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Home & Small Business Tech Solutions

BILL'S COMPLETE MANUALS

Storage Full?

Freeing up space on your phone, tablet and computer — what's using it, what's safe to delete, and what to ignore

A plain-English guide for iPhone, iPad, Android, Windows and Mac

Take your time — you can't break it

Written for you by Bill — Bill's Home Tech

(330) 200-8042 · BillsHomeTech.com

iPhone & iPad, Android & Samsung, Windows 11, Mac, iCloud, Google & OneDrive · facts current November 2026

What's Inside

This is your guide to the "storage full" message. It starts with the one idea that clears up most of the confusion: the space on your device and the space in your online account are two different things. Then it takes each kind of device in turn: iPhone and iPad, Android and Samsung, Windows computers and Macs. Part 6 covers the "storage full" emails from iCloud, Google and Microsoft, and Part 7 shows you how to spot the fake ones. Skip straight to the part for the device in your hand; you don't have to read it in order.

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PART 1

Start Here

What "storage full" really means, what fills up a device, and the simple rules for deleting things without losing anything you care about.

CHAPTER 1

A Note from Bill

Hello, and welcome. If you've picked up this guide, there's a good chance a message popped up that said something like **"Storage Almost Full"** or **"Not enough space"**, or an email arrived saying your iCloud, Google or OneDrive storage is full. Maybe the camera wouldn't take a picture, or an update wouldn't install. It's one of the most common things people ask me about, and it's almost always fixable.

I'm Bill. I've spent more than 30 years in professional technology work, and these days I help families here in Portage County, Ohio, with their phones, tablets and computers. I wrote this guide the way I'd explain it sitting at your kitchen table: slowly, in plain English, one step at a time.

The big promise: you can't break it

Looking at your storage can't hurt anything. Every screen in this guide that *shows* you what's using space is completely safe to open and poke around in. The only time to slow down is when a button says **Delete**, and I'll point out each of those, along with how to make sure you have a copy first.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this guide does for you

By the end you'll know what's actually filling up your device, which things are safe to remove, how to free space without losing a single photo, whether you need to pay for more cloud storage (often you don't), and how to tell a real "storage full" warning from a scam.

How to use this guide

- **Everyone**: read Chapter 2 first. It explains the difference between your *device* being full and your *online account* being full. Once that clicks, everything else is easier.
- **iPhone or iPad**: Part 2 (Chapters 5 to 9).
- **Android phone or tablet, including Samsung Galaxy**: Part 3 (Chapters 10 to 14).
- **Windows computer**: Part 4 (Chapters 15 to 18).
- **Mac**: Part 5 (Chapters 19 and 20).
- **An email says your iCloud, Google or OneDrive storage is full**: Part 6 (Chapters 21 to 24).

- **Not sure a message is real?** Go straight to Chapter 25.

And you're never stuck alone. If you'd like a hand, call me at **(330) 200-8042** and we'll sort it out together. There's no such thing as a silly question.

— Bill

CHAPTER 2

Two Kinds of "Full": Your Device vs. Your Cloud Account

Here's the single most useful idea in this guide. There are **two completely different places** where your things are kept, and either one can fill up on its own.

Which one	What it is
Device storage	The space *inside* your phone, tablet or computer. It's fixed when you buy the device: 64 GB, 128 GB, 256 GB and so on. When it's full, the device itself complains: the camera won't take pictures, apps won't install, updates won't download.
Cloud storage	Space in your *online account* with Apple (iCloud), Google, or Microsoft (OneDrive). It holds backups and copies of your photos, email and files. When it's full, you usually get an **email** or a banner, and backups or photo uploads stop. Your device keeps working.

Why the difference matters

The fixes are different, and mixing them up costs people money. Buying more iCloud or Google storage does **not** give your phone more room inside. And deleting things from your phone doesn't always free up cloud space, or it may free up both at once, depending on your settings.

The message says…	What's full	Where to go
"iPhone Storage Almost Full" / "Storage space running out"	The device itself	Part 2 (iPhone), Part 3 (Android)
"Not enough space" when updating	The device itself	Chapter 9 (iPhone), Part 3 (Android)
"iCloud storage is full" email or banner	Your Apple cloud account	Chapter 21
"Your Google storage is full" / Gmail can't receive	Your Google cloud account	Chapter 22
"Your OneDrive is full" / Outlook.com can't send	Your Microsoft cloud account	Chapter 23
"Low disk space" on a computer	The computer's drive	Part 4 (Windows), Part 5 (Mac)

GOOD TO KNOW

A new word: the cloud

The cloud just means storage on a company's computers, reached over the internet. Your photos "in iCloud" are on Apple's computers; your Gmail is on Google's. You get some for free, and you can pay for more.

SCAM ALERT

If the message asks for money through a link, stop

Real device-full messages never ask you to pay anything. Cloud companies do sell more storage, but they'll never pressure you to pay through a link in a text or email with a deadline. When in doubt, check your storage yourself in Settings, as Chapter 25 explains.

CHAPTER 3

What Actually Fills Up a Device

Before you delete anything, it helps to know the usual suspects. On almost every device, the same few things take up most of the room.

Gigabytes, in plain English

Storage is measured in **gigabytes**, written **GB**. A **terabyte (TB)** is about 1,000 GB. You don't need to do the math; just know that bigger numbers mean more room, and that videos are far bigger than photos, which are far bigger than text messages or emails.

The usual space-eaters, biggest first

What	Why it takes room
Videos	Nearly always the biggest. A few minutes of video can take as much room as hundreds of photos, especially in high resolution.
Photos	Each one is small, but years of them add up, along with screenshots, duplicates and pictures people send you.
Apps and games	Some apps are large on their own, and many keep growing as they save data.
Messages	The texts themselves are tiny, but the photos, videos and voice messages people send you in group chats pile up for years.
Downloads	Music, podcasts, movies and shows saved for offline viewing, plus files and attachments you opened once.
System and "Other"	The device's own software, temporary files and caches. You can't delete most of this directly, but it shrinks on its own when space runs low.

GOOD TO KNOW

A new word: cache

A **cache** (said "cash") is a pile of temporary files an app keeps so it can load things faster next time, like a scratch pad. Clearing a cache is generally safe: the app simply rebuilds it as needed.

Why a full device acts up

- The camera may refuse to take pictures or record video.
- Updates won't download or install, which leaves you without the latest security fixes.
- Apps may crash, run slowly, or fail to open.
- New messages, photos and email attachments may not download.

TIP

Aim for some breathing room

A device runs best when it isn't packed to the brim. Keeping a little free space, rather than running it right down to zero, gives updates and the camera room to work.

CHAPTER 4

What's Safe to Delete, and What Isn't

This chapter is the heart of the guide. Most people are afraid to delete anything because they're worried about losing photos. That's a good instinct. Here are the rules I follow.

Rule 1: Know whether it has a copy somewhere else

Before deleting a photo or file, ask: is there another copy? If your photos are backed up to iCloud Photos or Google Photos, or copied to a computer or external drive, deleting the phone copy is much less risky. If the phone is the **only** place a photo lives, treat it like a family heirloom. Chapter 26 shows you how to make a copy before you clear space.

Rule 2: Know what "syncing" means

Syncing means a service keeps the same pictures on every device you own. That's wonderful until you delete something: with iCloud Photos turned on, deleting a photo from your iPhone deletes it from iCloud and your other Apple devices too. Google Photos works the same way for backed-up photos. So deleting from a synced library is *not* a way to make room on just one device. Use the space-saving settings in Chapters 7 and 12 instead.

Usually safe to remove

- Apps you never use (you can download them again later for free if you paid once).
- Downloaded movies, shows, podcasts and music you've finished. They can be downloaded again.
- Caches and "junk" or "temporary" files the device itself offers to clean up.
- Old files in your Downloads folder that you've already saved elsewhere or no longer need.
- Screenshots, blurry shots and duplicates you've looked at and don't want.
- Old photos and videos in group text messages, once any you want are saved to your photo library.

Slow down before removing

- Photos and videos that might be the only copy.
- Anything in a folder you don't recognize on a computer, especially in Windows or system folders.
- Text message conversations you may want to keep for sentimental or legal reasons.

- Phone backups in iCloud or Google, unless you're sure which device they belong to (Chapter 21).

HEADS UP

"Recently Deleted" and "Trash" still take up room

On phones and computers, deleted photos and files usually go to a **Recently Deleted** album, a **Trash** or a **Recycle Bin** first, as a safety net. They keep using space until that holding area is emptied, either by you or automatically after a set time. If you deleted a lot and the space didn't come back, that's why.

STAY SAFE

Never use "cleaner" apps that promise miracles

Your phone and computer already have free, built-in tools to clean up space, and this guide shows you each one. Be wary of apps or websites that claim your device is "98% full of junk" or "infected" and want a subscription to fix it. The built-in tools are safer and cost nothing.

PART 2

iPhone & iPad

Find out what's using the space, then free it up safely: offloading apps, photos and videos, message attachments, and room for updates. Written for iOS 26 and iOS 27; iPad works the same way.

CHAPTER 5

See What's Using Space on Your iPhone or iPad

Your iPhone has a built-in storage screen that shows exactly what's taking up room, and even suggests ways to free some up. Opening it is completely safe.

1. Open the **Settings** app (the gray gear).
2. Tap **General**.
3. Tap **iPhone Storage** (on an iPad, **iPad Storage**).
4. Wait a few seconds while it adds everything up. A colored bar appears at the top.

Reading the screen

Part of the screen	What it tells you
The colored bar	Shows how much space is used and by what: Apps, Photos, Media, Messages, iOS and "System Data." The gray part at the end is free space.
Recommendations	Suggestions for saving space, such as offloading unused apps or reviewing large message attachments. Tap **Enable** to turn one on, or tap it to review what it would remove.
The app list	Every app, biggest first, with how much space it uses. Tap any app to see more and to offload or delete it.

GOOD TO KNOW

What "System Data" is

System Data (it may say "Other" on older phones) is a mix of temporary files, caches and logs. You can't delete it directly. Apple says the iPhone removes cached files on its own when it needs more space, so this number goes up and down by itself.

TIP

Look before you leap

Spend a minute just reading the list. Most people discover one or two surprises, often a video app with downloaded shows, or Messages holding years of photos. Those are where the easy wins are.

GOOD TO KNOW

Apple Intelligence needs room too

If your iPhone uses Apple Intelligence, Apple's AI features, they need several gigabytes of free space on the phone. If storage is very tight, that's one more reason to make some room.

CHAPTER 6

Offloading Apps: Free Space, Keep Your Stuff

Offloading is one of the iPhone's best tricks. It removes the app itself, which frees its space, but keeps your documents and data. The app's icon stays on your Home Screen with a small cloud next to it. Tap it any time and the app downloads again, right where you left off.

Offload one app

1. Go to **Settings** > **General** > **iPhone Storage**.
2. Scroll down and tap the app.
3. Tap **Offload App**, then tap **Offload App** again to confirm.

Let the iPhone offload unused apps for you

On the iPhone Storage screen, look under Recommendations for **Offload Unused Apps** and tap **Enable**. From then on, when space runs low, the iPhone quietly offloads apps you rarely use. Nothing personal is lost.

Button	What happens
Offload App	Removes the app, keeps its documents and data. Reinstall to pick up where you left off.
Delete App	Removes the app **and** everything it saved on the phone. Use for apps you're done with.

HEADS UP

Offloaded apps need the internet to come back

An offloaded app has to download again before you can use it, so you need Wi-Fi or cellular data. And if an app has been removed from the App Store, it may not come back. Don't offload an app you might need in a hurry while traveling, such as a boarding pass or a medical app.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

Offloading lets you keep every app you might want someday without paying for the space today. It's the lowest-risk way to free up room on an iPhone.

CHAPTER 7

Photos and Videos on iPhone and iPad

Photos and videos are the number-one space user on most iPhones. The good news: there's a setting that can free a great deal of room *without* deleting a single picture.

Optimize Storage: the space-saving setting

If you use **iCloud Photos** (your photos stored in iCloud), you can choose **Optimize iPhone Storage**. Your full-size originals stay safe in iCloud, and the iPhone keeps smaller, space-saving versions as space is needed. When you open a photo, the full version downloads.

1. Open **Settings**, tap your name at the top, then tap **iCloud**.
2. Tap **Photos**.
3. On iOS 27, tap **iPhone Storage**, then choose **Optimize Storage**. On iOS 26, choose **Optimize iPhone Storage** on that screen.

HEADS UP

Optimize needs enough iCloud space

Optimize works only when your whole photo library fits in your iCloud storage. With just the free 5 GB, most libraries won't fit, and you'll get an "iCloud storage is full" message. Chapter 21 explains the choices, and Chapter 24 helps you decide whether to pay for more.

Find and merge duplicate photos

The Photos app finds duplicates for you. Open **Photos**, scroll to the **Utilities** section, and tap **Duplicates**. Tap **Merge** next to a set. The iPhone keeps one copy, combining the best quality and details, and moves the extras to Recently Deleted.

Delete videos you don't need

Long videos are the biggest space users of all. In Photos, look in the **Media Types** section for **Videos** to see them together. Watch each one before deciding; if it matters, make sure it's copied somewhere safe first (Chapter 26).

Recently Deleted: the 30-day safety net

Deleted photos and videos go to the **Recently Deleted** album for **30 days**, then they're permanently removed. To get space back sooner, you can empty it; to rescue something, open the album and tap **Recover**.

HEADS UP

Deleting with iCloud Photos on deletes everywhere

With iCloud Photos turned on, deleting a photo from your iPhone also removes it from iCloud and your other Apple devices. To save space on just the phone, use Optimize Storage instead of deleting.

STAY SAFE

Only empty Recently Deleted when you're sure

Once Recently Deleted is emptied, those photos are gone for good. If you're not sure, leave them. They'll clear themselves after 30 days anyway.

CHAPTER 8

Messages and Their Attachments

Years of text conversations, especially busy family group chats full of photos and videos, can quietly grow very large. You have two tools: review the big attachments, or have old messages remove themselves.

Review large attachments

1. Go to **Settings** > **General** > **iPhone Storage**.
2. Look under Recommendations for **Review Large Attachments**, or tap **Messages** in the app list to see it.
3. You'll see a list of photos, videos and files from your conversations, biggest first.
4. Tap **Edit**, select the ones you don't need, and tap the **Trash** button.

If you don't see Review Large Attachments, that usually just means you don't have any big ones.

TIP

Save the keepers first

If a grandchild's video in a text is worth keeping, open it, tap the **Share** button, and choose **Save Video** or **Save Image** so it goes into your Photos library before you clear the attachment.

Have old messages remove themselves

1. Open **Settings** > **Apps** > **Messages**.
2. Scroll to **Message History** and tap **Keep Messages**.
3. Choose **30 Days**, **1 Year** or **Forever**.

HEADS UP

This deletes for good

Choosing 30 Days or 1 Year permanently removes older messages and their attachments, and the iPhone warns you before it does. If you use Messages in iCloud, the change applies to your other Apple devices too. Many people are happier with **1 Year**, or with leaving it on Forever and clearing only big attachments.

CHAPTER 9

Other iPhone Space Savers, and Room for Updates

After apps, photos and messages, a few other things are worth a look. Each one is quick.

Downloaded shows, music and podcasts

Streaming apps like Netflix, Prime Video, Spotify and Apple Music let you download things to watch or hear offline. Those downloads can be several gigabytes. Open the app, find its **Downloads** section, and remove what you've finished. You can always stream or download them again.

Safari's leftover website data

Websites store bits of data on your phone. To tidy them, go to **Settings** > **Apps** > **Safari** > **Clear History and Website Data**. This signs you out of some websites, but it doesn't delete your saved passwords.

"Not enough space" when updating

iPhone updates need free space to download and install. If you see a message that there isn't enough room, you have two good choices:

1. Free up space using the recommendations in **Settings** > **General** > **iPhone Storage**, such as offloading apps (Chapter 6), then try the update again.
2. Or update using a computer, which needs less free space on the phone. Connect the iPhone to a Mac, find it in the Finder sidebar, click **Check for Update**, then **Download and Update**. On a Windows PC, use Apple's **Apple Devices** app.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

Why updates matter

Updates carry security fixes that protect you from scams and hackers. Making room for them is one of the most worthwhile reasons to clean up your phone.

FROM BILL

If the phone is truly packed

Sometimes a phone is so full it can barely open Settings. Don't panic and don't start deleting photos in a rush. Offload a few big apps first to get breathing room, then work through this part calmly. Or call me at (330) 200-8042 and we'll do it together.

PART 3

Android Phones & Samsung Galaxy

Android phones and tablets, including Samsung Galaxy, have their own storage tools. Menu names vary a little by brand, so where they differ, both are given.

CHAPTER 10

See What's Using Space on Android

Every Android phone shows you a storage breakdown in Settings. The exact words depend on who made your phone, but the idea is the same everywhere.

1. Open the **Settings** app.
2. Tap **Storage**. On a Samsung Galaxy, tap **Battery and device care** (on some models, **Device care**), then **Storage**. If you can't find it, tap the search magnifying glass at the top of Settings and type **storage**.
3. You'll see how much space is used, broken down into categories like Apps, Images, Videos, Audio, Documents and System. Tap a category to see what's in it.

TIP

Search Settings when menus differ

Android phones from Google, Samsung, Motorola and others each word their menus a little differently. The search box at the top of Settings finds the right screen on any of them.

Files by Google: a free, built-in cleaner

Many Android phones come with Google's **Files** app (it's free in the Play Store if yours doesn't have it). Its **Clean** screen gathers safe suggestions in one place: junk files, duplicate files, large files, old screenshots and more.

1. Open the **Files** app by Google.
2. Tap the **Menu** button, then tap **Clean**.
3. On the **Junk files** card, tap **Clean** (it shows how much space it will free), then confirm.

Junk files are temporary files apps keep. Google says cleaning them doesn't affect your app settings.

HEADS UP

Cleaned files are gone for good

Google warns that clearing junk files, or deleting files with the Files app, deletes them permanently. Junk files are fine to lose; for photos and documents, look before you tap.

CHAPTER 11

Samsung Galaxy: Device Care and the Recycle Bin

Samsung builds its own storage helper into Settings. It's a friendly place to start on any Galaxy phone or tablet.

1. Open **Settings**.
2. Tap **Battery and device care**. (On some Galaxy models and older software, it's called **Device care**.)
3. Tap **Storage**.
4. Look through the categories and any suggestions. Depending on your model, you may see tools for **Duplicate files**, **Large files** and **Unused apps**, plus the **Recycle bin**.

The Recycle bin

On a Galaxy phone, photos and files you delete in the Gallery or My Files apps usually go to a **Recycle bin** first, where they wait for about 30 days before being removed for good. Like the iPhone's Recently Deleted album, they still use space while they wait. In the Gallery app, tap the **Menu** (three lines) to find the Recycle bin, where you can restore things or empty it.

TIP

Delete just some files, not all

In the Storage screens, you can press and hold on one file, then tap the others you want, so you remove only the ones you choose rather than a whole category.

HEADS UP

Samsung Cloud vs. OneDrive vs. Google

Galaxy phones may back up photos to Google Photos, to Microsoft OneDrive through Samsung's Gallery, or to Samsung Cloud, depending on how they were set up. If you get a "storage full" email, check which service sent it before doing anything. Chapter 22 covers Google and Chapter 23 covers OneDrive.

CHAPTER 12

Photos and Videos on Android

Most Android phones back up photos with **Google Photos**. If yours does, Google Photos has a button that removes the phone copies of photos that are already safely backed up.

Free up space with Google Photos

1. Open the **Google Photos** app. First, make sure backup is on and finished: tap your profile picture or initial at the top and look at the backup status.
2. In the same menu, tap **Free up space on this device**.
3. Google Photos tells you how much room it can free. Tap **Free up** (the button shows the amount) to remove the phone copies.

Your photos stay in your Google Photos library and you can still see them in the app; only the extra copies stored on the phone are removed.

HEADS UP

Check backup first

Google says to confirm your photos are backed up before using this, because it deletes items from your device. If backup was paused or off, the unbacked-up photos are the only copies.

Google Photos trash

What you deleted	How long you have to change your mind
Backed-up photos you delete	Stay in Google Photos' trash for **60 days**, then are removed.
Photos never backed up (Android 11 and up)	Stay in the trash for **30 days**.

HEADS UP

Deleting in Google Photos deletes from your account

When backup is on, deleting a photo in the Google Photos app removes it from your Google account and your other devices too, not just the phone. To save phone space only, use **Free up space** instead.

CHAPTER 13

Apps on Android: Archive, Uninstall and Clear Cache

Android gives you three different ways to get space back from apps. They're easy to confuse, so here they are side by side.

What you do	What it removes	What stays
Archive	The app itself, its permissions and temporary files	The icon and your data, so it's ready when you re-download
Clear cache	Only temporary files	Everything important, including your sign-in
Clear storage (Clear data)	Everything the app saved on the phone	Nothing; the app starts fresh, like new
Uninstall	The app and its data on the phone	Nothing on the phone

Archiving: Android's version of offloading

Archiving removes an app but keeps its icon and your data. Tap the icon later and it downloads again from the Play Store. You can have the Play Store do this automatically for apps you rarely use:

1. Open the **Play Store** app and tap your profile picture.
2. Tap **Settings**, then **General**.
3. Turn on **Automatically archive apps**.

Google notes that some archiving steps only work on Android 15 and later, and not every app can be archived.

Clear an app's cache

1. Open **Settings** > **Apps** and tap the app.
2. Tap **Storage & cache** (on some phones, just **Storage**).
3. Tap **Clear cache**.

HEADS UP

Clear cache, not Clear storage

Clear cache is safe. **Clear storage** (called **Clear data** on some phones) wipes the app back to brand new: you'll be signed out and may lose anything that app kept only on the phone. Use it only if you mean to reset the app.

Uninstall apps you never use

Press and hold the app's icon, then tap **Uninstall** (or drag it to Uninstall). Some apps that came with the phone can't be removed, only turned off. Apps you paid for can be re-downloaded from the Play Store without paying again.

CHAPTER 14

Messages, Downloads and Other Android Space

A few more places where space hides on Android phones.

Text message photos and videos

Photos and videos sent to you in texts take up space. In the **Google Messages** or **Samsung Messages** app, open a conversation, look at the media in it, and save the ones you want to your photos before deleting old conversations you don't need. Samsung's Messages app can also delete old messages automatically; look in the app's settings if you'd like that.

The Downloads folder

Every attachment or file you've ever saved from a website or email can land in **Downloads**. Open the **Files** app (or **My Files** on Samsung) and look in Downloads. Sort by size to find the big ones.

WhatsApp and other chat apps

Chat apps like WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger save the photos and videos people send. WhatsApp has its own storage tool under its **Settings** > **Storage and data** > **Manage storage**, which lists the biggest chats and files.

Memory cards

Some Android phones and tablets take a **microSD card** for extra room. Photos and videos can be saved or moved there. Bill's guide *External Drives & SD Cards* covers choosing and using one.

SCAM ALERT

Fake "your phone is full of viruses" pop-ups

A web page that suddenly says your Android is "damaged by viruses" or "98% full" and tells you to install a cleaner app is an ad or a scam. Close the tab. Your phone's own Settings and the Files app are all the cleaner you need.

PART 4

Windows 11 Computers

See what's filling your PC's drive, let Storage Sense tidy up automatically, clear out Downloads and the Recycle Bin, and keep OneDrive files in the cloud instead of on the computer.

CHAPTER 15

See What's Using Space on a Windows PC

Windows 11 has a storage page that works much like the one on a phone: a bar showing how full the drive is, and a breakdown of what's using it.

1. Click **Start**, then **Settings** (the gear).
2. Click **System**, then **Storage**.
3. Look at the bar at the top for used and free space, and the list below it: Apps & features, Temporary files, Documents, Pictures, Videos and so on.
4. Click **Show more categories** to see everything, or click any category for details.

GOOD TO KNOW

The C: drive

Windows calls the computer's main storage the **C: drive**, or **Local Disk (C:)**. When people say "the hard drive is full," that's what they mean.

Temporary files: the safest cleanup

On the Storage page, click **Temporary files**. Windows lists leftovers it can remove, such as old update files, thumbnails and the Recycle Bin, each with a checkbox and a size. Check the ones you want and click **Remove files**.

HEADS UP

Look at two boxes before clicking Remove

The list may include **Downloads** and **Recycle Bin**. Those can hold things you still want. Leave them unchecked until you've looked inside (Chapter 17).

STAY SAFE

Never delete files from the Windows folder by hand

Don't go into folders like **C:\Windows** or **Program Files** and delete things to make room. That can stop the computer from starting. Use the tools in Settings instead; they know what's safe.

CHAPTER 16

Storage Sense: Automatic Cleanup

Storage Sense is a free Windows feature that quietly clears temporary files and can empty the Recycle Bin and tidy the Downloads folder on a schedule you choose. It's **off** until you turn it on.

1. Go to **Settings** > **System** > **Storage**.
2. Turn on **Storage Sense**.
3. Click **Storage Sense** itself (the words, not the switch) to choose how often it runs and how long files sit in the Recycle Bin and Downloads before being removed.

Storage Sense and OneDrive

If you use OneDrive, Storage Sense can also make files you haven't opened in a while **online-only**. They stay safe in OneDrive and still show in File Explorer, but no longer take up space on the computer. Open one and it downloads again. Files you've marked **Always keep on this device** are left alone, and Storage Sense won't permanently delete your cloud files.

TIP

My recommended settings

Turn Storage Sense on. For the Recycle Bin, a month is a comfortable safety window. For the Downloads folder, choose **Never** unless you're sure nothing important lives there; many people use Downloads as a filing cabinet without realizing it.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

Once Storage Sense is on, your PC does a little housekeeping on its own, so "low disk space" warnings become much rarer.

CHAPTER 17

Downloads, the Recycle Bin and Unused Programs

The Downloads folder

Every file you save from a website or email lands in **Downloads** unless you choose otherwise. Over the years it can fill with installers, PDFs, photos and videos.

1. Open **File Explorer** (the folder icon on the taskbar) and click **Downloads**.
2. Click **View** > **Details**, then click the **Size** column heading to put the biggest files on top.
3. Move anything you want to keep into **Documents** or **Pictures**. Delete the rest, such as old program installers you've already used.

The Recycle Bin

Deleted files wait in the **Recycle Bin** on your desktop until it's emptied. Double-click it to look inside; right-click a file and choose **Restore** to bring it back. When you're sure, right-click the Recycle Bin and choose **Empty Recycle Bin**.

> HEADS UP
> **Emptying the Recycle Bin is permanent**
> Once it's emptied, those files are gone. Take a quick look inside first.

Uninstall programs you don't use

1. Go to **Settings** > **Apps** > **Installed apps**.
2. Use the **Sort by** menu to sort by **Size**.
3. Next to a program you don't need, click the **More** button (three dots) and choose **Uninstall**.

> HEADS UP
> **Leave the ones you don't recognize**
> Programs with names like Microsoft Visual C++, .NET, or your computer maker's name are often needed by other programs. If you don't know what something is, leave it. Removing the wrong thing causes more trouble than the space is worth.

CHAPTER 18

OneDrive's "Free Up Space" on a PC

Most Windows 11 computers come with **OneDrive**, Microsoft's cloud storage, often already backing up your Desktop, Documents and Pictures folders. OneDrive can keep files in the cloud and only download them when you open them. Microsoft calls this **Files On-Demand**.

Icon in File Explorer	What it means
Blue cloud	Online-only: stored in OneDrive, not taking space on the PC. Needs internet to open.
Green check outline	Downloaded because you opened it. Can be freed up again.
Solid green circle	Always kept on this device, even without internet.

Free up space on a file or folder

1. In File Explorer, find a large OneDrive folder, such as Pictures or Videos.
2. Right-click it and choose **Free up space**.
3. The files turn into blue clouds. They're still in OneDrive and still listed on your PC; they just don't take up room on the drive until you open them.

HEADS UP

Free up space is not delete

Free up space keeps your files safe in OneDrive. **Delete** on a OneDrive file deletes it from OneDrive and every device. If what you want is more room on the PC, always choose Free up space.

GOOD TO KNOW

Full computer vs. full OneDrive

Free up space helps when the **computer** is full. If **OneDrive** itself is full, that's a cloud problem; see Chapter 23. Bill's guide *OneDrive* covers it all in more depth.

PART 5

Mac Computers

Check your Mac's storage, follow its built-in recommendations, and clear out the Trash, Downloads and big files. Written for macOS Tahoe 26 and macOS 27.

CHAPTER 19

See What's Using Space on a Mac

Your Mac has a storage screen in System Settings that shows a colored bar of what's using space and offers recommendations for freeing it.

1. Click the **Apple menu** (the apple in the top-left corner) and choose **System Settings**.
2. Click **General** in the sidebar, then click **Storage**.
3. Wait a moment while the bar fills in. Below it you'll see **Recommendations**, and below those a list of categories such as Applications, Documents, Photos, Messages and Trash.
4. Click the **Info** button (a small "i") next to a category to see the files in it, biggest first.

The recommendations

The Mac suggests ways to save space, and each one explains itself before you turn it on. Typical ones are storing files and photos in iCloud so only recent ones stay on the Mac, removing movies and shows you've already watched, and emptying the Trash automatically. Read each one and turn on only what you're comfortable with.

HEADS UP

"Store in iCloud" needs iCloud space

Recommendations that store files or photos in iCloud only work if you have enough iCloud storage, which may mean paying for an iCloud+ plan (Chapter 21). They don't delete anything, but they do mean some files need the internet to open.

GOOD TO KNOW

"System Data" and "macOS"

The storage bar includes macOS itself and "System Data," which covers caches, logs and other behind-the-scenes files. You can't delete these from the storage screen, and you shouldn't go hunting for them in hidden folders. They shrink on their own over time.

CHAPTER 20

Cleaning Up a Mac: Trash, Downloads and Big Files

Empty the Trash

Files you delete on a Mac sit in the **Trash** (in the Dock) and keep using space until it's emptied. Click the Trash to look inside; drag anything out to rescue it, or select it and choose **File** > **Put Back**. When you're sure, Control-click the Trash and choose **Empty Trash**.

Have the Trash empty itself

1. Click the Finder (the smiling face in the Dock).
2. In the menu bar, choose **Finder** > **Settings**, then click **Advanced**.
3. Turn on **Remove items from the Trash after 30 days**.

HEADS UP

Emptied means gone

Once the Trash is emptied, files are permanently deleted. Thirty days is a comfortable safety window.

Clear out Downloads

1. Open a Finder window and click **Downloads** in the sidebar.
2. Choose **View** > **as List**, then click the **Size** column heading so the biggest files are on top.
3. Drag keepers into **Documents** or another folder. Move the rest to the Trash. Old installer files (ending in **.dmg** or **.pkg**) are usually safe to remove once the app is installed.

Remove apps you don't use

Open **Applications** in a Finder window and drag an app you no longer use to the Trash. Apps bought in the App Store can be downloaded again without paying. Some apps come with their own uninstaller; if so, use it.

STAY SAFE

Skip the "Mac cleaner" ads

Ads and pop-ups claiming your Mac is "infected" or "clogged" and selling a cleaner subscription are not from Apple. The storage screen and the steps in this chapter are all you need.

TIP

Photos on a Mac

If the Photos app is your biggest category and you use iCloud Photos, the Photos app's own setting to **Optimize Mac Storage** works like the iPhone one in Chapter 7: originals stay in iCloud, smaller versions stay on the Mac. You'll find it in Photos > **Settings** > **iCloud**.

PART 6

"Storage Full" Emails: iCloud, Google & OneDrive

When the full thing is your online account rather than your device: what each free allowance covers, what stops working, how to clear space, and whether paying is worth it. Prices are U.S., as of November 2026.

CHAPTER 21

"iCloud Storage Is Full"

Every Apple Account comes with **5 GB of iCloud storage free**. That space is shared by iCloud Photos, iPhone and iPad backups, iCloud Drive files, Messages in iCloud and iCloud Mail. Photos and backups fill 5 GB quickly, which is why this message is so common.

What happens when iCloud is full

- New photos stop uploading to iCloud Photos.
- Your iPhone or iPad stops backing up to iCloud.
- Files stop syncing to iCloud Drive, and iCloud Mail may stop receiving.
- Your iPhone itself keeps working normally. This is not the same as your iPhone being full.

See what's using your iCloud

1. Open **Settings** and tap your name at the top.
2. Tap **iCloud**. The bar at the top shows what's using your iCloud storage.
3. Tap the bar (or **Manage Account Storage**, depending on your iOS version) to see each item and how much space it uses.

Ways to free iCloud space

- **Old device backups.** Look under **Backups** for phones or iPads you no longer own. Deleting the backup of an old, retired iPhone is usually safe. Check the device name carefully, and never delete the backup of the phone you're using now.
- **Photos.** Deleting photos removes them from iCloud and all your devices, so save copies first (Chapter 26).
- **iCloud Drive.** Remove large files you no longer need.
- **Messages.** Clearing big attachments (Chapter 8) helps here too when Messages in iCloud is on.

HEADS UP

Buying iCloud space doesn't add room to your phone

A bigger iCloud plan gives you more online space for photos and backups. It does not make your iPhone's own storage any bigger, though it does let Optimize Storage (Chapter 7) do its job.

iCloud+ prices

iCloud+ plan	U.S. price, as of November 2026 (tax may apply)
50 GB	$0.99 a month
200 GB	$2.99 a month
2 TB	$9.99 a month
6 TB	$29.99 a month
12 TB	$59.99 a month

Any iCloud+ plan can be shared with up to five other people through Family Sharing, which makes the 200 GB or 2 TB plan good value for a couple or household.

CHAPTER 22

"Your Google Storage Is Full"

Every Google Account comes with **15 GB** of free storage, and the part most people miss is that it's **shared** between **Gmail**, **Google Photos** and **Google Drive**. Your photos can fill up your email, and old email attachments can stop your photos from backing up.

What counts against your 15 GB

- Gmail messages and attachments, including the Spam and Trash folders.
- Photos and videos backed up to Google Photos.
- Files in Google Drive.
- Your Android phone's backup.

What happens when Google storage is full

- Google Photos stops backing up new pictures.
- Gmail may stop sending and receiving email, and mail sent to you can bounce back to the sender.
- You can't add new files to Google Drive.
- Your existing photos, mail and files stay safe, and you can still sign in.

HEADS UP

Don't stay over the limit for years

Google's policy is that if an account stays over its storage limit for two years or more, its content may be removed. Google says it notifies you well ahead of time, but it's best not to let it get that far.

Clean up with Google's storage manager

1. On a computer, go to **one.google.com/storage/management** and sign in. (On a phone, open the Google One app, or the Google Photos or Gmail storage bar.)
2. Google shows suggestions such as large Gmail attachments, emails in Spam and Trash, large Drive files, and blurry photos and screenshots.
3. Open a suggestion, review the items, and delete the ones you don't want.

HEADS UP

Storage manager deletions are permanent

Items deleted through Google's storage manager skip the usual trash. Review them carefully first. After a big cleanup, allow a day or two for the storage total to update.

TIP

The quick Gmail win

In Gmail, search for **has:attachment larger:10M** to find messages with big attachments. Save any attachments you want, then delete the messages and empty the Trash.

Google One plans

If you need more than 15 GB, Google sells extra storage as a **Google One** membership. The smallest common U.S. plan is **100 GB for $1.99 a month** as of November 2026. Larger plans are now sold as **Google AI** plans that bundle Gemini AI features with more storage; their names and sizes have changed several times this year, so check the current list at **one.google.com** before buying. One plan covers Gmail, Photos and Drive together and can be shared with family.

CHAPTER 23

"Your OneDrive Is Full"

A free Microsoft account comes with **5 GB** of cloud storage. That 5 GB is shared by **OneDrive** files and the **attachments in your Outlook.com email** (including Hotmail and Live addresses). A Windows PC backing up its Desktop, Documents and Pictures to OneDrive can fill 5 GB quickly.

What happens when it's full

- OneDrive stops syncing new files, and its icon on the taskbar shows a warning.
- Outlook.com may stop sending and receiving email.
- Your files can become read-only until you make room.
- Microsoft warns that accounts left over the limit for a long time can be frozen and eventually have their files deleted, so don't ignore the warnings.

Make room in OneDrive

- Go to **onedrive.com**, sign in, and look at which folders are largest. Videos and photo folders are the usual culprits.
- Empty OneDrive's **Recycle bin** on the website: deleted files count toward your storage until it's emptied.
- In Outlook.com, delete old emails with large attachments, then empty Deleted Items.
- Consider whether you need your PC's folders backed up to OneDrive at all, or whether an external drive would do (Chapter 26).

Microsoft 365 plans

Plan	U.S. price, as of November 2026
Microsoft 365 Basic	100 GB storage · $1.99 a month or $19.99 a year
Microsoft 365 Personal	1 TB storage plus Word, Excel and more · $9.99 a month or $99.99 a year
Microsoft 365 Family	Up to 6 people · $12.99 a month or $129.99 a year

GOOD TO KNOW

Family storage is changing

Microsoft has announced changes to how storage works on its Family plan, starting with new subscriptions this fall and reaching existing ones at renewal in 2027, with email notice. Bill's guide *OneDrive* explains the details.

CHAPTER 24

Should You Pay for More Storage?

Sometimes the honest answer is yes. A couple of dollars a month to keep every family photo safely backed up is money well spent. But often a little cleanup is all you need. Here's how I think about it.

Clean up first if…

- You're only a little over the free amount.
- The space is being used by old phone backups, big email attachments or duplicate photos.
- You're paying for two or three services that all store the same photos.

Paying makes sense if…

- Your photos and videos alone are bigger than the free allowance, and you want them all backed up.
- You want your phone backed up automatically every night.
- A household can share one plan, so the cost is split.

	Free	Smallest paid step	As of November 2026
iCloud (Apple)	5 GB	50 GB	$0.99 a month
Google	15 GB	100 GB	$1.99 a month
Microsoft (OneDrive)	5 GB	100 GB	$1.99 a month

FROM BILL

My honest advice

Pick **one** home for your photos, the one that matches your phone, and pay for that one if you need to. For most iPhone owners that's iCloud; for most Android owners it's Google. Paying for all three is usually wasted money. And keep a second copy on an external drive, because a backup in only one place isn't really a backup.

HEADS UP

Check where you're paying before you upgrade

Before buying a plan, check whether you already have one. Look in **Settings** > your name > **Subscriptions** on an iPhone, or in the Play Store under **Payments & subscriptions** on Android. Bill's guide *Subscriptions* can help you find forgotten charges.

PART 7

Staying Safe & Keeping Room

How to spot a fake "storage full" message, how to make a copy before you delete, and a few habits that keep the warnings from coming back.

CHAPTER 25

Fake "Your Storage Is Full" Emails and Texts

Because real storage warnings are so common, criminals copy them. A fake message may look like it came from iCloud, Google, Microsoft or "Cloud Storage," and it's designed to scare you into clicking a link and typing in your password or card number.

SCAM ALERT

"Your photos will be deleted today"

The classic fake says your cloud storage is full and your photos and videos will be **deleted** or your account **blocked** unless you act now, often with a big button to "upgrade" or "claim free storage." The deadline and the threat are the giveaway. Don't click. Check your real storage yourself, as shown below.

Signs a storage message is fake

- It threatens that your photos will be deleted **today** or within hours.
- It offers a "loyalty reward," free upgrade or huge discount if you just pay a small fee or enter your card.
- It doesn't use your name, or the sender's email address is a jumble that isn't apple.com, google.com or microsoft.com.
- It arrives as a text message from an unknown number with a link.
- The link goes to a website that isn't the company's own.
- It warns about a service you don't even use.

The safe way to check, every time

1. Don't tap or click anything in the message.
2. Check your storage yourself: on an iPhone, **Settings** > your name > **iCloud**; for Google, type **one.google.com** into your browser; for Microsoft, type **onedrive.com**.
3. If your storage really is full, you'll see it there, and you can fix it or upgrade from there, safely.
4. If it isn't, the message was a fake. Delete it.

SCAM ALERT

A phone number in a storage warning

Real warnings from Apple, Google and Microsoft don't tell you to call a phone number to fix your storage. If a pop-up or email says to call "support," it's a scam. Never let a caller connect to your computer or phone, and never pay with gift cards.

If you already clicked

- **If you typed in a password**, change it right away on the real website, and turn on two-factor verification if it isn't on.
- **If you entered a card number**, call the number on the back of your card and tell the bank it was a scam.
- **If you let someone connect to your computer**, disconnect from the internet and get help before using it for banking.
- Report it: forward fake Apple messages to **reportphishing@apple.com**; use Gmail's **Report phishing** option; report Microsoft scams at **microsoft.com/reportascam**; and you can report any scam to the FTC at **ReportFraud.ftc.gov**.

FROM BILL

It's okay to ask

If you're not sure whether a storage message is real, call me at (330) 200-8042 before you click. Checking takes a couple of minutes, and there's no shame in asking. Bill's guides *I Think I've Been Scammed* and *Pop-Ups & Fake Virus Alerts* go further.

CHAPTER 26

Before You Delete: Make Sure There's a Copy

Clearing space is low-risk once you know your photos and important files exist somewhere else. Here's how to check, and how to make a copy if there isn't one.

Is my phone backing up?

Device	Where to check
iPhone or iPad	**Settings** > your name > **iCloud**. Check that **Photos** is syncing and look at **iCloud Backup** for the date of the last backup.
Android	In **Google Photos**, tap your profile picture to see backup status. For the phone itself, search Settings for **Backup**.
Windows PC	Look for the OneDrive cloud icon on the taskbar; click it to see whether it's up to date.
Mac	**System Settings** > **General** > **Time Machine** shows the last backup, if you use one.

Make a second copy on a drive

A **USB flash drive** or **external hard drive** gives you a copy of your photos that doesn't depend on any monthly fee. Once your photos are safely copied to a drive (and ideally also in the cloud), deleting old videos from the phone becomes a calm decision instead of a scary one.

- **iPhone to a Mac:** connect the phone with its cable, open the **Photos** app on the Mac, and import.
- **iPhone to a Windows PC:** use Apple's **Apple Devices** app or the **Photos** app in Windows to import.
- **Android to a computer:** connect with a USB cable, choose **File transfer** on the phone, and copy the **DCIM** folder (where the camera keeps photos).

TIP

The two-place rule

Anything you'd be heartbroken to lose should live in at least two places, such as the cloud and an external drive. Then a full phone, a lost phone or a full cloud account is an inconvenience, not a disaster. Bill's guide *External Drives & SD Cards* walks through choosing and using one.

CHAPTER 27

Keeping It from Filling Up Again

Once you've cleared space, a few easy habits keep the warnings from coming back.

- **Turn on the automatic helpers.** Offload Unused Apps on iPhone (Chapter 6), Automatically archive apps on Android (Chapter 13), Storage Sense on Windows (Chapter 16), and Remove items from the Trash after 30 days on a Mac (Chapter 20).
- **Use the space-saving photo settings**: Optimize Storage on iPhone (Chapter 7) or Free up space in Google Photos (Chapter 12).
- **Tidy group-chat media** a few times a year (Chapters 8 and 14).
- **Delete downloaded shows** after you've watched them.
- **Delete the misses right away**: blurry photos, accidental videos of your pocket, and screenshots you no longer need.
- **Check once a season.** Put a reminder on your calendar to open the storage screen four times a year.

WHAT THIS DOES FOR YOU

What this does for you

Ten minutes a season means the camera always works when the grandkids are doing something worth recording, and updates install without a fuss.

When it's time for a bigger device

If you've done everything in this guide and a phone is still always full, it may simply be too small for how you use it, especially older 32 GB or 64 GB phones. When you replace it, choose more storage than you think you need; you can't add more inside an iPhone later. Bill's *Device Training* service can help you set up a new phone and move everything across.

PART 8

When to Call Bill & Your Cheat-Sheet

An honest word about when a hand is worth it, and one page that sums up the whole guide.

CHAPTER 28

When to Call Bill

I've written this guide so you can do most of this yourself. But some situations are simply easier, and safer, with someone patient beside you. Here's my honest advice.

Times it's well worth a call

- **You're not sure your photos are backed up** and the phone is full. We'll make sure everything is safe in two places before anything gets deleted.
- **An update won't install** because there's no room, and you've tried the steps in Chapter 9.
- **You're paying for storage in more than one place** and want to settle on one and stop the others.
- **A computer's drive is nearly full** and you're not sure what's safe to remove.
- **You got a storage-full message you don't trust**, or you already clicked a link in one.
- **You're moving to a new phone** and want it set up right, with room to spare. That's exactly what my **Device Training** sessions are for.

What working with me is like

I work at your pace, in your home here in Portage County or over a remote session, and I explain what I'm doing in plain words as I go. I bring more than 30 years of professional experience, and I'll always tell you honestly when you don't need to buy anything at all.

FROM BILL

How to reach me

Call **(330) 200-8042** or book a time at **billshometech.com/book**. My help is $49 remote · $99 in your home. This guide is yours to keep and share, and no question is too small.

GOOD TO KNOW

You may meet Sophie

When you call or visit billshometech.com, you may be greeted by **Sophie**, my AI receptionist. She can answer quick questions and help you book a time. The actual help always comes from me.

Thank you for reading, and for taking good care of your photos and memories. Remember: you can't break it, and I'm only a phone call away.

— Bill

CHAPTER 29

Your Storage Cheat-Sheet

The whole guide on one page. Keep it somewhere handy.

Where to see your storage

Where	How to get there
iPhone / iPad	**Settings** > **General** > **iPhone Storage** (or iPad Storage).
Android	**Settings** > **Storage**, or search Settings for "storage." Also the **Files** app > **Clean**.
Samsung Galaxy	**Settings** > **Battery and device care** (or Device care) > **Storage**.
Windows 11	**Settings** > **System** > **Storage**. Turn on **Storage Sense**.
Mac	Apple menu > **System Settings** > **General** > **Storage**.
iCloud	**Settings** > your name > **iCloud**. 5 GB free.
Google	**one.google.com**. 15 GB free, shared by Gmail, Photos and Drive.
Microsoft OneDrive	**onedrive.com**. 5 GB free, shared with Outlook.com attachments.

The safest space savers

Saver	How
Offload / archive apps	Removes the app, keeps your data (iPhone: Offload App; Android: Archive).
Optimize photo storage	iPhone: Optimize Storage. Android: Google Photos > Free up space.
Clear junk and temporary files	Files by Google > Clean; Windows: Temporary files; Storage Sense.
Downloaded shows and music	Delete in each app's Downloads section; download again anytime.
Big message attachments	iPhone Storage > Messages > Review Large Attachments.
OneDrive on a PC	Right-click a folder > **Free up space** (not Delete).

Write it down once

Keep handy	
My phone's total storage	_____
Where my photos back up	_____
Cloud plan I pay for (and price)	_____
My external drive is kept	_____
Date of my last storage check	_____

When something's wrong, in order

1. Read the message: is it the **device** or the **cloud account** that's full? (Chapter 2)
2. If it came by email or text with a link, don't click. Check your storage yourself. (Chapter 25)
3. Make sure your photos have a copy somewhere else. (Chapter 26)
4. Open the storage screen and look at the biggest items.
5. Offload or archive apps you rarely use, and clear junk files.
6. Use the photo space-saving setting rather than deleting photos.
7. Clear big message attachments and downloaded shows.
8. Still full? Decide whether a small cloud plan makes sense. (Chapter 24)
9. Unsure about anything? Call Bill at (330) 200-8042.

SCAM ALERT

The golden rule

Real storage warnings never threaten to delete your photos today, never ask you to call a phone number, and never ask for gift cards. When in doubt, check in Settings yourself.