BILL'S HOME TECH

Home & Small Business Tech Solutions

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The Printer Says "Driver Unavailable"

What that scary message really means — and the safe, in-order fixes that clear it

Plain-English printer help from:

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SUMMARY

The 60-Second Version

"Driver unavailable" means the software your computer uses to talk to the printer needs refreshing — not that the printer is broken. It most often appears after a Windows update. Start by restarting the computer fully.

If that does not clear it, remove the printer and add it back (Windows downloads a fresh driver), check Windows Update for the driver, or install the maker's free app — HP Smart, Epson Smart Panel, Canon, or Brother — from the Microsoft Store. Never download a "driver" from a search-result website: those are frequently scams, and genuine printer software is always free from the maker or Windows itself.

- Need a page now? Print from your phone with AirPrint or the built-in print service.
- The Print Spooler restart and Services menu are a good point to hand off to Bill.

1 The Short Version

Your printer is on and connected, but your computer flashes a worrying message: "Driver is unavailable," or "Driver unavailable." It sounds serious and technical, but it almost never means the printer is broken. It means the little piece of software your computer uses to talk to the printer — the "driver" — has gone missing, become outdated, or gotten confused, usually after a Windows update.

The fix is to give the computer a fresh, correct copy of that software, and this guide walks you through it in the order a professional would try, from the quick restart to installing the maker's app. The one rule throughout: only ever get printer software from the real maker, never a random website.

- "Driver unavailable" means the printer's software needs refreshing — not that the printer is broken.
- It most often appears after a Windows update changed something behind the scenes.
- The reliable fix is to remove and re-add the printer, or install the maker's app.

- Never download a "driver" from a search-result website — those are frequently scams.

> **TIP**
> Before anything else, restart the computer. A surprising share of "driver unavailable" messages are temporary hiccups after an update, and a simple restart clears them in two minutes.

2 What a "Driver" Actually Is

A driver is just a translator. Your computer and your printer speak different languages, and the driver sits in between, turning your documents into instructions the printer understands. Every printer model has its own driver, the way every language has its own dictionary.

When the computer says the driver is "unavailable," it means it reached for that translator and could not find it, or found a copy too old or damaged to use. Nothing is physically wrong — the computer simply needs the right translator put back in place, which is exactly what the steps below do.

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
> Modern Windows and Mac computers include drivers for thousands of printers and can often fetch the right one automatically. That is why many fixes are as simple as removing the printer and letting the computer add it back on its own.

3 Why This Message Appears

The most common trigger is a Windows update. Updates occasionally replace or reset printer software, and until the right driver is back in place, the printer shows as unavailable. It can also happen after you change routers, swap computers, or if a driver file simply got corrupted over time.

None of these are your fault, and none mean you need a new printer. They all point to the same cure: refresh the software connection between the computer and the printer.

> **WATCH OUT**
> If the message appeared right after a big Windows update, that is almost certainly the cause. It is a well-known side effect, and it does not mean the update harmed your computer.

4 Fix One: Restart and Reconnect

Always start with the gentlest fix. Restarting clears temporary glitches, and making sure the printer is awake and connected rules out the simplest causes before you touch any settings.

1. Save any open work and restart the computer fully (not just sleep — a true restart).
2. Make sure the printer is turned on, awake, and on the same Wi-Fi as the computer.
3. Try printing a test page.
4. If the message is gone, you are done; if not, move to removing and re-adding the printer.

> **TIP**
> A true restart closes and reopens all the behind-the-scenes software, including the printer helper. It fixes far more than people expect and should always be the first thing you try.

5 Fix Two: Remove and Re-Add the Printer (Windows)

If a restart did not do it, giving Windows a clean copy of the printer usually clears the driver problem. Removing it does not harm the printer — only the computer's memory of it.

1. Open Settings, then Bluetooth & devices, then Printers & scanners.
2. Click your printer, choose Remove, and confirm.
3. Make sure the printer is on and on the same Wi-Fi.
4. Click "Add device" and wait for the printer to appear, then select it — Windows downloads the correct driver for you.
5. Print a test page.

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
>
> When Windows adds a printer this way, it fetches a fresh, matched driver automatically — which is exactly what cures the "unavailable" message. This single step solves the majority of cases.

6 Fix Three: Let Windows Update Find the Driver

Sometimes the right driver is waiting in Windows Update but has not been installed yet. Checking for updates can quietly put the missing piece back in place.

1. Open Settings, then Windows Update.
2. Click "Check for updates" and let anything it finds install.
3. Look for any "optional" updates — printer drivers sometimes live there — and install those too.
4. Restart if asked, then try printing again.

TIP

If you are nervous about updates, this kind is safe and routine — you are simply letting Microsoft supply the correct printer software. It is one of the few times an update is the fix rather than the cause.

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 Fix Four: Install the Maker's App

If Windows cannot supply the driver on its own, the printer maker's free app will install the right software reliably. Each major brand has one, and it handles everything for you.

- HP printers: the HP Smart app.
- Epson printers: the Epson Smart Panel app.
- Canon printers: the Canon PRINT app.
- Brother printers: the Brother Mobile Connect app (older models use Brother iPrint&Scan).

1. Open the Microsoft Store on your computer and search for your brand's app by the name above.
2. Install it, open it, and let it find and set up your printer.
3. Follow the prompts; the app installs the correct driver as part of setup.
4. Print a test page from the app to confirm.

GOOD TO KNOW

Install these apps only from the Microsoft Store or the maker's official website — those are the genuine, safe sources. The Store versions update themselves, which keeps the driver current and heads off future "unavailable" messages.

8 The Safety Rule: No Random Driver Sites

This is the most important caution in the guide. Searching the web for "[your printer] driver download" turns up many results that look official but are not — lookalike sites that install unwanted software, flood you with pop-ups, or try to charge you for free software or trick you into calling a fake support line.

WATCH OUT

You never need a driver from a search result. If a site asks you to pay for a driver, run a "driver updater" tool, or phone a number for printer help, close it at once — those are scams that specifically target people fixing a printer. Genuine printer software is always free and comes only from the maker or from Windows itself. If you are not certain a site is the real one, stop and call Bill before clicking.

9 Fix Five: Run the Windows Printer Troubleshooter

Windows includes a built-in helper that checks for common printer problems and fixes many of them automatically — a low-effort step worth trying before anything more technical.

1. Open Settings, then System, then Troubleshoot, then "Other troubleshooters."
2. Find the Printer troubleshooter and click Run.
3. Follow any suggestions it offers, letting it apply fixes.
4. Try printing again when it finishes.

GOOD TO KNOW

The troubleshooter is safe to run and often restarts the behind-the-scenes printing helpers for you — a tidy way to clear a stuck driver without hunting through menus.

10 Fix Six: Restart the Print Spooler

The "Print Spooler" is the behind-the-scenes helper that manages printing. If it has stalled, it can make a perfectly good driver look unavailable. Restarting it is a known fix — though it is a slightly more technical step.

1. Press the Windows key, type "Services," and open the Services app.
2. Scroll to "Print Spooler" in the list.
3. Right-click it and choose Restart.
4. Try printing again.

> **WATCH OUT**
> Digging into the Services list is further than many people want to go, and it is easy to change the wrong thing by accident. If the earlier fixes did not work, this is a very reasonable point to let me do it with you rather than venturing in alone.

11 A Workaround While You Sort It Out

If you need something printed right now and the driver is still misbehaving, there are reliable ways around it so you are not stuck.

- Print from your phone or tablet instead — iPhones use AirPrint and Androids use a built-in print service, neither of which needs the computer's driver.
- If the printer offers AirPrint or "driverless" printing, adding it that way on the computer can sidestep a broken brand driver entirely.
- Email the document to yourself, open it on another device, and print from there.

> **TIP**
> To print from a phone: put it on the same Wi-Fi as the printer, open the document, tap Share or the three-dots menu, choose Print, pick your printer, and tap Print.

12 Keep the Driver From Breaking Again

Once your printer is working, a few small habits keep the "driver unavailable" message from coming back — especially after the Windows updates that tend to trigger it in the first place.

- Keep the maker's app installed (HP Smart, Epson Smart Panel, Canon, Brother) — the Store version updates its own software, keeping the driver current.
- Let Windows updates install rather than postponing them indefinitely; an up-to-date system is less likely to lose the printer software.
- Leave the printer connected to the same Wi-Fi with a steady address so Windows does not keep rediscovering it as something new.
- If one specific update is known to break your printer, the maker's support page usually posts the fix — a safer source than any search result.

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
>
> The single best insurance is simply keeping the maker's app in place. Because it quietly refreshes the printer software in the background, it heads off most repeat "unavailable" messages before you ever see them.

13 When to Call Bill

"Driver unavailable" looks alarming but is usually a quick fix, and most people clear it within the first few steps here. But if the message keeps returning after every Windows update, if you cannot tell which software is the genuine one, or if you simply would rather not dig into Services and troubleshooters, there is no need to struggle.

I come to you, install the correct software from the genuine source, clear whatever the update tangled, and set things so the message stops coming back. If it is part of a bigger slowdown after an update, I will sort that at the same time and leave your printing dependable again.

- The message returns after every Windows update.
- You are unsure which "driver" download is the real, safe one.
- The maker's app will not find or set up the printer.
- You would rather not venture into Services or system settings yourself.

CHEAT SHEET

Everyday Cheat Sheet

Keep this by the computer. Refresh the software; never trust a driver website.

I want to…	Do this…
Try the quick fix	Restart the computer fully, then print a test page
Give it fresh software	Remove the printer and Add device again (Windows installs the driver)
Let Windows supply it	Settings Windows Update Check for updates (including optional)
Install the maker's app	HP Smart / Epson Smart Panel / Canon / Brother — from the Microsoft Store only
Let Windows self-fix	Settings Troubleshoot run the Printer troubleshooter
Print right now anyway	From your phone: Share Print (same Wi-Fi as the printer)
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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