BILL'S HOME TECH

Home & Small Business Tech Solutions

AN EXTENDED GUIDE · NO. 2229

Updated November 2026

Point Your Camera at Text to Copy It (Live Text / Google Lens)

Turn any printed words into text you can copy, call, or translate

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

Book a visit · billshometech.com/book

What's Inside

Everything in this guide, with page numbers. Skip to whichever chapter answers your question right now.

The 60-Second Version 3
The Short Version 3
What This Actually Does 4
On iPhone: Copy Text From a Photo 4
On iPhone: Grab Text Through the Camera 4
On Android: Use Google Lens 5
Call a Number You See 6
Translate a Foreign Menu or Sign 6
Copy a Recipe, Receipt, or Address 7
When the Phone Misreads 7
Keep Your Hands Free: Have It Read Aloud 8
A Note on Privacy 8
Everyday Ideas to Try 9
Make Sure It's Switched On 9
Handwriting, Fancy Fonts, and Hard Cases 10
When to Call Bill 11
Everyday Cheat Sheet 12
A Note From Bill 13
Your Visit — and My Promise 14

SUMMARY

The 60-Second Version

Your phone's camera can read printed words and turn them into text you can use. On iPhone it is Live Text: open a photo or the camera, press and hold the words, and tap Copy. On Android it is Google Lens: open it from the Camera or Google app, point at the text, and choose Copy, Listen, or Translate.

Use it to copy a long Wi-Fi password off a router, dial a number off a flyer, grab a recipe, or translate a foreign menu into English. Add light and hold steady for best results, and always double-check copied passwords and account numbers before using them.

1 The Short Version

Your phone's camera can recognize printed or handwritten words and hand them to you as text you can use. That means no more retyping a long Wi-Fi password off the back of a router, no more squinting at a phone number on a flyer, and no more being stuck with a menu in a language you do not read. The feature is free, already on your phone, and takes seconds once you know the gesture.

- iPhone calls it Live Text; Android calls it Google Lens — same idea, slightly different buttons.
- Point, tap the words, and choose Copy, Call, or Translate.
- It works on live camera and on photos you have already taken.
- Nothing is sent anywhere permanent — you are just grabbing words off a page.

> **TIP**
>
> The most popular everyday use is copying a long password or serial number you would otherwise have to type by hand. Point, copy, paste — and no typos.

2 What This Actually Does

For years, a photo of a page was just a picture — you could look at the words but not use them. Now the phone can "see" the letters and turn them back into real, selectable text, exactly as if you had typed them. That is the whole trick, and it opens up a surprising number of small daily wins.

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
> Because the phone is reading the letters, the words need to be reasonably clear and well-lit. Crisp printed text works best; faint, fancy, or badly blurred writing is harder. If it misreads something, steady the phone, add light, and try again.

3 On iPhone: Copy Text From a Photo

The easiest place to start on an iPhone is a photo you already have — say, a picture of a recipe card or a receipt.

1. Open the Photos app and tap a photo that has writing in it.
2. Press and hold your finger on the words until they highlight.
3. Drag the blue handles to select exactly the part you want, or tap Select All.
4. Tap Copy, then go to Messages, Notes, or Mail, press and hold, and tap Paste.

> **TIP**
> If pressing and holding does nothing, look for a small square-with-lines icon in the corner of the photo — tapping it switches on Live Text for that image.

4 On iPhone: Grab Text Through the Camera

You do not even need to take the photo first — you can pull words straight off the page live.

1. Open the Camera app and point it at the text, holding steady.
2. Look for the Live Text icon (a square with lines) in the bottom corner and tap it.
3. The words freeze and highlight; press and hold to select them.
4. Tap Copy, Look Up, or Translate.

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
>
> Live Text is built into more than the camera. In Mail, Messages, and Safari you can often press and hold on text inside a photo someone sent you and copy it the same way.

5 On Android: Use Google Lens

On Android, the same magic lives in Google Lens, which you can reach from the Camera, the Google app, or Google Photos.

1. Open the Google app and tap the small camera (Lens) icon in the search bar — or open your Camera and look for a Lens button.
2. Point it at the text and let it focus.
3. Tap the text on screen; it highlights the words it found.
4. Choose Copy text, Listen, Search, or Translate.

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
>
> To pull text from a picture you already took, open it in Google Photos and tap the Lens icon at the bottom. It finds the words in the photo instantly.

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.

6 Call a Number You See

A phone number printed on a flyer, a business card, or a van door is a tap away from dialing — no memorizing, no retyping.

1. Point the camera (Live Text or Lens) at the phone number.
2. Tap the number when it highlights.
3. Choose Call, or Add to Contacts to save it.

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
>
> The same works for web addresses and email addresses in a photo — tap the link to open it, or the email to start a message. It turns any printed page into something you can act on.

7 Translate a Foreign Menu or Sign

Point your camera at words in another language and the phone can show them in English, right over the original, so a restaurant menu or a product label suddenly makes sense.

1. On iPhone, select the text with Live Text and tap Translate; on Android, open Lens and tap the Translate tab.
2. Choose the language to translate into (English) if asked.
3. Hold the camera over the foreign words and read the English that appears.

> **TIP**
>
> This is wonderful for cooking from an imported package, reading a visitor's medication box, or traveling. It does not need to be perfect to be useful — it gives you the gist instantly.

8 Copy a Recipe, Receipt, or Address

Everyday paper is full of words you would rather not retype. Live Text and Lens make quick work of them.

- Copy a recipe from a cookbook into your Notes so you can take just the phone to the kitchen.
- Grab a mailing address off an envelope and paste it into a map or a label.
- Pull the total and date off a receipt into a note for your records.
- Copy the long Wi-Fi password from a router sticker instead of squinting at tiny print.

GOOD TO KNOW

For small, dense print like a router sticker, get close and tap to focus first. If it struggles, take a clear photo, then copy from the photo — you can zoom in and the text stays sharp.

9 When the Phone Misreads

Because the phone is reading real-world letters, it occasionally gets a character wrong — a capital O for a zero, or an l for a 1 — especially in faint or fancy type. This is normal and easy to catch.

- Always glance over copied numbers like passwords and account numbers before using them.
- Add light and hold the phone steady — most mistakes come from shadow or blur.
- For tricky text, take a clear, close photo and copy from that instead of the live view.

WATCH OUT

Be a little careful copying a password you then paste into a login — one wrong character and it will not work. If a copied password keeps failing, the camera may have misread one letter; retype it slowly by eye to be sure.

10 Keep Your Hands Free: Have It Read Aloud

Both phones can also read the words they find out loud, which pairs nicely with copying — handy for a long label or a block of small print you would rather hear than read.

1. iPhone: select the text, then tap the arrow and choose Speak (if you have turned on Speak Selection in Accessibility).
2. Android: in Google Lens, tap the text and choose Listen.
3. Adjust the speed with the controls that appear if it is too fast.

> **TIP**
>
> If you like having things read to you, we have a whole separate guide on making your phone read articles and emails out loud — ask me and I will set it up with you.

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.

11 A Note on Privacy

It is natural to wonder whether pointing your camera at a document sends it somewhere. For simple copying, the phone is just reading the letters in front of it, like a smart pair of eyes. Translation and web searches do send the words to the maker's service to look them up, the same way any search does.

GOOD TO KNOW

You are in control: you only copy or translate when you tap to do so. Nothing is captured in the background. Still, treat a document the way you would a photo of it — be thoughtful about copying something sensitive like a Social Security card, and never paste such a number into a search box.

12 Everyday Ideas to Try

Once the gesture becomes second nature, you will find uses everywhere. Here are a few to get you started.

- Save the model and serial number off the back of an appliance before calling for service.
- Copy an event's date, time, and address off a paper invitation into your calendar.
- Turn a handwritten shopping list into a text to send to whoever is heading to the store.
- Read a tiny ingredient list on a package by copying it and enlarging the text.

TIP

Pair this with Back Tap on iPhone or a home-screen shortcut on Android so the camera or Lens is one quick gesture away whenever you spot something worth grabbing.

13 Make Sure It's Switched On

On almost every recent phone, this feature is on out of the box, so you can usually just start using it. But if pressing and holding on text does nothing, a quick check in Settings confirms it is enabled.

1. iPhone: open Settings, then General, then Language & Region, and make sure Live Text is turned on.

2. Android: make sure you have the Google app installed and signed in — Lens lives inside it and in Google Photos.
3. Try again on a clear, well-lit page of printed text to confirm it is working.

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
>
> Very old phones may not have this feature at all — it arrived on iPhones a few years ago and on most Android phones around the same time. If yours predates that, the camera simply will not offer it, and that is nothing you did wrong.

14 Handwriting, Fancy Fonts, and Hard Cases

The camera reads clean printed text most reliably. Handwriting, decorative fonts, shiny labels, and curved surfaces like a pill bottle are harder, though often still workable with a little care.

- For handwriting, neat printing reads far better than cursive — but it is worth a try.
- For a shiny or curved label, tilt it to kill the glare and get the words flat to the camera.
- For a pill bottle, rotate it slowly and capture the part you need rather than the whole curve.
- For very small print, take a close, steady photo and copy from that so you can zoom in.

> **WATCH OUT**
>
> With medicine labels especially, never rely on a copy you have not read carefully — a misread dose or name matters. Use the camera to enlarge and copy, but confirm the important details with your own eyes, and ask your pharmacist if anything is unclear.

15 When to Call Bill

None of this is a test, and there is no prize for struggling. Most of these tricks take a minute once you know where to look, and this guide gets you there. But if a setting hides somewhere new on your version, or you would simply rather have someone set it up with you and show you once, that is exactly the kind of visit I make.

I come to you here in Portage County, sit down beside you, and set these up on your own phone or tablet so they work the way you want. I will show you each one slowly, write down the few steps that matter, and make sure you can do it yourself afterward. No rush, no jargon, and no question is too small.

- You cannot find the Live Text or Lens button on your particular phone.
- The camera keeps misreading and you want help getting clean, reliable results.
- You would like a short lesson using your own recipes, labels, and mail so it sticks.
- You would simply rather have it set up correctly the first time, with someone showing you how.

CHEAT SHEET

Everyday Cheat Sheet

Keep this handy. Point, tap the words, choose what to do.

I want to...	Do this...
Copy text (iPhone)	Open the photo press and hold the words Copy
Copy text (Android)	Open Google Lens point at the text Copy text
Call a printed number	Point the camera at it tap the number Call
Translate a menu	iPhone: select Translate. Android: Lens Translate tab
Grab a Wi-Fi password	Point at the router sticker select Copy Paste
Hear it read aloud	iPhone: Speak. Android: Lens Listen
If it misreads	Add light, hold steady, or copy from a clear photo
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

Call or text (330) 200-8042 · bill@billshometech.com

This free guide is for general information only — not professional advice, and no substitute for your device's own manual. Any prices or outside products mentioned can change; please confirm current details before you buy. Please use your own good judgment and follow it at your own risk — for anything involving electricity, gas, water, or heights, stop and call a licensed professional. Bill's Home Tech and Bill Davis can't be responsible for any damage, data loss, or injury that results. © 2026 Bill's Home Tech, LLC.