

RECORDING TIPS

It is important to us that you receive the best possible transcription. This, however, is largely dependent on the quality of audio we receive to transcribe. For this reason, we have compiled these tips to assist you with your recording and to ensure we can produce the best quality transcription for you.

If you have not yet conducted your recordings, please bear these tips in mind. If you have already conducted your recordings, these tips will assist you to understand your transcriptions.

Please note that bad audio recordings cannot be fixed after recording. Sound quality cannot be enhanced and interferences cannot be eliminated. Although we work with the best sound card and headphones, we can only enhance soft audio to a certain extent.

Audio Quality

It is preferential to record using a bit rate of at least 64kbps. The higher the bit rate, the clearer the audio. Higher bit rates will produce larger audio files, but the quality of the audio is not compromised. Please note, however, that the higher quality bit rate can also enhance surrounding noises.

Audio Format

We can accept most types of audio formats. Please note that .wav files are often larger than .mp3 files, for instance. When it comes to uploading your audio files, the size will make a difference in the upload speed.

We are finding more and more that we are receiving audio files from cell phones, which use a different format to normal recording devices. Although we do accept these audio files, and to date have not had an issue finding a programme to convert them to a format we can use in our transcription programme, if we are given an unfamiliar format, we may charge for the time required to find a programme to convert the file to .wav or .mp3.

Setup

Ensure that you record in a quiet environment to avoid unnecessary background noise. Ensure that all speakers are close to the recorder/microphone so that they can be clearly heard on the audio. Start recording a few seconds before speaking to ensure the beginning is not missed. Switch off cell phones to avoid interruptions and cell phone reception interference.

Noise Inference/Disturbance

There are many noise interferences and disturbances you need to be aware of when recording. Although these sounds in general are not very loud, the recorder/microphone may amplify these sounds to the point where they overpower the speaker's voice, particularly speakers with softer voices.

These may include, but are not limited to:

Papers rustling

Ensure that those around the recorder/microphone are not looking through papers while someone is speaking. Ask the person with the papers to move away from the recorder/microphone while paging through documents or move the recorder/microphone closer to the speaker to ensure the speaker is clearly heard. Remember to move it back when the person with the documents has stopped.

Cups and saucers

This is a common problem just after a tea break when those close to the recorder/microphone stir their tea or coffee or put their cups on their saucers. Ensure those present keep their cups as far from the recorder/microphone as possible and that they stir their tea or coffee prior to commencing with the recording. Another solution would be to use cups without saucers – a soft placement, for instance, could be used instead to eliminate the noise of the cups being put down on saucers.

Coughing/sneezing/throat clearing

Although these are often sudden, ask those present to turn completely away from the recorder/microphone if they feel the need to cough, sneeze, or clear their throat. Although they may be doing this as quietly as possible, if they are close to the recorder/microphone, these can be amplified and overpower the speaker's voice.

Where the person has not been able to turn away in time, ask the speaker to repeat what he/she said to ensure it is captured clearly on the recording.

Sweet wrappings

Ask those present to refrain from unwrapping sweets near the recorder. They may be doing it softly, but the noise is often amplified on the audio and overpowers speakers with soft voices.

Traffic noise

If the area you are in is near a particularly busy road, close all windows and place the recorder/microphone as far away as possible from the windows to ensure that the traffic noise is not picked up too loudly on your recording. Be aware of vehicles hooting, trucks reversing (beep-beep-beep), and so forth, and ask the speaker to repeat what he/se said (hooting) or stop talking until all is quiet again (trucks reversing).

Cell phone reception interference

This normally occurs when a cell phone is placed close to a recorder/microphone. While you are recording, all will seem normal but, on the recording, you will only hear interference. This also occurs if you place your cell phone near a radio, for instance. The interference completely overpowers the speaker's voice and can be painful to listen to. Ensure all cell phones are switched off (not on silence as the reception interference will still occur) or that they are placed far away from the recorder/microphone.

Air-conditioners

If you are in a room with a noisy air-conditioner, try to keep the air-conditioner fan as low as possible to eliminate noise levels. Ensure the speakers talk louder than normal and are closer to the recorder/microphone. Where possible, sit at the end of the room furthest away from the air-conditioner.

Construction

Whether inside the building or outside the building, construction noise is one of the most difficult to eliminate. Along with cell phone reception interference, it is also one of the most painful noises to listen to while transcribing. Where possible, request a change of venue. If this is not possible, ensure all windows (for outside construction) or doors (for inside construction) are kept closed at all times and sit as far as possible from the construction. Also ensure the speakers talk louder and are closer to the recorder/microphone so that their voices are heard above the construction noise.

Banging/tapping on tables

Ask those present to refrain from banging or tapping on the table near the recorder/microphone. It may sound soft on their side, but the recorder/microphone often amplifies the sound to the point where it overpowers the speaker's voice. In the case of an accidental bang or tap on the table, ask the speaker for repeat what he/she has just said.

Pen clicking

Ask those present not to constantly click their pens. Again, this sound can be amplified and may overpower the speaker's voice.

Venue noise

Venue noise occurs when you conduct your recording in a place such as a coffee shop, company cafeteria, outside area, and the likes. Try and avoid these areas at all times. You have no control over the environment and it can make clear recording very difficult.

If you have no choice but to conduct your recording in an open area, ensure that all speakers are talking directly into the recorder – don't place the recorder on the table – and that they speak louder than normal to ensure their voices are heard above the din associated with these venues.

Noises in general

If possible, take a couple of minutes in the venue before anyone arrives, close your eyes, and listen. Evaluate all the sounds you pick up during this time, and where they're coming from, and try to eliminate those that can be removed. Plan around those that can't.

If the area outside the room seems particularly noisy with a lot of people talking loudly as they pass, ask if they can keep the noise levels down for the duration of the recording.

Test all the chairs that will be used and, if possible, remove particularly noisy (squeaky) chairs. If this isn't possible, ask the people using those chairs to refrain from moving too much.

Where nothing can be done about the noise levels, ask those present to talk louder than normal and ensure those voice levels are kept up throughout the entire recording session.

If there are sudden noises or interruptions, ask the speaker to repeat what he/she has just said before continuing. Rather have the same thing twice than not at all.

Speaking

The most critical part of your recording is the way the speaker/s talk during the recording. If too much of what a speaker is saying is not heard, we can lose the entire context of what is being said. This causes problems not only for that particular section but also throughout the rest of the audio if we miss something important.

Here are a few things you can ask them to do to ensure you get the best quality transcription:

Speak clearly

Ask the speaker/s to speak clearly and enunciate while talking. Avoid mumbling at all costs.

Speak slowly

Ask the speaker/s to speak slowly. Speakers who speak quickly often have their words running into each other, which makes it difficult to hear precisely what is being said. Another positive to speaking slowly is that the speaker is less likely to stutter, stammer, and/or hesitate. The speaker will have a little more time to think while talking and the flow of the talking will be smoother.

Voice volume

Ask all speakers to maintain a good voice volume that can be picked up by the recorder/microphone. If a speaker talks too quietly, they might not be heard clearly. Wherever possible, place those with quieter voices closer to the recorder/microphone.

Heavy accents

Heavy accents cannot be avoided or changed. If a speaker has a particularly heavy accent, ask them to speak clearly, slowly, and enunciate as best as possible.

Simultaneous talking

Ask those present to refrain from talking over each other. Allow one speaker to finish before another speaker starts talking. If the speaker must be interrupted, interrupt the speaker with a brief (preferably non-verbal) indication and wait for the speaker to stop talking before speaking.

Special Notes on Group Recordings

If you are conducting a recording with a group of people (4 or more people), please take note of the following:

Simultaneous talking

This is one of the biggest issues when conducting group recordings, particularly when the speakers get excited about a topic. Advise speakers to allow each other to finish talking and wait their turn before speaking.

Recorders/microphones

Whenever possible in large groups, ensure that each speaker has their own microphone.

If you are using a recorder, ensure that the person speaking at any given point has the recorder close to him/her. In a large group, a recorder at the centre of the table doesn't always work as those with softer voices might not be heard.

If only one microphone is used, ensure the speaker has the microphone when speaking and hands it to the next speaker when he/she is done. Don't allow speakers to talk until they have the microphone in their hands.

In a case where microphones are not available for audience members (for instance, at a conference), during question and answer sessions, ask the speaker to repeat the question he/she has been asked before answering the question. This way, both the question and answer are recorded clearly, not just the answer.

Speaker identification

When speaker identification is required, ask the speakers to clearly identify themselves prior to talking. Where voices are easily distinguishable by accents, dialects, gender, and so on, this only needs to be done once. Please keep in mind, however, that voices may seem different but may be similar on the recording as pitch and tone change during conversation. This is only suggested when the differences are extreme.

In the case where voices may be fairly similar (for example, two or more speakers of the same gender with the same accent or dialect), this should be done each time they speak. This allows for easy and accurate identification during the transcription process (and assists to keep your transcription costs down as there will be less voice comparison required). Alternatively, video record the session instead (or as well) and ensure that all participants can be seen on the video. Video recordings can be converted to audio recordings for transcription, and the video can be used as an identification method.

The identification given by the speakers doesn't need to be their names if names are not to be used in the transcription. You can allocate them a code that they will use each time they speak. Have them introduce themselves using this code before beginning the session (ensure the introduction is recorded) and then have them use this code when they have something to say. In the introduction, let them say a few brief things so that we can pick up their voices and style of talking right at the beginning.

Example:

Female 1 Hi, I'm F1 and I'm here because...

Male 1 Hi, I'm M1 and I was asked to attend because...

Female 2 I'm F2 and I wanted to be here because...

Female 1 F1, I also wanted to say that...

Male 1 M1, I agree with that.

Female 2 F2, but don't you think...

Another option is to have a note-taker to take notes at the session and note each speaker and a few keywords they say while they're speaking to allow for easy identification. In the case of a meeting, have the chairperson of the meeting address the speaker prior to the speaker talking.

In group transcriptions, particularly long ones, it can be difficult to distinguish one voice from another. The voice of one person can change from one instance to the next, depending on their excitement levels and emotions at a particular point. At one point in the audio, the speaker may sound like he/she has a relatively deep voice but, at another point later, he/she is excited and the pitch and tone of voice rises. It makes comparison between the two very difficult.



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Supplying Information

In all cases of transcription, the more information you can supply, the better the quality of transcription we can provide. This information can include the list of attendees, agenda of the meeting, minutes of the meeting, programme for the conference, questionnaires used during interviews, information regarding the interviews, and so forth. All information will be kept strictly confidential and will be used for reference purposes only.