BILL'S HOME TECH

Home & Small Business Tech Solutions

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Move Your Files & Photos to a New Computer

Bring everything across — safely, with nothing left behind

Plain-English Windows help from:
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Tech Made Simple. Service Made Personal.

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SUMMARY

The 60-Second Version

Moving to a new computer is really just copying — your originals stay safe on the old machine the whole time. The three reliable ways are an external drive you carry across, a cloud service that downloads your files when you sign in on the new PC, or a direct connection for large amounts. Make a quick list first so nothing is forgotten: photos, documents, email, browser bookmarks and passwords, and the programs to re-install.

Programs don't copy — you install them fresh and sign back in. Pay special attention to photos, which are the one truly irreplaceable thing, and keep the old computer for a couple of weeks until you're sure everything made it across.

1 The Short Version

You have a new computer, and somewhere on the old one are your photos, your documents, your email, and years of little things you do not want to lose. Moving them across sounds daunting, but it is really just copying — and once you know the handful of reliable ways to do it, it is calm and even satisfying. Nothing has to be left behind.

This guide gives you several ways to move everything, from the simplest (a USB drive you carry across) to the most hands-off (the cloud doing it for you), plus a clear checklist of exactly what to bring so you do not forget anything. Keep the old computer until you are sure the new one has it all.

- Moving files is really just copying — the originals stay safe on the old computer.
- The three main ways: an external drive, a cloud service, or a direct connection.
- A checklist later ensures you don't forget photos, email, bookmarks, or passwords.
- Keep the old computer until the new one is proven to have everything.

WATCH OUT

The golden rule: don't erase or get rid of the old computer until you've used the new one for a couple of weeks and confirmed everything made it across. There is no rush, and the old machine is your safety net.

2 First, Make a List of What to Bring

Before copying anything, it helps to know what "everything" actually means, because it is more than just the obvious documents. Taking a minute to list it means nothing gets quietly left behind on the old machine.

- Photos and videos (often the most irreplaceable things of all).
- Documents — letters, spreadsheets, PDFs, scanned paperwork.
- Your email, contacts, and calendar, if they're not already online.
- Web browser bookmarks (your saved favorite sites) and saved passwords.
- Downloads and anything saved to the Desktop.
- Any specific programs you'll need to re-install (these don't copy across — you re-install them fresh).

GOOD TO KNOW

Programs are the one thing that does not simply copy over — you re-install them on the new computer and sign back in. Your files open in them just the same, so make a short list of the programs you actually use while you're thinking about it.

3 Way 1: The USB Drive or External Hard Drive

The most straightforward method is to copy your files onto a portable drive, carry it to the new computer, and copy them off. It needs no internet, no accounts, and no technical setup — just a drive big enough to hold your files. For lots of photos, an external hard drive is better than a small USB stick.

1. Plug the drive into the OLD computer.

2. Open your personal folders and copy Documents, Pictures, Videos, Downloads, and Desktop onto the drive.
3. Wait for the copying to fully finish (photos especially can take a while).
4. Safely remove the drive, then plug it into the NEW computer.
5. Copy everything from the drive into the matching folders on the new computer.

> **TIP**
> Give the drive a quick look on the new computer before celebrating — open a few photos and a document to be sure they really came across and open properly. Only then is the move truly done.

4 Way 2: Let the Cloud Do It

If your files already live in a cloud service — OneDrive on Windows, or Google Drive, Dropbox, or iCloud — moving to a new computer is almost magical: you simply sign in on the new machine with the same account, and your files flow down automatically. There is nothing to carry and nothing to forget.

1. On the OLD computer, make sure your files have finished uploading to the cloud service (look for a 'synced' or green checkmark).
2. On the NEW computer, install or open the same cloud service and sign in with the same account.
3. Wait for your files to download — they appear in the matching folders over a few minutes to a few hours depending on how many there are.
4. Open a few to confirm they're all there and working.

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
> Windows often puts your Documents, Pictures, and Desktop into OneDrive automatically if you've signed in with a Microsoft account. If so, half this job may already be done — signing into the same account on the new PC brings them right along.

5 Way 3: A Direct Connection

For a large amount of data, you can connect the two computers and move files directly, either over your home Wi-Fi or with a special cable. This is faster for big photo libraries and avoids needing a drive big enough to hold everything at once, but it is a little more involved to set up.

- Over your home network: both computers on the same Wi-Fi can share a folder so one sees the other.
- A dedicated 'transfer cable' plugs both computers together and comes with simple software to copy across.
- This route is best when there is a lot to move and you'd rather not buy or borrow a big external drive.

WATCH OUT

The direct-connection methods are the most technical of the three, with a few settings that have to line up. If you have a lot to move and want it done quickly and cleanly, this is a common thing I set up on a visit — often the fastest way to shift a big photo collection.

6 Don't Forget Your Photos

Photos deserve their own moment, because they are usually the most precious and the most scattered. They may be in a Pictures folder, inside a phone-backup app, in an email, or already in a cloud service — and it is worth checking each place so none are left behind.

1. Look in the Pictures folder first, and copy the whole thing.
2. Check whether your phone backs photos up to Google Photos or iCloud — if so, they're already safe online and reach the new computer through that account.
3. Look for any photo program (like the old Windows Photos library) and find where it stored the actual image files.

4. On the new computer, open a handful of photos to confirm they transferred and open correctly.

> **WATCH OUT**
> If your photos exist only on the old computer and nowhere else, treat this as the top priority of the whole move. Copy them first, confirm they opened on the new machine, and ideally put a second copy in the cloud — photos are the one thing you truly can't replace.

> 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.

7 Bring Your Bookmarks and Passwords

Two small things are easy to forget and annoying to lose: your web browser's bookmarks (the favorite sites you've saved) and your saved passwords. The good news is that modern browsers can carry both across for you automatically if you sign in.

1. On the old computer, note which browser you use (Chrome, Edge, or Firefox) and whether you're signed into it.
2. If you're signed in, simply sign into the same browser account on the new computer — bookmarks and saved passwords sync across.
3. If you're not signed in, each browser has an 'export bookmarks' option that saves them to a file you can carry over and 'import.'
4. Test a saved password on the new computer by visiting a site you normally sign into automatically.

TIP

Signing into your browser (with a Google, Microsoft, or Firefox account) is the easiest way to keep bookmarks and passwords across any computer change. If you'd rather not rely on saved passwords, a move is also a natural moment to set up a proper password manager — something I'm happy to help with.

8 Set Up Your Email and Contacts

Whether your email moves easily depends on how you read it. If you use webmail — Gmail, Outlook.com, Yahoo, or your provider's website — there is nothing to move at all; you just sign in on the new computer and it is all there. If you use a mail program like Outlook, a little more setup is involved.

- Webmail (read in a browser): nothing to transfer — sign in on the new PC and your email, contacts, and calendar are all present.
- A mail program (like Microsoft Outlook): you re-add your email account in the program on the new PC, and it re-downloads your mail.
- Contacts usually travel with the email account, so signing in brings them along.

GOOD TO KNOW

Most people today read email in a browser without realizing it, which makes this the easiest part of the whole move. If you use a mail program and aren't sure how it's set up, that's worth a hand so no old messages get stranded.

9 Re-Install Your Programs

Programs are the one category that does not copy across — you install them fresh on the new computer and sign back in. This is actually healthy: you end up with clean, current versions and only the programs you really use, rather than years of accumulated clutter.

1. Go through the short list of programs you made earlier.

2. For each, download it from the maker's own official website (or the Microsoft Store), not a random search result.
3. Install it, then sign in with the same account you used before if it has one.
4. Open one of your moved files in it to confirm everything lines up.

> **WATCH OUT**
>
> Download programs only from the maker's official site or the Microsoft Store. Searching a program's name and clicking the first result can land you on a copycat site bundling junk. If you're unsure which is the real one, that's a good moment to ask me before installing.

10 Check Everything, Then Keep the Old PC a While

Before you consider the move finished, spend a little time actually using the new computer as you normally would. Open your photos, write a document, check email, visit your usual sites. This is how you catch anything that quietly didn't make the trip — while the old computer is still around to fetch it from.

- Open several photos and documents to be sure they transferred and work.
- Sign into your email, your bank, and a few favorite sites.
- Confirm your printer and any devices connect to the new computer.
- Only after a couple of weeks of real use, consider wiping or passing on the old machine.

> **WATCH OUT**
>
> If you're going to give away, sell, or recycle the old computer, it must be securely wiped first so none of your personal information goes with it. That's an important step people often skip — I'm glad to do it properly so your old machine leaves the house with nothing personal left on it.

11 The Complete 'Don't Forget' Checklist

Here is everything in one place, so you can tick each item off and be confident nothing was left on the old machine. Keep it beside you as you work through the move.

Item	Where it usually lives	Done?
Photos & videos	Pictures folder, phone backup, cloud	
Documents	Documents folder	
Desktop items	The desktop itself	
Downloads	Downloads folder	
Email & contacts	Webmail (just sign in) or mail program	
Bookmarks & passwords	Your web browser	
Programs to re-install	Your short list	
Printer & devices	Set up on the new PC	

TIP

Print this page or copy it onto paper and physically tick each box as you confirm it on the new computer. That simple act is the difference between 'I think I got everything' and knowing you did.

12 Common Mix-Ups to Avoid

A few predictable slip-ups catch people during a move. Knowing them in advance saves a lot of frustration.

- Assuming programs copy across — they don't; you re-install them (your files still open fine).
- Forgetting photos that live only inside a phone-backup app rather than the Pictures folder.
- Erasing or giving away the old computer before confirming everything made it over.
- Downloading a program from a copycat site instead of the maker's official one.
- Handing on the old PC without securely wiping your personal information off it first.

WATCH OUT

The two mistakes that really hurt are getting rid of the old computer too soon, and passing it on without wiping it. Keep the old machine for a couple of weeks as your safety net, and make sure it's securely erased before it ever leaves your hands.

13 When to Call Bill

Moving to a new computer is really a series of small, safe copying jobs, and this guide lays them all out. But doing it thoroughly — so that genuinely nothing is left behind, your photos are doubly safe, your email and programs are set up cleanly, and the old machine is wiped properly before it leaves — is exactly the kind of start-to-finish job I do all the time.

I come to you here in Portage County, move everything across while you watch, re-install the programs you actually use, set up your email and printer on the new machine, and confirm together that it all works before we retire the old computer. You end up on a tidy, fast new PC with none of the worry of leaving something precious behind.

- You have a lot of photos and want them moved and double-protected.
- You're not sure where all your files, email, or passwords live.
- You'd like the new computer set up cleanly and the old one wiped safely.
- You simply want the whole move handled, with nothing left behind.

CHEAT SHEET

Everyday Cheat Sheet

Keep this handy. Moving is just copying — keep the old PC until the new one is proven.

I want to…	Do this…
Move files simply	Copy Documents, Pictures, Videos, Downloads, Desktop to an external drive, then onto the new PC
Let the cloud do it	Sign into the same cloud account (OneDrive/Google Drive/iCloud) on the new PC
Move a lot, fast	Connect the two computers directly over Wi-Fi or with a transfer cable
Keep bookmarks & passwords	Sign into the same browser account (Chrome/Edge/Firefox) on the new PC
Handle email	Webmail: just sign in. Mail program: re-add your account
Get programs back	Re-install from each maker's official site; files open the same
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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