BILL'S HOME TECH
Home & Small Business Tech Solutions

BILL'S COMPLETE MANUALS · NO. 26

Soundbars & Home Audio

Hear every word on your TV again — plus Bluetooth speakers and clearer sound, in plain English

Clearer voices, not just louder

Take your time — you can't break it

Written for you by Bill — Bill's Home Tech

(330) 200-8042 · BillsHomeTech.com

For soundbars & home speakers in 2026 · facts current November 2026

What's Inside

This is your guide to soundbars and home audio — mostly about one wonderful thing: hearing the words on your television clearly again. Read it in any order. It covers why TV sound got so hard to understand, how to choose a soundbar, how to connect it (simpler than it looks), the settings that make dialogue crisp, and how to use Bluetooth speakers too. The goal throughout is clearer voices — not just more volume.

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PART 1

Why You Can't Hear the TV

It's not just your ears — modern TVs really do have poor, tinny sound. What a soundbar is, and why it's the single best fix. Start here.

CHAPTER 1

A Note from Bill

Hello, and welcome. Whoever is holding this book — this is for **you**. If you've found yourself turning the TV up and up and *still* missing half the dialogue — catching the booming music and explosions fine but losing the quiet talking — then this little book is going to make your evenings a great deal more pleasant. You are absolutely not alone, and it's very likely not your hearing at fault.

I'm Bill. For more than 30 years I've helped folks feel at home with their technology, and I'll tell you: "I can't understand what they're saying on the TV" is one of the most common frustrations I hear — and one of the most satisfying to fix, because the fix is simple and the difference is night-and-day.

First, the truth: it's not just you

Here's something worth hearing plainly. **Modern televisions have genuinely bad sound.** As TVs got thinner and thinner, there was simply no room left inside for decent speakers — so the little ones they cram in fire backward or downward and sound tinny and muffled. Then shows and movies are mixed so the music and effects are loud while the dialogue stays low. The result catches everyone out, not just older ears. So set aside any worry that this is "your hearing going" — it's the TV.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this book does for you

By the end you'll understand why TV sound is so poor, how to pick a soundbar that makes *voices* clear (not just louder), how to connect it with one simple cable, and how to set it for the crispest dialogue. You'll also learn to use Bluetooth speakers. The payoff: enjoying your shows again without straining or rewinding.

The big promise: you can't break anything

Connecting a soundbar is just plugging in one cable, and you cannot harm your TV or the soundbar by trying. The worst that happens is you get no sound for a moment and try the other socket — easily sorted. So don't be nervous; this is one of the easier gadgets there is.

And you're never stuck alone. If you'd like a hand choosing or hooking one up, call me at **(330) 200-8042** — I set these up all the time, and the difference brings people real joy.

— Bill

CHAPTER 2

What a Soundbar Is

Let's get acquainted with the hero of this book.

A better set of speakers for your TV

A **soundbar** is a long, slim speaker — a bar, hence the name — that sits in front of or below your television and plays its sound far better than the TV's own tiny speakers can. One cable connects it to the TV, and suddenly voices are clear, full, and easy to follow. That's the whole idea: a proper speaker to replace the inadequate ones inside the TV.

The parts you might get

Part	What it's for
The soundbar itself	The long speaker that sits under the TV. On its own, it's a huge improvement — and for many folks, all they need.
A subwoofer (sometimes)	A separate box, often wireless, that adds deep bass. Nice for movies and music, but not essential for hearing dialogue — don't feel you must have one.
Rear speakers (sometimes)	Small extra speakers for behind you, for full 'surround sound.' Lovely for film buffs, overkill for most, and more to set up. Skip unless you really want them.

TIP

For clear voices, the bar alone is plenty

If your goal is simply to *understand the dialogue* — which it is for most folks — a plain soundbar by itself does the job beautifully. The subwoofer and rear speakers are about big, immersive movie sound, not clarity. So don't let a salesman talk you into an expensive multi-piece system when a single good bar is exactly what you need. Simpler is also easier to set up and live with.

CHAPTER 3

Clarity, Not Just Loudness

This chapter holds the single most important idea in the book, so let's dwell on it: the goal is **clearer voices**, not merely a louder television.

Why turning it up doesn't help

When you crank up the TV volume to catch the dialogue, you turn up *everything* — so the music swells and the explosions boom while the quiet talking is still buried underneath, just louder. You're not making the voices clearer; you're making the whole wall of sound bigger. That's why it feels like it never quite works, and why the neighbors start to wonder.

What a soundbar does differently

A good soundbar — especially one with a **voice or dialogue mode** (Part 4) — can lift the *voices* up out of the mix and make them distinct, without just blasting the music louder. That's the magic: the talking becomes clear and easy to follow at a *comfortable* overall volume. It's the difference between "louder" and "clearer" — and clearer is what you actually want.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

The feature that changes everything

When you shop (next part), the single most valuable feature for you is a **dialogue** or **voice-enhancement** mode — sometimes called "clear voice," "voice enhance," or similar. It's a setting that specifically boosts spoken words. For anyone who struggles to catch TV dialogue, this one feature is worth more than all the fancy surround-sound trimmings put together. Look for it first.

PART 2

Choosing a Soundbar

What actually matters when you buy — and what doesn't — so you get crystal-clear voices without overpaying for features you'll never use.

CHAPTER 4

What Actually Matters

Soundbars range from inexpensive to eye-watering, and the priciest is rarely the right one for hearing dialogue. Here's what to actually look for.

The things worth caring about

- **A dialogue / voice mode** — the most important feature for you, as we said. Some bars are specifically designed around clear speech and voice-boost levels; these are often the best choice if understanding voices is your main goal.
- **Simple connections and a simple remote** — a bar that connects with one HDMI cable and that your TV remote can control (Part 3) is far easier to live with.
- **A size that suits your TV** — roughly as wide as the TV, or a bit less. It doesn't need to match exactly.
- **Easy setup** — some bars are famously plug-and-play; worth seeking out.

The things you can mostly ignore

- **Fancy surround-sound formats** with impressive names — lovely for cinema buffs, irrelevant to hearing dialogue.
- **Huge channel counts** ("7.1.4" and such) — more speakers to place and pay for, no help with clarity.
- **Built-in voice assistants and streaming** — nice extras, but not why you're buying. Don't pay up for them unless you want them.

TIP

There are soundbars made specifically for clear speech

A useful thing to know: some soundbars are designed first and foremost around **making voices clear for hard-of-hearing viewers**, with multiple levels of voice boost rather than flashy movie features. If understanding dialogue is your whole reason for buying, these speech-focused bars are often a better, simpler, and cheaper choice than a big-brand home-theater system. Ask about them, or ask me.

CHAPTER 5

Spending Wisely

You do not need to spend a lot to hear your TV clearly. Let's keep your money where it counts.

Right-sizing your purchase

- **A modest, well-chosen soundbar** with a good voice mode will transform your TV sound. You do not need the top of the range.
- **Skip the subwoofer and rear speakers** unless you specifically want booming movie sound — they add cost and setup, not clarity.
- **Beware being upsold** a whole home-theater system when a single clear-voice bar is what solves your actual problem.
- **Check the return policy** — sound is personal, and it's good to be able to try one at home and return it if it doesn't suit you.

FROM BILL

Let me help you pick the right one

Choosing a soundbar that genuinely makes voices clear — without paying for features you'll never touch — is exactly the kind of honest guidance I offer. I'll match one to your TV, your room, and your hearing, and I'll steer you toward clarity, not price. Call (330) 200-8042 before you buy, and I'll make sure you get the right one the first time — and I'll happily set it up too.

PART 3

Connecting It

Getting the soundbar hooked to your TV — the three ways to connect, which is best, and why one cable lets your TV remote control it all.

CHAPTER 6

The Three Ways to Connect

There are three common ways to connect a soundbar to a TV. Knowing the difference — and which to prefer — makes setup painless.

Connection	In plain terms
HDMI (ARC)	The best for most folks. One HDMI cable to the TV's special "ARC" socket. It carries the sound AND lets your **TV remote control the soundbar's volume** — the big convenience. Look for an HDMI socket on the TV labeled **ARC** or **eARC**.
Optical	A cable with a little square plug and often a red light inside. Works well and is simple, but your TV remote usually can't control the soundbar's volume — you'll use the soundbar's own remote.
Bluetooth / wireless	Some soundbars connect to the TV wirelessly. Tidy (no cable), but can occasionally have sound-delay or dropout quirks; a cable is more reliable for a TV.

TIP

Choose HDMI ARC if your TV has it

The one-remote convenience is a bigger deal than it sounds: with HDMI ARC, you adjust the soundbar's volume with the *same TV remote* you already use, and the TV's own speakers go quiet automatically. No juggling two remotes. So if your TV has an HDMI socket labeled **ARC** or **eARC** (most TVs from the last several years do), that's the one to use. If it doesn't, optical is a perfectly good fallback.

CHAPTER 7

Hooking It Up, Step by Step

Let's connect it. We'll do the recommended HDMI ARC way; optical is nearly identical.

The steps

1. **Place the soundbar** in front of or just below the TV, centered, with its front facing the room.
2. **Plug in its power** cable to the wall.
3. **Find the HDMI socket on your TV labeled ARC** (or eARC). Plug one end of the HDMI cable there, and the other into the soundbar's HDMI **OUT (ARC)** socket.
4. **Turn on the soundbar** and set it to the matching input (its remote has a **source** or **input** button; choose HDMI/ARC or, for optical, the optical input).
5. **Play something on the TV.** You should hear it through the soundbar. If the TV's own speakers are also playing, a quick TV setting (Chapter 12) switches them off.

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
>
> **No HDMI cable in the box? It's a cheap fix**
>
> Some soundbars don't include the HDMI cable you need. Don't be caught out — a standard HDMI cable is inexpensive and sold everywhere, and any recent one will do (you don't need a pricey "premium" one for a soundbar). If you're unsure which cable or socket, that's a two-minute thing I can confirm — or just bring it up when I set it up for you.

Turning off the TV's own speakers

With HDMI ARC, the TV usually silences its own speakers automatically. If you hear a slight echo (both playing), go into the TV's **Sound** settings and choose the soundbar (often listed as "HDMI," "ARC," "audio system," or "external speakers") as the output. Done once, it sticks.

PART 4

Getting the Clearest Dialogue

The settings that make voices crisp — the voice mode, night mode, and a few placement tricks. This is where you win back your evenings.

CHAPTER 8

Turn On the Voice Mode

Now the payoff. Once your soundbar is connected, the most important thing you'll ever do with it is turn on its **voice/dialogue mode**.

Finding it

On the soundbar's remote (or in its app, or by a button on the bar), look for a mode called **Voice**, **Dialogue**, **Clear Voice**, **Voice Enhance**, or similar. Press it to turn it on. Some bars have *levels* of voice boost — try them and settle on the one where the talking is clearest to your ears.

Live with it, then fine-tune

Watch a show you know for a few minutes with the voice mode on. You should notice the dialogue stepping forward out of the music. If a bar offers a few sound "modes" (Movie, Music, News, Voice), the Voice or News one is usually best for everyday TV and clear speech. Leave it there; you can always switch to a fuller mode for a concert or a film.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

This is the moment it all pays off

Folks often tell me the instant they switch on the voice mode is when they stop straining and start *enjoying* television again — catching every line without rewinding, without blasting the neighbors. If you do just one thing after connecting your soundbar, find and turn on that voice mode. It's the whole reason you bought it.

CHAPTER 9

Night Mode, Placement & Fine-Tuning

A few more touches to make the sound just right for you and your home.

Night mode

Many soundbars have a **night mode** that gently tames loud sounds — the sudden booms and blasts — while keeping the voices clear. It's wonderful for watching late without jarring jumps in volume or waking someone, and some folks leave it on all the time simply because it evens everything out. Look for it on the remote or in the settings.

Where to put the soundbar

- **Centered under the TV**, with nothing blocking its front — not tucked inside a closed cabinet, which muffles it.
- **Facing out into the room,** toward where you sit.
- **Not crammed against a wall or behind the TV,** which dulls the sound.

Bass and treble

If voices sound boomy or muddy, turning the **bass** down a touch can actually make speech *clearer*. If they sound thin, a little more **treble** can sharpen them. Small adjustments on the remote, to taste — there's no wrong answer, only what sounds best to you.

TIP

A soundbar can help hearing aids, too

Clearer, front-facing TV sound from a soundbar often works better with hearing aids than a TV's muddy built-in speakers. And some hearing aids or TV-listening systems can receive the TV's sound directly — a further step worth asking your audiologist about. For many, though, a good soundbar with voice mode is the simplest big improvement there is.

PART 5

Bluetooth Speakers & Other Audio

Beyond the TV: pairing a Bluetooth speaker to your phone for music, wireless ways to hear the TV privately, and the simple idea of 'pairing' that runs it all.

CHAPTER 10

Bluetooth, Explained Simply

You'll hear the word **Bluetooth** a lot around speakers and headphones. It's simpler than it sounds, and worth understanding once.

What Bluetooth is

Bluetooth is a way for two gadgets close together — say, your phone and a speaker — to connect *without a wire*, over a short-range wireless signal. Introduce them once (called **pairing**) and thereafter they find each other automatically whenever both are on and nearby. It's how a wireless speaker plays music from your phone, or wireless earbuds play sound from your TV.

Pairing — the universal dance

1. Turn the speaker (or earbuds) on and put it in **pairing mode** — usually by holding a button until a light blinks or it chimes (its instructions say how).
2. On your phone, open **Settings** and tap **Bluetooth**; make sure it's on.
3. In the list of nearby devices, **tap your speaker's name** when it appears.
4. It connects — often with a little sound — and you're paired. Play music, and it comes out the speaker.

TIP

Pair once, enjoy forever

The nice thing about pairing is you only do it once per gadget. After that, your phone and speaker greet each other automatically whenever they're both on and near. If they ever don't reconnect, it's usually because one is off, out of range, or the speaker is already connected to a different device — simple things to check (Chapter 13).

CHAPTER 11

Speakers, Headphones & Private TV Listening

A quick tour of the other audio gadgets folks find useful, and what each is good for.

Portable Bluetooth speakers

A **Bluetooth speaker** is a small, often portable speaker that plays music, radio, or podcasts from your phone far better than the phone's own tiny speaker. Grand for the kitchen, the porch, or the garden. They come in every size; a modest one sounds wonderful for everyday listening.

Smart speakers double as music players

If you have an Amazon Echo or Google Nest speaker (from our *smart home* and *Alexa* manuals), it's also a fine music speaker you can control by voice — "play some Frank Sinatra." One gadget, two jobs.

Hearing the TV privately — wireless headphones

Here's a boon if you watch at a volume others find too loud, or want to watch without disturbing a sleeping spouse: **wireless headphones or earbuds** can carry the TV's sound straight to your ears, at your own volume, while the room stays quiet. Some TVs connect to Bluetooth headphones directly; there are also simple TV-headphone sets made exactly for this, often with a clear-voice boost of their own — especially nice for one hard-of-hearing person in a household.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

A soundbar and private listening together

Many households land on a lovely combination: a **soundbar** with voice mode for everyday watching, plus a set of **wireless TV headphones** for the person who needs it louder or wants to watch late. Everyone hears comfortably, nobody's blasted out, and peace reigns in the living room. It's one of the most appreciated setups I put in.

PART 6

Fixing Common Hiccups

No sound, two sets of speakers at once, lips out of sync, or a speaker that won't pair — the short list of easy fixes.

CHAPTER 12

No Sound, or the Wrong Sound

The most common soundbar niggles, each with a simple cure.

No sound from the soundbar

1. **Check the soundbar is on** and turned up (its own volume).
2. **Check it's set to the right input** — press its source/input button and pick the one your cable uses (HDMI/ARC or optical).
3. **Check the cable** is firmly in at both ends, and in the TV's **ARC** socket specifically (not just any HDMI).
4. **Check the TV's sound output** — in the TV's Sound settings, make sure it's set to the soundbar (HDMI/ARC/external speakers), not the TV's own.
5. **Restart both** — turn the TV and soundbar off and on. Cures many glitches.

Both the TV and soundbar playing (an echo)

If you hear a slight double or echo, the TV's internal speakers are still on. Go to the TV's **Sound** settings and choose the soundbar as the only output (often by picking "audio system," "HDMI," or "external speakers," or switching off "TV speakers"). One setting, fixed for good.

GOOD TO KNOW

Lips out of sync with the sound?

Occasionally the picture and sound drift slightly out of step — lips moving a touch ahead of or behind the words. Most TVs and soundbars have an **audio delay** or **lip-sync** setting (in the sound menu) you can nudge until they match. It's a known quirk, not a fault, and a small adjustment sorts it. If you can't find the setting, it's a quick one to call me about.

CHAPTER 13

Bluetooth & Remote Troubles

Two more common hiccups — a Bluetooth speaker that won't connect, and remote confusion.

A Bluetooth speaker won't pair or reconnect

1. **Make sure the speaker is on and charged,** and close to your phone.
2. **Check it's not already connected to another device** — a speaker can usually only play from one at a time. Disconnect it from the other phone or tablet.
3. **Turn your phone's Bluetooth off and back on,** then try again.
4. **Put the speaker back into pairing mode** (hold its button till it blinks) and reconnect as in Chapter 10.
5. **Restart the speaker and the phone** if it's still stubborn.

Juggling remotes

If you connected by HDMI ARC, your **TV remote** should control the soundbar's volume — so you can set the soundbar's own remote aside for daily use (you'll still want it for the voice mode and night mode). If your TV remote *isn't* controlling the volume, a setting on the TV called **HDMI-CEC** (brands give it different names, like Anynet+, Bravia Sync, Simplink) may need switching on — a good little job to have me do.

TIP

Restart cures most audio gremlins

As with every gadget in this series, turning the soundbar (and the TV) off and on again clears a surprising number of odd little problems — no sound, a stuck input, a Bluetooth hiccup — and it loses none of your settings. When something's acting up, reach for the restart before you worry.

PART 7

When to Call Bill & Your Cheat-Sheet

How I can help, and a one-page summary to keep by the TV.

CHAPTER 14

When to Call Bill

A soundbar is one of the easier gadgets to set up — and one of the most rewarding to get right. Here's where a hand genuinely helps, with no pressure.

Times it's worth a call

- **Choosing the right soundbar** for clear voices, matched to your TV and budget — before you overpay for features you don't need.
- **Connecting it** — HDMI ARC, turning off the TV speakers, and setting your remote to control the volume.
- **Dialing in the dialogue** — voice mode, night mode, and the tweaks that make voices crisp for your ears.
- **Setting up private TV listening** — wireless headphones for the person who needs it louder.
- **Pairing Bluetooth speakers** or sorting out lip-sync and remote niggles.

What working with me is like

I come to your home, here in Portage County, bring the right cable, hook it up, tune it to your ears, and leave you understanding every word — explaining it all in plain English. Honestly, it's one of my favorite visits, because the delight when someone hears their shows clearly again is something to see. That's been my way for more than 30 years.

FROM BILL

How to reach me

Call or text **(330) 200-8042**, or book a visit at **billshometech.com/book**. Bill's Home Tech serves Portage County, Ohio. No question is too small — and hearing your TV again is worth a call.

Thank you for letting me help you enjoy your television again. Take your time, find that voice mode, and remember I'm only a phone call away.

— Bill

CHAPTER 15

Your Home-Audio Cheat-Sheet

Keep this by the TV. The whole book, boiled down.

Buying

- Look first for a **voice / dialogue mode** — clarity matters more than anything.
- A plain soundbar is plenty for clear voices; skip subwoofer/rear speakers unless you want movie boom.
- Prefer a bar your TV remote can control (HDMI ARC); check the return policy.
- Don't overpay for surround formats and extras you won't use.

Connecting

1. Place the bar centered under the TV, facing the room.
2. Plug in power.
3. HDMI cable from the TV's **ARC** socket to the soundbar's HDMI **OUT (ARC)**.
4. Set the soundbar to that input; play something.
5. If both play, set the TV's Sound output to the soundbar.

For the clearest voices

- Turn on the **voice / dialogue mode** (the whole point).
- Try **night mode** to tame loud booms while keeping speech clear.
- Turn bass down a touch if voices sound muddy.
- Keep the bar out in the open, not in a closed cabinet.

When something's wrong

1. No sound? Check the soundbar's input, the cable in the ARC socket, and the TV's sound output.
2. Echo? Turn off the TV's own speakers in its Sound settings.
3. Lips out of sync? Adjust the audio-delay / lip-sync setting.
4. Bluetooth won't connect? Make sure it's not paired to another device; re-pair.
5. Still stuck? Restart the TV and soundbar — or call Bill at (330) 200-8042.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

You've got this

You now know why TV sound is so poor, how to choose a soundbar for clear *voices*, how to connect it with one cable, and how to set it for crisp dialogue — plus how to use Bluetooth speakers and private listening. Keep this book by the TV, find that voice mode, and enjoy every word again. I'm only a phone call away.