

IRENE BOSTON TRANSCRIPTION SERVICES

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DICTATION FACILITATION GUIDELINES & RECORDING TIPS

We have a wealth of experience in what works and what doesn't work when recording dictation. These guidelines are divided into **facilitation advice** and more technical recording tips, as well as addressing any specific **dictation transcription** issues. We hope that this will help clients to make recordings of the highest quality which will, in turn, cut down on transcription times and costs.

Please see our [dictation transcription services](#) page for details of the services we offer and our [Equipment](#) pages for further advice.

FACILITATION GUIDELINES - PLEASE DO...

Think about the **dictation location**. Recording in a quiet, indoor environment helps to ensure the best quality of sound recording. Dictating 'on the hoof' or in the car produces too much background noise and interference. If you must record outside, try and choose a quiet area. If in the car, record with the engine and radio turned off. If indoors, consider the acoustics of where you'll be sitting. A large room with a high ceiling ('church' like conditions) will produce significant echo which may result in 'booming' on the recording.

Turn off all mobile phones. 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.

Ensure that you speak clearly and slowly. You may be very familiar with your material and be tempted to speak quickly. Or if you're outside, you may speak quietly so that you can't be overhead. Either situation may produce an inaudible recording. Invariably, people don't realise that they're speaking softly - we rarely 'hear' our own voices.

Remember to **spell out any names, places or complex terminology** as you go along. One key point with all dictation is not to be tempted to speak faster in order to save on recording time! It's far better to send a slightly larger file or several tapes containing clearly dictated material which can then be transcribed more easily and quickly. Sending large digital files or many tapes can always be overcome - if a transcriber has to struggle with a 'gabbled' recording, this will result in an incomplete transcript and longer transcribing time.

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FACILITATION GUIDELINES - PLEASE DO NOT...

Record in a noisy environment such as restaurants, open spaces, airports, pubs, trains, cafes if it can be avoided. Background noise is often more intrusive on recordings than we realise at the time. Voices can easily be swamped by extraneous noise.

Leave windows open - however hot the day may be, try and keep windows closed. Noise from traffic, roadworks and aeroplanes will all impact on your recording - internal dictaphone microphones 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.

Sit near noisy machinery such as air conditioning, photocopiers, heaters or computers - even radios in the background can make it impossible to hear the recording.

Have crockery near the microphone. If you do, the clattering of the crockery will be the loudest sound on the recording, and you will deafen your transcriber!

Shuffle papers too near the microphone. As this may be the source of the nearest noise, that is what the microphone will hear and it will drown out whatever is being said.

Write near the microphone if you can avoid it. We have often heard recordings where the scribbling of a pen is the loudest sound we hear throughout the recording.

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RECORDING TIPS - PLEASE DO...

Use recording equipment that is fit for purpose - we would urge all clients to use **digital dictaphone recorders**. 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. There are many [digital dictaphones](#) on the market and we discuss some of the pros and cons on our [Equipment](#) pages. The other advantage with digital is that you can quickly send the digital file to the transcriber instead of relying on sending tapes in the post. This minimises delays if your correspondence is urgent.

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 your equipment - record something before you begin dictating to check that there are no technical problems with your equipment. If you're on the move and can't plug your recorder into the mains and are reliant on batteries, ensure that you have a spare set with you, or a battery charger for rechargeables. Ensure that you have sufficient memory cards for digital dictaphones.

It may sound obvious but make sure that the **recorder is running** before you start dictating! I've heard horror stories from clients who've spent considerable time dictating, only to find that the recorder wasn't switched on.

Begin recording well before you start speaking. Even with digital recorders, there is a very short delay between you pressing the record button and the equipment starting to record. If you start to speak at the same time as that is happening, the beginnings of your sentences will be cut off.

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RECORDING TIPS - PLEASE DO NOT...

Use a slow recording speed - some analogue recorders can be used at slower speeds. This extends recording time and saves on the number of tapes used. However, there is a consequential loss in recording quality and an increase in the amount of background hiss. We'd recommend that you use only the **fastest speed setting** on your recording equipment. Tapes are comparatively cheap, so why save on tape costs when those savings will be swallowed up by extra transcribing time and costs?

Use voice activation. If you use recorders with a voice activation feature and you're too far away from the microphone or speak softly, this may not be picked up by the equipment. We've found that some recorders are not very sensitive and will sometimes switch off in mid-sentence if the sound level goes below the minimum pick up threshold. There is also a slight time delay between someone speaking and the recorder starting up again, so beginnings of sentences are often chopped off.

Send copies of audio tapes - original audio tapes will always be clearer than copies, regardless of the quality of the copying equipment. To ensure greater accuracy, please ensure that **only** original tapes are sent. Audio tapes, mini tapes or micro cassettes are always less clear when they are copied, and transcribing from a copy only increases transcription time and your costs. Digital files don't degrade when copied - all analogue media does.

These guidelines relate to **dictation**, typically of correspondence or manuscripts. Please see our [Guidelines](#) for any other recording situation.

If you have any questions relating to dictation transcription not covered on this page, please contact us on 01485 543746 or Boston@ibss.fsnet.co.uk and we would be happy to help.