BILL'S HOME TECH
Home & Small Business Tech Solutions

BILL'S COMPLETE MANUALS

Buying a New Laptop or Desktop

What matters, what doesn't, and what it costs — explained in plain English, one step at a time

A plain-English buying guide for seniors and families

Take your time — there's a return window

Written for you by Bill — Bill's Home Tech

(330) 200-8042 · BillsHomeTech.com

Windows 11, Mac and Chromebook · facts and prices current November 2026

What's Inside

This is your guide to choosing a new laptop or desktop without the sales pitch. Read it in any order and at your own pace. Every spec comes with what it actually means *for you*, the sensible amount to look for in 2026, and honest prices checked in November 2026. Prices and models change, so always check the price on the day you buy.

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PART 1

Before You Shop

Why you might need a new computer, what you'll use it for, which shape suits you, and the big choice between Windows, Mac, and Chromebook.

CHAPTER 1

A Note from Bill

Hello, and welcome. If you're reading this, you're probably thinking about buying a new computer, or helping someone you love buy one. Maybe the old one is slow, maybe it stopped getting updates, or maybe this is your very first. Whatever brought you here, I'm glad you came.

I'm Bill. I've spent more than 30 years working professionally with computers, and these days I help folks all over Portage County, Ohio feel at home with their technology. I wrote this guide the way I'd talk you through it at your kitchen table: slowly, in plain English, without the sales pitch.

What this guide is, and what it isn't

This guide explains what matters when you buy a laptop or desktop, and just as important, what **doesn't**. A lot of the numbers on a store tag are there to impress, not to help you. I'll show you the handful that actually change how the computer feels to use, and give you honest price ranges.

I won't tell you to buy a particular model, and this guide doesn't promote any brand or store. Models change every few months. The ideas in this guide last much longer: once you know what to look for, you can walk into any store, or open any website, and choose with confidence.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this guide does for you

It turns a confusing wall of laptops into a short list. You'll know what you need for the things you actually do, which numbers to check on the tag, how much to expect to pay in late 2026, which add-ons to turn down, and how to spot the scams that follow new computer buyers around.

The big promise: you can't buy "wrong" if you know your return window

Here's the comforting truth. Almost every reputable store gives you a window of time to bring a computer back. If you get it home and the keyboard feels cramped or the screen is too small, you can usually return it. Knowing that takes a lot of the pressure off. You'll find the details in Chapter 25, *Return Windows & Price Protection*.

One honest warning: the return window is real, but it's short, and it starts the day you buy (or the day it arrives). So try the new computer right away, and keep the box and receipt until you're sure.

You're never stuck alone

If you'd like a second opinion before you buy, or a hand setting things up after, call or text me at **(330) 200-8042**. There's no such thing as a silly question about computers, and I'd much rather you ask than worry. Start with Chapter 3, *Start with What You'll Use It For* whenever you're ready.

— Bill

CHAPTER 2

Do You Really Need a New Computer?

Before you spend a dollar, it's worth asking whether you need a new computer at all. Sometimes a slow computer just needs a tune-up. Other times it really is time. Here's how to tell the difference.

Signs it really is time

- **It runs Windows 10 and can't move to Windows 11.** Windows 10 stopped getting regular security updates in October 2025 (more on that just below).
- **It's a Chromebook past its update date.** Every Chromebook has an end date for automatic updates. After that, it stops getting new security fixes.
- **It's a Mac that can no longer install new versions of macOS** and your banking or email websites have started warning you that your browser is out of date.
- **Repairs would cost a big share of a new one**: a cracked screen, a failing battery that won't hold a charge, a broken hinge, or a dead hard drive.
- **It takes minutes to start up** and freezes on simple things even after a good cleanup.

About Windows 10

Microsoft ended support for Windows 10 on **October 14, 2025**. Your old Windows 10 computer still turns on and still works, but Microsoft no longer sends it regular security updates or fixes. For home users, Microsoft offers a stopgap called **Extended Security Updates (ESU)** that keeps critical security fixes coming to eligible Windows 10 computers until **October 12, 2027**. That buys time, but it isn't forever.

Signs it might just need a tune-up

- It got slow gradually, and it's full of programs you don't remember installing.
- It's slow only on the internet. That may be your Wi-Fi or your internet service, not the computer.
- It's only a few years old and still gets updates.
- The battery is the only problem. A battery replacement is often far cheaper than a new laptop.

TIP

Get a second opinion before you shop

A slow computer that still gets updates can often be cleaned up, given more memory, or fitted with a new battery for much less than a new one. If you're not sure which camp yours is in, it's worth having someone you trust take a look first.

SCAM ALERT

"Your computer is out of date" pop-ups are not from Microsoft

Real update reminders appear in Windows Settings, not as a flashing web page with a phone number. If a screen tells you to call someone because your computer is "expired" or "infected," close it. See Chapter 28, *Fake Deals, Fake Stores & Tech-Support Scams*.

CHAPTER 3

Start with What You'll Use It For

The single best way to buy the right computer is to forget about the computer for a minute and think about **your day**. What will you actually do on it? Write down your top five. That list decides almost everything else.

The everyday list

Most people's lists look something like this:

- Email and looking things up on the web
- Video calls with family (Zoom, FaceTime, Google Meet, Teams)
- Online banking, bill paying, shopping, and patient portals like MyChart
- Photos: looking at them, sharing them, maybe printing a few
- Streaming shows, YouTube, music, and audiobooks
- Writing letters, keeping a budget spreadsheet, or a family history project
- Card games, puzzles, and word games

Here's the good news: every computer sold new today can do every item on that list. You don't need the fastest or most expensive model. You need one that's comfortable, easy to read, and kept up to date.

Match your uses to what matters

If you mostly do this…	Look for this
Email, web, banking	Any current computer. Choose for comfort: screen size, keyboard, easy to read.
Video calls	A good built-in camera and microphone, a bright screen, and decent speakers.
Lots of photos	More storage (512 GB), a sharper, larger screen, and an SD card slot if your camera uses cards.
Many browser tabs at once	More memory (16 GB) so it doesn't bog down.
A specific Windows program	Windows. Ask the program's maker if it runs on a Mac or Chromebook.
Video editing or serious games	A stronger processor and graphics, and more memory. This is the one case to spend more.
Mostly at one desk	A desktop or all-in-one with a big screen may suit you better than a laptop.

GOOD TO KNOW

The one question that changes the answer

Do you depend on one particular program, like tax software you've used for years, a genealogy program, or software for a hobby device? If so, check that it runs on the computer you're considering **before** you buy. That single program may decide Windows versus Mac versus Chromebook for you.

TIP

Bring your list to the store

Write your top five uses on a card and hand it to the salesperson. A good one will steer you to something sensible. If they start talking about gaming graphics when your list says email and photos, you'll know you're being upsold.

CHAPTER 4

Laptop, Desktop, All-in-One, or Tablet with Keyboard?

Computers come in four main shapes. None is "best"; each suits a different way of living. Think about where you'll sit, whether you'll travel with it, and how well you see small text.

Laptop

Everything folds into one: screen, keyboard, trackpad, and battery. You can use it in your favorite chair, take it on a trip, or carry it to the kitchen for a video call. The trade-off is a smaller screen and a smaller keyboard. Most laptops have 13- to 16-inch screens.

Desktop (a tower or small box)

A box that sits on or under your desk, plus a separate monitor, keyboard, and mouse. You can choose a large monitor and a full-size keyboard, which is very kind to eyes and hands. Desktops stay put, and they need a monitor, which may be extra. A small desktop box can also be a smart way to reuse a good monitor you already own.

All-in-one

The computer is built into the back of the monitor, so there's just one screen on a stand, plus a keyboard and mouse. Fewer cables and a tidy desk. It stays in one place, and if the screen breaks, the whole computer goes in for repair.

Tablet with a keyboard

An iPad, Android tablet, or a Windows tablet with a snap-on keyboard. Light and easy for reading, photos, and video calls. Many people find a tablet is all they need. If you write a lot, manage files, or use a specific desktop program, a regular computer is usually easier.

Shape	Best for	Watch out for
Laptop	Moving around the house, travel, one device for everything	Smaller screen and keys
Desktop	Big screen, full keyboard, one desk	Needs a monitor; doesn't move
All-in-one	Tidy desk, big screen, simple setup	Doesn't move; repairs take the whole thing
Tablet + keyboard	Reading, photos, calls, light typing	Some programs and tasks are harder

TIP

A laptop can become a desktop

If you want a laptop for travel but a big screen at home, you can plug a laptop into a separate monitor, keyboard, and mouse when you're at your desk. Check the ports first (see Chapter 16, *Ports & Connections: USB-C, HDMI and More*).

CHAPTER 5

Windows, Mac, or Chromebook: the Big Choice

The biggest decision isn't the brand of the box. It's the **operating system**: the basic software that runs everything you see. There are three main choices, and each is perfectly good for everyday life. Here's an honest side-by-side.

	Windows 11 PC	Mac (macOS)	Chromebook (ChromeOS)
Made by	Many brands (Dell, HP, Lenovo, Microsoft, and more)	Apple only	Many brands; software by Google
Feels like	Familiar if you've used Windows before	Familiar if you use an iPhone or iPad	Like using the Chrome web browser
Programs	The widest choice of programs	Wide choice; some Windows programs won't run	Web apps and Android apps; no regular Windows programs
Price range	Widest range, budget to premium	Starts higher; fewer models	Usually the lowest prices
Updates	Monthly from Microsoft	From Apple	Automatic, about 10 years from the model's release
Best match	You know Windows or need a Windows program	You have an iPhone or iPad	Mostly web, email, video, simple

If you've used Windows for years

Staying with Windows is usually the smoothest path. Windows 11 looks a little different from older versions, with the Start button moved toward the center, but the basics carry over. See Chapter 6, *A Closer Look at Windows 11 PCs*.

If you live on an iPhone or iPad

A Mac fits in beautifully: your photos, messages, notes, and passwords can follow you from your phone. See Chapter 7, *A Closer Look at Macs*.

If you mostly use the web

A Chromebook is simple, starts quickly, updates itself, and is hard to mess up. If everything you do happens in a web browser (Gmail, Facebook, YouTube, banking websites), it may be

all you need. See Chapter 8, *A Closer Look at Chromebooks and Chromebook Plus*.

GOOD TO KNOW

There's no wrong answer here

All three can do email, video calls, photos, and banking safely. Pick the one that matches your phone, your habits, and any program you rely on. If you're truly torn, choose the one that someone who helps you already knows. That makes getting help easier.

TIP

Try before you buy

Many big stores have all three on display. Spend ten minutes with each: open a web page, type a few sentences, and look at how easy the screen is to read. Your hands and eyes will tell you a lot.

CHAPTER 6

A Closer Look at Windows 11 PCs

Windows computers come from many companies at many prices, which is both the good news and the confusing part. Here's how to narrow it down.

Every new Windows computer comes with Windows 11

Any new Windows computer you buy today comes with Windows 11. Microsoft's official minimums for Windows 11 are quite low: **4 GB of memory and 64 GB of storage**, plus a security chip called **TPM 2.0**. Those are the bare minimums to install it, not what makes a pleasant computer. In this guide I'll suggest comfortable amounts instead (see Chapter 11, *Memory (RAM): How Much Is Enough?* and Chapter 12, *Storage: SSD, 256 GB or 512 GB?*).

The three tiers you'll see in stores

Tier	What you usually get
Budget	Often 8 GB of memory or less, slower storage, dimmer screens. Fine for very light use, but they can feel slow within a couple of years.
Mainstream	16 GB of memory, a 512 GB SSD, a Full HD screen. This is the sweet spot for most people.
Premium / Copilot+	16 GB or more, long battery life, better screens and cameras, and Microsoft's newest AI features. See Chapter 20, *Copilot+ PCs: What They Are and Whether You Need One*.

Windows Hello: signing in with your face or finger

Many Windows laptops let you sign in by looking at the camera or touching a fingerprint reader, instead of typing a password every time. For anyone who struggles to type a PIN, that's worth looking for. The tag or website usually says "Windows Hello" with "facial recognition" or "fingerprint reader."

HEADS UP

Watch for "S mode" and very cheap models

Some very low-priced Windows laptops come with limited storage (64 GB or 128 GB) that fills up quickly with Windows updates alone. A few come in a restricted setting that only installs apps from the Microsoft Store. Neither is a scam, but read the tag closely, and ask before you buy.

TIP

Moving from an old Windows PC?

Bill's Home Tech has a separate guide called "Moving to a New Windows PC" that walks you through bringing your files, photos, and passwords across. See Chapter 30, *Your First Day with the New Computer* for the short version.

CHAPTER 7

A Closer Look at Macs

Apple makes all its own computers, so there are fewer models to choose from. That makes shopping simpler. Here's the lineup that matters most for everyday use, with prices I checked on Apple's website in November 2026.

MacBook Neo: Apple's lowest-cost laptop

In March 2026 Apple introduced the **MacBook Neo**, its least expensive new laptop. It launched at $599, and after Apple raised prices in June 2026, Apple's store listed it from **$699** when I checked. It has a 13-inch screen rated at 500 nits of brightness, **8 GB of memory**, 256 GB or 512 GB of storage, two USB-C ports, and a headphone jack. It comes in silver, blush, citrus, and indigo.

MacBook Air: the everyday favorite

The **MacBook Air** with Apple's M5 chip comes in 13-inch and 15-inch sizes and starts with **16 GB of memory and 512 GB of storage**. It launched in March 2026 at $1,099 for the 13-inch; after the June 2026 price increase, Apple's store showed the 13-inch starting around **$1,299** when I checked. It's light, quiet (no fan), and has long battery life.

Neo or Air?

Choose	If…
MacBook Neo	Email, web, video calls, photos, light use. Fine for most everyday lists. 8 GB of memory is less room to grow.
MacBook Air	More memory (16 GB), more storage to start, a larger 15-inch choice, and a longer useful life if you keep computers for many years.

Desktop Macs

Apple also makes the **iMac**, an all-in-one with a built-in screen, and the **Mac mini**, a small box you connect to your own monitor, keyboard, and mouse. They're good choices if you'd rather sit at a desk with a big screen. Check Apple's site for current prices; they change.

GOOD TO KNOW

Apple prices moved in 2026

Apple raised prices on several Macs in June 2026, and news reports tied the increase to the worldwide memory chip shortage. Prices may change again, so always check the price on the day you buy. See Chapter 21, *What a Computer Costs in Late 2026*.

TIP

Already have an iPhone?

Apple says that when you set up a new Mac, you can bring your iPhone nearby and the Mac can sign in to your Wi-Fi and Apple Account for you. That's one of the nicest reasons to choose a Mac if you already use an iPhone.

CHAPTER 8

A Closer Look at Chromebooks and Chromebook Plus

A Chromebook is a laptop that runs Google's ChromeOS. If you've used the Chrome web browser, you already know most of it. It starts quickly, updates itself in the background, and keeps things simple.

What a Chromebook does well

- Email, web browsing, YouTube, streaming, and video calls
- Google Docs, Sheets, and Photos, plus many Android apps from Google Play
- Automatic updates without the long waits
- Lower prices than most Windows laptops and Macs

What it doesn't do

A Chromebook doesn't run regular Windows or Mac programs. If you rely on a particular program you install from a disc or download, such as older tax or genealogy software, check first. Many of those now have web versions that work fine on a Chromebook.

Chromebook Plus: the better tier

Google uses the name **Chromebook Plus** for models that meet a higher minimum: at least **8 GB of memory**, **128 GB of storage**, a Full HD (1080p) screen, a 1080p webcam, and a faster processor. They also include Google's Gemini AI features. Google's own listings show Chromebook Plus models starting around **$430 to $480**, while basic Chromebooks start lower, around $179, with as little as 4 GB of memory and 64 GB of storage.

How long will it get updates?

Google gives Chromebooks **10 years of automatic updates**, counted from when that model first came out, not from the day you buy it. A Chromebook that's been on store shelves for a few years has fewer years left. Google publishes each model's "automatic updates until" date.

HEADS UP

Skip the bargain-bin Chromebook

A $179 Chromebook with 4 GB of memory can feel slow, and older models on clearance may have only a few years of updates left. For most people, a Chromebook Plus is worth the extra money.

CHAPTER 9

Choosing to Fit Your Phone and Family

Your new computer doesn't live alone. It works alongside your phone, your photos, and the people who help you. Thinking about that ahead of time can save a lot of frustration later.

Match your phone where it makes sense

If you use…	Consider
iPhone or iPad	A Mac shares photos, messages, notes, and passwords most smoothly. Windows and Chromebooks still work fine with iCloud on the web.
Android phone	A Chromebook or Windows PC pairs well. Your Google account carries Gmail, Photos, and contacts across.
No smartphone	Any of the three. Choose for comfort and simplicity.

Who helps you with technology?

If a son, daughter, or grandchild helps you, ask what they use. It's much easier for them to talk you through something on the phone if they know where everything is. This is a perfectly good reason to choose one kind over another.

Buying for a parent or partner

- Ask what they'll use it for, in their words. Don't buy what you'd want.
- Favor a bigger, brighter screen and a comfortable keyboard over a faster processor.
- Set it up before you hand it over, and write down every password in a safe place.
- Keep the return window in mind and let them try it while you can still exchange it.

STAY SAFE

Set up accounts together

Set up the new computer's account (Microsoft account, Apple Account, or Google account) with the person who will use it, using their email and a password they'll remember. Avoid using your own account on their computer. Mixed accounts cause confusion with email, photos, and purchases later.

TIP

Write it down

Use the fill-in table in Chapter 33, *Your Computer-Buying Cheat-Sheet* to record what you bought, where, the return deadline, and the account used to set it up.

PART 2

The Specs in Plain English

Memory, storage, processor, screen, keyboard, ports, camera and battery: what each one means for you, and the sensible amount to look for in 2026.

CHAPTER 10

The Spec Sheet, Decoded

Every computer on a store shelf has a little card or web page full of numbers and abbreviations. It looks like a foreign language, but only a few lines really matter. Here's the whole card translated, with the amount I'd look for in late 2026.

On the tag	What it means	Sensible pick
Memory / RAM	How many things it can juggle at once	16 GB (Windows), 8 GB minimum (Chromebook)
Storage / SSD	How much it can keep: files, photos, apps	512 GB, or 256 GB if you use cloud storage
Processor / CPU	The engine	Any current mainstream chip (see the processor chapter)
Display	Screen size and sharpness	14 to 16 inches; Full HD (1920 x 1080) or better
Brightness (nits)	How bright the screen gets	About 300 nits or more
Ports	Places to plug things in	At least one USB-C and one USB-A
Webcam	Camera for video calls	1080p if you can
Battery	Hours away from the plug	Treat the claim as a best case

Each line has its own short chapter coming up: Chapter 11, *Memory (RAM): How Much Is Enough?*, Chapter 12, *Storage: SSD, 256 GB or 512 GB?*, Chapter 13, *The Processor, in Plain Words*, Chapter 14, *The Screen: Size, Brightness & Touch*, Chapter 15, *Keyboard, Trackpad & Mouse Comfort*, Chapter 16, *Ports & Connections: USB-C, HDMI and More*, Chapter 17, *Camera, Microphone & Speakers for Video Calls*, and Chapter 18, *Battery Life Claims, Honestly*.

What you can mostly ignore

- Graphics card details, unless you edit video or play demanding games
- Processor speed in "GHz" and the exact number of "cores"
- Refresh rates like 120 Hz or 144 Hz (smoother, but not needed for email and photos)
- Words like "ultra," "pro," "max," and "AI-powered" on their own. They're marketing.

GOOD TO KNOW

The three numbers that matter most

If you only remember three lines from the tag, make them **memory** (aim for 16 GB on Windows), **storage** (aim for 512 GB, and make sure it says SSD), and **screen** (big enough and bright enough for your eyes). Get those right and almost any current computer will serve you well.

TIP

Take a photo of the tag

When you're comparing computers in a store, snap a picture of each tag with your phone. Later, at home, you can compare them side by side without trying to remember which one had what.

CHAPTER 11

Memory (RAM): How Much Is Enough?

Memory, often called **RAM**, is the computer's working space: like the top of a desk. The bigger the desk, the more you can have open at once without things getting slow. It's different from storage, which is more like a filing cabinet.

What to look for in 2026

For a…	Aim for
Windows 11	**16 GB.** 8 GB works, but feels slow with several browser tabs and a video call. Copilot+ PCs require 16 GB.
Mac	The MacBook Neo has 8 GB; the MacBook Air starts at 16 GB. 16 GB gives more room for the years ahead.
Chromebook	**8 GB.** That's the Chromebook Plus minimum. Avoid 4 GB if you can.

Why it matters more than it used to

Web pages, video calls, and modern apps use more memory every year. A computer with plenty of memory stays comfortable longer, so you won't feel the need to replace it as soon. On many laptops, the memory is built in and can't be added later, so it's worth getting enough at the start.

HEADS UP

Memory can't be upgraded on many laptops

Look for the word "soldered" or "onboard" in the specs, or ask. On most thin laptops and all current Macs, what you buy is what you'll have for the life of the computer.

GOOD TO KNOW

Why memory got pricier in 2026

The memory chips in your computer are the same kind that big AI data centers are buying up in huge quantities. That shortage pushed computer prices up during 2026. It's one reason to buy the amount you need now rather than plan to add more later. See Chapter 21, *What a Computer Costs in Late 2026*.

TIP

If you have to choose

If your budget forces a choice between more memory and a faster processor, choose more memory. For everyday use, it makes the bigger difference.

CHAPTER 12

Storage: SSD, 256 GB or 512 GB?

Storage is where the computer keeps everything for the long term: Windows or macOS itself, your apps, documents, photos, and downloads. Think of it as the filing cabinet.

Make sure it says SSD

An **SSD** (solid-state drive) has no moving parts. It's fast, quiet, and much tougher than the old spinning hard drives. Nearly every new laptop has one. Very cheap laptops sometimes use slower "eMMC" storage instead. If the tag says eMMC, it will feel slower.

How much?

Size	Good for
256 GB	Enough if you keep most photos in the cloud (iCloud, Google Photos, OneDrive) and don't install much.
512 GB	The comfortable choice for most people, especially with a growing photo collection.
1 TB or more	Big photo and video libraries kept on the computer itself.

Windows and its updates take up a good chunk of the space on their own, and the space you can actually use is always a bit less than the number on the box.

Cloud storage and external drives

If space runs short later, you have options. A **cloud** service keeps copies of your files online (usually with a free starter amount and a monthly fee for more). An **external drive** plugs into a USB port and is a fine place for backups. Neither replaces having enough room on the computer itself.

TIP

Count your photos

On your old computer, check how much space your Pictures folder uses. If it's already over 100 GB, start with 512 GB on the new one.

HEADS UP

Storage upgrades at checkout can cost a lot

Stepping up to more storage is often one of the priciest options, especially on Macs. Compare the price difference with the cost of a cloud plan or an external drive before you decide.

CHAPTER 13

The Processor, in Plain Words

The processor (CPU, or "chip") is the engine. The truth that salespeople rarely say out loud: for email, web, video calls, and photos, **any current mainstream processor is plenty**. You don't need the top model.

The names you'll see

Name on the tag	In plain words
Intel Core / Core Ultra	Intel's mainstream chips. Higher numbers in the same family are usually faster.
AMD Ryzen / Ryzen AI	AMD's mainstream chips, a close equal to Intel's.
Snapdragon X	Qualcomm chips used in many Copilot+ PCs. Long battery life.
Apple M-series (M5) and A18 Pro	Apple's own chips in Macs. The MacBook Air uses M5; the MacBook Neo uses A18 Pro.
MediaTek or Intel N-series	Common in Chromebooks and budget laptops. Fine for light use.
Celeron or Pentium	Older budget names. Usually best avoided on a new computer.

About Windows on Snapdragon

Snapdragon laptops run Windows 11 and most everyday apps just fine, often with excellent battery life. A few older programs, some printer drivers, and some games may not work. If you rely on an older program or device, ask before you buy, or check that you're within the return window when you try it.

GOOD TO KNOW

Newer beats faster

A recent mid-range chip is usually a better buy than an old top-of-the-line one on clearance. Newer chips use less power, run cooler, and get updates longer.

TIP

Don't pay extra for a faster chip unless your list needs it

If your list from Chapter 3, *Start with What You'll Use It For* doesn't include video editing or games, put the money toward more memory, a better screen, or a comfortable keyboard instead.

CHAPTER 14

The Screen: Size, Brightness & Touch

You'll look at the screen every minute you use the computer, so it deserves real attention. For many people, a bigger, brighter screen is the single best upgrade.

Size

Screen size	What it's like
13 to 14 inches	Light and easy to carry; text is smaller.
15 to 16 inches	Easier on the eyes and often has a number pad; heavier.
24 inches and up	Desktop monitors and all-in-ones. Kindest for reading.

Sharpness

Look for at least **Full HD**, which is written as **1920 x 1080** (or 1920 x 1200). Anything lower, like 1366 x 768, looks fuzzy. Higher numbers are sharper still.

Brightness

Brightness is measured in **nits**. Around 300 nits is comfortable indoors; 400 to 500 nits helps near a sunny window. For example, Apple rates the MacBook Neo's screen at 500 nits. Cheap laptops are often dim, at around 250 nits, and that's hard on older eyes.

Touchscreen or not?

Many Windows laptops and Chromebooks have touchscreens. If you use a tablet or smartphone, being able to tap the screen can feel natural. Macs don't have touchscreens. Touch is a nice extra, not a must.

TIP

Glossy or matte?

Glossy screens look vivid but reflect lamps and windows. Matte ("anti-glare") screens are calmer to read in a bright room. Look at both in the store, standing where your chair would be.

GOOD TO KNOW

You can always make things bigger

Every computer lets you enlarge text and everything on the screen. Still, starting with a large, sharp, bright screen means you won't have to zoom as much. See Chapter 29, *Accessibility Features to Look For*.

CHAPTER 15

Keyboard, Trackpad & Mouse Comfort

These are the parts your hands touch all day. Specs can't tell you whether they feel right. Only your fingers can, which is why trying a computer in person is so valuable.

What to check on the keyboard

- Keys that are full-size, with letters that are easy to read
- A **backlight** so you can see the keys in a dim room
- A satisfying press. Some keys feel mushy; some feel crisp.
- A number pad on the right, if you do a lot of numbers (more common on 15- and 16-inch laptops)
- Arrow keys that aren't squeezed into tiny half-keys

The trackpad

The trackpad is the flat touch area below the keyboard that moves the pointer. A larger, smooth trackpad is easier to use. Try clicking, scrolling with two fingers, and dragging. If it frustrates you, that's fine: a mouse fixes it.

A plain mouse can make all the difference

A simple wireless mouse is inexpensive and can make a laptop much easier to use, especially if your hands shake or a trackpad feels fiddly. Many work with a small plug-in receiver or with Bluetooth.

TIP

Type a real sentence

In the store, open a notes app and type your name, your address, and a sentence or two. Ten seconds of real typing tells you more than any review.

GOOD TO KNOW

A separate keyboard is an option too

If you use a laptop at a desk, a full-size keyboard and a mouse plugged into it can be far more comfortable than the built-in ones, and you still have a laptop to carry when you need it.

CHAPTER 16

Ports & Connections: USB-C, HDMI and More

Ports are the sockets on the side of the computer. Thin laptops have fewer than they used to, so it's worth a quick look at what you'll need to plug in: a printer, a mouse, a flash drive, a camera card, or a TV.

Port	Looks like	Used for
USB-C	Small, oval, fits either way up	Charging, newer drives and phones, monitors
USB-A	The classic flat rectangle	Older flash drives, mice, keyboards, printers
HDMI	Wide, with angled corners	Connecting to a TV or monitor
Headphone jack	Small round hole	Wired headphones and some hearing devices
SD card slot	Thin slot	Memory cards from cameras

Real examples from 2026

Apple's MacBook Neo has **two USB-C ports** and a headphone jack. One of the two USB-C ports is the slower USB 2 kind; the faster one can run one extra monitor. Microsoft's 13-inch Surface Laptop has two USB-C ports, one USB-A port, and a headphone jack. Neither has HDMI built in, so you'd need an adapter to plug into most TVs.

Adapters and hubs

If a laptop doesn't have the port you need, a small **USB-C hub** or adapter can add USB-A, HDMI, and an SD card slot. They're widely available and not expensive. Count what you plug in today, and factor in an adapter if needed.

> **TIP**
>
> **Make a list of what you plug in**
>
> Look at your old computer and write down everything that's plugged in: printer, mouse, external drive, speakers. Bring that list when you shop.

HEADS UP

Not all USB-C ports are equal

Some USB-C ports charge the laptop and run monitors; others only transfer files. If you plan to connect a monitor, check that the port supports it (look for "DisplayPort" or "Thunderbolt" or ask).

CHAPTER 17

Camera, Microphone & Speakers for Video Calls

If seeing the grandkids on a video call is high on your list, the built-in camera, microphone, and speakers matter more than the processor. Here's what to look for.

The camera

Look for a **1080p** (Full HD) webcam. Older and budget laptops often have 720p cameras, which look grainy, especially in a dim room. Google requires a 1080p webcam on every Chromebook Plus.

Microphones and speakers

More than one microphone (sometimes called "dual mics" or "array microphones") helps the computer hear you clearly and filter out the dishwasher. For speakers, listen in the store if you can. Small laptops often sound thin, so if you're hard of hearing, plan on headphones or a small external speaker.

Built-in call helpers

Some computers clean up your picture and sound on video calls automatically. On Copilot+ PCs, Microsoft calls these **Windows Studio Effects**: better lighting, eye-contact correction, and clearer voice. Chromebook Plus models include similar effects, like background blur and noise reduction, that work in any video calling app. Nice to have, but a good camera and good lighting matter more.

TIP

Light from the front

No camera looks good with a bright window behind you. Sit facing a window or a lamp, and even an ordinary camera looks much better.

GOOD TO KNOW

Privacy shutter

Many laptops now have a little sliding cover over the camera, or a key that turns the camera off. It's a small thing that gives real peace of mind.

CHAPTER 18

Battery Life Claims, Honestly

Every laptop advertises a battery number like "up to 20 hours." That number is real, but it's measured under gentle conditions: often playing a single video with the screen fairly dim. Your everyday hours will usually be lower.

Read the fine print

Manufacturers usually give two numbers, and the gap between them is telling. Apple rates the MacBook Neo at up to 16 hours of video playback but up to 11 hours of web browsing. Microsoft rates its 13-inch Surface Laptop at up to 22.5 hours of video playback but up to 18 hours of active web browsing. Both companies say real results vary with settings and use.

What drains a battery fastest

- A very bright screen
- Video calls (camera, microphone, and Wi-Fi all working at once)
- Many browser tabs and apps running in the background
- Age: batteries slowly hold less charge over the years

Do you even need long battery life?

If your laptop will sit plugged in beside your chair most of the time, battery hours matter much less. If you travel or like to move around the house, they matter more. Be honest about your habits, and don't pay extra for battery life you won't use.

TIP

Use the web browsing number

When comparing laptops, compare the **web browsing** hours rather than the video hours. They're closer to real life, and then knock off a few hours for a bright screen and video calls.

GOOD TO KNOW

The charger matters too

Most new laptops charge through USB-C. Keep the charger that came in the box; a weaker phone charger may charge slowly or not at all.

CHAPTER 19

Wi-Fi, Bluetooth, Weight & Build

A few last details round out the spec sheet. None of them should decide your purchase on its own, but it's good to know what they mean.

Wi-Fi

You'll see labels like **Wi-Fi 6**, **Wi-Fi 6E**, or **Wi-Fi 7**. Any of these is fine for a home computer. A newer Wi-Fi label only helps if your home router supports it too. If your internet feels slow, the router or the internet plan is a more likely culprit than the laptop.

Bluetooth

Bluetooth connects wireless mice, keyboards, headphones, and many hearing aids. Every current laptop has it. Desktops usually do too, but it's worth checking on a desktop tower.

Weight

If you'll carry it, weight matters. Thin 13-inch laptops are usually under 3 pounds; Microsoft lists its 13-inch Surface Laptop at 2.7 pounds. Larger 15- and 16-inch laptops are often closer to 4 pounds. Pick one up in the store and imagine carrying it in a bag.

Build

Metal cases usually feel sturdier than plastic ones, and a firm hinge keeps the screen from wobbling. Open and close the lid a few times in the store. You'll be doing it thousands of times.

> **TIP**
>
> **Desktops need Wi-Fi too**
>
> Some inexpensive desktop towers come without Wi-Fi and expect a network cable. If your router is in another room, make sure the desktop includes Wi-Fi.

PART 3

AI PCs, Prices & Refurbished

What a Copilot+ PC really adds, what computers cost in late 2026 and why, and how to save safely with refurbished and open-box machines.

CHAPTER 20

Copilot+ PCs: What They Are and Whether You Need One

You'll see "Copilot+ PC" on a lot of Windows laptops. It's Microsoft's label for a newer class of Windows 11 computers with a special chip for AI features. Here's what that means in plain words, and an honest answer to whether it matters for you.

What makes a computer a Copilot+ PC

Microsoft says a Copilot+ PC must have an **NPU** (neural processing unit, a chip built for AI tasks) that can do at least **40 trillion operations per second** (written "40+ TOPS"), plus at least **16 GB of memory** and a **256 GB SSD**. Many use Snapdragon chips; newer Intel Core Ultra and AMD Ryzen AI chips qualify too.

What the extra features are

Feature	What it does for you
Recall	Takes snapshots of your screen so you can later search for "that recipe I saw last week." It's **off unless you choose to turn it on**, uses Windows Hello to confirm it's you, and can be paused or cleared.
Click to Do	Lets you act on text or a picture on your screen, such as summarizing a paragraph or removing a photo's background.
Improved Windows search	Find a file by describing it, like "photos of the beach," instead of remembering its name.
Live Captions with translation	Captions for any audio on the computer, and on Copilot+ PCs, translation from over 40 languages into English, even offline.
Cocreator and photo tools	Make or touch up pictures in Paint and Photos. Some need a Microsoft account and internet.
Windows Studio Effects	Better lighting, eye contact, and voice clarity on video calls.

Does a typical senior need one?

Honestly, **no, not for the AI features alone**. Email, video calls, photos, and banking work the same on any good Windows 11 computer. Regular Live Captions (without translation) works on any Windows 11 PC, too. That said, Copilot+ PCs often come with things that really do help: 16 GB of memory, a fast SSD, long battery life, and better cameras. If one fits your budget, it's a fine choice. Just don't pay extra for the label.

GOOD TO KNOW

"Copilot+" isn't the same as "Copilot"

Copilot is Microsoft's AI chat assistant. Copilot+ is a type of PC. You don't need a Copilot+ PC to chat with an AI assistant; you can do that in a web browser on almost any computer.

STAY SAFE

About Recall and privacy

Recall keeps its snapshots on your computer, and Microsoft says it's off by default. If you share your computer or do banking on it, you can simply leave Recall off. If you do turn it on, know that it can capture whatever is on your screen.

CHAPTER 21

What a Computer Costs in Late 2026

Computer prices moved around a lot in 2026. Here's what happened, what to expect today, and how not to overpay. Prices below are the makers' own listed prices as of November 2026; store sales can be lower.

Why prices went up

During 2026, a worldwide shortage of memory chips, driven largely by huge demand from AI data centers, pushed the cost of computers up. Several computer makers said they would pass higher costs along, and on **June 25, 2026**, Apple raised U.S. prices on many Macs and iPads, citing the memory shortage. Budget computers were expected to feel it most, because memory makes up a bigger share of their cost.

Price examples checked in November 2026

Computer	Listed price (Nov. 2026)	Notes
Basic Chromebook	From about $179	Often 4 GB memory, 64 GB storage. Too little for most.
Chromebook Plus	From about $430 to $480	8 GB memory, 128 GB storage minimum
MacBook Neo	From $699	Launched at $599 in March 2026
MacBook Air 13-inch (M5)	From about $1,299	Launched at $1,099 in March 2026
Surface Laptop 13-inch	$1,199.99	Copilot+ PC, Microsoft's own
Everyday Windows laptops	Widest range	Compare memory, storage, and screen, not just price

Where the sensible middle is

For most people, the best value is a mainstream machine: 16 GB of memory, a 512 GB SSD, a bright Full HD screen, and a comfortable keyboard. You don't need the most expensive model, but the very cheapest ones often cut corners on exactly the things you'll notice every day: memory, storage, and the screen.

TIP

Check the price on the day you buy

With prices shifting, the price you saw a month ago may have changed. Check the maker's own website and one or two big stores the same day, and remember that many stores adjust prices if they drop soon after you buy (see Chapter 25, *Return Windows & Price Protection*).

HEADS UP

"Sale" prices that aren't

A big red "was" price doesn't always mean much. Compare with the maker's own site. If a deal is wildly below every other store, be suspicious. See Chapter 28, *Fake Deals, Fake Stores & Tech-Support Scams*.

CHAPTER 22

Refurbished & Open-Box: Saving Money Safely

A refurbished computer has been returned, checked, repaired if needed, and resold. Bought from the right place, it can be a smart way to save, with nearly all the peace of mind of new.

Apple Certified Refurbished

Apple sells its own refurbished Macs on its website. Apple says each one gets full functional testing, genuine Apple replacement parts as needed, a thorough cleaning, all accessories and cables, a brand-new box, free shipping and returns, and the same **one-year limited warranty** as new. You can add AppleCare too. Apple describes the savings as up to 15%.

Other manufacturer refurbished programs

Microsoft sells certified refurbished products on its store, and several Windows computer makers run their own refurbished or outlet stores. Look for a stated warranty, a clear return policy, and the words "certified refurbished" from the maker itself.

Open-box

"Open-box" means someone bought it, opened it, and returned it, often unused. Big stores sell these at a discount. Ask what condition it's in, whether all parts are included, and whether the full warranty and return window still apply.

Type	Who checks it	Warranty to expect
Manufacturer refurbished	The maker	Often a full one-year warranty
Store open-box	The store	Usually the maker's warranty; ask
Third-party "renewed"	Varies	Varies widely; read carefully
Private sale	Nobody	None

HEADS UP

Check the update date before buying an older model

A refurbished computer is still an older model. For a Chromebook, check its automatic update date. For a Windows computer, make sure it has Windows 11. For a Mac, check that it runs a current version of macOS.

TIP

Buy refurbished from the maker when you can

Manufacturer refurbished programs are the closest thing to new. A random online seller with "like new" in the listing may be fine, or may not; you have far less protection.

CHAPTER 23

Hand-Me-Downs & Used Computers

Sometimes the best computer is one a family member is replacing. A good hand-me-down can be a wonderful gift. A few checks make sure it's a safe one.

Before you accept a used computer

- **Is it still getting updates?** A Windows computer should run Windows 11. A Chromebook should be before its update end date. A Mac should run a recent macOS.
- **How's the battery?** If it only lasts an hour, budget for a replacement battery or keep it plugged in.
- **Has it been wiped?** It should be reset to factory settings, with the old owner's accounts removed.
- **Is it signed out of the old owner's accounts?** On a Mac, the previous owner must turn off Find My and sign out of their Apple Account, or you may not be able to set it up.

Buying from a stranger

Buying a used computer from an online listing or a yard sale is the riskiest option. There's no warranty and usually no return. If you do it, meet somewhere public, turn it on before paying, and make sure it starts fresh with no one else's account on it.

SCAM ALERT

Never pay for a used computer with gift cards or a wire

A seller who wants payment by gift card, wire transfer, cryptocurrency, or a payment app to a stranger is a red flag. Those payments are like cash: once sent, they're very hard to get back.

TIP

When the price is close, buy new or refurbished

If a used computer costs nearly as much as a refurbished one with a warranty, the refurbished one is usually the better buy.

GOOD TO KNOW

Passing your old computer on

If you'll give your old computer to someone, back up your files first, then reset it to factory settings so none of your accounts or personal files go with it. See Chapter 30, *Your First Day with the New Computer*.

PART 4

Buying Smart & Staying Safe

Where to buy, return windows, honest talk about warranties, turning down add-ons, and avoiding fake deals and tech-support scams.

CHAPTER 24

Where to Buy

You can buy a computer from the company that makes it, from a big store, from a warehouse club, or online. Each has its pluses. What matters most is buying from a business you know is real, with a clear return policy.

Where	Good for	Keep in mind
The maker's own store or website	Full choice of options; refurbished programs	Prices can be higher than sales elsewhere
Big electronics stores	Trying computers in person; easy returns	Expect add-on and protection-plan offers
Warehouse clubs	Competitive prices; member return policies	Smaller selection; membership needed
Well-known online retailers	Price comparison; delivery	Watch for third-party sellers on marketplaces

Extra help when you buy from the maker

Some makers include setup help. For example, Apple says that when you buy a Mac from Apple, you can get free online one-on-one **Personal Setup** sessions with a Specialist, who can help move your data and show you around. That's worth knowing if you're new to Mac.

Online marketplaces: who's really selling?

On big shopping websites, the item may be sold by the website itself or by an outside seller. Look for "Sold by" near the price. Outside sellers can have different return rules and may sell older or imported models. When in doubt, choose an item sold directly by the store or the maker.

TIP

Try in a store, buy where you like

It's perfectly fine to try computers in a local store and then compare prices. Just be sure the model number matches exactly; similar names can hide different memory or storage.

STAY SAFE

Pay with a credit card

Credit cards generally give you stronger protection if something goes wrong, like a computer that never arrives. Never pay for a computer with a gift card, wire transfer, or cryptocurrency.

CHAPTER 25

Return Windows & Price Protection

Your return window is your safety net. It gives you time to bring the computer home, use it for real, and decide whether it's right. Every store's rules are different, so check before you buy.

Two examples from the makers

Store	What its policy says (November 2026)
Apple	Apple's online store lists a **14-day** return window for Macs. Returns must be in good condition in the original packaging with all accessories.
Microsoft Store	Return most physical products within **60 days** of receiving them, like new and in the original packaging. Microsoft also offers a one-time **price adjustment** for 60 days if it drops the price on select products.

Questions to ask any store

1. How many days do I have to return it, and does the clock start when I buy it or when it arrives?
2. Is there a **restocking fee** if I open it?
3. Do I need the original box and every accessory?
4. If the price drops next week, will you refund the difference?
5. Does the holiday season stretch the return window?

Make the most of the window

- Set up the computer and use it for your real tasks in the first few days.
- Keep the box, the paperwork, and every cable until you're sure.
- Put the return deadline on your calendar the day you buy.
- Keep your receipt, or save the email receipt in a folder.

> **TIP**
>
> **Write the deadline down**
>
> There's a spot for the return deadline in the fill-in table in Chapter 33, *Your Computer-Buying Cheat-Sheet*.

HEADS UP

Third-party sellers have their own rules

If an outside seller on a marketplace sold it, their return policy applies, and it may be shorter or stricter than the website's own.

CHAPTER 26

Warranties & Protection Plans, Honestly

At the register you'll almost always be offered an extended warranty or protection plan. Some are worth it for some people. Many aren't. Here's how to decide without pressure.

What you already get

Most new computers come with a manufacturer's warranty, often one year, that covers defects. For example, Apple includes a one-year limited warranty and up to 90 days of complimentary technical support with most of its hardware. That warranty usually **doesn't** cover drops, spills, or a cracked screen.

What the FTC says to check

The Federal Trade Commission's advice is to compare any extended plan with the warranty that already comes with the product. A plan isn't a good value if it doesn't add more coverage. Before you buy, find out:

- **The total cost**, plus any deductibles or fees each time you use it
- **Who's behind it.** It may not be the manufacturer.
- **What's covered.** Does it cover accidents like drops and spills? If it isn't listed, assume it isn't covered.
- **How claims work.** Do you mail it away? Take it to the store? How long does it take?

The FTC also points out that setting money aside in savings is another way to plan for repairs.

When a plan can make sense

- You're prone to drops or spills, or there are grandkids or pets around the laptop.
- The plan covers **accidental damage** and battery replacement.
- It's from the manufacturer or a well-known store, and the price is a modest share of the computer's cost.

For example, Apple says AppleCare+ for Mac adds accident coverage for drops and spills (with a service fee each time) and battery replacement.

SCAM ALERT

"Your warranty is about to expire" calls

The FTC warns that calls and mail pushing extended warranties often come from companies with no connection to where you bought your computer, and the calls are probably illegal if you've never done business with them. Hang up. Don't give card numbers to a caller.

TIP

You can usually decide later

Some makers let you add their protection plan for a while after purchase. Ask, and if so, there's no need to decide at the register under pressure.

CHAPTER 27

Saying No to Add-Ons, Trials & Bloatware

A new computer often comes with a pile of extras: some you're offered at the register, some already installed. A few are useful. Many quietly cost money later. Here's how to keep only what you want.

At the register

You may hear…	What to know
"Setup" or "optimization" fee	New computers set themselves up step by step. You can usually do it yourself, or have someone you trust help.
Antivirus subscription	Windows 11 already includes the Windows Security app with Microsoft Defender Antivirus, and Macs and Chromebooks have protection built in. A paid antivirus is optional.
Protection plan	See Chapter 26, *Warranties & Protection Plans, Honestly*. Decide calmly, not under pressure.
Pricey cables and cases	A basic case and a simple mouse are fine. Fancy cables rarely help.

Free trials that turn into charges

New computers often come with free trial subscriptions. They're fine to try, but they renew on their own. For example, Microsoft's Surface pages note that a Microsoft 365 trial needs a credit card and charges the regular fee after 30 days unless you cancel. Apple offers three months of select services with a new device, and those plans renew automatically until canceled.

Pre-installed extras (bloatware)

Many Windows computers arrive with trial antivirus, games, and "helper" apps from the maker. You don't need most of them. Leave them alone if you're not sure, or remove the ones you clearly don't want. Pop-ups from a trial antivirus saying your protection is "expiring" are sales messages, not emergencies.

TIP

Make a trial list

When you accept a free trial, write down what it is and the date it ends. Set a reminder a few days before, and cancel anything you don't want to pay for.

HEADS UP

Don't remove what you don't recognize in a hurry

Some pre-installed programs are drivers and updates for the computer itself. If you're unsure whether something is needed, leave it, or ask someone you trust.

CHAPTER 28

Fake Deals, Fake Stores & Tech-Support Scams

Scammers know people shop for computers online, and they know new computer owners sometimes need help. A few simple rules keep you safe from almost all of it.

Fake deals and fake stores

- A brand-new laptop at half the price of every other store is almost always a trick.
- Type the store's address yourself, or use a store you already know. Don't click deal ads in social media or email to reach a store you've never heard of.
- Look for a real phone number, a street address, and a clear return policy.
- Pay with a credit card, never with gift cards, a wire transfer, cryptocurrency, or a payment app to a stranger.

Tech-support scams

The Federal Trade Commission explains how these usually start: a fake pop-up warning that looks like it's from a well-known company and urges you to call a number, or a call or text from someone pretending to be a technician. Scammers also buy ads and fake websites that show up in search results for "tech support." Once on the phone, they ask for remote access to your computer, pretend to find a problem, and charge you to "fix" it.

SCAM ALERT

Two rules from the FTC

1. Real tech companies won't call, email, or text you to say there's a problem with your computer. **2.** Real security warnings never ask you to call a phone number. A pop-up with a phone number is a scam.

Fake renewal invoices

Another common trick is an email or text saying you've been charged hundreds of dollars to renew a tech support subscription, often using names like Geek Squad, McAfee, or Norton. It says to call within 24 hours to dispute it. Don't call the number in the message. Check your card or bank statement instead; if there's no charge, it's a scam.

If you think you've been scammed

1. Hang up or close the window. Turn the computer off if a scammer has control of it.
2. Call your bank or credit card company using the number on the back of your card.
3. If you gave someone your password, change it right away, and anywhere else you used it.
4. Report it to the FTC at **ReportFraud.ftc.gov**.
5. Have someone you trust check the computer before you use it for banking again.

STAY SAFE

Talk to someone you trust

The FTC suggests talking it over with a friend, family member, or neighbor if you're not sure. Saying it out loud often makes a scam obvious.

PART 5

After You Buy & Getting Help

Accessibility features to look for, your first day with the new computer, a complete buying checklist, when to call Bill, and a cheat-sheet.

CHAPTER 29

Accessibility Features to Look For

Every modern computer has built-in tools that make it easier to see, hear, and use. They're included at no extra cost, and they can matter more than any spec on the tag. Here are the ones worth knowing about while you shop.

Need	Windows 11	Mac	Chromebook
Bigger text and pointer	Text size, Magnifier	Text size, Zoom	Text size, Magnifier
Read the screen aloud	Narrator	VoiceOver, Spoken Content	ChromeVox, Select-to-speak
Captions for audio	Live captions	Live Captions	Live Caption
Talk instead of type	Voice typing	Dictation	Dictation
Easier contrast	Contrast themes	Increase contrast	Color inversion

Live captions on Windows 11

Live captions show words on the screen for anything you hear on the computer: a video call, a YouTube video, a doctor's telehealth visit. Microsoft says it works across Windows 11 and processes audio on the computer itself. Press the **Windows key + Ctrl + L** to turn it on, or go to **Settings > Accessibility > Captions**.

Things to check in the store

- Is the screen big and bright enough for you, even after you turn the text size up?
- Are the keys easy to read, and is there a backlight?
- Can you hear the speakers clearly, or will you need headphones?
- Does it sign in with your face or fingerprint, so you don't have to type a password every time?
- Does it connect to your hearing aids over Bluetooth, if you use them?

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

Why this matters

A computer you can see and hear comfortably is a computer you'll actually use. The right accessibility settings can make a modest laptop feel far easier than an expensive one set up the default way.

TIP

Ask for the settings to be shown

In the store, ask someone to show you how to make the text bigger on each computer you're considering. If it's easy to find, that's a good sign.

CHAPTER 30

Your First Day with the New Computer

You've made your choice and brought it home. The first day is about getting set up safely, bringing your important things across, and making sure it's the right computer while you can still return it.

A calm first-day plan

1. Charge it and set it near your Wi-Fi router. Have your Wi-Fi password handy.
2. Turn it on and follow the setup steps. Sign in with your Microsoft account, Apple Account, or Google account.
3. Let it install updates. This can take a while on the first day; that's normal.
4. Move your files, photos, and bookmarks from the old computer (see below).
5. Set up your email, your printer, and the websites you use most.
6. Make the text a comfortable size (see Chapter 29, *Accessibility Features to Look For*).
7. Use it for your real tasks over the next few days, well inside the return window.

Moving your things across

Moving…	How
To a new Windows PC	Bill's Home Tech's guide "Moving to a New Windows PC" walks you through it step by step.
To a new Mac	Apple includes **Migration Assistant** on every Mac to move documents, apps, accounts, and settings from a PC or another Mac.
To a Chromebook	Sign in with your Google account; Gmail, Google Photos, and bookmarks come along. Copy other files from a USB drive or Google Drive.

Don't throw out the old computer yet

Keep the old computer for a few weeks until you're sure everything came across. When you're ready to give it away, recycle it, or trade it in, back it up and reset it to factory settings first so your accounts and personal files don't go with it.

SCAM ALERT

Setup doesn't involve a phone call

During setup, nothing legitimate will ask you to call a phone number or let a stranger connect to your computer. If a screen does, stop and see Chapter 28, *Fake Deals, Fake Stores & Tech-Support Scams*.

TIP

Write down your new account details

Record the email and password used to set up the computer, and keep it somewhere safe. You'll need them later for updates, purchases, and if you ever need to recover the account.

CHAPTER 31

The Complete Buying Checklist

Here's everything in this guide on one page. Bring it to the store on your phone, or go through it before you click "Buy" online.

Before you shop

1. Write your top five uses (see Chapter 3, *Start with What You'll Use It For*).
2. List any program or device you can't do without, and check that it works with your choice.
3. Choose a shape: laptop, desktop, all-in-one, or tablet with keyboard.
4. Choose Windows, Mac, or Chromebook.
5. Set a budget, using the late-2026 prices in Chapter 21, *What a Computer Costs in Late 2026*.

On the tag

Check	Look for
Memory (RAM)	16 GB Windows or Mac; 8 GB Chromebook
Storage	SSD; 512 GB (256 GB if you use the cloud)
Screen	Full HD (1920 x 1080) or better; about 300 nits or more
Ports	What you plug in today, or budget for an adapter
Camera	1080p for video calls
Updates	Windows 11; current macOS; Chromebook update date years away

At the register or checkout

1. Confirm the exact model number matches what you compared.
2. Ask the return window and any restocking fee.
3. Decide calmly on any protection plan; ask whether you can add it later.
4. Turn down setup fees and add-ons you don't need.
5. Pay with a credit card.
6. Keep the receipt and put the return deadline on your calendar.

STAY SAFE

The safety checks

Buy only from stores you know are real. Never pay with gift cards or a wire. Never call a number from a pop-up. If something feels rushed or too good to be true, stop and ask someone you trust.

TIP

One more check at home

Within the first few days, sit down and do your real tasks: a video call, email, a few photos, your banking website. If anything feels wrong, you still have time to return it.

CHAPTER 32

When to Call Bill

This guide should carry you a long way on your own. But buying a computer is a big decision, and sometimes a knowledgeable friend in your corner helps. That's what my **Computer Help** service is for.

Good reasons to call

- You're not sure whether your old computer can be fixed or should be replaced.
- You'd like a second opinion on two or three computers you're considering.
- You need to know whether an important program or device will work with a new computer.
- You want help setting up the new computer and moving your files, photos, email, and passwords across.
- You're buying for a parent and want it set up and ready before you hand it over.
- You'd like the old computer wiped safely before you give it away or recycle it.
- A pop-up, phone call, or "renewal" email has you worried, and you want a calm second look.

SCAM ALERT

I will never call you out of the blue

I won't ever phone, text, or pop up on your screen saying your computer has a problem. If someone claims to be from Bill's Home Tech, Microsoft, Apple, or your internet company and asks for remote access or payment, hang up and call me at the number below.

How to reach me

Call or text **(330) 200-8042**, or book a time at **billshometech.com/book**. Bill's Home Tech serves **Portage County, Ohio**, and I bring more than 30 years of professional experience to every visit. If you reach my assistant **Sophie** on the main line, she can answer simple questions and get you on my schedule.

FROM BILL

What it costs

My help is **$49 remote · $99 in your home**. The guides on my website, including this one, cost nothing to read. I'll always tell you plainly what you need and what you don't.

— Bill

CHAPTER 33

Your Computer-Buying Cheat-Sheet

The most important points from this guide, all in one spot.

The sensible specs for 2026

Spec	Look for
Memory	16 GB for Windows and Mac; 8 GB for Chromebook
Storage	SSD, 512 GB (256 GB if you keep photos in the cloud)
Screen	Full HD or better, about 300 nits or brighter, a size your eyes like
Processor	Any current mainstream chip; skip Celeron and Pentium
Camera	1080p for video calls
Copilot+ PC	Nice extras, not a must; don't pay just for the label

Which kind of computer

If…	Consider
I've always used Windows	A Windows 11 PC
I have an iPhone or iPad	A Mac (MacBook Neo or MacBook Air)
I mostly use the web	A Chromebook Plus
I need one particular program	Whatever that program runs on

Five safety rules

1. Buy from stores you know are real; type the address yourself.
2. Pay with a credit card; never gift cards, wires, or crypto.
3. A pop-up with a phone number is always a scam.
4. Hang up on unexpected "tech support" and "warranty expiring" calls.
5. Cancel free trials you don't want before they renew.

Keep this handy

Item	My details
Computer and model number	_____

Item	My details
Bought from	_____
Date bought	_____
Return deadline	_____
Warranty ends	_____
Account used to set it up	_____
Free trials and end dates	_____

FROM BILL

You've got this

You now know more about buying a computer than most people who walk into the store. Take your time, trust your hands and eyes, and remember: if you'd like a second opinion, I'm at **(330) 200-8042**.

— Bill