

Transcription Style Guide v5.1 (Updated Nov/04/2024)

SECTION 1: FOR TRANSCRIBERS & PROOFREADERS

It's crucial that you read this guide over completely before beginning your first transcription.

All transcripts **MUST** label the Speaker. Speaker labels must always have a space after the colon.

Example: John: This is a nice day.

Use only square brackets “ [] ” around tags, never parentheses, (), curly brackets, {}, angle brackets, <>, or any other bracket-type symbols.

Important Criteria:

- Non-verbatim transcripts: must be cleaned up, not verbatim. No uhm, arrh etc.. (See below section on Verbatim / Non Verbatim)
- Uses standard English, not netspeak or phonetics (amirite? cuz u know its not profeshnul etc...);
- DO NOT paraphrase (do not type the gist of what you heard, but the words actually used).
- **NEVER** type anything that is **not spoken in the audio**, including your comments or the job number or title.

Other Major Rules:

- Do not make up words. There are two ways in which we mean this:
Do not spell words phonetically. All words should be spell checked and must be actual English words, unless the speaker was deliberately making up words, such as "what awesome majorness!" Otherwise,
Do not include words just because they sound similar to the syllables that were spoken. This is one of the co-owners' pet peeves. These tips should prevent that problem:
- Transcribe contraction as spoken by the speaker. If the speaker says "He'll" then write as "He'll", and if he says "He will" then write as "He will".
- Read your transcript before submitting, as if you were reading an article or story. If the words you used do not make sense in each sentence, they are probably not the words the speaker was saying.
- Tag any words that you are uncertain about or can't get with [?] i.e uncertain[?]
- Use all the information you have available. There are a few major ways in which you can get extra information, and we ask that you use them:

- ALWAYS read the **Extra Comment** area see if contain clues such as the speaker's names or the correct spelling for certain terms mentioned in the audio!
- The audio itself can give you new information. For example, if at the end, the interviewer says, "Thanks, Dave, for this interview!", and the interviewee's response clearly indicates that he is Dave, then you must go back and relabel the interviewee as Dave: throughout the transcript.
- For both verbatim and non-verbatim, when one person is speaking and another says nothing but "uh-huh" or "mm-hmm" in the meantime, leave out all those murmuring noises as long as they aren't an answer to a question from the speaker.

Example:

WRONG:

John: I went downtown today.

Joe: Uh-huh.

John: I like it there.

Joe: Mm-hmm.

John: And I think I'm getting better at finding parking spots!

RIGHT:

John: I went downtown today. I like it there. I think I'm getting better at finding parking spots!,

Because none of what the other person said was important.... If the "Mm-hmm" is in response to a direct question from the speaker, and the speaker waited for that answer, then include it to keep the transcript making sense.

Speaker Labels:

- Each change in speakers should be placed on a new line. Add a blank line before the changed speaker.
- Standard format: A complete speaker label includes a colon after the label as well as a space after that colon. Do this: "Woman 2: "
- When to use: whenever the speakers change, or whenever something happens on a separate line (like [laughter]) in the middle of a person speaking (even if the same person keeps speaking after).
- Order of preference for labels: Use names whenever possible, then roles, then use gender as the last resort.
- Full names: When you have information about a speaker's full name (from Extra Comment or because they state their name or are announced by name), use that the first time they appear in your audio chunk. After that, use only their first name if known, or last name if first name not known. Do not use full name.
- Descriptiveness: Make each speaker's label as informative as possible about the person's role in the audio. Except in the case of large groups (see special subsection, later in this section), labels must be useful for telling one person from another. Woman 1: is acceptable, but Interviewer: or

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Host: is much better. Other roles that may apply (use your judgment): Congregant:, Audience Member: , Passerby: , Announcer: , Interviewee: .

- Adding gender: Use Male and Female only as adjectives for roles, never by themselves. Only mention gender at all if people of different genders have the same role in the audio. Like this: Male Host: , Female Host: , but two female hosts would just be Host 1: and Host 2: .
- Adding numbers and cutting down on clutter: Always use numbers with "Man" or "Woman" labels. Do not use numbers if the speaker has a role other than just "Man" or "Woman," unless the audio includes two or more people of the same gender who are playing that same role. Like this: Woman 1: and Man 2: , or (if there are two male hosts and one female one) Female Host: , Male Host 1: , and Male Host 2:.

Special rules for speaker-labeling a large group

- Audience: is the label for an audience as a whole, unless they are gathered in a church or other place of worship, which makes them a Congregation:.
- A single member of that group is labeled Audience Member: or Congregant: .
- If there are already two or more other speakers in your audio, don' t worry about telling the audience or congregation apart. Each one will just be Audience Member: or Congregant: , with no numbers or gender needed.
- However, if there is only one main speaker on the audio, then be more detailed in specifying the first two group members who speak. We prefer you do this by mentioning gender (if they have different genders from each other): Female Audience Member:. If they are both the same gender, then add a number to their labels instead: Audience Member 2: .

Closed Captions Speaker Label Rule

This rule apply ONLY to closed captions work.

- Do **NOT** label speakers.
- Use "- ", dash followed by a space to represent speaker change.
- Use a new caption for each speaker change, unless there's rapid cross-talk.
- Start a new caption for each new sentence, except for 1-2 word sentences.

Closed Caption Speaker Change Example:

- Hello, how are you?

[NEW CAPTION]

- I am all well, thank you.

[NEW CAPTION]

- That's Great!

Tag List:

Tags list for things you couldn't make out, with brief definitions

Type 1: Use these for words in question

- [inaudible]: Indecipherable audio that seems to be in English.
- [foreign word]: Word (or [foreign words]) was spoken in a language that is not in English.
- [?]: This is your best guess about the word or words, but it does not really make sense in the sentence, so you would like someone to give it a close look. (He hurt his knee playing[?] Monopoly.)

Type 2: Use these for sound events

- When there are no real speakers: [background sounds only], [background conversations] or [silence] are completely OK to use. If the audio file is completely silent, email us at Emergency Escalation @ help@transcriptionstaff.com or click on the live chat button -- It may be an incomplete or corrupted audio file. **NEVER SUBMIT AN EMPTY FILE.**
- Signs that an audio file may be corrupted include; all static; high-pitched squealing; high-speed, high pitched voices, etcetera.
- Simply put, if it's out of the ordinary, email Emergency Escalation or contact live chat support.
- End all transcripts with [End].

Non-Verbatim / Verbatim Transcripts:

Verbatim Transcripts

Do not summarize -- write down exactly as you hear it. A verbatim transcript is prepared by transferring each and every utterance, including those that are non-verbal, and even the [pauses], [laughter], [silence] and [throat clearing] etc.. in an audio file exactly the same way as delivered.

In a verbatim transcript, false starts, repetitions, or grammatical errors are copied faithfully and delivered without being tidied up, or by being made more concise. The reader receives a true copy of an event with the words transcribed exactly the way they were spoken, thereby according a movie-dialogue, realistic feel to the transcript. Such a transcript is quite helpful when an interview is being documented or serves as a testimonial for legal purposes, as the thought process gets implied through verbal cues, such as repeated words or phrases, or awkward hesitations.

Transcribe every utterance, including repetitive phrasing, false starts, filler words like, "um," "uh," "er," etc., and every "I mean," "you know," etc (there are grammatically correct uses of those and similar words/phrases, even in non-verbatim).

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All slang should be retained, e.g., "gonna," "kinda," "sorta," "cuz," (or "coz"), etc., should be exactly as spoken. In other words, do not make any kind of grammatical corrections to the language.

When multiple speakers are involved, a verbatim transcript indicates segments in which there is an overlap of voices.

Non-Verbatim Transcripts

Businesses that are looking to get meetings transcribed, or academicians who want to provide their lectures to the students in the written form, wouldn't want to include something like a verbal nod included in that transcript, but rather would want to go with a clean transcript so that it is more reader-friendly.

A non-verbatim or "intelligent" transcription, rather than typing the words exactly the way they are spoken, captures the fundamental meaning behind them. Errors in grammar are rectified and words or sounds that don't contribute to the underlying message are removed. If fillers or repetitions occur naturally in the speakers' speech patterns, they are simply removed by the transcriptionist. In other instances, paraphrasing of a statement is required which conveys the same idea, but more succinctly. A non-verbatim transcript can be published online without edits, or it can serve as a marketing piece.

All slang should be changed to proper spelling, e.g., "gonna" changed to "going to", "kinda," change to "kind of", "cuz," (or "coz") changed to "because".

Sentence and Paragraph Structure:

- Where possible, break compound sentences into smaller ones. Long sentences should be broken into fragments.
- Insert a blank line between paragraphs. Also, start a new paragraph at every speaker change.
- Follow correct grammar. All sentences should start with a capital letter and have the correct punctuation.
- If a single speaker speaks through-out without speaker change, break into different paragraphs as the topics change. New line does not need speaker Label.

Transcription Examples:

Example of a well formatted Non-Verbatim Transcription

Jerry: This is the beginning of the transcription

John: All right, I am John.

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Jerry: Correct. because you can see, I am labeled with just my first name now. If you don't know my first name, then you may name me by my last name. Mr Atkins[?] or Mrs Atkins[?] if female.

Man 1: Hi, I'm a new speaker. No one ever mentions my name, so the transcriber going to [inaudible] give me a descriptive name. Here, the only information that can be gathered on me is that I'm male. So in this case I'm Man 1.

Man 2: Now, there are two identified males. No one ever mentions my name either, I am identified later than Man 1, so I'd be Man 2.

[END]

Example of a well formatted Verbatim Transcription

Jerry: This is the beginning of umm arrgh the transcription.

John: Umm. Ooo. [laughter] All Right, I am John.

Jerry: Correct, umm cuz you can see, I am labeled with just my first name now. If you don't know my first name, then you may name me by my last name. Mr Atkins[?] or Mrs Atkins[?] if female.

Man 1: Hi, I'm a new speaker. No one ever mentions my name, so the transcriber gonna [inaudible] give me a descriptive name. Here, the only information that can be gathered on me is that I'm male. So in this case I'm Man 1.

Man 2: Now, there are two identified males. No one ever mentions my name either, I am identified later than Man 1, so I'd be Man 2.

[END]

False Starts, Crosstalk, Incomplete Words:

These sentences have the beginning of an utterance and subsequently stopping prior to completion.

Example, "He was... uh... He was not as good as he seems." The beginning, "He was...uh..." would have been edited out in a non-verbatim transcript, depending on the context. In a Verbatim transcription, only the part of the word that is spoken is written, followed by a dash to show that it was cut-off.

Example:

VERBATIM:

Man 1: Yeah! She ju-, uh, just suddenly lost consciousness.

Man 2: O-okay. W-, what have you done then? Did you, uh, bring her to the clinic?

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NON-VERBATIM:

Man 1: Yeah! She just suddenly lost consciousness.

Man 2: Okay. What have you done then? Did you bring her to the clinic?

Stutters

Stuttering, also called as stammering, is a speech disorder in which the flow of speech is disrupted by involuntary prolongations. Stammers are removed in Non-Verbatim transcripts but retained in Verbatim Transcripts. Examples:

VERBATIM: W-w-w-w-well, I-I, uh, I th-th-thought that sh-she uh, s-she, uh, she left a-a-already.

NON- VERBATIM: Well, I thought that she left already.

Pauses and Silence

In Non-Verbatim transcriptions, please note the silence if it is abnormally long (more than 1 minute). On Verbatim, please indicate any pause longer than 10 seconds, using [pause], which can appear anywhere in the sentence. Short pauses, 2-10 seconds, can be indicated using ellipses (...). Example:

VERBATIM

David: Did you see Francis point the gun to Mrs. Gomez?

Ivan: [sighs]

David: Can you just answer the question, please?

Ivan: I... don't... [exhales]

Trailed Off Sentences

Use ellipses if the end of the sentence trails off. Example:

Bert: Do you want some coffee or...

Anna: No, thanks. Water will do.

Speaking Simultaneously / Crosstalk

When two or more persons are speaking at the same time, remove the overtalk in Non-Verbatim Transcripts. . Try to get as much from each speaker as possible.

In Verbatim, show exactly where the speech was interrupted by the other speaker/s. Use ellipses for the last word spoken before the interruption happened.

**VERBATIM:**

Joe: Are you accusing me of things I didn't do?

Mary: Liar! You took all the money!!!

Joe: Don't accuse me...

Mary: You liar, you are not...

Joe: ... I didn't take anything!

Mary: ... telling the truth.

NON-VERBATIM:

Joe: Are you accusing me of things I didn't do?

Mary: Liar! You took all the money!!!

Joe: Don't accuse me [crosstalk], I didn't take anything!

Mary: You liar, you are not telling the truth.

Example 2:

A patient is talking and the doctor interrupts with a question that is answered, do the following:

Non-Verbatim Example:

Patient: The pain is in this area [crosstalk] below the knee.

Doctor: How strong?

Patient: The pain is about eight.

The doctor interjected before the patient finished speaking, but we do not want to split the sentence into two paragraphs. Therefore, the patient's sentence is completed, and then the doctor's question is inserted into a new paragraph.

Slang and Profanity

RETAIN ALL SLANG ('cus, y'all, dunno) in Verbatim transcriptions. You can also use slang in Non-Verbatim, but sometimes, slang may be revised for clarity ('cus to "because")

Utterances for Affirmation/ Negation

Differentiate between the following:

AFFIRMATION: Uh-huh, mm-hmm, yeah...

NEGATION: Uh-uh, nah-uh, nah, mm-mm, hmm-mm

Numbers:

- Numbers: Phone number, street address, zip code, date, year, unit of measurement, numbers between 0-9 should be written as numeric. **ALL** other numbers such as fractions, decimals, month etc. should **ONLY use words** to represent. (**Special case for time and money.**)
- Time: - If an exact time is mentioned, write it as "8:11 a.m.", If the speaker says "o'clock", write as spoken: "eight o'clock." If the speaker doesn't mention an exact time, write as words. "Let's have dinner at nine." Days: A.D. 2010, the 1980s, the '90s, 21st century.
- Spell out units of measurement, such as "inches," "feet," "yards," "miles," "ounces," "pounds," and "tablespoons." However, if spoken in shortened form, symbols should be used. Example:
 - WRONG: I'm five-eight
 - TRANSCRIPTION: I'm 5'8".
- For whole numbers, use numerals. Example:
 - WRONG: I need five tablespoons of this.
 - RIGHT: I need 5 tablespoons of this.
- Use numerals and the percent sign to indicate all percentages except at the beginning of a sentence. Examples:
 - Middle sentence: Only 6% of the votes were counted.
 - Beginning of the sentence: Fifty-one percent of the group voted.
- Use the numeral plus the lowercase "th," "st," or "nd" when a day of the month is mentioned by itself (no month is referred to). Example:
WRONG: John went diving on the eighth.
RIGHT: John went diving on the 8th.
- When the day precedes the month, use the numeral plus the lowercase "th," "st," or "nd" if the ending is spoken. Example: My birthday is on the 9th of May.
- Use the numeral alone when the day follows the month. Example: I will get back to you on September 16.
- When the month, day, and year are spoken, use the numeral alone for the day, even if an ending ("th," "st," or "nd") is spoken. Example:
NARRATION: Paul will marry Sue on July sixth, nineteen eighty.
TRANSCRIPTION: Paul will marry Sue on July 6, 1980.

- Use the numeral plus “cents” or “¢” for amounts under one dollar. Examples: I need 15 cents. I owe you 32¢.
- Use the dollar sign plus the numeral for dollar amounts under one million. For whole-dollar amounts of one million and greater, spell out “million,” “billion,” etc. Examples:
John owes me \$1000.
Bob brought it at only \$6.02.
He should pay \$14 million.
- Use the word “dollar” when **describe a range**, and up to ten dollars.
Example: I hope I find three or four dollars.
- Use the dollar sign and numerals when transcribing **a range of currency over ten dollars**.
Example: Alice expected a raise of \$6000 to \$7000.

Court Transcriptions (Colloquy Format):

Colloquy is a common format for court transcriptions. Please read this document very carefully.

1. All speaker labels must be **capitalized** and **ONLY use LAST name**. i.e MS. SMITH: MR. JOHNSON:
2. Judge/Arbitrator etc.. always use THE COURT:
3. Single Space, colloquy should by default use single space (Unless requested by client to use double space).
4. During Direct Examination always use Q. and A. and put a "DIRECT EXAMINATION BY <NAME>" above the question to designate the person asking the questions.

Example:

DIRECT EXAMINATION BY MR. SMITH:

Q. What is your name?

A. My name is Susan Joans

Q. How old do you think the victim is?

A. He is 21.

When the Q&A are interrupted, format the colloquy as described in the Colloquy formatting. Once the Q&A resumes, put a "BY <NAME>" above the next question to designate the person asking the questions.
Example:

DIRECT EXAMINATION BY MR. SMITH:

Q. What is your name?

A. My name is Susan Joans

Q. How old do you think the victim is?

A. He is 21.

MS. GRAY: Object to hearsay, your Honor.

THE COURT: Sustained.

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BY MR. SMITH:

Q. Okay. Can you describe to me where you are on the 5th of January 2021, at exactly 8:05 in the evening.

A. I went out to buy food in the convenience store with my boyfriend.

Here's an example of colloquy transcription - READ EVERY LINE CAREFULLY.

COURT REPORTER: Good morning. My name is Tammy, I am the court reporter.

MR. SMITH: I'll go first with cross exam Ms. Joans.

THE COURT: Go ahead.

DIRECT EXAMINATION BY MR. SMITH:

Q. What is your name?

A. My name is Susan Joans.

Q. How old do you think the victim is?

A. He is 21.

MS. GRAY: Object to hearsay, your Honor.

THE COURT: Sustained.

BY MR. SMITH:

Q. Okay. Can you describe to me where you are on the 5th of January 2021, at exactly 8:05 in the evening.

A. I went out to buy food in the convenience store with my boyfriend.

MR. SMITH: I am done with the witness.

MS. GRAY: I will cross exam Susan.

DIRECT EXAMINATION BY MS. GARY:

Q. Why do you think the victim is 21?

A. I just guessed.

MR. SMITH: Object to hearsay, your Honor.

THE COURT: Sustained.

BY MS. GARY:

Q. Ok, how long have been with your boyfriend

A. Five years.

MS. GARY: I am finished with the witness.

THE COURT: The court is now in recess.

SECTION 2: FOR PROOFREADERS

Please refer primarily to the “**SECTION 1: FOR TRANSCRIBERS & PROOFREADERS**” at the 1st part of this document. All those rules apply to you, with the exceptions and differences listed here.

Basic rules for editors:

- It is your job to check the spelling of proper names and special terms against resources, such as the podcast's website or Google. Do not certify the transcript if you cannot verify these.
- Remove all instances of [?] as you edit, by verifying as above.
- If unable verify correct spellings, use your best guess.
- if it's not broken, don't fix it.
- Try to make good of the [inaudible] to the best of your ability.
- If customer have requested timestamp, make sure to insert it into the document. Timestamp is either once every 2 minutes or speaker at change (Depending on Customer Request). Note, It's proofreader's job to do the timestamp for multiple transcribed files, as transcribers are not able to do that.
- ***Read your transcript before submitting, as if you were reading an article or story. If the words you used do not make sense in each sentence, they are probably not the words the speaker was saying.***

Speakers Label:

- Order of preference for labels: Use names whenever possible, then roles, then use gender as the last resort.
- Descriptiveness: make each speaker's label as informative as possible about the person's role in the audio. Except in the case of large groups (see special subsection, later in this section), labels must be useful for telling one person from another. Woman 1: is acceptable, but Interviewer: or Host: is much better. Other roles that may apply (use your judgment): Congregant:, Audience Member: , Passerby: , Announcer: , Interviewee: .
- Whenever possible, relabel speakers shown only by their gender, to make their label into a descriptive one. Do this: "Woman 1: " becomes Interviewer:.
- The audio itself can give you new information. For example, if at the end, the interviewer says, "Thanks, Dave, for this interview!", and the interviewee's response clearly indicates that he is Dave, then you must go back and relabel the interviewee as Dave: throughout the transcript.
- Full names: when you have information about a speaker's full name (from the coversheet or because they state their name or are announced by name), use that the first time they appear in your audio chunk. After that, use only their first name if known, or last name if first name not known. Do not use full name.

- Adding gender: use Male and Female only as adjectives for roles, never by themselves. Only mention gender at all if people of different genders have the same role in the audio. Like this: Male Host: , Female Host: , but two female hosts would just be Host 1: and Host 2: .
- Adding numbers and cutting down on clutter: Always use numbers with "Man" or "Woman" labels. Do not use numbers if the speaker has a role other than just "Man" or "Woman," unless the audio includes two or more people of the same gender who are playing that same role. Like this: Woman 1: and Man 2: , or (if there are two male hosts and one female one) Female Host: , Male Host 1: , and Male Host 2:.
- If you are editing an audio file with multiple transcribed files (split up files), you **MUST** make sure the speaker label is consistent, and it may need to be relabeled as two or more transcribers have worked on a single audio file, and they would most likely have labelled same person differently.
- The extra comment area contains clues such as the speaker's names or the correct spelling for certain terms mentioned in the audio. so please check that!

Standard Format

- A complete speaker label includes a colon after the label as well as a space after that colon. Do this: "Woman 2: "
- Each change in speakers should be placed on a new line. Add a blank line before the changed speaker.
- Whenever the speakers change, or whenever something happens on a separate line (like [laughter]) in the middle of a person speaking (even if the same person keeps speaking after), always standard a new sentence with speaker label "Speaker: ".

Special rules for speaker-labeling a large group

- Audience: is the label for an audience as a whole, unless they are gathered in a church or other place of worship, which makes them a Congregation:.
- A single member of that group is labeled Audience Member: or Congregant: .
- If there are already two or more other speakers in your audio, don't worry about telling the audience or congregation apart. Each one will just be Audience Member: or Congregant: , with no numbers or gender needed.
- However, if there is only one main speaker on the audio, then be more detailed in specifying the first two group members who speak. We prefer you do this by mentioning gender (if they have different genders from each other): Female Audience Member:. If they are both the same gender, then add a number to their labels instead: Audience Member 2: .

Sentence and Paragraph Structure

- Fix any line breaks in the middle of your paragraphs before submitting the work.
- Where possible, break compound sentences into smaller ones. Long sentences should be broken into fragments.

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- Insert a blank line between paragraphs. Also, start a new paragraph at every speaker change.
 - Follow correct grammar. All sentences should start with a capital letter and have the correct punctuation.

SECTION 3: CAPTION

- Transcribe Verbatim: Write exactly what is spoken, including slang and grammatical errors.
- Correct Spelling: Use proper spelling and punctuation to aid comprehension.
- Non-Speech Elements, Sound Effects (Annotations): Include important sounds and music cues in square brackets, e.g., [Door Opens], [Laughter]. Use [] NOT () or {}.
- Speaker Identification & Speaker Change: Use a hyphen and a space ("- ") to indicate a change of speaker. Start a new caption for each speaker, unless there's rapid cross-talk.
 - How are you today?
 - I'm doing well, thanks!
- New Sentence, New Caption: Always end a caption at the end of a sentence. In most cases, avoid starting a new sentence within the same caption. If having multiple sentences in one caption affects readability, split them. However, short sentences can be grouped together if they are easy to read (e.g., "Stop! Go back.>").

If a sentence is too long, break it at a logical point (e.g., at a comma) and continue in the next caption.
- Handle Profanity Appropriately: Include swear words as spoken unless guidelines advise otherwise. If it's censored, put [Blurp].
- Use ♪ before and after lyrics to indicate singing. For example:
 - ♪ Twinkle, twinkle, little star ♪
 - ♪ How I wonder what you are ♪