

IRENE BOSTON TRANSCRIPTION SERVICES

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PODCAST FACILITATION GUIDELINES & RECORDING TIPS

We have a wealth of experience in what works and what doesn't work when conducting and recording podcasts. These guidelines are divided into **facilitation advice** and more **technical recording tips**, as well as addressing any specific **podcast 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.

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

FACILITATION GUIDELINES - PLEASE DO...

Obtain necessary permissions from your subjects. Ensure they're aware they'll be recorded and that not only will it be broadcast on the Internet but also transcribed. If it's important to capture on the recording that they give their verbal permission, do so at the beginning (even if that bit's not broadcast!). This will protect you from any conflicts in the future and show clearly that you have addressed these issues. If you intend using commercial music in the edited final version, ensure that you have the necessary licences.

Brief the transcriber - usually all podcasts are edited down before being sent to the transcriber but it's worthwhile clarifying what you need to be transcribed. That applies not only to the type of transcript (see our [definitions](#) page), but whether you need any housekeeping issues or background transcribed. Decide if you want your questions to be typed in shortened format and only the responses in full.

Think about the **recording location**. Recording in a quiet, indoor environment ensures the best quality of sound recording. If you're recording an interview at the interviewee's location, you may not have total control, but it's helpful if you can provide guidance beforehand. Interviewing on location can sometimes add atmosphere but try and **consider the acoustics of where you'll be recording**. A large empty room with a high ceiling ('church' like conditions) will produce significant echo, resulting in a 'booming' on the recording which could interfere with the broadcast quality of the final recording. If recording in your office, unplug the phone and ensure you're not disturbed.

Preparation is key - think about the structure and format of your podcast. Break it into logical sections and make notes or questions for each topic area. Rehearse your questions out loud, not only to get an idea of the flow of the words but also to gain a realistic idea of how long they'll take. Ask open ended questions to allow the interviewee to expand. Beware of asking questions which could only have yes or no answers. Don't cut out all your verbal 'quirks' or it will sound wooden but be aware of how many 'ers' 'ums' 'you knows' etc you tend to interject as that will take longer to edit out later.

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

Brief the participants - some people are seasoned interviewees but some will be understandably nervous about being recorded. Try to put them at ease before you start recording and brief them on the topics or questions you'd like to cover. If you're recording at their location, ask them to try and **minimise background noise**. You may have to spend some time on arrival asking for radios, computers or televisions to be turned off and doors closed. It may also be useful to inform them if the final podcast will be edited or broadcast in full.

Ensure that you **run through a few basic microphone techniques**. Remember this is broadcast quality material you're after, and how your subjects 'behave' is as important as the recording environment or the equipment you use. Anyone not used to being recorded may lean too close to the microphone and speak far too loudly - a gentle reminder to stay at least six inches away and to speak normally may be needed.

Familiarise yourself with the recording equipment, especially if you've never used it before. It will be very offputting to the interviewee to see you fiddling with the equipment to try to make it work. Similarly, either before you leave or during a break, check the interview has recorded.

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.

Ensure everyone can be heard- if any speakers have quiet voices or mumble, they won't be picked up by the recorder, however sophisticated it might be. If you can't hear what they're saying, then the chances are we can't either on the finished recording.

Ask people to speak up, not to speak too fast, or to repeat anything you don't hear clearly. Invariably, people don't realise they're speaking softly - we rarely 'hear' our own voices. If they regard taking part as important enough to set aside time, the chances are they'll want their contribution heard. Most are happy to speak up if asked to do so.

During the recording - try and **pause for a few seconds between each answer and the next question**, or when you go on to a different topic. If you make a mistake, just pause and start again. This is a hard technique to master but it will make any later editing much easier.

Be firm during the recording. Although it may be difficult to interrupt for fear of putting people off, if they begin to go off at a tangent, you may have to, although these bits can always be edited out later. If you have several interviewees, they may speak over each other if they become animated. You may need to **remind the participants to speak individually** or to repeat what they've just said so you can capture one clear recording of their answer.

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Assist in clarification - if the interviewee shows you something, be it a photograph or documents, it would be a good idea to say what IT is for the recording. Letting someone say, 'that is what we used' doesn't make great radio! You may remember what 'that' is at the time but will you later on when it comes to analysing the transcript? And if they just nod or shake their heads, either ask them to say yes or no, or confirm verbally what they've done. Ask the interviewee to spell out any names, places or complex terminology at the end.

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, especially when people are softly spoken. If people talk about what to them are sensitive issues, they'll invariably drop their voice so anyone nearby can't hear what they're saying. If they do, the recorder may not pick them up. We recognise that with some podcasts, a certain amount of background noise may be deliberately included to indicate that your interview has been recorded on location - just try to strike a balance between too much 'background colour' and audibility of the interview!

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.

Sit near noisy machinery such as air conditioning, photocopiers, heaters or computers - even radios in the background can dominate a recording and make it impossible to hear. If broadcast quality sound is required, the recording environment needs to 'managed' even more to ensure your listeners don't struggle to hear the main subject of your podcast.

Have crockery near the microphone. It's tempting to have tea or coffee to relax the interviewee and to have this on the table where the recorder also sits. If you do, the clattering of the crockery will be the loudest sound on the recording.

Speak over your interviewee. In a more conversational type interview, it can be tempting to interject comments during the interview. In normal conversation, we tend to say 'yeah' or 'right' or 'okay' on a regular basis, if only to indicate to the other person that we're actually listening to them. It may be hard but try and break yourself of this habit because **your interjections may drown out what the interviewee is saying** and these will be impossible to edit out later.

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FACILITATION GUIDELINES - PLEASE DO NOT... cont/d.

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 by either you or the interviewee. If you need to refer to a list of questions, it may be worthwhile either having them on one side of A4, if possible, or on cards for ease of reference.

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 assume that most podcasts will be originally recorded in digital format anyway. Digital recordings 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. It's essential that the final edited podcast is of broadcast quality, or your audience will quickly lose patience and stop listening. This will obviously impact on any future audience you may be trying to attract.

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 - 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.

Digital file compatibility - check that the digital file format you are using is compatible with digital transcription software, or that it can be converted into a useable format. Digital transcription software will only transcribe from certain digital file formats, so it's vital to ensure you choose a format that can be transcribed. We discuss the pros and cons of the more common file types such as wav, dss, mp3 and wma [here](#).

Record on one file - don't keep stopping and starting the recording. Make your recording as one large file, instead of lots of smaller ones. It's easier to edit from one large file and not have to paste bits of small files together to form the final edited version.

Test your equipment - record something beforehand to check there are no technical problems with your equipment. If you can't plug your recorder into the mains and are reliant on batteries, ensure you have a spare set with you, or a charger and enough memory cards.

Test the sound levels - use different volumes and microphone distances to determine what will work. Use headphones to check the recording levels. What you hear through the headphones is a fair indication of what the transcriber and your audience will hear. If it's too faint, the microphone(s) may need to be repositioned.

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Once you can hear their 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. If you have multiple speakers, you should adjust the microphone levels during the sound check to ensure everyone is equal in volume.

Use an external microphone - most built-in microphones are of poor quality with limited control over volume levels, and this can apply to digital recorders as well. Use a good quality, external microphone. **Lapel microphones** pick up voices very clearly, but can also pick up rustling clothing. **Noise cancelling microphones** are ideal for cutting down on background ambient noise.

For multiple speakers, we recommend using **one microphone for every 1 to 2 people**. Asking more people to share a microphone will result in noise as the mic is passed around. Use an individual desktop stand for each microphone. **DON'T** let anyone handhold their microphone - it's too noisy! For multiple microphones, you'll need a **mixer** to connect all the microphones to the recorder. We discuss microphones in more detail on our [Equipment](#) pages.

Place the microphone near the speaker or speakers - if your discussion is with several people, make sure you place the microphones evenly spaced between each 'set' of two people. For one-to-one interviews, it may be tempting for the interviewer to sit close to the recorder to check it's working during the interview, but if the interviewee is too far from the microphone, then the clarity of the recording will suffer.

Keep your headphones on during the recording. This will allow you to monitor the sound levels as the interview / discussion progresses and adjust the levels accordingly. Please ensure that the headphones are plugged into the recorder **NOT** the mixer - the latter will not give you an accurate representation of the actual recording quality. If this sounds too much like 'multi-tasking', you may have to ask a colleague to monitor the sound levels while you ask the questions!

Editing - listen to the entire recording to identify areas you wish to keep and which to edit. At this stage, you can edit out any repetitions, pauses or verbal habits or quirks, although try not to edit too much as it may then sound wooden and unnatural. Make sure you save this edited version as a new file instead of overwriting the original.

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RECORDING TIPS - PLEASE DO NOT...

Use a slow recording speed - some recorders can be used at slower speeds and in compressed digital file formats. 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 and uncompressed settings on your recorder.

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. 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.

Copy digital recordings onto analogue- hard to believe but it has been done! Ensure you send the digital recording to the transcriber, **not** any audio tapes you may make. The digital recording will be far superior in quality.

These guidelines relate to podcast transcription and recording. Please use the above links for guidelines designed for any other recording situation including [webcasts](#).

If you have any questions relating to podcast 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.