BILL'S HOME TECH
Home & Small Business Tech Solutions

BILL'S COMPLETE MANUALS

Moving to a New Windows PC

Your files, email, programs and settings — moved safely — explained in plain English, one step at a time

A plain-English guide for everyone getting a new computer

Take your time — keep the old PC until you're sure

Written for you by Bill — Bill's Home Tech

(330) 200-8042 · BillsHomeTech.com

For Windows 11 (25H2 and 26H2), moving from Windows 10 or 11 · facts current November 2026

What's Inside

This is your guide to moving from an old Windows computer to a new one. Read it in any order and at your own pace. Each chapter explains what a step does *for you*, then walks you through it slowly. If a screen looks a little different on your computer, the idea is still the same.

Part 1 — Getting Ready to Move

1 A Note from Bill
2 The Big Picture: What Moves and What Doesn't
3 Your Moving Inventory
4 Finding Your Programs and License Keys
5 Your Accounts and Passwords Checklist
6 Where Your Files Actually Live
7 If Your Old PC Runs Windows 10

Part 2 — Moving Your Things

8 Choosing Your Moving Method
9 Windows Backup: What It Saves
10 Running Windows Backup on the Old PC
11 Restoring During New-PC Setup
12 OneDrive in Plain English — and What It Costs
13 What Happened to PC-to-PC Transfer
14 The External Drive Method
15 Paid Transfer Tools: Laplink PCmover
16 Photos: Making Sure Every Picture Comes Along

Part 3 — Email, Browsers & Programs

17 Moving Your Email: The Big Idea
18 New Outlook vs. Classic Outlook
19 .pst Files: Old Email Saved on Your PC
20 Gmail, Outlook.com, Yahoo and Internet-Provider Email
21 Browsers: Edge, Chrome and Firefox Sync
22 Passwords: Moving Them Safely
23 Microsoft 365 and Office on the New PC
24 Printers and Scanners
25 Quicken, TurboTax and Other Licensed Programs

Part 4 — Your First Day on the New PC

26 Setting Up: Microsoft Account or Local Account
27 Windows Update First

28 A Windows Hello PIN for Easy Sign-In
29 Make It Comfortable: Text Size, Display and Mouse
30 Default Apps and Notifications
31 Trial Software and Bloatware: Removing It Carefully
32 Windows Security: Protection That's Already Built In

Part 5 — Saying Goodbye to the Old PC

33 Before You Wipe: The Final Check
34 Your BitLocker Recovery Key
35 Reset This PC: Remove Everything
36 Recycling, Donating or Selling the Old PC

Part 6 — Staying Safe & Getting Help

37 "Transfer Help" Scams to Watch For
38 When to Call Bill
39 Your Moving Cheat-Sheet

PART 1

Getting Ready to Move

What moves on its own, what needs a hand, and the simple inventory that makes moving day calm. Start here.

CHAPTER 1

A Note from Bill

Hello, and welcome. If you're reading this, chances are there's a new computer in a box nearby, or one already sitting on your desk next to the old one. Maybe you're excited. Maybe you're a little worried that your photos, your email, or that one program you use every April won't make the trip. Both feelings are completely normal, and this guide is here for both of them.

I'm Bill. I've spent 30+ years working professionally with computers, and these days I help folks around Portage County, Ohio feel at home with their technology. I wrote this guide the way I'd walk you through a move at your kitchen table: one box at a time, in plain English, with no rushing and no fancy words.

What this guide covers

- **Getting ready** — a simple inventory so nothing gets left behind.
- **Moving your things** — Windows Backup, OneDrive, an external drive, and the paid tools, with honest costs.
- **Email, browsers and programs** — the pieces that don't move by themselves.
- **Your first day** — the handful of settings that make a new PC comfortable and safe.
- **Saying goodbye to the old PC** — wiping it properly and recycling it responsibly.
- **Staying safe** — the "transfer help" scams that target people with new computers.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this guide does for you

It turns one big, worrying job into a list of small, ordinary ones. Each chapter tells you what a step does *for you*, then walks you through it slowly. By the end, your new PC will have your files, your email, your bookmarks and your favorite programs, and your old PC will be wiped clean and on its way to a proper recycler.

The big promise — and the one honest exception

Here's the good news: almost nothing in this guide can hurt you. Copying files doesn't remove them from the old PC. Signing in to your accounts on a new computer doesn't sign you out of the old one. Changing text size or default apps can always be changed back. Explore freely.

The one honest exception is the very last step: **wiping the old computer**. Once you reset it and remove everything, those files are gone for good. That's why this guide keeps that step for the end, after a final check that everything you care about is safely on the new PC. Until then, keep the old computer plugged in, untouched and ready. It's your safety net.

> **TIP**
>
> **Give yourself a few weeks**
>
> There's no prize for finishing in one afternoon. Many people use the new PC for a few weeks while the old one sits quietly in a closet, just in case something turns up missing. That's a smart, calm way to move.

You're never stuck alone

This guide will carry you a long way on your own. If you get stuck, or you'd simply rather have me handle the move, call or text me at **(330) 200-8042**. There's no such thing as a silly question about moving computers. Read on at your own pace and take it one step at a time. See Chapter 2, *The Big Picture: What Moves and What Doesn't* next.

— Bill

CHAPTER 2

The Big Picture: What Moves and What Doesn't

Moving to a new computer is a lot like moving to a new house. Some things ride along in the moving truck automatically. Some things you carry yourself. And a few things — like your utilities — have to be set up fresh at the new address. Knowing which is which takes most of the worry away.

The three kinds of "stuff" on your computer

- **Your files** — photos, documents, letters, spreadsheets, music and videos. These can be copied, and copying is easy.
- **Your settings** — wallpaper, Wi-Fi networks, accessibility choices. Windows Backup can carry many of these.
- **Your programs** — Microsoft Office, Quicken, printer software, games. These almost never copy over cleanly. They're *reinstalled* on the new PC, then signed in or activated.

What it is	How it usually moves
Photos and documents	Windows Backup with OneDrive, an external drive, or both
Wi-Fi networks, wallpaper, accessibility	Windows Backup (restored during setup)
Email (Gmail, Outlook.com, most provider email)	Lives online — just sign in on the new PC
Old email saved only on the PC	A .pst file copied and imported
Bookmarks and saved passwords	Browser sync (Edge, Chrome or Firefox)
Microsoft 365 / Office	Install again from your Microsoft account
Quicken, TurboTax and similar	Install fresh, then bring the data file over
Printer	Add it again on the new PC

GOOD TO KNOW

Programs are the part people forget

Files are what everyone worries about, but they're usually the easiest piece. The step that trips people up is programs: discovering on a Sunday night that a program from years ago needs a product key nobody wrote down. Chapter 3, *Your Moving Inventory* and Chapter 4, *Finding Your Programs and License Keys* help you find those before moving day.

The order that works

1. Make your inventory on the old PC (Chapter 3, *Your Moving Inventory*).
2. Back up from the old PC with Windows Backup, an external drive, or both (Chapter 8, *Choosing Your Moving Method*).
3. Set up the new PC and restore your backup during setup (Chapter 11, *Restoring During New-PC Setup*).
4. Sign in to email and your browser; reinstall your programs (Part 3).
5. Do the first-day settings (Part 4).
6. Live with the new PC for a while, then do the final check and wipe the old one (Part 5).

FROM BILL

Keep both computers side by side if you can

If there's room on the table, set the new PC right next to the old one. Being able to glance at the old screen — "what was that program called?" — makes everything easier.

CHAPTER 3

Your Moving Inventory

Before you copy a single file, spend twenty minutes making a list. It's the most valuable twenty minutes of the whole move. The list tells you what to bring, reminds you of passwords you'll need, and becomes your checklist for the final check before you wipe the old PC.

What to write down

Item	What to note
Files	Where your important folders are: Documents, Pictures, Desktop, Downloads, and any other folders or drives you use.
Photos	Every place pictures live: the Pictures folder, a camera or phone import folder, a second drive.
Programs	Every program you actually use, plus how you got it (disc, download, subscription).
License keys	Product keys or the account each paid program is tied to.
Email	Each email address, which company provides it, and whether you use Outlook, the web or another program.
Browsers	Which browser you use (Edge, Chrome, Firefox) and whether you're signed in to it.
Printers and devices	Printer make and model, scanner, external drives, any special mouse or keyboard.
Accounts	Microsoft account, Google account, Apple Account, bank and pharmacy sites you visit.

A quick way to see your programs

1. On the old PC, open **Settings** (press the **Windows key + I**).
2. On Windows 11, select **Apps > Installed apps**. On Windows 10, select **Apps > Apps & features**.
3. Scroll through slowly. Write down only the programs you actually use. You don't need the long list of drivers and helper tools — those come with the new PC or reinstall themselves.

TIP

Take photos of the screen

If writing is a chore, use your phone to take pictures of the Installed apps list and of anything else you want to remember. A clear photo is as good as a written note, and it's quicker.

STAY SAFE

Keep your password list private

Your inventory may end up with passwords on it. Store it somewhere private at home, not taped to the computer, and never photograph it and send it to anyone who calls offering to help. Chapter 5, *Your Accounts and Passwords Checklist* has more.

CHAPTER 4

Finding Your Programs and License Keys

A **license key** (also called a product key or serial number) is the proof that you paid for a program. Many modern programs don't use keys anymore — they're tied to an account you sign in to. Older programs often still need the key typed in when you install them on a new PC.

Two kinds of paid programs

Type	How it moves	Examples
Account-based	Install on the new PC and sign in; the license follows you	Microsoft 365, most antivirus subscriptions, Quicken subscriptions
Key-based	Install on the new PC and type the product key	Older one-time-purchase software, some photo and genealogy programs

Where to look for a key

- **Your email** — search for the program's name plus "order", "receipt" or "license". Online purchases usually email the key.
- **The box or disc sleeve** — look for a sticker with a long code of letters and numbers.
- **Inside the program** — many programs show the key or the account under **Help > About** or **Help > Register**.
- **The company's website** — signing in to your account there often lists your purchases and keys.

HEADS UP

Some programs limit how many computers they run on

Some licenses allow only one or two computers at a time. If a program says you've reached your limit, you may need to deactivate it on the old PC first (look for **Deactivate** or **Sign out** in the program's Help or Account menu). Do that before you wipe the old computer.

GOOD TO KNOW

Windows itself doesn't need your old key

Your new PC came with Windows already licensed. You don't move the Windows license from your old computer, and you don't need its product key.

SCAM ALERT

Don't download "key finder" tools from pop-ups

Ads that promise to recover all your keys or "migrate everything for free" are a common way to slip unwanted software onto a computer. If you can't find a key, contact the program's maker through its official website, or give me a call.

CHAPTER 5

Your Accounts and Passwords Checklist

On a new computer, nearly everything starts with signing in. Your email, your browser, Microsoft 365, OneDrive and your backup all live behind an account and a password. Getting these ready before moving day is what makes the new PC feel like home in an hour instead of a week.

The accounts that matter most

Account	Why you'll need it
Microsoft account	The email and password you use for Windows, OneDrive, Outlook.com and Microsoft 365. This is the key to Windows Backup.
Google account	Gmail, Chrome sync, Google Photos and YouTube.
Your email account	If your email comes from your internet company (Spectrum, AT&T, Frontier and so on), its address and password.
Browser account	Edge uses your Microsoft account, Chrome your Google account, Firefox a Mozilla account.
Program accounts	Quicken, TurboTax, antivirus, photo programs.

Check each one before moving day

1. Make sure you can sign in to each account on the **old** PC or your phone, and that you know the password.
2. Check that the recovery phone number and backup email on each account are current. Those are how you get back in if a code is needed.
3. Have your phone nearby on moving day. Many accounts text a code or ask you to approve the sign-in on your phone.

> **TIP**
>
> **"Is this really you?" messages are normal**
>
> When you sign in on a new computer, Microsoft and Google often send a code or a "was this you?" alert. That's the security working. If you started the sign-in yourself, approve it. If you didn't, don't.

SCAM ALERT

Nobody legitimate needs your passwords to move your files

No real company will call and ask for your passwords or a code that was texted to you. A code sent to your phone is meant for *you* to type into the screen in front of you — never to read to a caller.

CHAPTER 6

Where Your Files Actually Live

Before you can move your files, it helps to know where they are. Most people keep nearly everything in a handful of folders that Windows makes for you. A few people have files tucked in other places, and those are the ones that get left behind.

The usual places

Folder	What's usually in it
Desktop	Anything sitting on your main screen. Easy to forget it's a folder too.
Documents	Letters, spreadsheets, PDFs and most program files.
Pictures	Photos imported from cameras and phones.
Downloads	Things you saved from the internet and email attachments.
Music and Videos	Any music collection or home movies you've copied in.
OneDrive	If you've been using OneDrive, a copy of these may already be online.

See them all in File Explorer

1. Press the **Windows key + E** to open **File Explorer**.
2. Look down the left side. You'll see Desktop, Documents, Downloads, Pictures, Music and Videos.
3. Select **This PC** to see any other drives (like a D: drive) where files may be stored.
4. To see how big a folder is, right-click it and choose **Properties**. The size tells you what kind of backup drive or OneDrive plan you'll need.

HEADS UP

Programs sometimes save files in their own folders

Some programs — older genealogy, recipe, tax and money programs especially — keep their data in a folder of their own. If you're not sure, open the program and look for **File > Save As**; the folder it offers is often where its files live. Note it on your inventory.

TIP

Check the Desktop and Downloads twice

These two folders hold a surprising number of important files that people forget to bring along. A quick look through both on the old PC is worth it.

CHAPTER 7

If Your Old PC Runs Windows 10

Many people buying a new computer in 2026 are moving from Windows 10. That's a perfectly good place to move from: the tools in this guide work from Windows 10 as well as from an older Windows 11 PC.

Where Windows 10 stands

Microsoft ended regular support for Windows 10 on October 14, 2025. Home users could keep getting security fixes through Microsoft's **Extended Security Updates (ESU)** program, which Microsoft has since extended to **October 12, 2027**. Once you're on your new PC, the old computer's support status matters less — but keep it updated and connected only as long as you need it for the move.

Windows Backup works on Windows 10 too

The **Windows Backup** app, described in Chapter 9, *Windows Backup: What It Saves*, is available on Windows 10. If you can't find it, update the old PC first.

1. On the old PC, select **Start > Settings > Update & Security > Windows Update**.
2. Select **Check for updates**, then install everything offered and restart.
3. If Windows 10 offers to upgrade the old PC to Windows 11, you can ignore it — you're moving to a new PC instead.
4. Search the Start menu for **Windows Backup**.

GOOD TO KNOW

Some menus look a little different on Windows 10

Where this guide gives a Windows 11 path, Windows 10 usually has the same idea in a slightly different spot. When the difference matters, both paths are listed.

HEADS UP

Don't rush to throw away the Windows 10 PC

Even an unsupported Windows 10 computer is still a working backup of your files. Keep it until you've done the final check in Chapter 33, *Before You Wipe: The Final Check*. Just avoid using it for banking or email once your new PC is ready.

PART 2

Moving Your Things

Windows Backup, OneDrive, an external drive and the paid tools — what each one does, what it costs, and how to use it.

CHAPTER 8

Choosing Your Moving Method

There's more than one way to carry your things to a new PC. None of them is "the right one" for everybody. The best choice depends on how much you have, whether you use OneDrive, and how comfortable you are plugging in a drive and copying folders.

Method	Good for	Cost
Windows Backup + OneDrive	Settings, Wi-Fi, app list, and files that fit in your OneDrive space	Free up to 5 GB of files; more storage is a subscription
External drive copy	Lots of photos and files; anyone who'd rather not pay for cloud storage	The price of a USB drive
Both together	The most careful move: settings from Windows Backup, files on a drive	Same as above
Laplink PCmover	People who want programs moved too and don't mind paying	Paid software

Bill's simple rule of thumb

- **Under 5 GB of files** (or you already pay for Microsoft 365)? Windows Backup with OneDrive handles it.
- **Lots of photos** and no plan to pay for storage? Use Windows Backup for settings, plus an external drive for files.
- **Not sure how much you have?** Check folder sizes as shown in Chapter 6, *Where Your Files Actually Live*, then decide.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

Two copies are better than one

Using Windows Backup *and* an external drive means your files exist in two places during the move. If one method misses something, the other has it. That's the calm way to move.

GOOD TO KNOW

Microsoft's direct PC-to-PC transfer isn't an option anymore

Microsoft briefly offered a feature that copied files straight from the old PC to the new one over your home network. Its help page now says that feature is no longer available. Chapter 13, *What Happened to PC-to-PC Transfer* explains what to do instead.

CHAPTER 9

Windows Backup: What It Saves

Windows Backup is a free app built into Windows 11 and Windows 10. It saves your settings and a list of your apps to your Microsoft account, and it backs up your main folders to OneDrive. When you set up the new PC and sign in with the same Microsoft account, Windows offers to put it all back.

What Windows Backup can save

What	What it means
Folders	Desktop, Documents, Pictures, Videos and Music — synced to OneDrive.
Installed apps	A list of your apps, so their pins come back on the new PC.
Accessibility	Your text size, magnifier and other accessibility choices.
Accounts, Wi-Fi and passwords	Wi-Fi networks you've joined and some Windows sign-in details.
Personalization	Wallpaper, colors, theme and Start layout (needs OneDrive space).
Language preferences	Your language settings and dictionary.
Other Windows settings	Some printer and mouse options, File Explorer settings and notification preferences.

What it doesn't do

- It doesn't **install** your programs. It remembers them. Store apps reinstall when you select their pin; other programs send you to the web to download their installer.
- It doesn't back up files **outside** the main folders, like a D: drive or a program's own folder.
- It doesn't move your **browser** data. Edge, Chrome and Firefox each have their own sync (Chapter 21, *Browsers: Edge, Chrome and Firefox Sync*).
- It works with a **personal** Microsoft account (like @outlook.com or @live.com), not a work or school account.

HEADS UP

Your folders count against your OneDrive space

Backing up folders copies them to OneDrive, and a free Microsoft account includes 5 GB of OneDrive storage. If your Pictures folder alone is bigger than that, the backup will run out of room. Chapter 12, *OneDrive in Plain English — and What It Costs* explains your choices and the honest costs.

CHAPTER 10

Running Windows Backup on the Old PC

This is the step you do on the **old** computer, before you set up the new one. Give it a quiet afternoon; the first backup of a large Pictures folder can take a while to upload.

Step 1: Make sure you're signed in with a Microsoft account

1. On the old PC, open **Settings > Accounts > Your info**.
2. If you see **Sign in with a Microsoft account instead**, you're using a local account. Select it and sign in. If you see **Sign in with a local account instead**, you're already set.

Step 2: Choose what to back up

1. Select **Start**, type **backup**, and choose **Windows Backup**.
2. Expand **Folders** and turn on the folders you want: Desktop, Documents, Pictures, Videos and Music.
3. Expand each of the other sections (apps, accessibility, accounts and Wi-Fi, personalization, language, other settings) and turn on what you'd like saved. Some may already say **Backed up**.
4. Select **Back up**.

Step 3: Check that it finished

1. Open **Settings > Accounts > Windows backup**.
2. Look for a status showing your folders and settings are backed up.
3. Leave the old PC on and connected until OneDrive finishes uploading. The OneDrive cloud icon near the clock shows when it's up to date.

HEADS UP

If OneDrive shows an error

An error during backup usually means you aren't signed in to OneDrive, or OneDrive is out of space. Select the cloud icon near the clock to see the message. If it's a space problem, either turn off a large folder (and copy it to a drive instead, see Chapter 14, *The External Drive Method*) or add storage.

TIP

Backing up is also a good everyday habit

Windows Backup isn't only for moving. Leaving it on keeps your settings and folders protected on the new PC too. Bill's guide on backing up everything goes deeper into keeping your files safe for the long run.

CHAPTER 11

Restoring During New-PC Setup

Here's where the work you did on the old PC pays off. The first time you turn on the new computer, Windows walks you through a series of setup screens. Partway through, after you sign in with your Microsoft account, it looks for your backup and offers to restore it.

How the restore works

1. Turn on the new PC and follow the setup screens: language, keyboard and Wi-Fi.
2. When asked, sign in with the **same Microsoft account** you used for the backup on the old PC.
3. Windows finds your backup and asks whether you want to restore it. Choose to restore.
4. If you've backed up more than one PC, select **More options** and pick the right one (the old PC's name).
5. Finish the remaining setup screens. When you reach the desktop, your settings and app pins will be waiting.

What you'll find on the desktop

- Your **app pins** where you left them. Selecting a pin for a Microsoft Store app installs it. For other programs, the pin takes you to the web to download the installer.
- Your **settings** — wallpaper, Wi-Fi networks, accessibility choices.
- Your **files** — they come back through OneDrive. Once OneDrive is signed in with the same account, your backed-up folders appear in File Explorer.

GOOD TO KNOW

Files may show a little cloud at first

OneDrive sometimes shows files as "online-only" with a small cloud icon, downloading each one when you open it. That's normal and saves space. If you'd like a folder kept on the PC at all times, right-click it and choose **Always keep on this device**.

TIP

Missed the restore screen?

If you skipped the restore offer, your files are still safe in OneDrive — signing in to OneDrive brings them back. Settings are trickier to restore later, so if the PC is brand new and you haven't done much yet, it can be worth calling me before you start over.

CHAPTER 12

OneDrive in Plain English — and What It Costs

OneDrive is Microsoft's online storage — a locked filing cabinet on the internet, tied to your Microsoft account. Files in OneDrive can be reached from any computer or phone where you sign in, which is why Windows Backup uses it to carry your folders to the new PC.

The free amount

Every free Microsoft account comes with **5 GB** of OneDrive storage. That's plenty for documents and letters. It isn't much for photos: a phone photo is often a few megabytes, so a few thousand photos can fill it.

If you need more — the honest costs

Plan	OneDrive storage	About what it costs (November 2026)
Free Microsoft account	5 GB	No charge
Microsoft 365 Basic	100 GB	About $1.99 a month or $19.99 a year
Microsoft 365 Personal	1 TB, plus the Office apps	About $9.99 a month
Microsoft 365 Family	Up to six people, plus the Office apps	About $12.99 a month

HEADS UP

Family plan storage is changing

Microsoft has announced that Microsoft 365 Family and Premium are moving from 1 TB per person to **2 TB shared** by everyone on the plan. Existing subscribers generally switch after a renewal on or after May 2, 2027. If several family members use a lot of storage, check the current terms before you buy.

TIP

You don't have to pay to move

If your files don't fit in 5 GB, you can skip the subscription: let Windows Backup carry your settings, turn off the large folders in Windows Backup, and copy those folders with an external drive (Chapter 14, *The External Drive Method*). A one-time drive purchase often costs less than a year of storage.

SCAM ALERT

OneDrive "storage full" emails can be fake

Scammers send look-alike emails saying your storage is full and your photos will be deleted unless you click and pay. Don't click. Check your real storage by opening OneDrive yourself or visiting your Microsoft account in your browser.

CHAPTER 13

What Happened to PC-to-PC Transfer

You may have read about a Microsoft feature that copied everything from an old PC straight to a new one over your home Wi-Fi during setup, using a pairing code. It's worth clearing up, because older articles and videos still describe it.

Where it stands in November 2026

Microsoft's own help page for this **PC-to-PC transfer** now carries a notice that the feature is **no longer available**, and points people to Windows Backup and Restore instead. When it was offered, it also had notable limits: it didn't move installed programs or saved passwords, and it skipped OneDrive files and BitLocker-encrypted drives.

What to use instead

For	Use
Settings and app list	Windows Backup, restored during setup (Chapter 10, *Running Windows Backup on the Old PC*, Chapter 11, *Restoring During New-PC Setup*).
Files that fit in OneDrive	Windows Backup's folder backup.
Large photo collections	An external drive (Chapter 14, *The External Drive Method*).
Programs	Reinstall them (Part 3), or consider a paid tool (Chapter 15, *Paid Transfer Tools: Laplink PCmover*).

HEADS UP

Be wary of videos promising a one-click move

Some online videos and ads still show the old transfer feature, or promise a free tool that "moves everything." If your screens don't match what you're seeing, trust Microsoft's current help pages and this guide's steps instead.

GOOD TO KNOW

Features change — that's normal

Microsoft adds and removes features over time. If a newer version of the transfer tool appears in the future, the ideas in this guide still apply: back up first, keep the old PC until you've checked everything, and wipe it last.

CHAPTER 14

The External Drive Method

This is the old-fashioned, dependable way: copy your folders onto a USB drive or external hard drive from the old PC, then copy them onto the new PC. No subscription, no internet needed, and you can see exactly what you're moving.

What you'll need

- A **USB flash drive** or **external hard drive** bigger than the folders you're moving (check sizes as in Chapter 6, *Where Your Files Actually Live*).
- About an hour, depending on how much you have.

On the old PC

1. Plug the drive into a USB port.
2. Open **File Explorer** (Windows key + E).
3. Select the folders you want to bring — Documents, Desktop, Downloads, Pictures, Music, Videos. Hold **Ctrl** to select more than one.
4. Right-click and choose **Copy**, then open the drive under **This PC**, right-click an empty spot and choose **Paste**.
5. When copying finishes, open the drive and check that your folders are there.
6. Right-click the drive in File Explorer and choose **Eject** before unplugging it.

On the new PC

1. Plug the drive in and open **File Explorer**.
2. Select **This PC**, then open the drive.
3. Copy the folders' contents and paste them into the matching folders on the new PC (Documents into Documents, Pictures into Pictures, and so on).
4. Open a few files and photos to confirm they came over properly.

> **TIP**
>
> **Keep the drive afterward**
>
> Once the move is done, don't erase the drive right away. It's a ready-made backup of your old PC. Put it in a drawer, labeled with the date.

HEADS UP

Copy, don't move

Always choose **Copy**, not **Cut**. Copying leaves the originals on the old PC, so if anything goes wrong, nothing is lost.

CHAPTER 15

Paid Transfer Tools: Laplink PCmover

Some companies sell software that tries to move *everything* — files, settings and even installed programs — from one PC to another. The best-known is **Laplink PCmover**. It's worth knowing about, and worth understanding honestly.

What it does well

- It can move files, settings, user accounts and many installed programs in one go.
- It can work over your home network or with a cable, so you don't need cloud storage.
- For someone with many older programs and no install discs, it can save a lot of reinstalling.

What to keep in mind

- **It costs money.** Pricing varies by edition and seller; the Professional edition has been listed around $45 to $60. Check Laplink's own website for the current price.
- **Not every program survives the trip.** Programs that need activation, and very old programs, may still need to be reinstalled or re-registered.
- **It moves clutter too.** Old junk, toolbars and leftover trial software can come along for the ride.

FROM BILL

My honest take

For most people moving a home computer, Windows Backup plus an external drive, followed by reinstalling a handful of programs, gives a cleaner new PC. A paid tool makes the most sense when there are many old programs you can't easily reinstall. I don't earn anything from recommending it either way.

SCAM ALERT

Buy only from the real website or a known store

Fake "PC transfer" downloads exist. If you decide on a paid tool, buy it from the maker's own website or a store you know. Never install one because a pop-up or a caller told you to.

CHAPTER 16

Photos: Making Sure Every Picture Comes Along

For many families, photos are the most precious thing on the computer. They deserve their own chapter and an extra check. The goal is simple: every picture on the old PC should open on the new one before the old one is wiped.

Find every place photos live

- The **Pictures** folder, including folders inside it like "Camera Roll" or dated import folders.
- Photos saved to the **Desktop** or **Downloads** from email.
- A **second drive** or an old photo program's own library folder.
- **Online services** such as Google Photos, iCloud Photos or OneDrive — these stay online and just need a sign-in.

A quick search for stragglers

1. On the old PC, open **File Explorer** and select **This PC**.
2. Click in the search box at the top right and type ***.jpg**, then press **Enter**.
3. Look at the folder locations shown for the results. Any folder you didn't know about goes on your list.
4. Repeat with ***.heic** (iPhone photos) and ***.mp4** (videos) if you have them.

TIP

Count before and after

Right-click your Pictures folder and choose **Properties**. Note the number of files. Do the same on the new PC after copying. If the numbers match, you can relax.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

Peace of mind for the whole family

Once your photos are on the new PC *and* on a drive or in OneDrive, they're safer than they've ever been. Two copies in two places is how you make sure the grandkids' pictures outlast any one computer.

PART 3

Email, Browsers & Programs

The pieces that don't ride along on their own: your email, your bookmarks and passwords, Office, printers and licensed programs.

CHAPTER 17

Moving Your Email: The Big Idea

Email worries people more than anything else in a move, and usually it shouldn't. For most people today, email doesn't live on the computer at all. It lives on the email company's computers, and your PC is just a window onto it. Open that window on the new PC and everything is there.

IMAP and POP — the two ways a PC gets email

Type	What it means for your move
IMAP (or Exchange)	Your mail stays on the email company's servers. Every device shows the same inbox, folders and sent mail. Moving is easy: sign in on the new PC.
POP	An older method that downloads mail onto one computer and often removes it from the server. Your old messages may exist **only** on the old PC. Those need to be copied over (Chapter 19, *.pst Files: Old Email Saved on Your PC*).

How to tell which you have

- **Gmail, Outlook.com, Hotmail, Yahoo and iCloud Mail** used through a website or app are almost always online (IMAP or the company's own system).
- If you can see your old mail by signing in on your phone or a website, it's online — good news.
- If your old mail **only** shows up in a program on the old PC, it may be POP. Note it on your inventory.

TIP

The website test

On your phone or another computer, sign in to your email company's website. If last year's messages are there, your mail is online, and the move is as simple as signing in.

GOOD TO KNOW

Windows Mail and Calendar have been retired

If your old PC used the built-in Windows **Mail** and **Calendar** apps, note that Microsoft ended support for them on December 31, 2024. They've been replaced by the new **Outlook** app, which comes free with Windows 11. Your new PC will use Outlook or your email company's website instead.

CHAPTER 18

New Outlook vs. Classic Outlook

If you use "Outlook," it helps to know there are now two different programs with that name. They look similar but behave differently, especially when it comes to moving old mail.

	New Outlook	Classic Outlook
Where it comes from	Built into Windows 11 at no charge	Part of the Microsoft 365 or Office desktop apps
Works with	Outlook.com, Gmail, Yahoo, iCloud and most other accounts	Nearly any account, including POP
Old mail saved on the PC (.pst)	Import of email from a .pst rolled out in 2026	Full import and export
Best for	Most home users	People with years of POP mail or .pst files

Setting up Outlook on the new PC

1. Open **Outlook** from the Start menu.
2. Type your email address and select **Continue**.
3. Sign in with your email password, or approve the sign-in on your phone if asked.
4. Wait a few minutes. Your inbox, folders and sent mail will fill in from the server.

GOOD TO KNOW

Which one am I using?

In classic Outlook there's a **File** tab at the top left. In new Outlook there isn't — settings live behind a gear icon. If you're not sure, look for that File tab.

TIP

Add one account at a time

If you have more than one email address, add the main one first and let it finish loading before adding the next. It's easier to tell if something went wrong.

HEADS UP

Don't remove the account from the old PC yet

Leave Outlook set up on the old computer until the new one shows all your mail. Removing an account from a POP setup on the old PC can make the only copy of old messages harder to reach.

CHAPTER 19

.pst Files: Old Email Saved on Your PC

A **.pst file** (Outlook Data File) is a single file that holds email, contacts and calendar items saved on your computer. If you've used classic Outlook with a POP account for years, your history may live in one of these. Moving it is like moving a filing box: export, copy, import.

On the old PC: export to a .pst (classic Outlook)

1. In classic Outlook, select **File > Open & Export > Import/Export**.
2. Choose **Export to a file**, then **Next**.
3. Choose **Outlook Data File (.pst)**, then **Next**.
4. Select the account or folder to export, and make sure **Include subfolders** is checked.
5. Choose where to save the file (a USB drive works well) and finish.

On the new PC: bring it in

- **Classic Outlook**: **File > Open & Export > Import/Export**, then **Import from another program or file**, then **Outlook Data File (.pst)**, and follow the steps.
- **New Outlook**: Microsoft rolled out importing email from a .pst file during 2026; importing contacts and calendars from a .pst is arriving separately. If you don't see an import option yet, classic Outlook can do it.

TIP

Contacts can travel separately

If all you need is your address book, classic Outlook can export contacts on their own to a .csv file, which almost any email program can import.

HEADS UP

Big .pst files take time

A .pst holding many years of mail can be several gigabytes. Copy it while Outlook is closed, and give the import time to finish. If it's very large or gives errors, that's a good moment to call me.

CHAPTER 20

Gmail, Outlook.com, Yahoo and Internet-Provider Email

If you read your email on a website — gmail.com, outlook.com, yahoo.com — there's nothing to move. Open the browser on the new PC, go to the site, sign in, and your mail is there. That's one of the nicest things about web email.

Getting back in on the new PC

1. Open your browser (Edge, Chrome or Firefox).
2. Type the address of your email site yourself: **gmail.com**, **outlook.com** or **mail.yahoo.com**.
3. Sign in with your email address and password.
4. Approve the sign-in on your phone, or type the code you're sent, if asked.
5. Bookmark the page or pin it to the taskbar so it's one click away.

Email from your internet company

Addresses from internet providers (Spectrum, AT&T, Frontier, Windstream and others) usually have their own webmail website. You can sign in there, or add the address to Outlook. If Outlook asks for server settings, your provider's help pages list them — look for the **IMAP** settings, which keep mail on the server.

HEADS UP

Gmail is phasing out fetching mail from other accounts

Google has announced it is ending Gmailify and the older POP option that pulled mail from other addresses into Gmail. If you rely on Gmail to collect mail from another address, plan to read that address on its own website or add it to Outlook instead. Messages already in Gmail stay there.

SCAM ALERT

Type the address yourself

Fake sign-in pages are a favorite scam. Don't reach your email by clicking an ad or a link in a message. Type the address yourself, or use a bookmark you made.

CHAPTER 21

Browsers: Edge, Chrome and Firefox Sync

Your **browser** is the program you use for the internet. Over the years it has collected your bookmarks (Edge calls them **favorites**), saved passwords, and history. All three major browsers can **sync** those through an account, so signing in on the new PC brings them back.

Microsoft Edge

1. On the **old** PC, open Edge, select **Settings and more** (the three dots), then **Settings > Profiles**. Make sure you're signed in and **Sync** is turned on.
2. On the **new** PC, open Edge, go to **Settings > Profiles**, and sign in with the same Microsoft account.
3. Turn on sync. Favorites, passwords, history and settings arrive over the next few minutes.

Google Chrome

1. On the **old** PC, select your **profile picture** at the top right of Chrome and check that you're signed in with sync on.
2. On the **new** PC, install Chrome from **google.com/chrome** (type it yourself), open it, and sign in with the same Google account.
3. Turn on sync when asked. Your bookmarks and passwords in Google Password Manager come along.

Mozilla Firefox

1. On the **old** PC, make sure Firefox is signed in to your **Mozilla account** with Sync on.
2. On the **new** PC, install Firefox from **firefox.com**, open it, and sign in to the **same** Mozilla account.
3. In Firefox **Settings**, open the **Sync** section and confirm bookmarks and passwords are checked.

HEADS UP

Don't create a new account by mistake

Sign in with the account you already use. A brand-new account starts empty — it won't contain anything from the old computer.

CHAPTER 22

Passwords: Moving Them Safely

Saved passwords are the most sensitive thing you'll move. The safest way to bring them along is the browser sync in Chapter 21, *Browsers: Edge, Chrome and Firefox Sync*: they travel encrypted through your account, and you never handle them yourself.

When exporting comes up

Every browser can also **export** your passwords to a file, usually a **.csv** spreadsheet file, and import that file elsewhere. It works — but that file is **not protected**. Anyone who opens it can read every password in plain text.

If you must export

1. Export the file directly to a USB drive, not to the Desktop.
2. Import it into the new browser right away.
3. Delete the file from the USB drive, then empty the Recycle Bin.
4. Never email the file to yourself, upload it, or send it to anyone.

STAY SAFE

A good moment to tidy up passwords

Moving is a natural time to update any password you've used on many sites, and to turn on two-step verification for your email. Your email is the master key to everything else.

SCAM ALERT

"Send me your passwords file" is always a scam

No real support person needs your passwords exported. If anyone asks for that file, or asks you to read passwords aloud, end the conversation.

CHAPTER 23

Microsoft 365 and Office on the New PC

Word, Excel, PowerPoint and classic Outlook come with **Microsoft 365** (a subscription) or with a one-time purchase such as **Office 2024**. Either way, you don't copy them from the old PC. You install them fresh from your Microsoft account.

Install with a Microsoft 365 subscription

1. On the new PC, open your browser and go to **microsoft365.com**. Sign in with the Microsoft account your subscription is on.
2. Select **Install apps** (or open **Apps** on the left, then **Install apps**).
3. Run the downloaded installer and wait for it to finish.
4. Open Word and sign in if asked. It's now activated.

If you bought Office with a product key

1. If you have a new, unused key card, first go to **microsoft365.com/setup** to redeem it, which links it to your Microsoft account.
2. If it was already used on the old PC, it's likely already linked. Sign in at your Microsoft account's **Services & subscriptions** page, find the purchase, and select **Install**.

GOOD TO KNOW

Some new PCs come with an Office trial

A new computer may show a Microsoft 365 trial or an offer to buy. If you already have a subscription, simply sign in with your account — don't start a second one.

HEADS UP

Check which account your subscription is on

If install doesn't appear after signing in, you may be using a different Microsoft account than the one that paid. Try any other email addresses you might have used.

CHAPTER 24

Printers and Scanners

Printers don't move with Windows Backup in a way you can count on. The good news: Windows 11 often finds and sets up a printer on its own, especially one on your home Wi-Fi.

Add your printer

1. Make sure the printer is on and connected to the same Wi-Fi as the new PC (or plug in its USB cable).
2. Open **Settings > Bluetooth & devices > Printers & scanners**.
3. Next to **Add a printer or scanner**, select **Add device**.
4. Wait for your printer to appear, then select **Add device** next to it.
5. Print a test page to be sure.

If it isn't found

- Restart the printer and the PC, then try again.
- Check that the printer is on your Wi-Fi (its own screen or setup button usually shows this).
- Visit the printer maker's official support website, type your model, and download the Windows 11 software.

HEADS UP

Printer software can be optional

Some printer makers offer a large app with ink offers and account sign-ups. Windows often prints fine without it. Install it only if you need a feature like scanning from the printer's buttons.

SCAM ALERT

"Printer offline? Call this number"

Searching for printer help can bring up fake "printer support" sites with phone numbers. Get drivers only from the printer maker's own website, and never let a stranger connect to your PC to "fix" a printer.

CHAPTER 25

Quicken, TurboTax and Other Licensed Programs

Money and tax programs deserve care, because their data is important and their licenses are tied to you. The pattern is the same for nearly all of them: install the program fresh on the new PC, sign in or enter the license, then bring over the **data file**.

The general pattern

1. On the old PC, open the program and make a fresh backup of its data to a USB drive. Most have **File > Backup** or similar.
2. Note the version you're using (**Help > About**).
3. On the new PC, download the program from the maker's official website and install it.
4. Sign in with your account or enter your license key.
5. Use the program's **Restore** option to open your backup from the USB drive.
6. Check that the latest transactions or documents are there.

Quicken

Quicken's own instructions use **File > Copy or Backup File** on the old PC, then **File > Restore a Backup File** on the new one. Install the same version of Quicken (or newer) on the new PC first. Your Quicken data file ends in **.QDF**.

Tax programs like TurboTax

Past years' tax returns are usually saved as files in your Documents folder, so they move with your files. Online tax services keep returns in your online account. Desktop tax software for a past year may need to be re-downloaded from the company's website by signing in to your account there.

HEADS UP

Do the money program last on the old PC

Once you've made the final backup from the old PC, stop entering new transactions there. Otherwise the two computers drift apart, and you'll have to sort out which one is right.

PART 4

Your First Day on the New PC

Setup, updates, a PIN, comfortable text, sensible defaults, trimming trial software, and the protection that's already built in.

CHAPTER 26

Setting Up: Microsoft Account or Local Account

The first time you turn on the new PC, Windows walks you through setup. One of the first big questions is how you'll sign in: with a **Microsoft account** (an email address and password from Microsoft) or a **local account** (one that exists only on this computer).

What setup expects in 2026

Windows 11 setup on Home and Pro computers expects an internet connection and a Microsoft account. Microsoft has been closing the old tricks people used to skip that step. For a move, that's actually convenient, because the Microsoft account is what unlocks your backup.

Why a Microsoft account helps with a move

- It's how **Windows Backup** finds and restores your settings (Chapter 11, *Restoring During New-PC Setup*).
- It connects **OneDrive** and **Microsoft 365**.
- It keeps your **BitLocker recovery key** safely online (Chapter 34, *Your BitLocker Recovery Key*).
- It lets you reset a forgotten password from your phone.

If you'd rather use a local account afterward

1. Finish setup with your Microsoft account and restore your backup first.
2. Later, open **Settings > Accounts > Your info**.
3. Select **Sign in with a local account instead** and follow the steps.

> **FROM BILL**
>
> **My recommendation**
>
> For most people, staying with the Microsoft account is simpler and safer. Make sure you know its password and that the recovery phone number on it is current.

CHAPTER 27

Windows Update First

A new PC may have sat in a warehouse for months. Before you settle in, let it catch up on updates. This brings security fixes, better drivers for your hardware, and sometimes features that make the move smoother.

Run Windows Update

1. Open **Settings > Windows Update**.
2. Select **Check for updates**.
3. Let everything download and install. Restart when asked.
4. Check again. It's normal to need two or three rounds on a brand-new PC.

Which version of Windows 11 do I have?

Open **Settings > System > About** and look under **Windows specifications**. In November 2026 you'll most likely see **25H2** or **26H2**. Microsoft began releasing version 26H2 to Windows 11 PCs on September 29, 2026, as a small update for computers already on 24H2 or 25H2.

TIP

Plug in and leave it overnight

Updates go fastest when the computer is plugged in and left alone. Starting them in the evening and letting them finish overnight is perfectly fine.

SCAM ALERT

Real updates come from Settings

Windows updates arrive through **Settings > Windows Update**. A website pop-up or email saying "your PC needs an urgent update — click here" is not Windows. Close it.

CHAPTER 28

A Windows Hello PIN for Easy Sign-In

Typing a long Microsoft account password every time you open the computer gets old fast. **Windows Hello** lets you use a short **PIN** instead, or your face or fingerprint if the PC has the right camera or reader. Setup usually asks you to create a PIN anyway.

Why a PIN is safe

A Windows Hello PIN works only on **this one computer**. Someone who learns it can't use it to sign in to your Microsoft account from anywhere else, which makes it safer than typing your account password at the sign-in screen.

Set up or change your PIN

1. Open **Settings > Accounts > Sign-in options**.
2. Under **Ways to sign in**, select **PIN (Windows Hello)**.
3. Select **Set up** (or **Change PIN**) and follow the steps.
4. If your PC has a face camera or fingerprint reader, you'll also see **Facial recognition** or **Fingerprint recognition** here.

TIP

Pick something memorable, not obvious

Avoid 1234, 0000 or your birth year. A PIN can be longer than four digits if you like.

HEADS UP

Still know your account password

You'll still need your Microsoft account password now and then — on a new device, or to reset a forgotten PIN. Keep it written somewhere private at home.

CHAPTER 29

Make It Comfortable: Text Size, Display and Mouse

New computers often have sharp, high-resolution screens where everything looks tiny. A few settings make the new PC as comfortable as the old one — or more so. If your old PC's accessibility settings were backed up, some of these may already be set.

Make just the text bigger

1. Open **Settings > Accessibility > Text size**.
2. Drag the slider to the right until the sample text is comfortable.
3. Select **Apply**.

Make everything bigger

1. Open **Settings > System > Display**.
2. Under **Scale**, choose a larger percentage. This enlarges text, icons and apps together.

Make the mouse pointer easier to see

1. Open **Settings > Accessibility > Mouse pointer and touch**.
2. Choose a pointer style and drag the **Size** slider to make it larger.

TIP

Zoom on websites

In any browser, hold **Ctrl** and press **+** to make a web page bigger, **-** to make it smaller, and **0** to go back to normal.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

Comfort is worth the five minutes

When text is easy to read, you make fewer mistakes, you spot scams more easily, and you simply enjoy the computer more. There's no prize for squinting.

CHAPTER 30

Default Apps and Notifications

Two small groups of settings make a big difference to how calm a new PC feels: which program opens your files and links (**default apps**), and which apps are allowed to pop up messages (**notifications**).

Choose your default browser, email and PDF reader

1. Open **Settings > Apps > Default apps**.
2. Select the app you want to use, such as Chrome or Firefox.
3. Select **Set default** at the top, if offered, or choose the file types (like .pdf or .htm) one by one.

Quiet the notifications

1. Open **Settings > System > Notifications**.
2. Scroll to the list of apps and turn off any you don't want hearing from.
3. Turn on **Do not disturb** when you want complete quiet.

TIP

Keep the important ones

Leave notifications on for Windows Security, your calendar and anything you rely on for reminders.

HEADS UP

Browser "Allow notifications?" pop-ups

Websites often ask to send notifications. Choose **Block** unless it's a site you truly want alerts from. Allowing a shady site is a common way people end up with fake virus warnings.

CHAPTER 31

Trial Software and Bloatware: Removing It Carefully

Many new PCs arrive with extra programs: antivirus trials, games, shopping shortcuts and the computer maker's own tools. People call this **bloatware**. Some is harmless, some is useful, and some will nag you to pay. You can remove what you don't want — carefully.

Safe to remove for most people

- Antivirus **trials** you don't plan to pay for (Windows Security protects you, see Chapter 32, *Windows Security: Protection That's Already Built In*).
- Games and streaming shortcuts you don't use.
- Shopping or "deals" apps.

Leave these alone

- Anything with **driver**, **audio**, **graphics**, **touchpad** or **Bluetooth** in the name.
- The computer maker's **update** or **support** app (HP, Dell, Lenovo, ASUS and so on) — it delivers fixes for your hardware.
- Anything you don't recognize. When in doubt, leave it.

How to uninstall

1. Open **Settings > Apps > Installed apps**.
2. Find the program, select the **three dots** next to it, and choose **Uninstall**.
3. Confirm, and follow any steps the program shows.

HEADS UP

Antivirus trials: uninstall, don't just ignore

When an antivirus trial ends, it may keep showing alarming pop-ups asking you to pay. Uninstalling it lets Windows Security take over automatically.

CHAPTER 32

Windows Security: Protection That's Already Built In

Every Windows 11 PC includes **Windows Security**, with **Microsoft Defender Antivirus** built in. It's on from the first day, updates itself through Windows Update, and costs nothing extra. For most home users it's solid protection.

Check that it's on

1. Select **Start**, type **Windows Security**, and open it.
2. Look at the **Security at a glance** page. Green check marks mean you're protected.
3. If anything shows a yellow or red warning, select it and follow the recommended action.

Do I need to buy antivirus?

Usually not. Many people buy a paid antivirus because a trial on the new PC told them to. If you install another antivirus, Microsoft Defender steps aside; if you uninstall it, Defender turns itself back on. Paying for extras is a choice, not a requirement.

GOOD TO KNOW

One antivirus at a time

Running two full antivirus programs at once can slow a PC and cause conflicts. Choose one: Windows Security, or a paid product you trust.

FROM BILL

For a deeper look

Bill's guide on Windows 11 covers everyday Windows features in more depth, and I'm always glad to check a new PC's security settings with you.

PART 5

Saying Goodbye to the Old PC

A final check, your encryption recovery key, a proper wipe, and responsible places to recycle or donate.

CHAPTER 33

Before You Wipe: The Final Check

This is the moment to slow down. Once the old PC is wiped, its files are gone for good. Spend half an hour with your inventory from Chapter 3, *Your Moving Inventory* and the new PC side by side, and tick off each item.

Your final checklist

Check	How to confirm on the new PC
Documents	Open three or four important files, including older ones.
Photos	Compare the file count in Pictures (see Chapter 16, *Photos: Making Sure Every Picture Comes Along*).
Desktop and Downloads	Look through both folders for anything missing.
Email	Old messages, sent mail and contacts are visible.
Bookmarks and passwords	Open a few favorite sites and sign in.
Programs	Open each program on your list and check it's activated.
Money and tax data	Latest transactions are in Quicken or similar.
Printer	A test page prints.

Then make one last safety copy

1. Plug a USB or external drive into the old PC.
2. Copy the whole user folder one more time (in File Explorer, open **This PC > Local Disk (C:) > Users**, then copy the folder with your name).
3. Label the drive with the date and keep it for at least a few months.

TIP

Sign out and deactivate

Before wiping, open any program that limits how many computers it can run on and choose its **Deactivate** or **Sign out** option, so the license is free for the new PC.

FROM BILL

No rush

If you're not sure, wait. An old computer in a closet for a month costs nothing. A wiped computer with the only copy of a file can't be undone.

CHAPTER 34

Your BitLocker Recovery Key

Many Windows PCs quietly encrypt their drives — scramble the data so only your computer can read it. On Windows 11 Home this is called **device encryption**; on Pro it's **BitLocker**. If the computer ever can't unlock itself, it asks for a **recovery key**: a 48-digit number.

Why it matters during a move

- The **new** PC is very likely encrypted too. Knowing where its key is saved prevents a scary lockout later.
- If a repair, a firmware update or a hardware change ever triggers the blue recovery screen, the key is the only way back in without erasing everything.

Find your keys

1. On any device, open a browser and go to **aka.ms/myrecoverykey**.
2. Sign in with the Microsoft account you use on the PC.
3. You'll see a list of recovery keys for your devices. Match the device name (and the key ID, if the PC is showing a recovery screen).
4. Make sure your **new** PC appears in the list. Write its key down and keep it somewhere private at home.

HEADS UP

Microsoft can't recover a lost key

Microsoft says its support staff can't retrieve, provide or recreate a lost recovery key. If the key isn't saved anywhere, the only option is to reset the PC, which erases its files. That's why it's worth checking now.

GOOD TO KNOW

Wiping the old PC doesn't need its key

When you reset the old computer from inside Windows (Chapter 35, *Reset This PC: Remove Everything*), you won't normally be asked for its key. The key matters most for the PC you'll keep using.

CHAPTER 35

Reset This PC: Remove Everything

When you're sure everything is on the new PC, it's time to wipe the old one. Windows has a built-in tool called **Reset this PC**. Choosing **Remove everything** with the data-cleaning option turned on erases your files and reinstalls Windows, so the next owner gets a clean computer.

Before you start

- Plug in the old PC. A reset can take an hour or more, and several hours with data cleaning turned on.
- Sign out of programs that limit installs (see Chapter 33, *Before You Wipe: The Final Check*).
- Have your safety copy on a drive, unplugged and put away.

Wipe it on Windows 11

1. Open **Settings > System > Recovery**.
2. Next to **Reset this PC**, select **Reset PC**.
3. Choose **Remove everything**.
4. Choose **Cloud download** or **Local reinstall**. Either is fine; Local reinstall doesn't need much internet.
5. On the next screen, select **Change settings** and turn on **Clean data**. This takes longer but makes your old files much harder to recover.
6. Select **Next**, then **Reset**, and let it run.

On Windows 10

Open **Settings > Update & Security > Recovery**, select **Get started** under **Reset this PC**, and follow the same choices: Remove everything, then turn on data cleaning under Change settings.

HEADS UP

Clean data isn't on by default

If you skip **Change settings**, Windows removes your files but doesn't fully scrub the drive. For a PC you're giving away, selling or recycling, turn **Clean data** on.

GOOD TO KNOW

When you're done

The PC restarts to the first Windows setup screen, just like a new computer. Stop there and shut it down. The next owner will set it up with their own account.

CHAPTER 36

Recycling, Donating or Selling the Old PC

Computers contain metals and batteries that shouldn't go in the trash. Once your old PC is wiped, there are several easy, responsible places to take it. Policies change, so check the current details before you go.

Option	What to know (checked November 2026)
Staples	Accepts many electronics for recycling in most stores, all brands, no purchase needed.
Dell Reconnect at Goodwill	Free drop-off of any brand of computer at participating Goodwill locations; find one at dell.com/reconnect.
Best Buy	Takes many electronics at U.S. stores, with a limit per household per day; some item types carry a fee.
Portage County Solid Waste Management District	Holds electronics collection events; check portagecounty-oh.gov for dates and accepted items.
Trade-in programs	Some computer makers and stores offer trade-in credit for newer machines.

Donating or giving it to family

A wiped PC that still works can be a gift to a grandchild, a neighbor or a charity. If it ran Windows 10, be honest with the new owner that it may not get updates for long. If it can run Windows 11, it may still have years of life.

HEADS UP

Keep the drive or remove it?

Reset with **Clean data** is enough for most people. If the PC held very sensitive records and you'd feel better removing the drive, that's a reasonable choice for a technician to help with.

TIP

Keep the power cord with it

Recyclers and charities appreciate the power cord. Keep any USB drives and your safety-copy drive, though.

SCAM ALERT

"We'll pay cash for your old computer" calls

Be careful with strangers who offer to collect or buy an unwiped computer. Wipe it first, and use a known store, charity or the county program.

PART 6

Staying Safe & Getting Help

The scams aimed at people with new computers, when to call Bill, and a cheat-sheet for the whole move.

CHAPTER 37

"Transfer Help" Scams to Watch For

Scammers know that a new computer means a person who might be confused, busy and eager for help. They pose as Microsoft, your computer maker, your internet company or a "Geek" helper and offer to "set up" or "transfer" your new PC. What they really want is remote control of your computer and your money.

The ones you'll see

Scam	What it looks like
The surprise call	"This is Microsoft — we see a problem with your new computer." Microsoft doesn't make unsolicited calls offering PC support.
The pop-up with a phone number	A screen that says your PC is infected and to call a number. Real Windows error messages never include a phone number.
The fake search result	Searching "transfer files to new PC help" brings up ads for phone lines that are scams.
The "setup fee" email	A fake receipt for setup or protection you didn't buy, with a number to call for a "refund."
The remote-access request	Anyone asking you to install a program so they can "connect and move your files."

The safe moves

1. Hang up on any unexpected call about your computer.
2. Close a scary pop-up. If it won't close, hold the power button to turn the PC off, then turn it back on.
3. Never give remote access, gift cards, payment-app transfers or bank details to anyone who contacted you first.
4. If you're unsure, call someone you already know and trust — using a number you looked up yourself.

SCAM ALERT

Report it

You can report tech support scams to Microsoft at **microsoft.com/reportascam** and to the Federal Trade Commission at **reportfraud.ftc.gov**. If you've already paid or let someone in, call your bank first.

FROM BILL

How you'll know it's really me

I never call out of the blue saying your computer has a problem. If you want my help, you'll reach me at (330) 200-8042 or through billshometech.com/book — the number and address you looked up yourself.

CHAPTER 38

When to Call Bill

This guide is meant to let you handle a move on your own. But some moves are simply easier with an experienced hand nearby, and there's no shame in asking. Moving computers is exactly the kind of job my **Computer Help** service is for.

Good reasons to call

- You'd rather not do the move yourself — you'd like the old PC moved to the new one, start to finish.
- Your photos don't fit in OneDrive and you'd like help choosing and using a drive.
- You have old email in Outlook that only exists on the old PC.
- A program needs a license key you can't find, or won't activate.
- Your money or tax program data won't open on the new PC.
- The printer won't show up.
- You see a BitLocker recovery screen, or can't find your recovery key.
- You want a second pair of eyes before wiping the old PC.
- Someone called or a pop-up appeared offering "transfer help" and you're not sure.

SCAM ALERT

Already let someone in?

If a stranger has connected to your computer or you've paid one, don't be embarrassed — call your bank first, then call me. The sooner it's looked at, the better.

How to reach me

Call or text	**(330) 200-8042**
Book online	**billshometech.com/book**
Where I work	Bill's Home Tech serves **Portage County, Ohio**.
Price	$49 remote · $99 in your home
Experience	30+ years of professional experience

If you reach my assistant **Sophie** on the main line, she can answer simple questions and get you on my schedule. The guides are free to read; my help is a paid service at the prices

above, with no surprises.

— Bill

CHAPTER 39

Your Moving Cheat-Sheet

The whole move on one page. Keep this handy for moving day.

The most-used steps

I want to…	Do this
Back up the old PC	Start > type **backup** > **Windows Backup** > turn on folders and settings > **Back up**
Restore on the new PC	During setup, sign in with the same Microsoft account and choose to restore
Copy files to a drive	File Explorer > select folders > **Copy** > drive > **Paste** > **Eject**
Edge sync	Edge > **Settings > Profiles** > sign in > Sync on
Install Microsoft 365	**microsoft365.com** > sign in > **Install apps**
Add a printer	**Settings > Bluetooth & devices > Printers & scanners > Add device**
Windows Update	**Settings > Windows Update > Check for updates**
Bigger text	**Settings > Accessibility > Text size**
Recovery key	**aka.ms/myrecoverykey**
Wipe the old PC	**Settings > System > Recovery > Reset PC > Remove everything**, Clean data on

Five safety rules for moving day

1. Copy, never cut or move — keep originals on the old PC until the end.
2. Keep the old PC untouched for a few weeks.
3. Do the final check before you wipe anything.
4. Turn on Clean data when you reset the old PC.
5. Hang up on anyone who calls offering to help with your new computer.

Keep this handy

Item	Yours
Microsoft account email	_____
Google account email	_____

Item	Yours
Email provider and address	_____
New PC name and model	_____
Recovery key saved at	_____
Backup drive label	_____
Programs to reinstall	_____
Printer model	_____
Bill's Home Tech	(330) 200-8042 · billshometech.com/book

FROM BILL

You did it

Moving to a new computer is a real accomplishment. Take it one step at a time, keep the old PC as your safety net until you're sure, and enjoy the new one. And if anything gives you trouble, I'm a call away.