadsheets as .xlsx automatically. Then sharing with anyone is seamless.

- ❑ In LibreOffice, open Tools, then Options (on a Mac, LibreOffice > Preferences).
- ❑ Click 'Load/Save,' then 'General.'
- ❑ Under 'Default file format,' set Text document to Word (.docx).
- ❑ Set Spreadsheet to Excel (.xlsx), and Presentation to PowerPoint (.pptx).
- ❑ Click OK — now your files save in Microsoft formats automatically.

★ I'll flip this setting for you

This one setting is the difference between seamless sharing and the occasional 'I can't open your file.' It's quick to set, and I'm glad to do it with you. Call (330) 200-8042.

Writer — your free word processor

Writer is LibreOffice's answer to Word, and for letters and documents it has everything you need.

Open Writer and you get a familiar blank page: type your letter, choose fonts and sizes, set margins, add pictures, print. Nearly everything you'd do in Word has a direct equivalent, usually in a similar spot. Our Word-for-letters guide's advice — type first, format after, mind the margins — applies here just the same.

It opens the .docx files people send and, with that save setting, hands yours back as .docx too. For the vast majority of home writing — letters, notes, simple documents — Writer does the job beautifully, free.

✓ If you know Word, you know Writer

The skills transfer almost entirely. Buttons may sit in slightly different places, but typing, formatting, and printing a letter work just as you'd expect.

Calc — your free spreadsheet

Calc is LibreOffice's spreadsheet, and it handles household budgets and lists exactly like Excel.

The same grid of cells, the same AutoSum button, the same formulas (=SUM, =AVERAGE), the same tables for sorting and filtering. Everything in our Excel budget and formulas guides works in Calc with only tiny differences in where a button lives. If you've learned Excel basics, you already know Calc.

It opens .xlsx files and saves them too, so a budget you build in Calc opens fine for an Excel user, and vice versa. For home spreadsheets — budgets, address lists, inventories — Calc is more than capable, at no cost.

✓ Your Excel knowledge carries over

AutoSum, formulas, tables, charts — Calc has them all, working the same way. Nothing you learned about home Excel goes to waste.

Where LibreOffice differs from Microsoft Office

It's honest to know the differences. For home use they're minor, but here they are.

- **The look:** menus and toolbars instead of Microsoft's ribbon — a bit old-fashioned, but everything's findable.
- **No online storage or AI:** no built-in cloud or Copilot; it's a straightforward installed program.
- **Heavily designed documents** can shift slightly when passed between LibreOffice and Microsoft Office — fine for letters, occasionally fiddly for complex layouts.
- **Some advanced business features** work differently or aren't present — rarely an issue for home use.

None of these matter much for letters, budgets, and everyday documents. They mainly affect heavy business users with elaborate files. For the typical home, LibreOffice does what you need and the differences fade into the background.

✓ Differences that rarely matter at home

The gaps are real but small for everyday use. Write letters, keep budgets, open what people send — and you'll seldom bump into a difference that matters.

Two kinds of readers, two sets of needs

How smoothly LibreOffice fits depends on what you do. Find yourself below.

If you do everyday home tasks

Letters, budgets, lists, opening files people send — the normal run of home computing. LibreOffice fits you beautifully.

- Writer and Calc cover all of it, free forever.
- Set it to save in Word/Excel formats and sharing is seamless.
- Your existing Word/Excel know-how transfers right over.
- You'll likely never miss the paid version.

If you handle complex or shared business files

Heavily formatted documents, elaborate spreadsheets, or files you pass back and forth constantly with Microsoft Office users.

- LibreOffice still opens and saves them, but complex layouts may shift a little.
- For constant back-and-forth with Office users, test a few files first.
- You can run LibreOffice alongside Office if you ever need both.
- For most, it's still fine — just be aware of the layout caveat.

★ Not sure if it'll fit your work?

Tell me what you do with Office and I'll tell you honestly whether LibreOffice covers it — it does for the great majority. Call (330) 200-8042.

Trading files with Word and Excel users

The worry folks have is whether LibreOffice cuts them off from everyone else. It doesn't — here's how to keep sharing smooth.

With the save setting pointed at Microsoft formats, your documents go out as .docx and .xlsx, which open perfectly for Word and Excel users — they won't even know you used LibreOffice. And LibreOffice opens the files they send you just fine. For everyday documents, the exchange is seamless in both directions.

For anything where exact looks are critical — a resume, a carefully formatted flyer — you can also save as a PDF, which looks identical everywhere regardless of what anyone uses to open it. Our Word-to-PDF guide covers that trick, and it works the same in LibreOffice.

✓ Save as .docx, or PDF for exact looks

For editable sharing, save in Word/Excel formats. For looks-exactly-right sharing, save a PDF. Between the two, you can send anything to anyone.

Keeping LibreOffice up to date

Like any program, LibreOffice gets occasional updates. Keeping current is easy and worthwhile.

Updates bring improvements and security fixes. LibreOffice will usually let you know when a new version is available, and you update by downloading the latest from libreoffice.org again and installing it over the old one — your files and settings carry through. It's the same safe, type-the-address-yourself routine as the first install.

You don't need to chase every update the day it appears, but installing them now and then keeps the program running well and safely. Always from the official site — never from a pop-up claiming you must 'update now.'

! Update only from the official site

Real LibreOffice updates come from libreoffice.org, which you visit yourself. A pop-up or email urging you to 'update LibreOffice now' through a link is a trick — ignore it and check the real site.

Common mistakes, and how to avoid them

A few snags trip up newcomers to LibreOffice. Here's how to skip them.

- **Downloading from the wrong site** — type libreoffice.org yourself; avoid ads and 'downloader' sites.
- **Leaving the save format on .odt** — then Word users struggle to open your files. Set it to .docx.
- **Expecting the exact Word look** — the menus differ; the capabilities don't.
- **Paying for it** — it's free. Any charge means you're on the wrong site.
- **Chasing a specific version number** — just pick the stable 'Still' line on the real site.

✓ Right site, right save format

Two habits prevent nearly every issue: download from the real libreoffice.org, and set it to save in Word/Excel formats. Do those and the rest is smooth.

Who LibreOffice is perfect for

LibreOffice isn't for everyone, but for a lot of folks it's an ideal fit. See if you're one.

- **Anyone avoiding a yearly fee:** it does most of what Office does, free forever.
- **Light-to-moderate home users:** letters, budgets, lists — all well covered.
- **Folks with an older computer:** it runs on modest machines without a subscription.
- **People who received an odd file:** it opens a huge range, including formats others can't.
- **Clubs and churches on a budget:** free office software for volunteers.

If you mainly write, budget, and open documents others send, LibreOffice likely covers you completely at no cost. It's one of the best free deals in all of computing, and it's been reliably free for many years.

★ A great fit for budget-minded folks

If a yearly Office fee grates on you and your needs are everyday ones, LibreOffice may be exactly right. I'm glad to set it up and show you around. Call (330) 200-8042.

Free doesn't mean second-rate

If 'free software' makes you wary, let me put that worry to rest.

LibreOffice has been made and maintained by a dedicated non-profit community for well over a decade, used by millions, including businesses and governments. It's not a flimsy knock-off — it's a serious, capable suite that happens to be free. For home use, you give up very little and save real money every year.

Switching feels like a leap, but it's a gentle one: your files still open, your skills still apply, and you can keep Microsoft Office too if you ever want both. Try LibreOffice for your letters and budgets, and you may find you never miss paying.

★ A confidence-building first tour

A short walk-through of Writer and Calc usually turns 'I'm not sure about this free thing' into 'oh, this is just like what I know.' Happy to give you that tour. Call or text (330) 200-8042.

Questions to ask yourself

A few answers tell you whether LibreOffice is your match.

Q: What do I actually do with Office?

Letters, budgets, lists, opening files? LibreOffice covers all of that free. Only heavy, complex business work gives it trouble.

Q: Do I trade files with Office users?

Yes? Set LibreOffice to save in Word/Excel formats and it's seamless. Use PDF when exact looks matter.

Q: Which version should I get?

If unsure, the stable 'Still' line from libreoffice.org. Both lines are free and fine.

Q: Am I mainly trying to avoid a fee?

Then LibreOffice is a strong fit — a capable suite at no cost, for as long as you use it.

✓ Everyday needs, free answer

If your computing is the everyday kind — write, budget, open what's sent — LibreOffice almost certainly fits, and it costs nothing to find out.

A few more worth answering

These come up as folks consider the switch.

Q: Can LibreOffice open my old Word and Excel files?

Yes — it opens .docx and .xlsx (and older .doc/.xls) files directly, plus many other formats. Your existing documents all open.

Q: Will people be able to open what I send?

Yes, if you set it to save in Word/Excel formats (one quick setting). For exact looks, send a PDF, which opens everywhere.

Q: Is it really free, with no catch?

Really free, no subscription, no ads, no catch — maintained by a non-profit. Just download it only from libreoffice.org.

Q: Can I keep Microsoft Office too?

Yes — LibreOffice can live alongside Office. Some folks keep both: Office for a few specific things, LibreOffice for everyday free use.

★ Thinking about trying it?

Call or text me at (330) 200-8042 and I'll help you install LibreOffice safely, set it up to share smoothly, and show you around Writer and Calc.

The whole thing, recapped

Here's getting started with LibreOffice as a short routine.

- ❑ Type libreoffice.org yourself and download it (pick 'Still' if unsure).
- ❑ Install it — no payment, no account needed.
- ❑ Set it to save in Word (.docx) and Excel (.xlsx) formats by default.
- ❑ Use Writer for letters, Calc for budgets and lists.
- ❑ Open the files people send; send yours as .docx, or PDF for exact looks.
- ❑ Update now and then, always from the official site.

Follow that and you'll have a complete, free office suite that opens almost anything and shares smoothly with the Microsoft world — without ever paying a fee.

✓ Free suite, one smart setting

The whole art of it: install from the real site, flip the save-format setting, and LibreOffice becomes a seamless, free stand-in for Office.

Common Questions

The questions I hear most about LibreOffice.

Q: What is LibreOffice?

A complete, free office suite — Writer (like Word), Calc (like Excel), and more — made by a non-profit. It opens and saves Microsoft formats and costs nothing, with no subscription.

Q: Where do I download it safely?

Only from libreoffice.org, which you type yourself. It's free, so avoid any site that charges or pushes a different 'downloader' — those bundle junk.

Q: Will it open and save Word and Excel files?

Yes. It opens .docx and .xlsx directly, and you can set it to save in those formats by default so Word and Excel users open your files with no trouble.

Q: How is it different from Microsoft Office?

It looks a bit more old-fashioned (menus, not the ribbon), has no built-in cloud or AI, and very complex layouts can shift when swapped with Office. For everyday home use, the differences are minor.

★ Want to go free with LibreOffice?

Setting folks up with free LibreOffice — installed safely, sharing smoothly — is a satisfying, money-saving visit. Call or text me at (330) 200-8042.

The bottom line

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

LibreOffice is a complete, genuinely free office suite that opens and saves Word and Excel files, covering letters, budgets, and most home tasks at no cost. Download it only from libreoffice.org, pick the stable 'Still' version if unsure, and flip one setting so it saves in Microsoft formats.

It looks a little different and skips the cloud and AI extras, but for everyday home use those gaps hardly register. If you'd rather not pay a yearly Office fee, LibreOffice is one of the best free deals in computing — capable, trustworthy, and here to stay.

✓ Capable, free, and yours to keep

No subscription, no expiry, no catch — just a solid office suite that does what most people need. For the budget-minded, it's hard to beat.

One more thought on going free

A closing note on what choosing LibreOffice really means.

Moving to LibreOffice isn't settling for less — it's deciding that your everyday writing and budgeting don't need to come with a yearly bill. For a lot of people, especially on a fixed income, that's a smart, freeing choice that puts a little money back in your pocket every year with almost no downside.

And you lose nothing by trying it: it's free, it installs alongside anything you already have, and your files stay compatible. Give Writer and Calc a fair run on your real letters and budgets, and let the results decide. Many folks are pleasantly surprised.

★ Here to help you try it

Whether you switch fully or just keep LibreOffice handy, call or text me at (330) 200-8042. I'll set it up safely and make sure it fits the way you work.

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 getting started with free LibreOffice 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

What's in LibreOffice

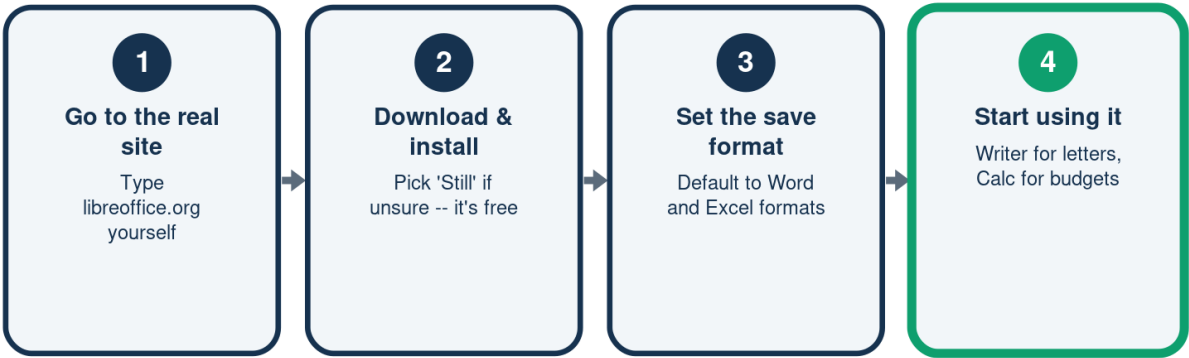
The free programs you get

	Program	Like
Writer	Microsoft Word	Letters, documents
Calc	Microsoft Excel	Budgets, lists
Impress	PowerPoint	Slideshows
All of it	Free forever	No subscription

A complete office suite -- and it opens the files others send you.

Getting Started Safely

Four calm steps



Install from the real site; flip the save setting; you're ready.

LibreOffice vs. Microsoft Office

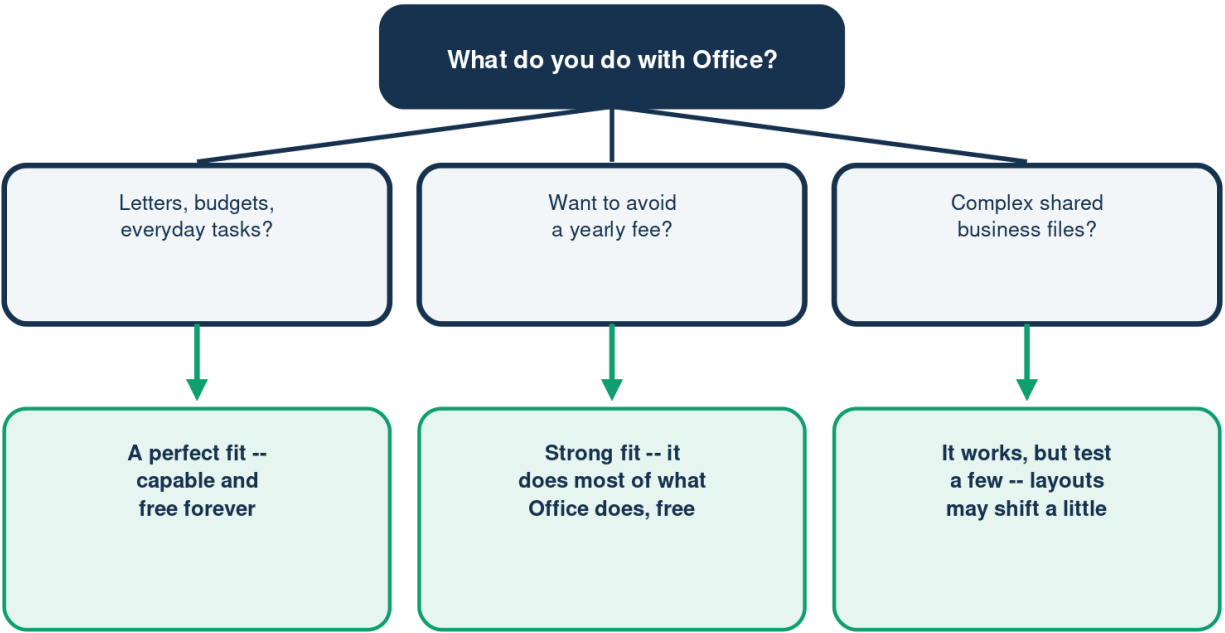
Honest differences

	LibreOffice	Microsoft Office
Cost	Free forever	Paid
Look	Menus/toolbars	The ribbon
Cloud & AI	None built in	Storage, Copilot
Opens Word/Excel	Yes	Yes

For everyday home use, the differences rarely matter.

Is LibreOffice Right for You?

A few honest questions



Download only from libreoffice.org -- never a pop-up or ad.

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



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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.

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