BILL'S HOME TECH

Home & Small Business Tech Solutions

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Live Captions — Subtitles on Any Call or Video

Read the words as they are spoken, on phone calls, video chats, and anything that plays

Plain-English tech help from:
Bill's Home Tech
Portage County, Ohio

Tech Made Simple. Service Made Personal.

Bill Davis — Bill's Home Tech
(330) 200-8042 · bill@billshometech.com · Atwater, Ohio

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SUMMARY

The 60-Second Version

Live Captions turn spoken words into text on your screen in real time, for phone calls, video chats, and anything that plays. Turn it on under Settings, Accessibility (Live Captions on iPhone, iPad, and Mac; Live Caption on Android from the volume button; on Windows press Windows, Ctrl and L). Then style the captions large, bold, and white-on-black under Subtitles & Captioning so they are easy to read.

The words are made by the device on the spot, so confirm any critical detail like a dose or a date. For professionally made shows, the built-in subtitles are more accurate than live captions.

1 The Short Version

Live Captions is a feature that turns speech into written words on your screen, in real time, for almost anything — a phone call, a video chat with the grandchildren, a show, a voice message. The words scroll by in a little box as they are said, so you can read what you might not catch by ear.

It is built into recent iPhones, iPads, Macs, Windows computers, and Android phones. Once you switch it on and learn the one button that starts it, it is there whenever you need it — and it costs nothing.

- Live Captions writes out spoken words on your screen as they are said.
- It works on phone calls, video calls, videos, and most anything that plays sound.
- It is free and built in — no extra app, no subscription.
- The words are generated by the device automatically, so they are usually good but not perfect.

TIP

Live Captions works entirely on the device itself, which means it keeps up live and does not send your conversations off anywhere. That is good for both speed and privacy — your phone call stays your phone call.

2 Captions, Subtitles, Live Captions — What's the Difference

The words get used loosely, so here is the plain version. Subtitles and closed captions are pre-written for shows and movies by the people who made them — accurate and polished, but only available where someone prepared them in advance. Live Captions are different: your own device listens and writes the words itself, on the fly, for anything at all, even a live phone call that no one prepared captions for.

So you might use ready-made subtitles for a film on Netflix, and Live Captions for a phone call from your doctor's office. This guide is mostly about the second kind — the captions your device makes for you, anywhere — but we cover the ready-made ones too.

GOOD TO KNOW

Because Live Captions are generated on the spot, they occasionally mishear a word — especially names, medical terms, or heavy accents. They are a tremendous help for catching the gist and most of the detail, not a flawless transcript, so treat them as a strong assist rather than a legal record.

3 Turn On Live Captions on iPhone and iPad

On an iPhone or iPad, Live Captions lives in the Accessibility settings and, once enabled, floats a caption box on top of whatever you are doing, which you can move and resize to suit you.

1. Open Settings, tap Accessibility.
2. Scroll to the Hearing section and tap Live Captions.
3. Turn on Live Captions.
4. A small caption box appears; drag it anywhere on the screen and tap it to make it bigger or smaller.
5. To caption a phone call specifically, there is a Live Captions option within the call screen as well.

> **TIP**
> On newer iPhones you can turn on Live Captions right inside a phone call, so the words appear as the other person talks — a godsend for an important call where you cannot afford to miss a detail like an appointment time or a dose.

4 Turn On Live Captions on Android

Google phones and most newer Android phones have an excellent version called Live Caption that can even be turned on with a tap of the volume button, so it is always a moment away.

1. Open Settings, tap Accessibility.
2. Tap Live Caption (sometimes under a Hearing or Caption preferences section).
3. Turn it on.
4. Now, whenever something plays sound, press a volume button and tap the Live Caption icon that appears below the volume slider.

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
> On many Android phones Live Caption even works for phone calls as a related feature — look for “Live Caption during calls” or a captions button on the call screen. It is one of Android's quiet gems and asks nothing of the person on the other end.

5 Live Captions on a Mac

A Mac can caption spoken audio too, which is handy for video calls and videos watched on the computer, and the bigger screen makes the words comfortable to read.

1. Open System Settings, click Accessibility.
2. Click Live Captions under the Hearing section.
3. Turn on Live Captions; a caption window appears that you can move and resize.
4. Keep it on during video calls so the words appear as people speak.

TIP

On a Mac the caption window stays on top of your other windows, so you can read along during a video call without the box getting hidden behind anything. Park it along the bottom of the screen where your eyes naturally rest.

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6 Live Captions on a Windows Computer

Recent versions of Windows include Live Captions as well, captioning any sound playing on the computer — a video, a call, a podcast — in a bar across the top of the screen.

1. Open Settings, click Accessibility, then Captions.
2. Turn on Live captions.
3. Or simply hold the Windows key and Ctrl and press L to toggle captions on and off.
4. The first time, Windows may download a small speech file; let it finish.

GOOD TO KNOW

The Windows keyboard shortcut — Windows key, Ctrl, and L together — is worth remembering, because it flips captions on the instant a video starts talking too fast to follow. One shortcut, always ready.

7 Make the Captions Big and Easy to Read

Tiny captions help no one, so take a minute to make them large, bold, and high-contrast. The styling controls change the look of both ready-made subtitles and, on most devices, the live ones too.

- iPhone/iPad: Settings, Accessibility, Subtitles & Captioning, Style — choose Large Text or create a custom style.
- Android: Settings, Accessibility, Caption preferences — set the text size and style.
- Windows: Settings, Accessibility, Captions — choose a larger caption style.
- Pick white letters on a solid black band — it is the easiest combination to read over a moving picture.

GOOD TO KNOW

A solid dark background behind the letters matters as much as the size. Captions that float as plain text over a bright scene can simply vanish; a black band behind them keeps every word readable no matter what is on screen.

8 Captioning a Phone Call

One of the most valuable uses is an ordinary phone call — the pharmacy, the bank, a family member on a bad line. Reading along as they speak means you never have to say “pardon?” three times or worry you missed the appointment time.

1. Turn on Live Captions in your Accessibility settings first (see the earlier chapters).
2. Place or answer the call as normal.

3. Look for the Live Captions option on the call screen, or make sure the floating caption box is on.
4. Read along; you can still talk normally while the words appear underneath.

> **WATCH OUT**
> Caption accuracy on a crackly or speakerphone call is lower than on a clear one. If a detail truly matters — a dose, a date, an amount of money — read it back to the person to confirm, just as you would with any phone call you want to get right.

9 Captioning Video Calls With Family

Video calls — FaceTime, a video app, a chat with the grandchildren — are a lovely place to use captions, because you get both the face and the words. It takes the strain out of a call where the sound is less than perfect or the little ones are talking fast.

- Turn Live Captions on before the call starts so you are not fumbling once it connects.
- Position the caption box where it does not cover the person's face.
- If the call is on an app on your phone, the floating captions still work right over it.
- On a Mac or iPad the bigger screen makes reading along especially comfortable.

> **TIP**
> Encourage the person on the other end to speak a little slower and face their camera and microphone. Clear speech into a good microphone produces far better captions than someone talking across the room with the television on.

10 Captions in Video Apps Like YouTube

Many video apps have their own caption button that works even when it is not your device doing the listening, and it is often more accurate because the app prepared the words. YouTube is a good example — most videos have a captions button.

1. Start the video and tap the screen to show the controls.
2. Look for a CC or speech-bubble icon, usually near the bottom or in a settings cog.
3. Tap it to turn captions on; tap again to turn them off.
4. In the settings cog you can often choose the size and the language.

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
>
> If a video has no captions button, your device's own Live Captions will still caption it, because they listen to whatever is playing. So you are covered either way — the app's captions when they exist, your device's when they do not.

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11 Ready-Made Subtitles for Shows and Movies

For anything professionally made — Netflix, the news, a DVD — you will get the most accurate words from the built-in subtitles the makers provide, rather than from live captions. Turning them on is usually a single button and they read perfectly.

1. While a show is playing, look for a speech-bubble or CC icon, often near the volume or in the playback menu.
2. Tap it and choose English (or your preferred language).
3. If you cannot find it in the app, check the app's own settings for Subtitles or Captions.
4. On a TV, the remote may have a dedicated subtitles or CC button you can press anytime.

GOOD TO KNOW

Most people who hear perfectly well now leave subtitles on for TV all the time, because modern shows mix the dialogue so quietly under the music and effects. You are in very good company turning them on — it is one of the most popular TV settings there is.

12 Captions on Your Television

Your TV and streaming boxes have their own caption controls, separate from your phone, and it is worth turning them on and making them big so every show is readable from the couch.

- On the TV itself, look in Settings for Accessibility or Captions, turn them on, and raise the text size.
- On a Roku, Fire TV, or Apple TV, the caption and caption-style settings live in that box's Accessibility menu.
- Choose a large, bold caption style with a solid background, just as on the phone.
- A dedicated guide, “Make Captions Appear on Live TV,” goes deeper on cable and antenna channels.

WATCH OUT

Set the caption style once in the TV's or the streaming box's settings and every app and channel uses it. You do not have to style the captions over and over for each service.

13 When Captions Lag or Look Wrong

Sometimes the captions fall behind, show nonsense, or do not appear at all. A few simple checks clear up nearly all of it, and none of it means anything is broken.

- Make sure your device's software is up to date — these features improve with each update.

- A quieter room and clearer audio always produce better captions.
- If captions freeze, turn Live Captions off and on again, or restart the device.
- The very first time you use them, the device may need a minute (and an internet connection) to download the language file.

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
>
> A short lag between the words being spoken and appearing on screen is completely normal — the device listens to a whole phrase before it can print it accurately. A second or two behind is expected, not a fault, and you quickly stop noticing it.

14 Make Captions a Comfortable Habit

Captions are at their best when they are just always there for the things you find hard, rather than something you scramble to turn on in the moment. A little setup makes them effortless.

- Add the captions button to your Control Center (iPhone) or learn the one shortcut (Windows) so it is one tap.
- Leave TV subtitles on permanently — most people never turn them off again.
- Style them large and bold once, everywhere, so they are always readable.
- Tell the family you use captions, so they know to speak clearly on video calls.

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
>
> There is no shame whatsoever in using captions. Hearing changes for almost everyone with time, and captions are simply reading glasses for your ears — a sensible aid, used by millions, that makes life easier.

15 When to Call Bill

Turning Live Captions on is usually quick, but getting it set up the way you will actually use it — big readable text, the one-tap way to start it on a call, captions on the devices you use most — is the kind of thing that sticks far better when someone sets it up with you and watches you use it once.

I will turn Live Captions on across your phone, tablet, and computer, style the text large and clear, show you the single button that starts it on a phone call, and make sure your TV's subtitles are on and legible too. You will leave able to call up captions whenever you want them, on whatever you are using.

- You want captions set up and styled large on all your devices at once.
- Live Captions is not appearing — often a software update is needed first.
- You want the one-tap way to caption an important phone call.
- You would like TV subtitles turned on and made big and clear as well.

CHEAT SHEET

Everyday Cheat Sheet

Keep this handy. Turn Live Captions on once, then make the text big and learn the start button.

I want to…	Do this…
Turn on (iPhone)	Settings Accessibility Live Captions on
Turn on (Android)	Settings Accessibility Live Caption on, then the volume-button icon
Turn on (Windows)	Hold Windows + Ctrl + L, or Settings Accessibility Captions
Caption a phone call	Turn on Live Captions, then use the Live Captions option on the call screen
Make captions big	Accessibility Subtitles & Captioning Style Large, white-on-black
Subtitles on a show	Tap the speech-bubble / CC icon and choose English
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

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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.

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