BILL'S HOME TECH
Home & Small Business Tech Solutions

BILL'S COMPLETE MANUALS

Buying Refurbished & Trading In

Refurbished grades, trade-in programs, wiping and recycling — explained in plain English, one step at a time

A plain-English guide for smart, safe device shopping

Take your time — you can't break it

Written for you by Bill — Bill's Home Tech

(330) 200-8042 · BillsHomeTech.com

For phones, tablets, computers & watches · facts current November 2026

What's Inside

This is your guide to saving money on a refurbished phone, tablet or computer — and to getting the most from the old one when it's time to let it go. Read it in any order and at your own pace. It explains what the labels really mean, what to check before you pay, how trade-in programs work, and how to wipe a device so none of your information goes with it. Stores change their programs and menus often, so when something has moved, look for the same words nearby.

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PART 1

Getting Started

What "refurbished," "renewed," "open box" and "pre-owned" really mean, and whether a second-hand device is a good fit for you. Start here.

CHAPTER 1

A Note from Bill

Hello, and welcome. A new phone or computer can cost a great deal, and the old one sitting in a drawer still has some value. This guide is about both halves of that: buying a good second-hand device without getting burned, and passing on your old one safely — for credit, for cash, to a family member, or to a recycler.

I'm Bill. I've spent more than 30 years working with technology, and these days I help folks here in Portage County feel at home with theirs. I wrote this guide the way I'd explain it at your kitchen table: patiently, in plain English, and without trying to sell you anything. I don't get a penny from any store or program named in these pages.

What this guide will do for you

- Explain the labels — refurbished, renewed, open box, pre-owned — and the grades stores use.
- Walk through the big refurbished sellers: Apple, Samsung, Amazon, Back Market, Best Buy and the phone companies.
- Show you the four checks that matter before you pay: battery, Activation Lock, carrier lock and a stolen-phone check.
- Explain trade-in programs honestly, including carrier bill credits and what happens if you switch companies.
- Take you step by step through backing up, signing out and erasing an iPhone, Android phone, Mac, Windows PC, tablet or watch.
- Point you to safe recycling, and explain what to do with a swollen battery.

The big promise: you can't break anything

Reading labels and checking settings can't hurt a thing. The one step in this guide that can't be undone is **erasing** a device — and Part 5 makes sure your photos and contacts are safely backed up before you ever get there. Take your time; there's no rush.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

Why this matters

A good refurbished phone or computer can cost noticeably less than new and work just as well for email, video calls and photos. And a well-prepared trade-in puts money back in your pocket while keeping your information out of a stranger's hands.

And I'm only a phone call away

If anything here leaves you unsure, call me at **(330) 200-8042**. There's no such thing as a silly question.

Let's start with what all those labels mean.

— Bill

CHAPTER 2

Refurbished, Renewed, Open Box, Pre-Owned: The Words Decoded

Stores use a handful of words for second-hand devices, and they don't all mean the same thing. Here they are in plain English.

Word	What it means
Refurbished	Used or returned, then inspected, tested, repaired if needed, and cleaned before being sold again. How thorough that is depends entirely on *who* did it.
Certified refurbished	Refurbished by — or to the standards of — the company that made it, such as **Apple Certified Refurbished** or **Samsung Certified Re-Newed**. Usually the most careful work and the best warranty.
Renewed	Amazon's word for refurbished. Most Renewed items are refurbished by independent sellers who meet Amazon's rules, not by Amazon itself.
Open box	Someone bought it, opened it, and returned it — sometimes without ever using it. Often nearly new, sold at a discount.
Pre-owned / Used	Previously owned. "Certified pre-owned" from a phone company means it was inspected; plain "used" from a stranger means nobody has checked it but you.
Grade	A letter or word (Fair, Good, Excellent, Premium) describing how a device *looks* — scratches and scuffs. At most sellers, the grade is about appearance, not how well it works.
Warranty	The seller's or maker's promise to repair or replace it if it fails during a set time.
Return window	How many days you have to send it back if you simply don't like it.

GOOD TO KNOW

The word matters less than the promise behind it

Two phones both labeled "refurbished" can be very different. What really protects you is the **warranty**, the **return window**, and **who did the work**. Chapter 10 shows you how to find and write down those three things for anything you buy.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

Once you know the words, a listing that says "Renewed — Good" or "Open box — Excellent" stops being a puzzle. You'll know what questions to ask and what you're really paying for.

CHAPTER 3

Is Refurbished Right for You?

For most people, a refurbished device from a trustworthy seller is a sensible way to save money. But it isn't the right choice every time. Here's an honest look.

When refurbished makes good sense

- You want a recent model for less than new.
- You're buying a backup phone, a tablet for the grandkids, or a computer for simple tasks.
- The seller offers a real warranty (ideally a year) and an easy return window.
- You'd like to keep a working device out of the landfill.

When to think twice

- **The model is very old.** Phones and computers eventually stop getting security updates. A bargain on a device that's near the end of its updates isn't a bargain. Before buying, search for the model name plus "software updates" on the maker's site.
- **The price is far below everyone else's.** That's a warning sign, not a lucky find (Chapter 27).
- **The seller is a stranger with no warranty and no returns.** You'd be relying entirely on your own checks (Part 3).
- **You need it to last many years.** A refurbished device has already used part of its life. If you keep devices for a very long time, the savings may be smaller than they look.

	Certified refurbished	Marketplace renewed	Private sale
Who checked it	The maker or its partner	An independent refurbisher	Nobody but you
Typical warranty	Often 1 year	Varies by seller and grade	Usually none
Returns	Yes, set window	Yes, set window	Rarely
Price	Highest of the three	Middle	Lowest

TIP

My rule of thumb

Pay a little more for a seller who will take it back. The difference between a cheap device and a good one is often just one bad battery — and a return window is what saves you from it.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

You'll go in knowing when to save and when to spend, instead of guessing at the checkout.

PART 2

Where to Buy Refurbished

The big names — Apple, Samsung, Amazon, Back Market, Best Buy and the phone companies — and what each one actually promises.

CHAPTER 4

Apple Certified Refurbished

Apple sells its own refurbished iPhones, iPads, Macs, Apple Watches and more in the **Refurbished** section of the Apple online store (apple.com/shop/refurbished). For many people this is the safest refurbished purchase there is.

What Apple promises

- Every device is fully tested, and any faulty parts are replaced with genuine Apple parts.
- **iPhones, iPads and other iOS devices get a new battery and a new outer shell.** So a refurbished iPhone from Apple should look new and start with a fresh battery.
- It's cleaned and comes in a new box with the usual accessories and cable.
- A **one-year limited warranty** — the same as a new Apple product — plus Apple's period of complimentary phone support.
- You can add **AppleCare** for longer coverage and accident protection, just as with a new device.
- Free shipping and free returns.

GOOD TO KNOW

Macs are a little different

The "new battery and new outer shell" promise is for iPhones and iPads. Refurbished Macs are still tested, cleaned and covered by the same one-year warranty, but Apple doesn't promise a new battery. Check the Mac's battery condition when it arrives (Chapter 11).

How to shop it

1. Go to **apple.com/shop/refurbished** in your web browser.
2. Choose the kind of device: iPhone, iPad, Mac, Apple Watch and so on.
3. Filter by model, size, storage and color. Stock changes daily, so if you don't see what you want, look again in a few days.
4. Open a listing and read its details: the model year, storage, and what's in the box.
5. Add AppleCare at checkout if you want longer coverage.

TIP

Compare the price with new

Apple's refurbished discounts are real but modest, and Apple sometimes lowers the price of the new model too. Before you buy, check what the same model costs new.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

You get an as-good-as-new device with the same warranty as new, for less. It's the closest thing to a worry-free refurbished purchase.

CHAPTER 5

Samsung Certified Re-Newed

Samsung's own refurbished program for Galaxy phones is called **Samsung Certified Re-Newed**. Samsung has sold these phones through Amazon in the U.S.

What Samsung promises

- Each phone is inspected and repaired by Samsung, using genuine Samsung parts.
- Each phone gets a **certified new battery**.
- It must pass a long list of quality checks before it earns the Re-Newed label.
- A **one-year limited manufacturer warranty**.

TIP

Make sure it really says "Samsung Certified Re-Newed"

On Amazon, Samsung's own refurbished phones sit right next to ordinary Renewed phones from other sellers. Look for **Samsung Certified Re-Newed** in the title, and check that the warranty listed is Samsung's. If it just says "Renewed," it's a different seller with different promises (Chapter 6).

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

A new battery and a maker's warranty take most of the risk out of buying a used Galaxy phone.

CHAPTER 6

Amazon Renewed and Renewed Premium

Amazon's refurbished section is called **Amazon Renewed**. Most items there are refurbished and sold by independent sellers who have to meet Amazon's standards. Amazon then adds its own guarantee on top.

Two levels

Label	What to expect
Renewed	Comes in condition grades such as Excellent, Good and Acceptable. Phones are generally described as having at least 80% of their original battery capacity. Comes with the **Amazon Renewed Guarantee**, usually described as a 90-day replacement or refund.
Renewed Premium	A stricter tier: phones are described as having over 90% battery capacity, with no visible scratches at arm's length, and a longer guarantee — usually described as one year.

HEADS UP

The listing is the final word

Amazon's terms vary by product and by seller, and some Renewed items carry a different warranty arrangement. Before you buy, scroll to the section on the product page that describes the guarantee, and read who the seller is. Write it down (Chapter 10).

Shopping Amazon Renewed sensibly

1. Search Amazon for the model you want and add the word **Renewed**, or choose **Renewed** in the filters.
2. Look at the label: **Renewed** or **Renewed Premium**, and the condition grade.
3. Check who sells it, and read recent reviews of the *seller*, not just the product.
4. Read what the listing says about battery, accessories and warranty.
5. When it arrives, run the checks in Chapter 14 right away, while you can still return it.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

Amazon's guarantee means you aren't stuck if a Renewed phone turns out badly — as long as you check it early.

CHAPTER 7

Back Market and Its Grades

Back Market is a large online marketplace for refurbished phones, tablets, laptops, watches and more. Like Amazon Renewed, the devices come from many independent refurbishers; Back Market sets the rules and handles the warranty and returns.

Back Market's grades

Phones, tablets, laptops, desktops and smartwatches come in four grades: **Fair**, **Good**, **Excellent** and **Premium**. Back Market says every grade works fully; the grade describes how it looks.

Grade	What it means
Fair	Fully working, with visible wear such as scratches or scuffs. Lowest price.
Good	Light signs of use.
Excellent	Hard to tell from new at a normal distance.
Premium	Back Market's top grade. The only grade promised to use only the maker's own parts.
Battery	Back Market says devices in the Fair, Good and Excellent grades have at least 80% of their original battery capacity.

GOOD TO KNOW

Warranty and returns

Back Market advertises a one-year warranty and a 30-day return window on its devices. Check the current terms on the listing before you buy, and keep your order confirmation.

TIP

"Fair" can be a smart buy

If you'll keep the phone in a case anyway, a Fair or Good grade can save money without giving up anything that matters. The scratches are on the outside; the phone works the same.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

Knowing that the grade is mostly about looks lets you pay for what you care about — and skip paying extra for a shine nobody will see.

CHAPTER 8

Best Buy Open-Box and Geek Squad Certified

Best Buy sells **open-box** items — products customers bought and returned — at a discount, in stores and online. You'll also see the label **Geek Squad Certified** on some refurbished items.

Open-box condition labels

Best Buy inspects open-box items and gives each one a condition label, from the best (labels such as **Excellent**) down to items with more cosmetic wear or a missing accessory (such as **Fair**). Best Buy has changed the exact labels over the years, so read the description on the listing or tag: it says what condition the item is in and what's included.

What to check before you pay

- What's in the box: charger, cable, stand, remote. A missing charger is a cost to add in.
- The warranty: many open-box items still carry the maker's warranty, and some refurbished items carry their own. The listing or the store will tell you.
- The return window: Best Buy's return period depends on the product and on your My Best Buy membership level. Ask at checkout and write the date down.
- For a phone: whether it's tied to a particular carrier (Chapter 13).

TIP

In the store, look before you leave

If you buy open-box in person, ask to open the box at the counter. Check that the accessories are there and that it powers on. It takes two minutes and saves a second trip.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

Open-box is often the easiest way to get a nearly new device at a lower price — with a local store to walk back into if something isn't right.

CHAPTER 9

Carrier Certified Pre-Owned Phones

The phone companies — Verizon, AT&T, T-Mobile and many prepaid brands — sell inspected used phones, often called **certified pre-owned**. They're usually traded-in phones that the company has checked, cleaned and reset.

What to know

- **Warranty is often shorter.** Verizon's certified pre-owned phones, for example, come with a **90-day limited warranty**. That's much shorter than Apple's or Samsung's year.
- **The phone may be locked** to that carrier for a while. That's fine if you're staying, but matters if you might switch (Chapter 13).
- **Battery health isn't always stated.** Ask, and check it yourself when you get it (Chapter 11).
- Carrier protection plans can usually be added for a monthly fee. Weigh that cost against simply buying a phone with a longer warranty.

TIP

Ask three questions at the counter

How long is the warranty? How many days do I have to return it? Is the phone locked to your network, and when can it be unlocked? Write the answers on your receipt.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

A carrier pre-owned phone can be the simplest option — it's set up and working on your account the same day — as long as you know its shorter warranty going in.

PART 3

Checking Before You Buy

Warranties and return windows, battery health, Activation Lock, carrier locks and stolen-phone checks — the handful of things that separate a good buy from a headache.

CHAPTER 10

Warranty and Return Windows: What to Write Down

The most valuable part of a refurbished purchase isn't printed on the device. It's the seller's promise. Before you pay, find these three things and write them down.

1. **Who is selling it** — the maker (Apple, Samsung), a marketplace (Amazon, Back Market) and the refurbisher behind it, a store (Best Buy), or a phone company.
2. **How long the warranty lasts**, and who handles it. A one-year warranty is the gold standard; 90 days is common from carriers and some marketplace sellers.
3. **How many days you have to return it**, and whether returns are free. Mark the last day on your calendar.

Seller	Warranty (as described, November 2026)	Where to confirm
Apple Certified Refurbished	1-year limited; AppleCare available	apple.com/shop/refurbished
Samsung Certified Re-Newed	1-year limited manufacturer	The product listing
Amazon Renewed	Usually 90-day guarantee	The product listing
Amazon Renewed Premium	Usually 1 year	The product listing
Back Market	1 year; 30-day returns advertised	The product listing
Verizon certified pre-owned	90-day limited	verizon.com
Best Buy open-box	Depends on the item	The listing or store tag

TIP

Save the proof

Take a screenshot of the listing showing the warranty and grade, and keep the order email in a folder. If you ever need to make a claim, you'll have exactly what you were promised.

HEADS UP

"Seller warranty" isn't the same as a maker's warranty

A small seller's own warranty is only as good as the seller. If the store disappears, so does the promise. A marketplace guarantee (Amazon, Back Market) or a maker's warranty (Apple, Samsung) is sturdier.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

Two minutes of note-taking means that if something goes wrong in week three, you know exactly who to call and by when.

CHAPTER 11

Checking Battery Health

The battery is the part of a used device most likely to be tired. Luckily, most phones and Macs can tell you how healthy theirs is. Check it on any used device the day it arrives.

iPhone

1. Open **Settings** and tap **Battery**.
2. Tap **Battery Health** (on iPhone 14 and earlier it's called **Battery Health & Charging**).
3. Look at **Maximum Capacity**. That's how much the battery holds compared with when it was new.

Google Pixel

On a Pixel 8a or later, go to **Settings** > **Battery** > **Battery health**. It shows **Normal** or **Reduced**; Reduced means the battery is below 80% and Google recommends a replacement. Older Pixels show tips only.

Samsung Galaxy

On many newer Galaxy phones you'll find battery information in **Settings** > **Battery**, and the **Samsung Members** app has a phone-diagnostics check that includes the battery. Menus vary by model; if you can't find it, tap the search magnifier in Settings and type **battery**.

Mac

Choose **Apple menu** > **System Settings** > **Battery**. Battery Health shows **Normal** or **Service Recommended**.

What number is good enough?

- Apple refurbished iPhones and Samsung Certified Re-Newed phones should have a new battery.
- Many marketplaces promise at least 80% on standard grades; Amazon Renewed Premium is described as over 90%.
- Below 80%, or a **Service** message, means the battery is worn. If the seller promised more, that's a reason to return it within the window.

GOOD TO KNOW

More on batteries

Bill's guide **Batteries: Health, Charging & Replacement** goes much deeper, including what a battery replacement involves and how to make a battery last.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

A one-minute check tells you whether your bargain will last the day — while you can still send it back.

CHAPTER 12

Activation Lock and Google's Reset Protection

This is the single most important check when buying a used phone, tablet or watch from anyone other than a big, reputable store.

What these locks are

Activation Lock (Apple) ties an iPhone, iPad, Mac or Apple Watch to its owner's Apple Account through **Find My**. Even after it's erased, it can't be set up by anyone else without that owner's password. Android phones have the same idea, called **Factory Reset Protection**: after a reset, the phone asks for the Google Account that was on it before. These locks are what make stolen phones nearly worthless — and that's exactly why you must check for them.

Checking a used iPhone or iPad

1. Turn it on in front of the seller.
2. It should show the **Hello** setup screen.
3. If it shows a passcode screen, an **Activation Lock** screen, or **iPhone Locked to Owner**, it has not been released. Ask the seller to remove it from their account right then — or walk away.
4. Never accept "I'll remove it from home tonight."

Checking a used Android phone

1. Turn it on. It should show the first setup screen.
2. Step through setup far enough to connect to Wi-Fi. If it asks you to **verify the Google Account that was previously on this device**, the seller didn't sign out before resetting.
3. Ask the seller to sign in and remove their account, then reset again — or walk away.

SCAM ALERT

"Activation-locked" phones sold cheap

A listing that says "iCloud locked," "for parts," "needs owner's account," or "FRP lock" is often a stolen phone. There's no legitimate trick to remove these locks without the owner. Paying someone online to "bypass" them usually means losing your money as well.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

Checking for the Hello screen takes seconds and protects you from the most common used-phone disaster: a phone you paid for but can never use.

CHAPTER 13

Carrier Locks and Blacklisted IMEI Numbers

Two more checks matter for phones and cellular tablets: whether the phone is **locked** to one phone company, and whether it has been **reported lost or stolen**.

Is it carrier-locked?

A locked phone only works with the company that sold it. That's fine if you're on the same company, a problem if you aren't.

- **iPhone:** go to **Settings** > **General** > **About** and look for **Carrier Lock**. **No SIM restrictions** means it's unlocked.
- **Android:** the simplest test is to put your own SIM card in, or ask your carrier to check the phone's IMEI number for you.
- **Buying from a carrier:** ask when the phone can be unlocked. Each carrier sets its own rules, usually tied to the phone being paid off and active for a set time.

Find the IMEI

The **IMEI** is a phone's serial number on the cell network. Dial ***#06#** on almost any phone and it appears on screen. On an iPhone it's also in **Settings** > **General** > **About**.

Check whether it's reported stolen

1. Ask the seller for the IMEI *before* you meet. A seller who won't share it is a red flag.
2. In your web browser, go to **stolenphonechecker.org**. It's a free tool from CTIA, the U.S. wireless industry association.
3. Enter the IMEI. It tells you whether the phone has been reported lost or stolen to participating carriers.
4. When you meet, dial *#06# on the phone itself to confirm the number matches.

HEADS UP

A clean result isn't a guarantee

The checker only knows about phones that have already been reported. A phone stolen this morning may still look clean. That's why the Activation Lock check (Chapter 12) matters just as much.

TIP

Ask your own carrier too

Before buying a used phone privately, call or chat with your phone company and give them the IMEI. They can tell you whether it will work on your plan.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

These checks stop you from paying for a phone that won't connect, or that could be shut off later because it was stolen.

CHAPTER 14

Your First Day with a Refurbished Device

The return window starts the day it arrives. Use the first day to test everything, so any problem shows up while it's still easy to send back.

The first-day checklist

1. Look it over in good light: screen cracks, dents, a loose charging port.
2. Charge it fully with the cable it came with. Make sure it charges and doesn't get unusually hot.
3. Check battery health (Chapter 11).
4. For phones: make a call, send a text, and check both speakers and the microphone.
5. Try both cameras, front and back, and the flash.
6. Test Face ID or the fingerprint reader, Wi-Fi and Bluetooth.
7. For computers: try the keyboard, trackpad, every port, the webcam and the speakers.
8. Check the model and storage match what you ordered (Settings > General > About on an iPhone; Apple menu > About This Mac on a Mac).
9. Use it normally for a few days. If anything seems off, contact the seller before the window closes.

TIP

Keep the box

Keep the box and packing for the whole return window. Returning a device is much easier when it goes back the way it came.

GOOD TO KNOW

Moving your things over

Once it passes, set it up and move your information across. Bill's guides on the iPhone, Android phones and **Buying a New Computer** walk through that step by step.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

A short test now means any surprise becomes a free return, not a repair bill.

PART 4

Trading In Your Old Device

How trade-in programs work, the Apple, Samsung, Best Buy and Amazon programs, carrier bill credits, and how to decide between trading in, selling and giving away.

CHAPTER 15

How Trade-In Programs Work

A trade-in program takes your old device and gives you credit — usually toward something new, or as a store gift card. Nearly every program works the same basic way.

1. **Get an estimate.** You answer a few questions online or in a store: the model, the storage, whether it turns on, whether the screen is cracked.
2. **Prepare the device.** Back it up, sign out, and usually erase it (Part 5).
3. **Hand it over.** In a store, or by mail with a prepaid label or kit.
4. **Inspection.** The company checks that the device matches what you said.
5. **Credit.** If it matches, you get the estimated value. If it doesn't, you may be offered a lower amount.

HEADS UP

Values change — often

Trade-in values go up and down with new model releases, promotions and the season. The number you see today may be different next month. This guide gives no dollar figures for that reason: always check the program's own website for today's estimate.

What usually lowers the value

- A cracked screen or back, or water damage.
- It doesn't turn on or won't hold a charge.
- It's still locked with Find My or a Google Account (most programs refuse it outright).
- It's carrier-locked, still owed on, or reported lost or stolen.
- It doesn't match the model you described.

TIP

Describe it honestly

If you say "no cracks" and there's a hairline crack, the value can drop after inspection, and some programs then charge back the difference. A truthful estimate is the one you'll actually get.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

Trade-ins turn a drawer full of old phones into credit toward the next one, with very little effort.

CHAPTER 16

Apple Trade In

Apple's program is called **Apple Trade In**. You can trade in iPhones, iPads, Macs, Apple Watches and other devices, online or at an Apple Store.

How it works

- Get an estimate at **apple.com/shop/trade-in** or in the Apple Store app.
- **In a store:** if you accept the estimate, you get credit toward your purchase right away, or an Apple Gift Card.
- **Online:** Apple sends a trade-in kit or a prepaid label. After Apple inspects the device, you get the final value as credit or an Apple Gift Card. This can take a couple of weeks.
- The value Apple gives depends on the device's condition, and the final amount is set after inspection.
- **If your device has no trade-in value**, Apple will still **recycle it for free**.

GOOD TO KNOW

Credit, not cash

Apple Trade In pays in Apple credit or an Apple Gift Card, not cash. That's great if you're buying from Apple anyway. If you'd rather have cash, see Chapter 19.

TIP

Trading in at the Apple Store when you buy a new iPhone

If you're getting a new iPhone at the store and trading in the old one, the staff can help you move your things across first. Still make an iCloud backup before you go (Chapter 20).

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

One stop: the old device goes, the new one comes home, and anything with no value is recycled responsibly at no charge.

CHAPTER 17

Samsung, Best Buy and Amazon Trade-In

Samsung trade-in

When you buy a new Galaxy phone or tablet at samsung.com, you can trade in an eligible device for credit, often given instantly at checkout.

- You then **have 15 days from the day you receive your new device** to ship the old one to Samsung. Miss that deadline and Samsung charges the trade-in credit back to your card.
- Samsung inspects the device; the final value depends on that inspection. If it isn't in the condition you described, you may be charged part of the credit back.
- Once shipped, the device belongs to Samsung and can't be returned to you — so be sure you've backed it up and erased it.

Best Buy trade-in

Best Buy takes many phones, tablets, computers, game consoles and more for trade-in, in stores and online. You're paid in a **Best Buy gift card** or store credit, not cash. For online trade-ins, Best Buy evaluates the item, confirms the final offer by email, and then emails an electronic gift card.

Amazon Trade-In

Amazon's trade-in program takes cell phones, video games, Amazon devices such as Kindle, Fire tablets, Fire TV, Echo and eero, and some other electronics. Qualifying trade-ins earn an **Amazon gift card**, and sometimes a discount toward a new Amazon device. You ship with a prepaid label. Amazon devices that aren't eligible for trade-in can still be sent in for free recycling.

TIP

Compare before you commit

Get an estimate from two or three programs for the same device. The difference can be surprising — and it changes month to month.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

Knowing the rules (especially Samsung's 15-day shipping window) keeps your credit safe and avoids a surprise charge on your card.

CHAPTER 18

Carrier Trade-Ins and Bill Credits

The phone companies offer some of the biggest-sounding trade-in deals — sometimes hundreds of dollars off a new phone. It's worth understanding how that money actually reaches you.

It usually comes as monthly bill credits

With most carrier promotions, the trade-in value isn't paid all at once. Instead, you buy the new phone on a monthly payment plan, and the carrier gives you a small **credit on each bill** over the length of that plan — often **24 or 36 months**. Together, the credits add up to the promised amount.

What happens if you leave early

- If you cancel the line, switch companies or pay the phone off early, the **remaining credits usually stop**.
- Whatever you still owe on the phone then becomes due — and you no longer get the credits that were meant to cover it.
- T-Mobile's promotion terms, for example, say you must keep the line and the financed phone to get the full value; if either is canceled, the monthly credits stop.
- Verizon describes trade-in value as either a one-time credit or monthly credits over up to 36 months, depending on the offer, usually starting within two billing cycles.

HEADS UP

A long deal is a long commitment

A 36-month bill-credit deal is a three-year promise to stay. Before you sign, ask: *"If I leave in a year, what will I owe?"* Get the answer in writing, or on the order summary.

TIP

Check the credits are showing

Credits often take one or two bills to start. Look at your bill for a line describing the promotion credit. If it hasn't appeared after a couple of bills, contact the carrier.

GOOD TO KNOW

More on your carrier

Bill's guides to Verizon, AT&T and T-Mobile cover device payments, promotions and reading the bill in more detail.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

You'll see a "$800 off" offer for what it really is — and avoid an unexpected bill if your plans change.

CHAPTER 19

Trade In, Sell, or Give Away?

A trade-in is the easiest choice, but not always the one that pays best. Here's how the options compare.

	Trade in	Sell it yourself	Give to family
Effort	Lowest	Most: photos, buyers, meetups	Low
What you get	Credit or gift card	Usually the most money	Gratitude
Risk	Low	Scams and no-shows	None
Best for	Buying new from the same place	Newer, valuable devices	Phones still updated

A few honest rules of thumb

- **Older or damaged devices:** trade in or recycle. They're rarely worth the trouble of selling.
- **A recent, valuable phone:** selling privately may bring more, if you're comfortable with it.
- **Passing to a grandchild or spouse:** they'll still need it erased and set up under *their* account. Don't hand over a phone signed in as you.

GOOD TO KNOW

Selling it yourself

Bill's guide **Selling Your Stuff Online** covers eBay, Facebook Marketplace and OfferUp, safe meetups and the scams that target sellers.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

You'll pick the option that fits your time and comfort, not just the one advertised loudest.

PART 5

Preparing Your Old Device

Back up, sign out, and erase — step by step for iPhones and iPads, Android phones and tablets, Macs, Windows PCs and watches — plus SIM cards and eSIMs.

CHAPTER 20

Before Anything: Back Up and Write Down

Erasing a device can't be undone. So before you trade it in, sell it or give it away, make sure everything you care about is safely somewhere else.

The before-you-erase checklist

1. **Make a fresh backup.** iPhone and iPad: iCloud Backup or a computer. Android: Google backup. Mac: Time Machine or iCloud. Windows: OneDrive or Windows Backup.
2. **Check your photos are safe.** Open your photo service (iCloud Photos, Google Photos) on another device or the web and make sure recent pictures are there.
3. **Move anything that isn't backed up automatically** — text-message chats you want to keep, voicemails, documents saved only on the device.
4. **Write down your account passwords.** You'll need your Apple Account or Google Account password to sign out — and to sign in on the new device.
5. **Two-factor codes.** If the old phone receives your sign-in codes or holds an authenticator app, set those up on the new phone *before* erasing the old one.
6. **Banking and other apps:** make sure you can sign in on the new device first.

HEADS UP

Authenticator apps don't always move by themselves

If you use an app that shows six-digit sign-in codes, check the app's own instructions for moving to a new phone. Erasing the old phone first can lock you out of accounts that rely on it.

TIP

Keep the old one a little longer

Many trade-ins give you two weeks or more. Use the new device for a few days before you erase the old one, so you can go back for anything you forgot.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

Your photos, contacts and messages come with you to the new device — and nothing is lost when the old one is wiped.

CHAPTER 21

Wiping an iPhone or iPad

On an iPhone or iPad, signing out turns off Find My and Activation Lock, and erasing removes your information. Do them in this order.

Step 1: unpair your Apple Watch

If you have an Apple Watch paired with this iPhone, unpair it first (Chapter 24).

Step 2: sign out

1. Open **Settings** and tap **your name** at the top.
2. Scroll down and tap **Sign Out**.
3. On iOS 26, you then choose **Erase this iPhone** or **Sign Out But Don't Erase**. On older versions, enter your Apple Account password and tap **Turn Off**.

Step 3: erase

1. Go to **Settings** > **General** > **Transfer or Reset iPhone** (or iPad).
2. Tap **Erase All Content and Settings**.
3. If you're asked about your **eSIM**, choose to erase it when the phone is leaving your family (Chapter 24).
4. Enter your passcode or Apple Account password if asked, and confirm.
5. Wait until you see the **Hello** screen. That's what the next owner should see.

> GOOD TO KNOW
> **Your iCloud data stays put**
> Signing out and erasing the phone does **not** delete your photos, contacts or backups from iCloud. They stay in your account, ready for your new device.

Already handed it over without erasing?

Sign in at **icloud.com/find**, choose the device, and choose **Erase**. Once it's erased, remove it from your account. You can also review your devices at **account.apple.com** under **Devices**.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

The next owner gets a clean phone, Activation Lock is off so it can be used, and your information stays yours.

CHAPTER 22

Wiping an Android Phone or Tablet

Android phones and tablets have **Factory Reset Protection**: after a reset, the device asks for the Google Account that was on it. That stops thieves — and it will stop the next owner too if you don't sign out first.

Before you reset

- Make sure you know your Google Account email and password.
- If you recently changed your Google Account password, Google advises waiting **24 hours** before a factory reset.
- Charge the device to at least 70%; a reset can take up to an hour.
- Remove any memory card (SD card). A reset may not erase it.

Remove your accounts (best practice, especially on Samsung)

1. Open **Settings** > **Accounts and backup** > **Manage accounts** (on a Samsung Galaxy) or **Settings** > **Passwords, passkeys & accounts** (names vary).
2. Tap your **Google** account and choose **Remove account**. Remove every Google account on the device.
3. On a Samsung, also remove your **Samsung account**. It's separate from Google's and asks for its own password.

Factory reset

1. **Most Android phones and Pixels: Settings** > **System** > **Reset options** > **Erase all data (factory reset)**.
2. **Samsung Galaxy: Settings** > **General management** > **Reset** > **Factory data reset**.
3. Follow the prompts, and enter your PIN or password if asked.
4. When it restarts at the welcome screen, it's ready for the next owner.

GOOD TO KNOW

Find Hub lets it go too

A factory reset removes the device from **Find Hub** (Google's service for finding lost Android devices, formerly called Find My Device). Afterward, check **myaccount.google.com** > **Security** > **Your devices** and sign the old one out if it's still listed.

TIP

If you can't find a menu

Every maker arranges Settings a little differently. Open Settings, tap the search magnifier, and type **reset**.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

The buyer or trade-in company can set it up straight away, and no one can get into your Google Account, photos or email.

CHAPTER 23

Wiping a Mac or Windows PC

Mac

1. **Back up** with Time Machine, or make sure your files are in iCloud Drive.
2. **Sign out of iCloud:** Apple menu > System Settings > your name > Sign Out. When asked whether to keep a copy of your iCloud data on this Mac, keeping a copy is fine, since you'll erase it next.
3. **AppleCare:** if the Mac has a plan, you can cancel it or transfer it to the new owner.
4. **Erase:** on recent macOS versions, go to Apple menu > System Settings > General > Transfer or Reset > **Erase All Content and Settings**, and follow the steps. This erases everything and signs you out of Apple services.
5. If that option isn't there (older Macs and older macOS versions), Apple's article "What to do before you sell, give away, trade in, or recycle your Mac" has the alternative steps.

Windows 11 PC

1. **Back up** your files to OneDrive or an external drive.
2. Go to **Settings** > **System** > **Recovery**.
3. Next to **Reset this PC**, select **Reset PC**.
4. Choose **Remove everything**.
5. When offered, turn on the option to **clean the drive** (Microsoft recommends this when you're donating, recycling or selling the PC). It takes longer but makes your files much harder to recover.
6. The screen may go black for a while. Don't turn the PC off; let it finish.

HEADS UP

BitLocker recovery key

Some PCs ask for a **BitLocker recovery key** during a reset. If yours is linked to your Microsoft account, you can find it by signing in at account.microsoft.com and looking under your devices. Find it before you start.

TIP

Remove the PC from your Microsoft account

After the reset, sign in at **account.microsoft.com**, go to **Devices**, and remove the old PC from your list.

GOOD TO KNOW

Windows 10

On Windows 10 the path is **Settings** > **Update & Security** > **Recovery** > **Reset this PC** > **Get started**.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

A cleaned computer can go to a new home, a school or a recycler without carrying your tax returns or saved passwords along with it.

CHAPTER 24

Watches, SIM Cards and eSIMs

Apple Watch: unpair, don't just erase

Unpairing an Apple Watch from its iPhone removes Activation Lock *and* erases the watch. Erasing the watch on its own leaves Activation Lock on, so the next owner can't use it.

1. Keep the watch and iPhone close together.
2. On the iPhone, open the **Watch** app and tap **My Watch**, then **All Watches**.
3. Tap the **info** button next to your watch, then **Unpair Apple Watch**.
4. On a cellular watch, choose to remove the cellular plan, and contact your carrier to cancel that line if you don't need it.
5. Enter your Apple Account password to turn off Activation Lock, and confirm.

Samsung Galaxy Watch and other watches

Galaxy Watches are managed in the **Galaxy Wearable** app on the phone. Look in the watch's settings for **Reset**, and remove the watch from your Samsung account afterward. For other watches, follow the maker's "before you sell" instructions; the idea is always the same — disconnect it from your account, then reset it.

Physical SIM cards

- Pop out the SIM tray with the little tool (or a straightened paper clip) and take your SIM out.
- If you're moving to a new phone, that SIM may go into the new phone — or your carrier may switch you to an eSIM.
- Remove any memory card at the same time.

eSIMs

- An **eSIM** is a digital SIM built into the phone. There's nothing to remove; it's erased with the phone.
- When erasing an iPhone, choose to erase the eSIM if the phone is leaving your family.
- Make sure your phone number is working on the new phone *before* erasing the old eSIM. If you're unsure, call your carrier first.

HEADS UP

Tell your carrier if you're dropping a line

Erasing a phone or watch doesn't cancel its service. If you're giving up a line, call your carrier, or you'll keep paying for it.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

No watch stuck behind your Activation Lock, no SIM with your number in someone else's drawer, and no forgotten line on the bill.

PART 6

Recycling and Battery Safety

Where to take devices nobody wants, how to find local drop-offs, and what to do with a swollen or damaged battery.

CHAPTER 25

Recycling What's Left

Old phones, chargers and laptops don't belong in the trash. They contain batteries that can start fires in garbage trucks, and materials that can be recovered. Happily, there are easy, free or low-cost ways to recycle them. **Erase the device first** (Part 5), even if it's going to a recycler.

Apple

Through **Apple Trade In**, devices that have no trade-in value can be **recycled for free**. Start at apple.com/shop/trade-in, or ask at an Apple Store.

Best Buy

- Best Buy stores take many electronics for recycling, and most small electronics — such as laptops, desktops, tablets and printers — are free to drop off.
- There's a limit of **three items per household per day**, including no more than two TVs.
- Some items, including TVs, carry a fee in many states (for example, **$29.99** per TV as of November 2026). Rules vary by state.
- Check **bestbuy.com/recycling** for the current list, limits and fees before you go.

Staples

- Staples stores in the U.S. take electronics for free recycling, any brand, wherever you bought it. You don't need to buy anything.
- Bring items to the customer service desk. Staples lists a limit of **7 items per customer per day**.
- Staples does **not** take TVs, appliances, kitchen electronics, lamps and bulbs, alkaline batteries, or recalled products.

Amazon

Amazon devices that aren't eligible for trade-in can be sent to Amazon for free recycling through its recycling program.

Here in Portage County

The **Portage County Solid Waste Management** page on the county's official website, **portagecounty-oh.gov**, lists recycling drop-offs and community recycling events, including events for electronics. Dates and accepted items change, so check the page or call the county before you load the car.

TIP

Bundle the cables

Recyclers take old chargers and cables too. Put them in a bag with the device so everything goes in one trip.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

The junk drawer gets cleared out, nothing dangerous goes in the trash, and your information doesn't go out the door with it.

CHAPTER 26

Swollen and Damaged Batteries

Old phones and laptops sometimes develop a **swollen battery**. You might notice the screen lifting away from the case, the back bulging, a laptop that won't sit flat, or a trackpad that won't click. A swollen battery is damaged and can be a fire hazard.

STAY SAFE

If a battery is swollen, hot, smoking or smells odd

Stop using and stop charging it. Unplug it if you can do so safely. Don't press on it, puncture it, or try to remove it yourself. Move it away from anything that can burn, onto a non-flammable surface outdoors or in a garage if possible. If it's smoking or on fire, get away from it and call 911.

Storing it until you can drop it off

- Cover the battery terminals (or the device's charging port) with non-conductive tape, such as clear packing tape, or put it in its own plastic bag.
- Keep it in a cool, dry place in a container of non-flammable material such as sand or cat litter.
- Never put lithium-ion batteries or devices containing them in the trash or curbside recycling bin.

Where it can go

- Damaged and swollen batteries shouldn't go in ordinary store drop-off boxes. Contact the device's maker first; they may repair it or tell you how to return it.
- The Battery Network (formerly Call2Recycle) has a locator at **batterynetwork.org** and guidance for damaged batteries.
- Your county's household hazardous waste program may also accept them. Ask before you bring one in.

HEADS UP

Don't trade in or mail a swollen device

Trade-in programs and shipping carriers have strict rules about damaged batteries. Contact the program first instead of dropping a swollen phone in the mail.

GOOD TO KNOW

More on batteries

Bill's guide **Batteries: Health, Charging & Replacement** covers battery safety, charging habits and replacements in depth.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

You'll know how to handle the one kind of old device that's genuinely dangerous, calmly and safely.

PART 7

Scams to Watch For

Fake trade-in sites, buyers who want your verification code, locked stolen phones and listings that are too good to be true.

CHAPTER 27

Scams Around Refurbished Devices and Trade-Ins

Used phones and trade-ins attract scammers because there's real money involved and most people don't do it often. Here are the tricks to recognize.

SCAM ALERT

Fake trade-in websites

Ads and look-alike sites promise trade-in prices far above Apple's, Samsung's or your carrier's. You mail the phone — and never hear back, or get a fraction of the quote. Get estimates by typing the company's address yourself (apple.com, samsung.com, bestbuy.com, your carrier), not by clicking an ad or a text.

SCAM ALERT

"Send me the code to prove you're real"

A buyer for your old phone asks you to read back a six-digit code that was just texted to you. That code may set up a Google Voice number in your name, or sign them into one of your accounts. Never share a verification code with anyone, for any reason.

SCAM ALERT

Activation-locked or "iCloud locked" phones

Cheap listings for phones that are "locked, for parts" or "needs the owner's account" are often stolen. Sellers may promise that a shop can unlock it. It can't, without the owner. Only buy a used phone you've seen on the Hello or welcome screen (Chapter 12).

SCAM ALERT

Too-good-to-be-true listings

A nearly new iPhone or Galaxy at half the going price, a seller who wants payment by gift card, wire, crypto or a payment app "as friends and family," or pressure to pay before you see it — walk away. Real deals don't need you to hurry.

SCAM ALERT

Fake "your trade-in has a problem" messages

A text or email says your trade-in failed inspection or your credit is on hold, with a link to "fix" it or verify your card. Don't click. Check your order by signing in to the company's website or app directly.

Safe habits that cover almost everything

- Buy from sellers with a real warranty and a return window (Chapter 10).
- Pay by credit card, or through the marketplace's own checkout — never by gift card, wire or crypto.
- For a private sale, meet in a public place, check the Hello screen, the IMEI and the stolen-phone checker before money changes hands (Chapters 12 and 13).
- Never share a sign-in or verification code.
- Erase your own device before it leaves your hands (Part 5).

If you think you've been scammed

1. Stop contact with the other person.
2. If you paid by card, call the number on the back of the card and dispute the charge.
3. If you shared a code or password, change that account's password right away and turn on two-step verification.
4. Report it at **ReportFraud.ftc.gov**. In Ohio, you can also contact the Ohio Attorney General's consumer protection section at 1-800-282-0515.
5. Call Bill if you'd like help securing your accounts.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

A handful of habits — official sites only, no codes, no gift cards — protect you from nearly every trick that targets buyers and sellers of used devices.

PART 8

Getting Help & Your Cheat-Sheet

An honest word about when a hand is worth it, and a one-page summary to keep by the junk drawer.

CHAPTER 28

When to Call Bill

Most of what's in this guide you can do yourself, at your own pace. But part of being helpful is being honest about when a hand saves you time and worry. Here's my straight advice, with no pressure.

Times it's well worth a call

- **Checking a used device before you buy** — battery, Activation Lock, carrier lock and the stolen-phone check, done together with you.
- **Moving everything to the new phone or computer**, then confirming your photos, contacts, messages and two-factor codes all made it across.
- **Wiping a drawer full of old devices** safely — phones, tablets, laptops and watches — so they can be traded in, donated or recycled.
- **A device that's still locked to an old account**, such as a late relative's phone or tablet. There are proper ways to approach Apple and Google, and I can help you through them.
- **Reading a carrier trade-in deal** and working out what you'd owe if you left early.
- **A swollen battery** you're not sure how to handle.

What working with me is like

I work at your pace, explain what I'm doing in plain words, and never talk down to anyone. I'll tell you honestly when something isn't worth your money, and I don't take commissions from any store or trade-in program. I've been doing this kind of work for more than 30 years, and I serve Portage County, Ohio, in person, and folks farther away by remote help.

FROM BILL

How to reach me

Call **(330) 200-8042** or book a time at **billshometech.com/book**. My help is **$49 remote · $99 in your home**. This guide is yours to keep for free; if you'd like a hand, I'm only a phone call away.

GOOD TO KNOW

You may meet Sophie first

When you call or visit billshometech.com, you might be greeted by **Sophie**, my AI receptionist. She can answer quick questions and help you book a time. A real person — me — does the actual help.

Thank you for taking the time to do this carefully. A little checking before you buy, and a little care before you let go, makes all the difference.

— Bill

CHAPTER 29

Your Refurbished & Trade-In Cheat-Sheet

Keep this handy. The whole guide, boiled down.

The essentials

Topic	Remember
Safest refurbished	Apple Certified Refurbished or Samsung Certified Re-Newed: new battery, 1-year warranty.
Marketplaces	Amazon Renewed (usually 90 days) or Renewed Premium (usually 1 year); Back Market (1 year, 30-day returns advertised). Grades are about looks.
Carrier pre-owned	Shorter warranty (Verizon: 90 days). Ask about unlocking.
Battery check	iPhone: Settings > Battery > Battery Health. Mac: System Settings > Battery. Below 80% = worn.
Before you pay	Hello screen (no Activation Lock), *#06# for IMEI, stolenphonechecker.org, carrier lock status.
Trade-in values	Change often — check today's estimate on the official site.
Carrier credits	Paid monthly over 24–36 months; usually stop if you leave or pay off early.
Erase iPhone	Settings > your name > Sign Out, then Settings > General > Transfer or Reset iPhone > Erase All Content and Settings.
Erase Android	Remove Google (and Samsung) accounts, then Settings > System > Reset options (Samsung: General management > Reset).
Erase Windows 11	Settings > System > Recovery > Reset PC > Remove everything.
Apple Watch	Unpair in the Watch app on the iPhone — don't just erase.
Recycle	Apple Trade In (free for no-value devices), Best Buy, Staples, Portage County events.

Write it down once

Keep handy	
What I bought, from whom	_____
Order number & date	_____
Warranty length & who handles it	_____
Last day to return it	_____
IMEI or serial number	_____
Trade-in: program & ship-by date	_____
Carrier credit: amount, months, start bill	_____
Apple Account / Google Account email	_____

When something's wrong, in order

1. Is it still inside the return window? Contact the seller first.
2. Does battery health match what was promised?
3. Does it show a lock screen asking for someone else's account? Return it.
4. Won't connect to your carrier? Check the carrier lock and IMEI.
5. Trade-in credit missing? Check the order on the official site — not a link in a text.
6. Swollen battery? Stop charging, move it somewhere safe, and see Chapter 26.
7. Still stuck? Call Bill at (330) 200-8042.