BILL'S HOME TECH
Home & Small Business Tech Solutions

BILL'S COMPLETE MANUALS

# Speeding Up a Slow Computer

Why it slows down, how to make it quick again — for Windows and Mac, in plain English

**A calm, no-nonsense tune-up guide**

Take your time — you can't break it

*Written for you by Bill — Bill's Home Tech*

(330) 200-8042 · BillsHomeTech.com

*Covers Windows 11 & recent macOS · facts current November 2026*

# What's Inside

This is your tune-up manual for a computer that has gotten slow. Read it in any order and at your own pace — there is no test, and you can't fall behind. It covers both **Windows** computers and **Mac** computers, and tells you clearly which steps are for which. Nearly everything here is free, safe, and undo-able. We'll start with the quick wins that fix most slowness in a few minutes, then work calmly toward the deeper causes. If a screen on yours looks a little different, don't worry — the idea is still the same, and I'll tell you what to look for.

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PART 1

# Why Computers Slow Down

What "slow" really means, the handful of things that actually cause it, and the first move that fixes more problems than anything else. Start here.

CHAPTER 1

# A Note from Bill

Hello, and welcome. If you've ever sat in front of your computer, watched that little spinning circle go round and round, and quietly wondered whether the thing was broken — or whether *you* had done something wrong — this book is for you. You haven't broken anything, and you're not doing anything wrong. Computers simply slow down over time, the way a kitchen drawer fills up with clutter, and the good news is that cleaning it out is something you can absolutely do yourself.

I'm Bill. Helping folks feel at home with their technology is what I do every day, and I wrote this book the way I'd sit down next to you at your own desk: patiently, in plain English, with no rushing. If I use a word you don't know, I'll stop and explain it right then — you won't have to look anything up.

## The promise of this book

Here's what I want you to know before we begin: a slow computer is almost never a dead computer. Most of the time it's carrying too much clutter, running too many things at once, or simply needing a good restart. We're going to walk through the fixes in order — the quick, easy ones first, which solve most cases — and by the end you'll have a computer that feels years younger, plus the know-how to keep it that way.

And everything we do together in this book is **safe and undo-able**. We are not going to delete your photos, your documents, or anything precious. We're clearing away the clutter and the cobwebs, not your memories. You can follow these steps with complete confidence.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

### What a quick computer gives you back

A computer that responds the moment you click isn't a luxury — it's your patience, your time, and your peace of mind handed back to you. No more dreading the slow startup, no more losing your train of thought while you wait. The machine goes back to being a helpful tool instead of a daily test of your temper. That's what we're after.

## And I'm only a phone call away

This book will carry you a long way on your own. But if you ever get stuck, or you'd simply rather have a hand, you are never stuck alone. Call me at **(330) 200-8042** and we'll work it out together, with no judgment and no eye-rolling. There is no such thing as a silly question.

Now let's find out why your computer is dragging — and fix it.

***— Bill***

CHAPTER 2

# What "Slow" Really Means

"My computer is slow" can mean several different things, and knowing which kind of slow you have points us straight at the fix. Let's put a name to what you're seeing.

## The common kinds of slow

| What you notice | What it usually points to |
|---|---|
| **Slow to start up** | You press the power button and it takes a long time to get to your desktop and be ready to use. Usually caused by too many programs launching themselves at startup. |
| **Slow all the time** | Everything lags — opening a program, clicking a button, typing. Often too little free space, too little memory, or too many things running at once. |
| **Slow web browsing** | The computer's fine, but web pages crawl. Often a cluttered browser, too many tabs, or a slow internet connection — not the computer itself. |
| **Slows down after a while** | Fine at first, then bogs down the longer it's on. Usually programs piling up in the background; a restart clears it. |
| **Suddenly slow** | It was fine yesterday. Could be an update installing, a stuck program, or something unwanted that snuck on (we'll check). |

TIP

### Notice when it's slow — it's half the diagnosis

Before you change anything, take a moment to notice *when* the slowness happens. Only at startup? Only in your web browser? Only when a certain program is open? That one observation often tells us exactly where to look, and saves a lot of poking around. Jot it down.

## A fair word about age

Sometimes a computer is slow simply because it's old — the way an older car still runs fine but won't win any races. If your computer is many years old, the steps in this book will still make it noticeably quicker, but there may be a limit to how fast it can go. That's not a failure on your part, and we'll talk honestly near the end about when a tune-up is enough and when a new machine is the kinder choice for your patience.

CHAPTER 3

# The Real Culprits Behind a Slow Computer

There's a lot of bad advice and outright nonsense out there about why computers slow down — much of it from companies trying to sell you something you don't need. Let me give you the honest, short list. Nearly every slow computer comes down to one or more of these:

- **Too many programs running at once**, including ones that launch themselves the moment you turn the computer on and then run quietly in the background.
- **Not enough free space** on the computer's storage. A nearly-full computer slows to a crawl, because the system needs elbow room to work.
- **Too little memory (RAM)** for what you're asking it to do — especially many browser tabs and programs open together.
- **A long time since the last restart.** Little problems pile up the longer a computer runs without a fresh start.
- **Clutter in your web browser** — too many tabs, too many add-ons, a cache that's grown fat.
- **Something unwanted** — junk software, or occasionally a bit of malware, hogging resources.
- **Old hardware**, especially an old-style spinning hard drive, which is slow by nature compared to modern storage.

That's the whole list. Notice that most of these are *clutter and habits* — things you can clean up for free — and only the last one is about the machine itself. That's why most slow computers can be dramatically improved without spending a dime.

GOOD TO KNOW

**It's usually not one big thing — it's several small ones**

People often expect a single dramatic cause for a slow computer. In reality it's usually three or four small things adding up: a dozen startup programs, a nearly-full drive, forty browser tabs, and three weeks since the last restart. The good news? Clear a few of them and the computer feels transformed. We'll tackle them one at a time.

CHAPTER 4

# Windows or Mac — Knowing Which You Have

This book covers the two kinds of computer most people own. Before we start, let's make sure you know which one you've got, because some steps differ between them. It's easy to tell.

| Type | How to tell |
|---|---|
| **Windows PC** | Made by many companies — Dell, HP, Lenovo, Acer, ASUS, and others. The bottom-left of the screen has a **Start button** (a four-pane window symbol). Most computers sold are Windows. |
| **Mac** | Made only by Apple — a MacBook, iMac, Mac mini, or Mac Studio. The top-left of the screen has a small black **Apple logo**. The programs look a bit different and there's a row of icons (the Dock) often along the bottom. |

## Finding your exact version

Knowing the version helps, and it's quick to find:

- **On Windows:** click Start, then Settings (the gear), then **System**, then scroll to **About**. It shows "Windows 11" (or 10) and details about your computer.
- **On a Mac:** click the Apple logo (top-left), then **About This Mac**. It shows the macOS version name (like Sequoia or Tahoe) and your Mac's details.

TIP

### Write down what you have

Jot your computer's type, version, and model on the inside cover of this book, along with how old it is if you know. When you call me, those few facts let me picture your exact screen and walk you through anything confidently. It turns a guessing game into a quick answer.

## Throughout this book: look for the labels

As we go, I'll clearly mark which steps are for which computer — I'll say **"On Windows"** or **"On a Mac"** so you always know which to follow. If a chapter doesn't apply to your machine, you can simply skip it. Nothing here will ever ask you to do something that doesn't fit the computer in front of you.

CHAPTER 5

# The One Fix to Try First: Restart

Before we do anything else — before we clean a single thing — there is one move that fixes more slow computers than all the others combined, and it takes two minutes: **restart the computer**. If you only ever learn one thing from this book, let it be this.

## Why a restart works such wonders

The longer a computer runs without a restart, the more little jobs, leftovers, and stuck programs pile up in its memory, quietly gumming up the works. A restart sweeps all of that away and lets the computer begin fresh, clean and clear. It's the single most effective thing you can do, and it's completely safe — nothing of yours is lost.

## Restart the right way — it's not the same as shutting down

Here's a subtle thing worth knowing: on modern computers, "Shut Down" and then turning it back on is *not* always the same as "Restart." The **Restart** option does the fullest, cleanest job. So choose Restart:

- **On Windows:** click Start, click the power symbol, and choose **Restart** (not Shut down). Let it go all the way off and come back on by itself.
- **On a Mac:** click the Apple logo and choose **Restart**. If it offers to reopen your windows next time, you can untick that box for the cleanest start.

GOOD TO KNOW

**"Have you tried turning it off and on again?" — it's a cliché because it works**

The old joke about restarting is a joke precisely because it's true. A huge share of the computer problems I'm called about — slowness, a frozen program, a gadget that won't connect — melt away after a proper restart. It's not a trick or a dodge; it's genuinely the first and best thing to try, every single time.

## A gentle new habit

Many people never turn their computer fully off for weeks, just closing the lid or letting the screen sleep. That's fine for a laptop day to day, but make a habit of a **full restart once a week or so**. It keeps the computer running smoothly and heads off the gradual slowdown that creeps in between restarts. Pick a time — say, Sunday evening — and it'll become second nature.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

### Two minutes that save you hours

Building the weekly-restart habit is the highest-value thing in this entire book. It costs you two minutes and prevents a great deal of the slowness, freezing, and frustration that would otherwise build up. Do this one thing faithfully and you've already won half the battle.

PART 2

# The Quick Wins

The handful of free, five-minute fixes that cure most slow computers: taming startup programs, closing what you're not using, freeing up space, and keeping things updated.

CHAPTER 6

# Closing What You're Not Using

The simplest everyday cause of a sluggish computer is having too many things open at once. Every open program and every browser tab uses a little of your computer's memory and attention. A dozen of them together can bring even a good computer to a crawl. The fix is free and instant: close what you're not using.

## Closing programs you've finished with

When you're done with a program, actually close it rather than just clicking away to something else. Minimizing a window (sending it down out of sight) doesn't close it — it's still running.

- **On Windows:** click the **X** in the top-right corner of the program's window to close it fully.
- **On a Mac:** clicking the red dot in the top-left often only closes the window, not the program. To quit it fully, click the program's name in the top menu bar and choose **Quit**, or press **Command+Q**. A little dot under a program's icon in the Dock means it's still running.

## The browser-tab pile-up

A **web browser** is the program you use to visit websites — Chrome, Edge, Safari, or Firefox. Each website you open lives in a **tab**, the little labeled strips across the top. It's astonishing how many tabs pile up — twenty, thirty, more — and each one quietly uses memory as if it were its own program. Closing tabs you're done with often gives an instant speed boost.

1. Look along the top of your browser at the row of tabs.
2. Click the small **X** on any tab you're finished with to close it.
3. Keep only the few you're actually using. You can always reopen a website later in a second.

> TIP
>
> **Bookmark instead of hoarding tabs**
>
> Many people keep a tab open because they don't want to lose the page. There's a better way: **bookmark** it (click the little star in the address bar) to save it for later, then close the tab. Your browser stays lean and quick, and the page is tucked safely in your bookmarks whenever you want it back.

## Seeing what's hogging the computer

Both kinds of computer have a built-in tool that shows you what's running and what's using the most resources — handy when you want to find a greedy program:

- **On Windows:** the **Task Manager**. Right-click the Start button and choose Task Manager, or press Ctrl+Shift+Esc. The Processes list shows what's using your memory and processor.
- **On a Mac:** the **Activity Monitor** (find it in Applications, then Utilities, or search for it). The CPU and Memory tabs show what's working hardest.

HEADS UP

### Look, don't yank

Task Manager and Activity Monitor let you force a program to quit, which is useful for a frozen one. But don't go force-quitting things you don't recognize just because they're using resources — many are parts of the system doing their proper job. When in doubt, just look, note the name, and ask me. Forcing the wrong thing closed can make a program misbehave until you restart.

CHAPTER 7

# Taming Startup Programs (Windows)

This is one of the biggest wins of all, especially if your computer is slow to *start up*. Over the years, program after program quietly sets itself to launch the moment you turn the computer on — and then runs in the background forever after. Most of them don't need to. Trimming this list can make a dramatic difference, and it's completely safe.

## Seeing and trimming your startup programs

1. Click the **Start** button and open **Settings** (the gear icon).
2. Click **Apps**, then **Startup**. (You can also use the **Task Manager**'s **Startup apps** tab — right-click Start, choose Task Manager, click Startup apps.)
3. You'll see a list of programs with switches, each marked with a **startup impact** — Low, Medium, or High. The High ones slow your start the most.
4. For any program you don't need running the instant you turn on the computer, click its switch to **Off**. This does *not* uninstall it — it just stops it launching itself. You can still open it normally whenever you want.

## What's safe to turn off

A good rule: if you don't need a program the very second your computer starts, it doesn't need to be in startup. Safe candidates to switch off include music and video apps (Spotify, iTunes), chat apps, shopping and update helpers, printer software, and the little "assistant" programs that came with your computer.

| Startup item | Guidance |
|---|---|
| **Usually safe to turn OFF** | Spotify, Steam, Zoom, Skype, Adobe helpers, printer utilities, GoPro/phone-sync helpers, shopping apps, most things marked "High impact." |
| **Leave ON (when in doubt)** | Your security/antivirus software, anything with "Audio," "Display," "Graphics," "Touchpad," or your cloud storage if you rely on it syncing. |

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

### A faster, calmer startup every single day

Turning off a handful of needless startup programs means your computer gets to the desktop faster and has more memory free for what you actually want to do — every time you turn it on, for the life of the machine. It's a one-time, five-minute job that pays you back daily. One of the best few minutes you'll ever spend on your computer.

CHAPTER 8

# Taming Login Items (Mac)

Macs have the very same issue under a different name. Programs add themselves to your **Login Items** — the things that launch automatically when you log in — and background helpers accumulate quietly. Trimming them is just as safe and just as effective as on Windows.

## Reviewing your Login Items

1. Click the **Apple logo** (top-left) and choose **System Settings**.
2. Click **General** in the list, then **Login Items & Extensions**.
3. The top list, **Open at Login**, shows programs that start automatically. Select any you don't need starting on their own and click the **minus (–)** button to remove it from the list. (This doesn't delete the program — you can still open it anytime.)
4. Below that, **Allow in the Background** lists background helpers. You can switch off ones from programs you no longer use — but leave anything you don't recognize alone, or ask me.

> **TIP**
>
> **Background helpers are the usual Mac culprit**
>
> On a Mac, the most common reason it feels slow right after you turn it on is a stack of login items and background helpers — cloud-sync tools, old menu-bar utilities, and browser helpers — all waking up at once. Clearing the ones you don't use is often the single biggest improvement you can make to a sluggish Mac.

## The menu bar tells a story

Glance at the row of little icons in the top-right of your Mac's screen — the **menu bar**. Each icon is usually a program running in the background. If it's crowded with things you don't recognize or never use, that's a sign you have background programs worth trimming. We can go through them together on a call if you'd like a second opinion on what's what.

CHAPTER 9

# Freeing Up Space (Windows)

A computer that's nearly full slows down badly — it needs free room to shuffle things around while it works, the way a cook needs clear counter space. Freeing up space is one of the most reliable speed-ups there is, and Windows has good built-in tools to do it safely.

## Seeing how full your computer is

1. Open **Settings**, click **System**, then **Storage**.
2. The bar at the top shows how much space is used and how much is free. If free space is very low (a sliver), that alone could be your whole slowdown.
3. Below, Windows breaks down what's using the space — apps, temporary files, documents, and so on. Tap a category to see more.

## Storage Sense — the safe automatic cleaner

Windows includes a free, safe cleanup tool called **Storage Sense** that clears out temporary files and empties the Recycle Bin for you. It only removes genuine junk — never your documents or photos.

1. In **Settings > System > Storage**, find **Storage Sense** and turn it on.
2. Click into it and you can have it run automatically now and then, and choose how often to empty the Recycle Bin and clear temporary files.
3. You can also click **Temporary files** on the Storage page to review and delete safe junk — things like Windows Update leftovers and the Recycle Bin — right away.

> **GOOD TO KNOW**
>
> **Emptying the Recycle Bin actually frees space**
>
> When you delete a file, it goes to the **Recycle Bin** — a safety net in case you change your mind — and it still takes up space until the bin is emptied. If you're sure you don't need what's in there, right-click the Recycle Bin on your desktop and choose **Empty Recycle Bin**. On a full computer, this one step can free a surprising amount of room.

## Finding the big space-hogs

The Storage page shows which categories use the most room. The usual culprits are your **Downloads** folder (full of things you downloaded once and forgot), old videos and photos, and programs you no longer use (we'll uninstall those in Part 3). Clearing the obvious big

items frees the most space for the least effort.

HEADS UP

### Delete the junk, keep the treasures

When freeing space, stick to **temporary files, the Recycle Bin, and things you downloaded and no longer need**. Never delete files just because they're large if you don't know what they are — a big file might be your photo library or an important document. When unsure, leave it and ask me. Freeing space should never cost you something you wanted to keep.

CHAPTER 10

# Freeing Up Space (Mac)

A Mac also slows down when its storage gets too full. Apple's rule of thumb is to keep at least ten to fifteen percent of your disk free so the system has room to breathe. Here's how to see where you stand and safely reclaim space.

## Checking your storage

1. Click the **Apple logo**, choose **System Settings**, click **General**, then **Storage**.
2. A colored bar shows what's using your space, broken into categories — Applications, Documents, Photos, System Data, and so on.
3. Hover over the bar or scroll down for recommendations and tools to clear space.

## Safe ways to reclaim room

- **Empty the Trash.** Deleted files sit in the **Trash** (the bin at the end of the Dock) until emptied. Right-click it and choose **Empty Trash** to actually free the space.
- **Review large files.** On the Storage screen, the built-in tools let you find large files and old downloads you may not need.
- **Clear the Downloads folder** of installers and files you grabbed once and forgot.
- **Offload** — the Mac can store older files in iCloud and keep only what you're using on the computer, if you use iCloud. Handy, but understand it needs internet to fetch them back.

HEADS UP

### Beware the 'System Data' rabbit hole

You may see a large chunk called **System Data** and feel the urge to attack it. Resist. It holds caches and files the Mac manages itself, and digging in to delete the wrong thing can cause real trouble that's much worse than a full disk. Clear the Trash, Downloads, and large files you recognize — and leave System Data to the Mac. If it's genuinely huge, that's a good reason to call me.

CHAPTER 11

# Keeping Everything Updated

It sounds backwards, but keeping your computer **updated** usually makes it faster and safer, not slower. Updates fix bugs that cause slowdowns and freezes, and they patch security holes that junk software and scammers love to exploit. A well-updated computer is a healthier, quicker one.

## Checking for updates

- **On Windows:** Settings > **Windows Update**. Click **Check for updates**, let it download and install, and restart when it asks. Do this when you won't need the computer for a little while.
- **On a Mac:** Apple logo > System Settings > **General** > **Software Update**. Install what it offers and restart if asked.

## Updating your programs too

Your web browser and other programs update themselves from time to time as well. Mostly this happens quietly in the background, but if a program nags you that an update is ready, it's generally wise to let it — from the program itself or the official store, never from a pop-up ad (more on that danger later).

GOOD TO KNOW

### Updates can make it briefly slow — that's normal

Right after a big update, your computer may feel slow for a little while — even an hour or two — as it tidies up and re-organizes in the background. This is completely normal and it settles down on its own. Give it some time (and a restart) before worrying that the update made things worse. Nine times out of ten it's just finishing up.

STAY SAFE

### Only update from the computer itself

Real updates come from **Windows Update**, **Software Update** on a Mac, or a program's own menu — never from a pop-up on a web page shouting that your computer is "out of date" or "infected." Those pop-ups are a scam, every time. We'll cover them properly in Part 4, but for now: real updates are quiet and live in Settings. Loud ones are fake.

PART 3

# Cleaning House

Clearing out the deeper clutter: programs you never use, a bloated web browser, duplicate security software, and the junk that quietly piles up over the years.

CHAPTER 12

# Uninstalling Programs You Never Use

Over the years, computers collect programs the way a garage collects boxes — things installed once for a single task, trial software that came with the machine, and tools you've long forgotten. Many run quietly in the background and all of them take up space. Removing the ones you don't use frees room and reduces clutter. This is safe and tidy — not risky.

## Removing a program on Windows

1. Open **Settings**, click **Apps**, then **Installed apps**.
2. Scroll the list. You can sort by size to spot the big ones, or by install date.
3. For any program you're sure you don't use, click the **three dots** beside it and choose **Uninstall**, then confirm.
4. Repeat for each one. Restart when you're done.

## Removing a program on a Mac

1. Open **Finder**, then click **Applications** in the sidebar.
2. Find the program you don't want. Drag its icon to the **Trash**, or right-click and choose **Move to Trash**.
3. Empty the Trash to finish removing it.

HEADS UP

### Uninstall what you know, leave what you don't

Only remove programs you **recognize and are sure you don't need** — your old tax software, a game you never play, a trial that came with the computer. If you don't know what something is, leave it: it may be a part your computer needs. A quick web search of the name, or a call to me, settles any doubt. There's no rush to clear everything at once.

## The pre-installed 'bloatware' that came with your computer

New Windows computers often arrive with a pile of trial programs and promotional apps the maker was paid to include — folks in the trade call it **bloatware**. Most of it you'll never use, and it can slow a new computer right out of the box. It's perfectly safe to uninstall the trials and promos you didn't ask for. If you'd like a hand telling the junk from the useful, that's a quick and satisfying call to make together.

CHAPTER 13

# Cleaning Up Your Web Browser

For many people, the **web browser** — the program for visiting websites — is where they spend almost all their time, and it's often the real source of "my computer is slow." A cluttered browser can drag even a fast computer down. The good news: cleaning it is easy and makes an immediate difference.

## The three big browser clean-ups

1. **Close extra tabs** (as in Chapter 6). Each open website uses memory; keep only the few you need.
2. **Clear the cache.** Your browser saves bits of every site you visit to load them faster — the **cache** — but over time it grows bloated. Clearing it (in the browser's Settings, under **Privacy** or **Clear browsing data**) is safe and often perks things up. You can clear "cached images and files" without losing your saved passwords if you leave that box unticked.
3. **Review your add-ons** (see below).

## Add-ons and extensions — the hidden slow-down

An **extension** (or add-on) is a small add-on program that lives inside your browser — a coupon finder, a weather bar, a toolbar. A few are useful; many are useless or worse, and each one slows your browsing and can snoop on what you do. Clearing out the ones you don't need often gives a real speed boost and improves your safety at the same time.

- **In Chrome or Edge:** click the three dots (top-right), find **Extensions**, and review the list. Remove anything you don't recognize or don't use.
- **In Safari:** Safari menu > Settings > **Extensions**. Untick or uninstall ones you don't need.
- **In Firefox:** the menu (three lines) > **Add-ons and themes**.

SCAM ALERT

### Toolbars and 'helpful' add-ons are often the problem

If your browser has sprouted extra toolbars, a search box you didn't choose, or pop-ups and coupon offers, those unwanted add-ons are very likely what's slowing you down — and some are outright junk that snuck in alongside something else you installed. Removing them is safe and usually a big relief. If your browser looks hijacked — a strange home page, constant pop-ups — stop and call me; that's a sign of unwanted software we should clean up properly.

## Too many browsers at once

It's fine to have more than one browser installed, but you only need one open at a time. If you find Chrome, Edge, *and* Firefox all running, that's extra load for no benefit. Pick the one you like, use it, and close the others.

CHAPTER 14

# The Trouble with Too Many Security Programs

This one surprises people. Having **more than one** antivirus or "security" program isn't safer — it's slower, and they can actually fight each other and cause problems. More is not better here. One good guard at the door is plenty.

## What you actually need

- **On Windows:** Windows includes a capable, free, built-in protector called **Windows Security** (also known as Microsoft Defender). For most home users it is genuinely enough. You do not need to buy or install a second antivirus on top of it.
- **On a Mac:** macOS has strong built-in protections too. Most Mac users don't need extra antivirus software at all.

## The paid 'suites' that slow things down

Many computers come with a trial of a big paid security "suite" that constantly scans, pops up, and nags you to renew — and bogs the computer down while it does. If you have one running alongside the built-in protection, you often have *two* guards tripping over each other. Removing the extra one (and relying on the solid built-in protection) frequently makes a slow computer noticeably quicker. If you're nervous about which to keep, let's talk it through — I'll never leave you unprotected.

SCAM ALERT

### Beware 'your computer is infected!' scare pop-ups

A loud pop-up, a web page, or a phone call warning that your computer is "infected" and urging you to call a number, pay a fee, or install a "cleaner" is a **scam** — one aimed squarely at older folks. Real security software is quiet and lives on your computer, not in a screaming web pop-up. Never call the number, never pay, never let anyone "remote in" from such a warning. Close it, and if you're shaken, call me at **(330) 200-8042**. I'll tell you plainly whether anything's wrong — usually nothing is.

CHAPTER 15

# Clutter on the Desktop & in Your Folders

A tidy computer runs a little better and feels a lot better. Two kinds of clutter are worth a few minutes: a jam-packed desktop, and the piles of files that drift into your Downloads and folders over the years.

## A packed desktop can slow you down

The **desktop** — the home screen with your background picture and icons — is a handy place for a few things, but when it's covered wall-to-wall with dozens or hundreds of icons, the computer has to draw them all every time, and it can bog down. Tidying it helps the computer and your peace of mind.

1. Make a couple of folders on your desktop (right-click an empty spot > **New > Folder** on Windows; right-click > **New Folder** on a Mac).
2. Name them simply — "Photos," "Documents," "To Sort" — and drag the loose icons into them.
3. Keep only a handful of truly-used shortcuts on the desktop itself.

## The Downloads folder: where files go to be forgotten

Every time you download something — a form, a photo, a program installer — it lands in your **Downloads** folder and tends to stay there forever. Over years this becomes a huge, messy pile taking up real space. Open it now and then, keep what you need (move it somewhere sensible), and delete the installers and one-time files you're done with. It's quick, safe, and surprisingly freeing.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

### A clean machine is a calm machine

Tidying your desktop and clearing out old downloads does more than reclaim space — it makes the computer quicker to respond and, honestly, much nicer to sit down at. You spend less time hunting for things and less time waiting. A little order goes a long way toward making the whole computer feel pleasant and under control again.

CHAPTER 16

# Cutting Down Background Syncing

Modern computers constantly sync things in the background — copying your photos and files up to the internet so they're backed up and available on your other devices. This is genuinely useful, but when several sync services run at once, or one is churning through a huge backlog, it can make the computer feel slow. A little awareness helps.

## The common sync services

| Service | What it does |
|---|---|
| **OneDrive (Windows / Microsoft)** | Syncs your documents, desktop, and photos to Microsoft's cloud. Useful backup, but can be busy, especially the first time or after adding many files. |
| **iCloud (Apple)** | Syncs photos, files, and more across your Apple devices. Can churn when your photo library is large. |
| **Google Drive / Photos** | Backs up files and pictures to Google. Another background worker. |
| **Dropbox and others** | Older file-sync tools that may still be running from years ago. |

## Easing the load

You usually *want* one backup service running — losing your photos is far worse than a little slowness. But you rarely need several. If you have two or three all syncing the same sorts of things, consider keeping the one you rely on and signing out of the others. And after you add a big batch of photos or files, expect some background busy-ness for a while as it catches up; it settles down on its own.

FROM BILL

### Don't turn off your backup to chase speed

It can be tempting to switch off syncing entirely to speed things up — please don't, unless you've got another backup. The day a computer dies or a photo is lost, that quiet background backup is worth more than all the speed in the world. Let's trim the *extra* ones and keep the one that protects your memories. If you're not sure you have a backup at all, that's absolutely worth a call — it's some of the most important peace of mind I can set up for you.

PART 4

# The Deeper Causes

When the quick wins aren't enough: frozen programs, unwanted software, heat and dust, too little memory, and the aging parts that a tune-up can't fully cure.

CHAPTER 17

# When It Freezes: the Spinning Wheel

Sometimes the computer doesn't just slow down — it **freezes**, and you get a spinning circle (Windows) or a colorful spinning wheel (Mac, nicknamed the "beachball"). It feels alarming, but it usually just means one program got stuck, not that the whole computer is broken. Here's how to handle it calmly.

## First, give it a moment

A spinning wheel often clears on its own if you wait half a minute — the computer may be finishing a big task. Take your hands off the mouse and keyboard and count slowly to thirty. Often it comes right back.

## If one program is stuck, close just that one

- **On Windows:** press **Ctrl+Shift+Esc** to open Task Manager, click the frozen program in the list, and click **End task**.
- **On a Mac:** press **Command+Option+Esc**, pick the stuck program, and click **Force Quit**.

This closes only the problem program. You may lose unsaved work in that one program, but everything else stays fine. Then reopen it and carry on.

TIP

### If the whole computer is frozen solid

If nothing responds at all — not even Ctrl+Shift+Esc — you can force the computer off by pressing and holding the **power button** for about ten seconds until it shuts down. Wait a moment, turn it back on, and it'll start fresh. Save this for a true freeze; it's a last resort, not an everyday move, but it's safe when you genuinely need it.

CHAPTER 18

# Malware, Junkware & Scareware

Sometimes a computer is slow because something unwanted got onto it. These go by scary names — **malware** (harmful software), **junkware** (useless programs that sneak in), and **scareware** (fake warnings designed to frighten you). Let's demystify them, because fear is exactly what the bad actors want, and a clear head is your best defense.

## How this stuff gets on

- Clicking "Download" on a pop-up ad instead of the real button you wanted.
- Installing a "free" program that quietly brings junk along for the ride.
- Clicking a link or attachment in a scam email or text.
- Falling for a fake "your computer is infected" warning and calling the number.

## Checking your computer safely

The built-in protection can scan for you. On Windows, open **Windows Security** (search for it in Start), choose **Virus & threat protection**, and run a **Quick scan** (or Full scan for a thorough look). On a Mac, the system guards against most threats automatically; the bigger risk is usually junk software and browser hijacks (Chapter 13) rather than classic viruses.

SCAM ALERT

### The scariest warnings are the fake ones

Real security scans are quiet and live inside your computer's own security program. A warning that **shouts**, fills your screen, won't close, blares a sound, or demands you call a number or pay right now is **always a scam** — no exceptions. Never call, never pay, never let a stranger connect to your computer. Close the page (or restart if it won't close), and if it rattled you, call me. I'll check it over and set your mind at ease — usually there's nothing wrong at all.

CHAPTER 19

# Overheating, Dust & Fan Noise

Computers slow themselves down on purpose when they get too hot — it's a safety measure to protect the delicate parts inside. So a dusty, overheating computer can be a slow one, and the fix is often as simple as a good cleaning and better airflow.

## Signs of heat trouble

- The fan runs loud and often, like a little hair dryer.
- The computer (especially a laptop) feels hot to the touch.
- It slows down or shuts off during demanding tasks or on hot days.

## Simple cooling fixes

- **Give it air.** Don't use a laptop on a bed, couch, or pillow — soft surfaces block the vents. A hard, flat surface lets it breathe.
- **Clear the vents.** Dust clogs the little grilles. A can of compressed air, puffed into the vents (with the computer off), clears a surprising amount. Don't vacuum the insides.
- **Keep it out of direct sun** and away from radiators and heat vents.

HEADS UP

### Leave opening it up to a professional

Giving the vents a puff of air from outside is fine for anyone. But actually opening the computer's case to clean inside is a job for someone who knows what they're doing — it's easy to damage something or void a warranty. If your computer is badly clogged or running hot even after the simple steps, let me take a look rather than prying it open yourself.

CHAPTER 20

# Not Enough Memory (RAM)

**Memory** — the technical name is **RAM** — is your computer's work space: the desk it spreads its current tasks out on. (This is different from *storage*, which is the filing cabinet where your files live — people mix these up all the time.) If your computer doesn't have enough memory for what you ask of it, it bogs down, especially with many programs or browser tabs open.

## How to tell if memory is your limit

Open Task Manager (Windows) or Activity Monitor (Mac) and look at the **Memory** figure while you work the way you normally do. If it's pinned near the top — or on a Mac the "Memory Pressure" graph stays yellow or red — your computer is short on memory for your habits. The everyday cure is to **close programs and browser tabs you aren't using**, which frees memory instantly and costs nothing.

## Can you add more?

On many desktop computers and some laptops, more memory can be added — a modest upgrade that can breathe real life into a computer that's otherwise fine. On many modern laptops, though, the memory is built in and can't be changed. Whether it's possible and worthwhile for your exact machine is a perfect thing to ask me; I'll tell you honestly if it's worth it or not.

GOOD TO KNOW

### Memory vs. storage — the two 'sizes'

Here's the distinction worth remembering: **memory (RAM)** is the work desk — how much the computer can juggle at once. **Storage** is the filing cabinet — how many files, photos, and programs you can keep. A computer can run low on either, and they cause different kinds of slow. Knowing which is which helps us aim the fix. When in doubt, tell me both numbers and I'll sort it out.

CHAPTER 21

# The Old Hard Drive — and the SSD That Fixes It

If your computer is several years old and slow at *everything* — slow to start, slow to open programs, slow to switch tasks — the most likely culprit is the kind of storage inside it. And this one has a genuinely transformative fix.

## Two kinds of storage

| Type | What to know |
|---|---|
| **Hard drive (HDD)** | The old style: a spinning disk, like a tiny record player. Cheap and roomy but **slow** by nature. Common in older and budget computers. A major cause of "slow at everything." |
| **Solid-state drive (SSD)** | The modern style: no moving parts, like a big memory card. **Many times faster.** Standard in newer computers. |

## The single best upgrade there is

If your computer still has an old spinning hard drive, swapping it for an **SSD** is, hands down, the most dramatic speed-up money can buy — often turning a painfully slow computer into one that feels brand new, for a fraction of the cost of replacing it. It's a job for a professional (your files need to be moved over carefully), but it's one of my favorite things to do, because the before-and-after is night and day.

FROM BILL

### Ask me before you give up on an old computer

I've rescued many computers that their owners had written off as hopelessly slow, simply by fitting an SSD and clearing the clutter. Before you spend hundreds on a new machine, it's worth a short call to find out whether an inexpensive upgrade would give you years more happy use. Sometimes it will, sometimes it won't — and I'll tell you the truth either way. **(330) 200-8042**.

CHAPTER 22

# When a Full Disk Is the Whole Problem

We touched on freeing space in Part 2, but it's worth saying plainly: a computer whose storage is **nearly full** can be slow at everything, and simply clearing room often fixes it completely. The system needs free space to work in — when it runs out, everything grinds.

## A quick gut-check

Look at your storage (Chapter 9 for Windows, Chapter 10 for Mac). If free space is down to a tiny sliver — just a few percent — that is very likely your whole problem, and the earlier clean-up steps will give you an immediate, satisfying improvement. Aim to keep at least ten to fifteen percent of your storage free as breathing room.

## Where the space usually goes

- **Photos and videos** — the biggest space-eaters for most people. Backing them up and offloading can free enormous room.
- **Downloads** you've forgotten (Chapter 15).
- **Programs** you don't use (Chapter 12).
- **Temporary files and the Recycle Bin / Trash** (Chapters 9 and 10).

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

### Free space is free speed

Of all the free fixes in this book, clearing a stuffed-full disk often gives the most dramatic overnight improvement — and it costs nothing but a little tidying. If your computer is nearly full, start there and you may not need to do anything else at all.

CHAPTER 23

# When It's the Internet, Not the Computer

Here's a distinction that saves a lot of needless worry: sometimes the computer is perfectly fine, and it's your **internet connection** that's slow. If web pages crawl and videos keep stopping to "buffer," but your computer is otherwise snappy, the problem is likely the internet, not the machine.

## Telling them apart

- **Only slow online?** (Web pages, video, email load slowly, but programs and files open fine.) That points to your internet or Wi-Fi.
- **Slow at everything**, even things that don't use the internet? That points to the computer.

## Simple internet speed-ups

- **Restart your router** (the box that beams your Wi-Fi): unplug it for 30 seconds, plug it back in, wait two minutes. This fixes a great deal of internet slowness.
- **Move closer** to the router, or reduce what's between you and it — thick walls and distance weaken Wi-Fi.
- **Check whether others are streaming** — several people watching video at once can slow everyone down.

GOOD TO KNOW

### A whole separate subject — and I can help there too

Internet and Wi-Fi troubles are a big topic of their own, with their own fixes. If your slowness turns out to be the connection rather than the computer, don't despair — that's just as fixable, and often simpler. A quick call will sort out which one you're dealing with and what to do about it.

CHAPTER 24

# Laptop Battery & Power Settings

If you use a laptop, a couple of power-related things can quietly hold back its speed, and they're easy to check.

## Power-saving mode can slow you down

To stretch battery life, laptops can run in a **power-saving mode** that deliberately slows the computer. That's fine when you're away from an outlet, but if you're plugged in and the computer still feels sluggish, make sure it's set to a balanced or better performance mode:

- **On Windows:** Settings > System > **Power & battery** > set the **Power mode** to Balanced or Best performance when plugged in.
- **On a Mac:** System Settings > **Battery** — check that Low Power Mode isn't set to run all the time.

## An aging battery

Laptop batteries wear out after a few years and hold less charge. That won't slow the computer on its own, but a worn battery that dies quickly is a nuisance, and on some machines it can cause the computer to throttle back. Both Windows and Mac can show you your battery's health; if yours is tired, a replacement is often worthwhile, and I can advise whether it's practical for your model.

TIP

### Plugged in for demanding work

If you're doing something that asks a lot of the computer — editing photos, a video call, lots of tabs — plug the laptop in. It'll run at full speed rather than holding back to save battery, and you won't risk it dying mid-task. A simple habit that keeps a laptop feeling its best.

CHAPTER 25

# A Quick Diagnosis Walkthrough

Let's pull it all together into a simple order of checks. Next time your computer is slow, walk down this list and you'll find — and usually fix — the cause without fuss or guesswork.

1. **Restart** the computer, properly (Chapter 5). Fixes the most cases.
2. **Close** extra programs and browser tabs (Chapter 6).
3. **Check free space** — if it's nearly full, clear room (Chapters 9, 10, 22).
4. **Check startup/login items** if it's slow to start (Chapters 7, 8).
5. **Clean the browser** if it's mostly web slowness (Chapter 13).
6. **Scan for junk/malware** if something seems off (Chapter 18).
7. **Check for heat/dust** if the fan roars (Chapter 19).
8. **Consider memory or an SSD** if it's an older machine slow at everything (Chapters 20, 21).
9. **Check the internet** if only online things are slow (Chapter 23).

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

### A calm checklist instead of a helpless feeling

The difference between frustration and confidence is simply having an order to follow. With this list, a slow computer stops being a mystery you're powerless against and becomes a short series of checks you can run yourself. Most days, you'll fix it before you reach the bottom — and if you don't, you'll know exactly what to tell me.

PART 5

# Habits, Maintenance & Staying Safe

A simple routine to keep your computer quick for years, the honest truth about "cleaner" apps, protecting your files, and staying a step ahead of the scammers.

CHAPTER 26

# Your Simple Maintenance Routine

A computer, like a car, stays healthy with a little regular attention — and far less of it than you'd think. Here's an easy rhythm. Pin it up, and your computer will stay quick and happy for years without you fussing over it.

| How often | What to do |
|---|---|
| **Weekly** | Restart the computer fully. Close tabs and programs you've left open. |
| **Monthly** | Install any Windows/macOS and program updates. Empty the Recycle Bin / Trash. Glance at your free space. |
| **Every few months** | Clear out the Downloads folder. Review startup/login items. Uninstall programs you no longer use. Puff dust from the vents. |
| **Once or twice a year** | Make sure your photos and files are backed up. Review your browser extensions. Check that you're not running duplicate security software. |

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

### Small habits, a computer that stays fast

This is the whole secret to a computer that doesn't slowly bog down: a weekly restart, a monthly tidy, and an occasional deeper clean. None of it is hard or time-consuming, and together they prevent nearly all the gradual slowdown that would otherwise creep in. A few minutes now and then buys you years of smooth sailing.

CHAPTER 27

# The Truth About "Cleaner" & "Booster" Apps

You've surely seen the ads: "Speed up your PC with one click!" "Clean your Mac now!" These **cleaner** and **booster** programs promise to fix a slow computer automatically. Let me give you the honest, money-saving truth about them, because this is where a lot of good people get taken.

## Why I steer people away from most of them

- Most do little that you can't do yourself for free with the steps in this book.
- Many are the *cause* of slowness — they run constantly, nag you, and are hard to remove.
- Some are outright scams that "find" fake problems to frighten you into paying.
- A few are genuinely harmful, bringing junk or worse along with them.

SCAM ALERT

**"One-click speed-up" is the oldest trick in the book**

Be especially wary of any program or pop-up that scans your computer in seconds, declares it full of "errors" or "junk" or "threats," and demands payment to fix them. That is a classic scam, dressed up to look helpful. The errors are usually invented. Never pay, never install it, and never give it your card number. The real fixes are the free ones you're learning here. When in doubt, ask me *before* you click or pay — not after.

## If one's already installed

If you already have one of these cleaner programs running — and it's nagging you or you suspect it's slowing things down — it's usually best to uninstall it (Chapter 12) and rely on the built-in tools and good habits instead. Some are stubborn to remove; if one won't go quietly, that's a fine reason to call me and we'll clear it out properly.

CHAPTER 28

# Backing Up Your Files

This chapter isn't strictly about speed, but it's so important that I won't skip it. Before you do any serious clean-up — and really, as a matter of course — your precious files should be **backed up**, meaning there's a second copy safe somewhere else. Then nothing you do can ever cost you your memories.

## The two easy kinds of backup

| Kind | What it is |
|---|---|
| **A cloud backup** | Your files copied automatically to the internet — OneDrive, iCloud, Google, or a backup service. Safe from fire, theft, and a dead computer. Needs internet. |
| **An external drive** | A small drive you plug in that holds a copy of your files. Windows has **File History**; Macs have **Time Machine**, which backs up automatically once set up. |

The best approach is honestly to have both — a drive at home and a copy in the cloud — so a single mishap can never wipe out everything. But any backup is vastly better than none.

FROM BILL

### The most important call you'll ever make about your computer

In all my years, the heartbreak I most wish I could prevent is someone losing a lifetime of photos because a computer died with no backup. If you're not certain your files are safely copied somewhere, please — call me at **(330) 200-8042** and let's set up a backup. It's not expensive, it's not hard, and it is the single best protection for the things on your computer that truly can't be replaced.

CHAPTER 29

# Staying Secure & Scam-Aware

A secure computer is usually a faster, healthier one — junk and scams are a leading cause of both slowness and heartache. You don't need to be an expert; a handful of steady habits keeps you safe from the great majority of trouble.

## The habits that protect you

- **Keep the computer updated** (Chapter 11). Updates close the doors the bad guys use.
- **Rely on the built-in protection** and don't stack extra security programs (Chapter 14).
- **Be slow to click.** Pause before clicking links and attachments in email and texts, especially unexpected ones. When unsure, don't.
- **Never let a stranger "remote in."** No real company calls you to fix your computer or asks to take control of it. That's always a scam.
- **Never pay with gift cards.** Any request to pay for "support," "fees," or "fines" with gift cards is a scam, 100 percent of the time.

SCAM ALERT

### The golden rule: real help never pressures you

Scammers work by creating fear and urgency — "act now or lose your files/money/account!" Real help never does that. Anyone pressuring you to hurry, to pay immediately, to keep it secret, or to let them onto your computer is trying to rob you. The safest thing you can ever do is slow down and call someone you trust first. For anything to do with your computer, that's me — **(330) 200-8042** — and I'd always rather get the "is this real?" call than the "I think I got scammed" one.

CHAPTER 30

# Good Daily Habits

Beyond the maintenance routine, a few easy everyday habits keep your computer running sweetly and spare you most slowdowns before they start. None of these is a chore — they just become the natural way you use the machine.

- **Close what you finish.** Done with a program or a website? Close it, rather than leaving a dozen things open all day.
- **Don't drown in browser tabs.** Bookmark instead of hoarding (Chapter 6).
- **Restart when it acts up.** First move, every time.
- **Think before you install.** Only install programs you actually want, from sources you trust, and untick any "extras" an installer tries to sneak in.
- **Keep a little free space** — don't let the disk fill to the brim.
- **Let updates happen** when offered (at a convenient time).

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

### The computer becomes a pleasure again

Put these habits together and something lovely happens: the computer simply stops being a source of frustration. It starts quickly, responds when you click, and stays out of your way so you can get on with what you actually sat down to do. That's the whole goal — a tool that serves you, quietly and well.

CHAPTER 31

# Turning Off Fancy Visual Effects

Both Windows and Mac dress up the screen with little animations — windows that slide and fade, menus that glide open. They look nice, but on an older or slower computer they cost a bit of speed for no real benefit. Turning them down can make the whole machine feel snappier and more responsive, and it changes nothing about how the computer works.

## Reducing effects on Windows

1. Open **Settings**, click **Accessibility**, then **Visual effects**.
2. Turn off **Animation effects**. (You can also turn off Transparency effects.)
3. For a deeper trim, search the Start menu for **"adjust the appearance and performance of Windows"** and choose **Adjust for best performance**, or untick the fancier items.

## Reducing motion on a Mac

1. Click the **Apple logo**, choose **System Settings**, then **Accessibility**.
2. Click **Display** and turn on **Reduce motion**. This calms the animations.
3. You can also turn on **Reduce transparency** on the same screen for a touch more speed.

GOOD TO KNOW

**Less dazzle, more speed — and easier on the eyes**

Trimming animations does double duty: the computer feels quicker, and for many folks the screen becomes calmer and easier to follow without things sliding about. It's a small change that costs you nothing and that you can switch right back if you miss the sparkle. Worth a try on any computer that feels a step slow.

CHAPTER 32

# Taming Notifications & Widgets

Modern computers love to interrupt — little pop-up **notifications** in the corner, news and weather **widgets**, and "suggestions" that appear uninvited. Beyond being distracting, the busier ones use a bit of your computer's attention in the background. Quieting the ones you don't want makes the computer calmer and a touch quicker.

## Quieting notifications

- **On Windows:** Settings > **System** > **Notifications**. Turn off notifications for any program you don't need to hear from, or switch them off entirely for peace and quiet.
- **On a Mac:** System Settings > **Notifications**. Click each program and turn off the ones you don't want popping up.

## Turning off clutter you didn't ask for

Windows shows a **Widgets** panel (weather, news) and sometimes "suggestions" and ads inside the Start menu and File Explorer. You can turn these off in Settings — under **Personalization** and **Privacy & security** — for a cleaner, less busy computer. If hunting through settings feels tedious, this is a nice quick thing we can do together on a call, and you'll enjoy the calmer screen afterward.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

### A computer that stops pestering you

Switching off needless notifications and widgets does wonders for your experience: fewer interruptions, less visual noise, and a machine that waits quietly for you instead of constantly tapping you on the shoulder. It's your computer — it should work on your terms, not bombard you with things you never asked to see.

CHAPTER 33

# Making the Screen Easier on Your Eyes

This chapter isn't about speed, but it's about making your computer genuinely pleasant to use — and that matters just as much. If you ever squint at the screen or struggle to find the mouse pointer, a few simple settings can make everything larger, clearer, and more comfortable.

## Bigger text and icons

- **On Windows:** Settings > **System** > **Display** > **Scale**. Nudging this up makes everything on screen larger. Under **Accessibility > Text size** you can enlarge just the text.
- **On a Mac:** System Settings > **Displays** lets you choose a setting that makes everything larger. **Accessibility > Zoom** lets you magnify parts of the screen.

## Finding the pointer and more

Both computers can make the mouse pointer bigger and easier to spot (look under **Accessibility** > **Mouse pointer** on Windows, or **Accessibility** > **Pointer** on a Mac). You can also have the computer read text aloud, increase contrast, and more. These tools are there for everyone, and there's no reason not to set your computer up to be comfortable for *you*.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

### Comfort is not a frill

A computer you can see clearly and use without strain is one you'll actually enjoy and use more confidently. Making the text bigger or the pointer easier to find isn't "giving in" to anything — it's simply setting the tool up to fit you, the way you'd adjust a chair or the mirrors in your car. If you'd like help getting it just right, I'm glad to walk through it with you.

CHAPTER 34

# Speeding Up One Particular Slow Program

Sometimes the whole computer is fine, but *one* program is slow — your email, a photo program, a particular website. The fixes are a little different when it's just one thing misbehaving rather than the whole machine.

## The things to try

1. **Close and reopen it.** Quit the program fully (Chapter 6) and start it again fresh.
2. **Restart the computer.** Still the best first move, even for a single stubborn program.
3. **Update it.** An out-of-date program can be slow or buggy; check for an update in its own menu or the app store.
4. **Clear its clutter.** For a web browser, clear tabs and cache (Chapter 13). For email, a huge inbox can slow things — archiving old mail helps.
5. **Reinstall it** as a last resort: uninstall (Chapter 12) and install a fresh copy from the official source. This often cures a program that's gone wonky.

> TIP
>
> **One slow program is good news**
>
> When only one program drags while everything else is fine, that's actually the easy case — the computer itself is healthy, and you only have one thing to coax back into line. Work the list above and it usually comes right. If one particular program defeats you, tell me which one and what it's doing, and we'll tackle it specifically.

CHAPTER 35

# A Fresh Start: Reinstalling as a Last Resort

If a computer is slow and troubled no matter what you try, there's a powerful last resort: wiping it clean and reinstalling the system fresh, so it's like the day it was new. It's the "nuclear option" — hugely effective, but not to be done lightly, and best with a steady hand guiding it.

## What it does — and the one firm rule

A fresh reinstall clears away years of accumulated junk, broken settings, and unwanted software in one stroke, leaving a clean, fast system. But it also **erases everything on the computer** — so the one firm, non-negotiable rule is that *all* your files and photos must be safely backed up first (Chapter 28). There is no undo. This is exactly why a backup matters so much.

## Windows and Mac both offer it

Windows has **Reset this PC** (in Settings > System > Recovery), with an option to keep your files or remove everything. Macs can be **erased and reinstalled** from their built-in recovery tools. Both are genuine, built-in features — not something you need to buy or download.

FROM BILL

### Please don't do this one alone

A fresh reinstall is one of the few things in this book I'd rather you not attempt by yourself the first time. The payoff is real, but so is the risk if a step is missed — and losing your files would be heartbreaking. If your computer is troubled enough to need this, call me at **(330) 200-8042**. I'll make certain everything is backed up first, do the reinstall safely, and hand you back a computer that runs like new — with all your files right where they belong.

PART 6

# Upgrade, Replace & When to Call Bill

Whether a tune-up is enough or it's time for something new, how to choose and move to a new computer, and — honestly — when to let me take it from here.

CHAPTER 36

# Is It Worth Upgrading?

If you've worked through this book and your computer is still slow, the trouble may be the hardware itself — and the question becomes whether to **upgrade** a part or **replace** the whole machine. Here's how to think about it clearly.

## Upgrades that can rescue an older computer

| Upgrade | What it does |
|---|---|
| **Add an SSD** | The big one. Replacing an old spinning hard drive with a solid-state drive can make an old computer feel new (Chapter 21). Often very worthwhile. |
| **Add memory (RAM)** | On computers that allow it, more memory helps if you run lots at once (Chapter 20). A modest, worthwhile boost where possible. |
| **New battery** | For a laptop that won't hold a charge — restores portability, not speed. |

## When an upgrade makes sense

An upgrade is usually worth it when the computer is only a few years old, still does what you need, and the one thing holding it back is an old hard drive or too little memory. For the cost of a nice dinner out, you can often add years of happy use. When a computer is very old, though, or the upgrade would cost nearly as much as a new machine, replacing is the wiser spend.

> **FROM BILL**
>
> **Let me tell you honestly which way to go**
>
> This is exactly the decision I love to help with, because getting it right saves you real money. Tell me your computer's age and what's slow about it, and I'll give you my straight opinion — upgrade, replace, or just keep tuning — even when that means *not* selling you anything. A ten-minute call can save you hundreds. **(330) 200-8042**.

CHAPTER 37

# Buying a New Computer Wisely

When it really is time for a new computer, a little knowledge keeps you from overspending or buying the wrong thing. You don't need the fanciest machine — you need the *right* one for how you actually use it.

## What actually matters for most people

- **An SSD** (solid-state storage) — insist on this. Almost all new computers have one now, but confirm it. It's the biggest factor in day-to-day speed.
- **Enough memory (RAM)** — a comfortable amount for web browsing, email, and photos so it doesn't bog down with a few things open. I can tell you a sensible figure for today.
- **Enough storage** for your photos and files, with room to spare.
- **A screen and keyboard you find comfortable** — honestly as important as the insides for your daily happiness.

## What you can usually skip

Most folks do *not* need a top-of-the-line processor, a fancy graphics card (those are for gaming and video editing), or the most expensive model on the shelf. Those add cost without adding anything to email, web browsing, photos, and video calls. Spend on an SSD and comfort, not on bragging-rights numbers you'll never use.

> **TIP**
>
> **Take me shopping (by phone)**
>
> Before you buy, give me a call or send me the details of what you're looking at. I'll tell you whether it's a fair deal and a good fit, or steer you to something better for less — with no sales pitch, because I'm not the one selling it. It's one of the most useful ten-minute calls you can make, and it often saves far more than it costs.

CHAPTER 38

# Moving to a New Computer

The part people dread most about a new computer isn't buying it — it's the worry of "losing everything" or not being able to get their files, photos, and email onto the new one. Take heart: it's very doable, and you don't have to face it alone.

## What needs to come across

- Your **files** — documents, photos, videos.
- Your **email** and contacts (often automatic once you sign in to your email account).
- Your **bookmarks** and saved passwords from your browser (these often sync automatically when you sign in to the browser).
- Your **programs** — these generally need reinstalling fresh, not copying.

## The easiest ways across

If your files are backed up to the cloud (Chapter 28), much of this is as simple as signing in on the new computer and letting them flow down. Otherwise an external drive moves your files over. The one thing to be careful about is making sure *everything* precious is safely on the new machine (or backed up) **before** you let go of the old one.

> **FROM BILL**
>
> **Switching computers is a great thing to do together**
>
> Moving to a new computer is probably my single most-requested job, and for good reason — it's fiddly, and the stakes (your photos, your email) feel high. I'll make sure every file, every photo, and your email all land safely on the new machine, set it up the way you like, and clear the junk off before you ever touch it. If a new computer is in your future, let's plan the move together: **(330) 200-8042**.

CHAPTER 39

# Myths and Things That Don't Actually Help

There's a lot of folk wisdom about speeding up computers, and some of it is simply wrong — or worse, costs you money for nothing. Let me clear away the common myths so you don't waste time or dollars chasing fixes that don't help.

| | |
|---|---|
| **"Buy a cleaner program to speed it up"** | Mostly unhelpful or harmful. The free built-in tools and the habits in this book do the real work (Chapter 27). |
| **"Delete big files to go faster"** | Only helps if your disk is nearly full. A fast computer with space to spare won't speed up by deleting things — and you might lose something you want. |
| **"More antivirus is safer and faster"** | The opposite. One good protector is plenty; stacking them slows the computer and causes conflicts (Chapter 14). |
| **"Shut it down every night to keep it fresh"** | A full restart now and then matters more than nightly shutdowns. Sleep is fine; a weekly Restart is the real tonic. |
| **"Defragment the drive"** | An old tip from the hard-drive era. Modern computers with SSDs neither need nor want this; the system handles maintenance itself. |
| **"It's slow, so it must have a virus"** | Usually not. Clutter, a full disk, and too many programs are far more common causes than any virus. |

SCAM ALERT

### Nobody can speed up your computer over a surprise phone call

The biggest and most expensive myth of all is that a stranger who calls you — or a pop-up number — can "optimize" or "fix" your slow computer if you just let them in and pay a fee. That is always a scam. Real speed-ups are the free, calm steps in this book, done by you or by someone you actually know and trust. Never pay a cold caller, and never let one connect to your computer.

CHAPTER 40

# Questions People Ask Me All the Time

The same good questions come up again and again. Here are my plain answers to the ones I hear most — chances are the thing on your mind is right here.

### Will these steps delete my photos or documents?

No. Everything in this book — restarting, closing programs, trimming startup items, clearing temporary files and the Recycle Bin — leaves your photos, documents, and emails untouched. The only step that erases files is a full reinstall (Chapter 35), and that's done deliberately, after a backup, never by accident.

### How often should I restart?

A full restart about once a week keeps things smooth, plus any time the computer starts acting slow or strange. It's the cheapest, most effective maintenance there is.

### Is it bad to leave my computer on all the time?

It's fine to leave it on or let it sleep. Just give it a proper restart weekly rather than running for weeks on end without one. For a laptop, closing the lid to sleep is perfectly normal between uses.

### My computer is old. Is it worth doing anything?

Often, yes — the free steps here will make almost any computer noticeably quicker, and an inexpensive SSD can rescue many older machines (Chapter 21). But there's a point where a new computer is the kinder choice. Tell me its age and I'll give you my honest read.

### How do I know if I have a virus?

Run the built-in security scan (Chapter 18). But remember that slowness alone usually means clutter, not a virus — and that loud "you're infected!" pop-ups are themselves the scam, not a real diagnosis.

### Do I really need to back up? It's never failed me.

Yes — precisely because the day a computer fails, it's too late. A backup is cheap insurance for things that can't be replaced (Chapter 28). If you take one thing from this book beyond the weekly restart, let it be: get your photos backed up.

FROM BILL

### Still have a question? Just ask

If your question isn't here, that's exactly what I'm for. There's no such thing as a silly computer question, and in 30+ years I've heard — and answered — just about all of them. Call or text me at **(330) 200-8042** and we'll sort it out together.

CHAPTER 41

# When to Call Bill

This book is meant to make you confident and capable with your own computer, and most days it will. But you should never feel you have to struggle alone. Calling for help is a smart move, not a failure — here's when it makes good sense.

## Good reasons to call

- The computer is still slow after you've worked through the quick wins, and you'd like a second set of eyes.
- You suspect junk software, a browser hijack, or malware you can't clear — or a scary pop-up has you worried.
- You want to know whether an SSD, more memory, or a new battery is worth it for your exact machine.
- You're choosing a new computer, or moving to one and want your files and email brought over safely.
- You're not sure your photos and files are backed up — let's fix that before anything goes wrong.
- **Any** time a pop-up, email, or caller is pressuring you about your computer — call me before you click, pay, or let anyone connect.

SCAM ALERT

### The call I most want to get

Please hear this plainly: if anyone — a pop-up, an email, a phone call — ever pressures you to pay, to hurry, or to let a stranger onto your computer, stop and call me *first*, at **(330) 200-8042**. There is never any shame in it, and I would a thousand times rather answer a two-minute "does this seem right?" question than help someone recover from a scam. You checking with me is exactly the smart, safe thing to do.

## How to reach me

I'm Bill, and I help folks right here in **Portage County, Ohio** with exactly this kind of thing. Call or text **(330) 200-8042**, or book a visit online at **billshometech.com/book**. If you call the main line and reach my assistant **Sophie**, she can answer simple questions and get you on my schedule — she's there to help. With 30+ years of professional experience, there's very little about a slow computer I haven't seen, and no question too small to ask.

*— Bill*

CHAPTER 42

# Your Slow-Computer Cheat-Sheet

Tear this page out, or fold the corner, and keep it by the computer. It's the whole book boiled down to the moves you'll reach for most.

## When it's slow, in order

1. **Restart** the computer, properly (Restart, not just Shut Down).
2. **Close** programs and browser tabs you aren't using.
3. **Free up space** if the disk is nearly full; empty the Recycle Bin / Trash.
4. **Trim startup/login items** if it's slow to start.
5. **Clean the browser** — tabs, cache, unwanted add-ons — if it's web slowness.
6. **Scan** with the built-in security if something seems off.
7. **Check heat, memory, the drive, or the internet** for stubborn cases.

## Quick reference

| To do this… | Go here |
|---|---|
| **Restart (Windows)** | Start → Power → Restart. |
| **Restart (Mac)** | Apple logo → Restart. |
| **Startup apps (Windows)** | Settings → Apps → Startup. |
| **Login items (Mac)** | System Settings → General → Login Items & Extensions. |
| **Free space (Windows)** | Settings → System → Storage → Storage Sense. |
| **Free space (Mac)** | Apple logo → System Settings → General → Storage. |
| **What's running (Windows)** | Ctrl+Shift+Esc → Task Manager. |
| **What's running (Mac)** | Activity Monitor (in Utilities). |
| **Updates (Windows)** | Settings → Windows Update. |
| **Updates (Mac)** | Apple logo → System Settings → General → Software Update. |

## Remember

- Loud "your computer is infected" warnings are **always scams**. Never call or pay.
- You can't break it by exploring these settings — and your files are safe.
- Back up your photos and files. It's the most important thing of all.

| Keep handy | Fill in |
|---|---|
| **My computer (type, age)** | _____ |
| **Bill's Home Tech** | (330) 200-8042 · billshometech.com/book |

FROM BILL

### You've got this

A slow computer is almost always a fixable computer — and now you know how. Keep this book nearby, run down the checklist when things drag, and remember I'm one phone call away for the rest. You can't break it, and you're not alone. — Bill, (330) 200-8042