

IRENE BOSTON TRANSCRIPTION SERVICES

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CONFERENCE / SEMINAR GUIDELINES & RECORDING TIPS

We have a wealth of experience in what works and what doesn't work when conducting and recording conferences. These guidelines are divided into **facilitation advice** and **technical recording tips**, as well as addressing specific **conference transcription issues**. We hope this will help our clients to make recordings of the highest quality which will cut down on transcription times and costs. Please see our [conference transcription services](#) for details of the services we offer and our [Equipment](#) pages for further advice.

FACILITATION GUIDELINES - PLEASE DO...

Seek professional help when recording conferences or seminars. When there are multiple speakers in large rooms or individual speeches from a podium, it's vital to seek professional help to ensure that everything is clearly recorded. A venue specialising in hosting conferences will often have its own in-house recording system and be able to advise you on the best recording option, or they usually can recommend an audio visual company whom they regularly use. **DON'T** skimp on this essential step - it will be a false economy.

Provide the transcriber with an **agenda, a list of speakers and delegates**, as well as any presentations or handouts supplied by the speakers. It's also useful to provide any supporting material on the conference, as this will help to establish 'key words' that may not be in common usage but are particularly relevant to the conference topic. A good transcriptionist will be able to search for most of the unusual words using Google, but time will be saved if you've already provided the relevant material.

Minimise background noise - whether this is chatter from the other panel speakers or equipment interference from air conditioning or laptops. If it's loud enough, it'll be captured on the recording and may drown out the speakers' voices.

Be firm in your facilitation, particularly with any questions from the audience. Although it may be difficult to interrupt, if delegates (or panel members) begin to go off at a tangent, you may have to **steer them back on course**. Similarly, a speaker or delegate who mumbles won't be picked up by the recording equipment, however sophisticated it might be. If you or the audience can't hear what they're saying, the chances are that the transcriber can't either on the finished recording. A restless audience should give you a clue as to **whether a speaker is audible or not**. We have often received recordings where the keynote speaker is speaking barely above a whisper and the facilitator was afraid to interrupt as they were a VIP. Invariably, people don't realise they're speaking softly - we rarely 'hear' our own voices. If a guest speaker regards taking part in a conference as important enough to set aside time, the chances are they will want their contribution heard. Most are happy to speak up if asked to do so.

Ask delegates to introduce themselves - during the Q&A sessions, if it's important to capture the identity of the questioner, please ask the delegates to introduce themselves with their name and company. If the transcriber has been provided with a delegate list, it will then be possible to accurately ascribe any questions. We can't identify voices we've never heard before and valuable contributions may be wasted if you need to attribute the questions to particular speakers.

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Ensure that any questions or comments from the audience can be heard. Some delegates tend to start speaking before the roaming microphone arrives. If a speaker has a quiet voice, that also may be difficult to hear on the recording.

Ensure that all speakers and delegates have **turned off all mobile phones**. This may be difficult to enforce with a large audience but if you can at least ask the speakers to do so, that will help enormously. Text messages or voice mails emit a radio frequency which is inaudible to the human ear but the recording equipment will pick it up, and the resulting buzzing noise will drown out whatever is being said at the time. Turning mobile phones to 'silent' or 'vibrate' mode is not enough - they need to be turned off and this applies to all the 'top table' representatives.

Brief the transcriber on exactly what needs to be transcribed - see our [Definitions](#) page for clarification on the different **types of transcript** available. Please also be clear whether you need any housekeeping issues or material from the chairman's introduction included in the transcript.

Assist with clarification - if any speaker or delegate shows the audience photographs or documents, (anything that isn't on a Powerpoint presentation and, therefore, unlikely to be available for reference later on), it would be a good idea to say what 'IT' is for the benefit of the recording, or make a note of it. You may remember what 'it' is at the time but will you later on when it comes to analysing the transcript?

FACILITATION GUIDELINES - PLEASE DO NOT...

Allow crockery near the microphones. It's tempting to have tea or coffee on the 'top table' to relax the participants or to allow them to bring cups back after any coffee breaks. If you do, then the clattering of the crockery may interfere with the clarity of the recording.

Leave windows open - however hot the day may be, windows need to be closed. Noise from traffic, roadworks and aeroplanes will all impact on your recording. Unless you use a noise cancelling microphone, most mics are not as selective as the human ear and can't filter out extraneous noise in the same way that we can. They record everything they hear and the loudest noise will dominate.

Allow panel members to speak over each other. In an animated discussion, particularly with a large panel of speakers, there can be a tendency for several to speak at once. Please ensure that you brief them beforehand that if they do, then both their contributions will be lost. And if they persist in the heat of the moment during the debate, you may have to diplomatically ask each to repeat what they just said for the benefit of the recording. Such a gentle reminder is often all that's needed!

Shuffle papers or write near any top table microphones. As this may be the source of the nearest noise, that's what the microphone will pick up and it will drown out whatever is being said.

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RECORDING TIPS - PLEASE DO...

Use recording equipment that is fit for purpose - we would urge all clients to **use digital recordings**. They produce an excellent sound quality which will cut down on transcription time, minimise the number of inaudibles and reduce costs. Please read our [comparison](#) between digital and analogue recordings. Not all conference venues have made the switch to digital, so you may not have complete freedom of choice, but at least most will be using superior quality analogue recorders with multiple microphones and should be able to produce a broadcast quality recording. The ideal solution is to connect noise cancelling lectern microphones or lapel mics to professional recording equipment via a direct feed. Roving microphones will also be needed to capture any audience participation. See our [Equipment](#) pages for advice on particular recorders.

Choose an uncompressed digital setting - most digital recorders offer recording settings ranging from SHQ (stereo high quality) down to LP (long play). SHQ produces the largest file size but the best quality. HQ is a good compromise but LP produces the poorest quality. Don't compromise on quality just to save memory space. Use the **highest uncompressed quality level your recorder offers** - issues over file size and length of time to transmit the digital files are trivial compared to the production of a good quality recording. You can probably get away with a lower quality for dictation, but will need the highest quality for multiple participant interviews, conferences or focus groups or meetings.

Decide on a suitable digital audio level and file type - 8,000kHz should be suitable for dictation. 44,100kHz is the highest end of the range and produces exceptional recordings but there is a trade off in larger file sizes. Ensure you choose a digital file type which is compatible with transcription software. We discuss the pros and cons of the more common file types such as wav, dss, mp3 and wma [here](#).

Test the equipment - this may not be an issue if you're using a specialist venue as they will generally have a rehearsal and test equipment before the conference. If you listen to any test recording they make, please do so through earphones. This is how a transcriber will hear the recording.

Ensure that all speakers and members of any panels **have individual microphones**, whether that be a lectern microphone or an individual lapel or tie-clip mic. However, make sure that, if a speaker is giving their presentation, all the other panel members' microphones are turned off. I'm sure you don't want to capture all those off the cuff comments! Lapel microphones pick up voices very clearly, but can also pick up rustling clothing. Another option is to use a **noise cancelling microphone** which will cut down on a certain amount of background ambient noise. For a roundtable or forum discussion format, we recommend using **one microphone for every 1 to 2 people**. Do **NOT** try and cope with one microphone in the middle of a large table and push it towards each person as they speak. You'll only record the scraping noise as you do so! For multiple microphones, you'll need a **mixer** to connect all the microphones to the recorder. We discuss the differences microphones in more detail on our [Equipment](#) pages.

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RECORDING TIPS - PLEASE DO NOT...

Use a portable recorder while sitting in the audience. Balancing a dictaphone or standard tape recorder on your knee will **NOT** pick up the speeches from the conference platform. All they will record is the noise nearest the recorder. You may be able to hear a speaker clearly from the middle of an audience, but your recorder will pick up other noises - you scribbling down notes, your neighbour coughing, or the person three rows back having a sneezing fit. Needless to say, none of that will produce a recording that's possible to transcribe. If you're an audience member, consider contacting the conference organisers for a transcript afterwards. If time doesn't allow for that option, the only way you'll have a chance of recording anything is to put a **microphone on or near the podium**. Even then, there will be issues over feedback from the sound system and distance from the speakers, even with digital equipment. Be prepared for a less than complete transcript.

Use mini tapes or micro-cassettes for conferences. Please don't use a dictaphone for anything other than dictation. Recording in a large room with background noise, no external microphone and feedback from other electronic systems is a waste of time. You're asking the equipment to record in an environment for which it was never designed.

Record in a noisy environment - brief any inexperienced speakers that they should wait for the audience hubbub to die down before beginning their presentations. Even with lectern or lapel microphones, the background noise can often be more intrusive on recordings than we realise at the time. Voices can easily be swamped by extraneous noise, especially when speakers are softly spoken. As you near lunchtime, noise from the neighbouring room as the venue staff set up lunch may also be intrusive. Check with the conference venue beforehand that they will take measures to minimise this.

Use the time-stamp bleep. Some recorders come with an option to insert a bleep at intervals. Please turn this off! Each time the recorder inserts a bleep, it will drown out any voices and will result in an incomplete transcript. Our transcribers are experienced in inserting time stamps on the transcript where required without any electronic help.

These guidelines relate to **conferences**. If you are recording research [interviews](#), [meetings](#), [focus groups](#), please see the guidelines designed for those situations. If you have any questions relating to conference recording not covered on this page, please contact us on 01485 543746 or Boston@ibss.fsnet.co.uk we would be happy to help.