

IRENE BOSTON TRANSCRIPTION SERVICES

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LECTURES / SPEECHES / KEYNOTE SPEAKER FACILITATION GUIDELINES & RECORDING TIPS

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

Most of the information below is based on lectures and speeches being given in conference type situations. If you're recording speeches or lectures in any other environment, or are a student on a limited budget, please [contact us](#) for further advice.

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

FACILITATION GUIDELINES - PLEASE DO...

Think about the **speech or lecture location**. Recording in a quiet, indoor environment ensures the best quality of sound recording. A large room with a high ceiling ('church' like conditions) produces significant echo which your ear can filter out but the microphone can't. It will result in a 'booming' on the recording which could make the speech difficult to hear, especially if the lecturer has a quiet voice.

Seek professional help when recording. If you wish to capture individual speeches from a podium, it's vital to seek professional help to ensure that everything is clearly recorded. The ideal solution is to connect standard lectern or lapel microphones to recording equipment via a direct feed. Roving mics will also be needed to capture any audience participation in question and answer sessions. A venue specialising in hosting conferences will often have its own in-house recording facilities with specialist technicians who can advise on the best recording option, or they may recommend an audio visual company whom they regularly use. **DON'T** skimp on this essential step - it will be a false economy.

Obtain necessary permissions from your speakers before the event. Ensure that they're aware they'll be recorded and that the recording will be transcribed. If they suddenly object during the event, you may have to abandon the recording.

Brief the transcriber on exactly what you need to be transcribed - see our [Definitions](#) page for clarification on the type of transcript available. Clarify whether you need any housekeeping issues or speaker introductions transcribed.

Turn off all mobile phones. Text messages or voice mails emit a radio frequency which is inaudible to the human ear but your 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.

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FACILITATION GUIDELINES - PLEASE DO... cont/d.

Ensure the speaker can be heard. It may be tempting to think that all lecturers and speakers are used to speaking in public. Although this is usually the case, it doesn't apply across the board. So if you're aware of a someone's inexperience in public speaking or they have a quiet voice, they may need a gentle reminder beforehand to **speak clearly and loudly**. Invariably, people don't realise they're speaking softly - we rarely 'hear' our own voices. If they regard giving a lecture as important enough to set aside time, the chances are they'll want to be heard. Most are happy to speak up if asked to do so. Platform lecturers, particularly those with slide presentations, also have a tendency to wander around the stage. This is not such a problem with a lapel microphone but a nightmare if the microphone is on the lectern. Speakers need to be made aware that if they want their speech to be heard clearly, then they need to **stay within the microphone's recording range**.

Minimise background noise - if it's sufficiently loud, it will be captured on the recording and may drown out the speaker's voice. Noisy machinery such as air conditioning or laptops will all emit noise which is often more intrusive on recordings than we realise at the time, and voices can be swamped, especially if people are softly spoken.

Ask delegates to introduce themselves - if part of the lecture or keynote speech is a Q&A session, please ask the delegates to introduce themselves with their name and company. If the transcriber has been provided with a delegate list, it's then 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 questions to speakers.

Provide the transcriber with an **agenda, list of speakers and delegates**, as well as any presentations, handouts or background material supplied by the speakers. The latter is very useful as it helps to establish 'key words' that may be not in common usage, but are particularly relevant to the topic of the speech. Transcribers can always search for any key words on the Internet but this will all add to the transcription time, so it's helpful if they are provided in advance.

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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 using 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 we can. They record everything they hear and the loudest noise will dominate.

Allow crockery near the microphones. It's tempting to have tea or coffee on the 'top table' to relax the speakers or to allow them to bring cups back after any coffee breaks. If you do, then the clattering of the crockery will be the loudest sound on the recording.

Shuffle papers near the microphone. As this may be the source of the nearest noise, that's 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 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. If the speech venue gives you the choice, ensure you choose digital rather than analogue.

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 and sound levels. If you're using a professional venue, presumably they'll do their own test recording. If you can, listen to that through headphones. What you hear will be a fair indication of what the transcriber will hear. If it's too faint, move the microphones or ensure additional microphones are made available. Once you can hear the voices clearly, we probably can too. Most digital recorders will set the recording level automatically, although on some, you can change this setting. This can be useful if you have a speaker with a quiet voice or dominant background noise.

Ensure all speakers have **individual microphones**, whether that be a lectern microphone or individual lapel or tie-clip mics. The latter pick up voices very clearly, but can also pick up rustling clothing. Roaming microphones are essential to capture any audience contributions. However, make sure that if a speaker is giving their presentation, that all the other panel members' microphones are turned off. I'm sure you don't want to capture all their off the cuff remarks!

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RECORDING TIPS - PLEASE DO NOT...

Use a portable recorder whilst sitting in the audience. Balancing a dictaphone or standard tape recorder on your knee will **NOT** pick up the speeches from the stage. **All they will record is the noises nearest the recorder.** Whilst you may be able to hear a speaker clearly from the middle of an audience, your recorder will pick up other noises such as you scribbling 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 will be possible to transcribe. If you're a member of the audience, for example, a reporter who needs to capture a particular speech, consider contacting the organisers for a detailed transcript after the event. If time doesn't allow for that option, the only way you'll record anything is to place a microphone on or near the podium. Even then, there are issues over feedback from the sound system and distance from the speakers. Be prepared for a less than complete transcript.

Use standard audio tapes - they have been superseded largely by digital, either minidisc or digital audio sound files which produce a far superior quality of recording.

Use mini tapes or micro-cassettes for anything other than dictation. These are designed to be used by one voice using a dictaphone held very close to the mouth, as they only have an internal microphone. If a dictaphone is used to record a lecture or speech, the recording will be very poor and with background noise, virtually inaudible. We discuss the differences between external and internal microphones in more detail on our [Equipment](#) pages.

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 drowns out any voices resulting in an incomplete transcript. Our transcribers are experienced in inserting time stamps where required without electronic help.

Send copies of audio tapes. If, despite all the above, you do use analogue recording equipment, please ensure that **only** original tapes are sent. Originals are always clearer than copies, regardless of the quality of the copying equipment and transcribing from a copy increases transcription time and your costs. Digital files do not degrade when copied - all analogue media does.

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 would 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?

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RECORDING TIPS - PLEASE DO NOT... cont/d.

Use voice activation. If you use recorders with a voice activation feature and the speaker is too far away from the microphone or speaks 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, especially with softly spoken speakers. There is also a slight time delay between someone speaking and the recorder starting up again, so the beginnings of sentences are often chopped off.

These guidelines relate to recording and transcribing **lectures, speeches** and **keynote speakers**, mostly in conference type situations. Please use the links above for guidelines designed for any other recording situation.

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