

General Transcription Training
The *ZOOM TRANSCRIPTION* Method



*By Janet Shaughnessy
Zoom Transcription Service*

Disclaimer

Every effort has been made to accurately represent this product and it's potential. Even though this industry is one of the few where one can write their own check in terms of earnings, there is no guarantee that you will earn any money using the techniques and ideas in these materials. Examples in these materials are not to be interpreted as a promise or guarantee of earnings. Earning potential is entirely dependent on the person using our product, ideas, and techniques. We do not purport this as a "get rich quick scheme."

Any claims made of actual earnings or examples of actual results can be verified upon request. Your level of success in attaining the results claimed in our materials depends on the time you devote to the program, ideas, and techniques mentioned, your finances, the economy in general, your knowledge and various skills. Since these factors differ according to individuals, we cannot guarantee your success or income level, nor are we responsible for any of your actions.

Many factors will be important in determining your actual results and no guarantees are made that you will achieve results similar to ours or anybody else's. In fact, no guarantees are made that you will achieve any results from or ideas and techniques in our materials.

With that being said, we hope to hear your success story some day!

Table of Contents

Why I Decided To Write This Book.....	4
Work-from-Home Self-Assessment Quiz.....	4
Overview.....	5
The Growing Need for General Transcriptionists.....	5
Equipment.....	6-10
Computer and Work Space	
Transcribing Equipment	
Software and Hardware	
Transcription Style.....	11
Skills.....	12
Test Your Typing Skills & Drills.....	12
Text Expanders and Shortcut Keys.....	13
Spell Checking.....	15
Search and Replace.....	15
Commonly Used Transcriptionists' Notes.....	16
Organization Skills.....	17
Sample Formats.....	18
Time Coding.....	18
Critical Thinking Skills.....	19
Income.....	20-21
Establishing and Calculating Rates.....	20-21
Grammar and Punctuation.....	22
Test and Answer Key.....	22-23
Punctuation Overview.....	24-27
Commas, Hyphens, Em Dashes... Oh, my!	
Punctuation Links.....	27
Spelling.....	28
Formatting.....	32-35
Speaker Identification	
Naming Files	
Time Coding	
Transcribing Numbers	
Practice Dictations.....	36-38
60 Audio/Video Files with Answer Keys	
Who's Going to Hire Me?.....	39-45
Links to Companies that Hire Transcriptionists	
Research	
Competition	
Business Plan.....	44-50
Template for the One-Hour Business Plan	
Business Description	
Product/Service Description	
Marketing	
Organization and Management.....	51
Expanding Your Business.....	52

Why I Decided to Write This Book

First and foremost, I feel compelled to debunk the idea that "anyone can be a general transcriptionist." I hear and read this phrase all too often and, frankly, nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, the major obstacle in growing my own transcription business has been the inability to find qualified transcriptionists!

It simply isn't true that anyone with a computer and some keyboarding skills is qualified to call themselves a transcriptionist. Is it rocket science? No, of course it isn't. However, it does require excellent typing skills, a good ear, above average grammar and punctuation skills, and the ability to sit for long periods of time...alone. Working from home has many advantages, but it's really not for everyone. Before you quit your full-time job to work your dream job from home, do a quick self-assessment. If you're a social butterfly, you might not enjoy the isolation associated with working from home. If you're lacking in self-discipline, you might have a tendency to procrastinate and end up missing a deadline, or staying up all night to meet the deadline. Either way, you'll be unhappy, your client will be unhappy, and this job probably isn't a good fit for you.

Is working from home really for you? Take this quick self-assessment quiz to help determine if work-from-employment is really a good idea for you:

<http://www.teleworkarizona.com/mainfiles/employee/eselfassessment.asp>

Okay, if you're ready to give up your corporate job to enjoy the advantages (and there are many!) of working from home, then keep reading. I'm going to lay it all out for you. This is real world information gleaned from my years of experience in the transcription field. Everything you need to know to work as a self-employed general transcriptionist is included in these pages. YOU need to be prepared to put in some work though.

The second reason I developed this product is because I know that so many of us NEED to work from home. This is one of the few areas of real employment that you can do from home that doesn't involve MLM, sales of some sort, or the steadily increasing number of scams. This involves real work for real pay and is perfectly suited to a virtual work environment. In my case, I have a disabled husband. I have to be home. I'm not complaining. I thoroughly enjoy the freedom of a flexible schedule and the ability to work as much or as little as I want -- well, that's not exactly true. I ALWAYS work too much!

Perhaps, you have young children or elderly parents that you need to take care of, maybe you're a student -- whatever your reason, if you're willing to put in some time honing your skills, I have no doubt that you'll be successful in this field.

Let's get started!

Overview

The Growing Need for General Transcriptionists

Offering administrative services to others from your home office is a growing phenomenon. One fast growing area of specialization is general transcription.

Over the last five years, more and more home offices have gained access to high-speed Internet connections. This has led to the production of increasing amounts of Internet audio. High speed Internet has made it easier for users to listen to and download audio files. What once took hours, now only takes minutes. Podcasts, webinars, digitally recorded interviews...there is a great deal of audio being produced and many of those offer text versions. This is where you come in!

There are over 60 practice audio dictations, with the answer keys, included in this course. However, you have to crawl before you can walk, as they say, and we need to be sure that your typing, writing, and grammar skills are up-to-par before you jump right in. So, hang with me and take the entire course. I promise you that it's not that hard, but it will take some time and practice. Being a fast typist isn't enough. If you don't know where to place a comma correctly, if you don't spell check every document, and if you don't proofread your document while listening to the audio one more time before submitting your transcript, I can almost guarantee that you won't be retaining clients. All of these things are important, but the proofing component is what seems to trip people up. Yes, time is money and we need to work fast to make a buck; but, you simply must proof your documents to audio or you're going to make mistakes. I know that there are some who disagree with me and think just re-reading the transcribed document is enough. To them I say, how do you know that what you typed is what was actually said if you're not listening to the audio? Believe me, I've been doing this for more years than you've probably been on this earth and I still find mistakes when I proof to audio -- every time! I simply can't stress this enough. Accuracy is key. Speed will come.

Equipment

Luckily for us, you probably already have most of the tools of the transcriber's trade and what you don't have I'm going to show you where to get for free or very inexpensively.

Computer and Work Space

Of course, you need a computer with a high-speed Internet connection and a comfortable work area. Transcribing requires long hours at your computer desk. It will serve you well to have the most comfortable, ergonomically correct desk and chair that you can set up. I've invested in the best chair that I could afford, added a gel seat cushion, and a lumbar support cushion. So far, my wrists and hands are doing okay; but, I know many transcriptionists who use gel wrist supports. My personal area of pain is in my neck and shoulders. Take frequent breaks and stretch. Your eyes need a break too. This is very, very important. LOL! I need to take my own advice!

High Speed Internet is essential. I think most everyone has it now. But, if you're working with dial-up, the connection process will be significantly slower than with Cable or DSL. Working with audio on a slow connection will soon become a frustration and will eat into your profits because, I'll say it again, time is money in this field.

The most commonly used word processing software is Microsoft Word. You'll need the latest version of Microsoft Office, including Word, Excel, and PowerPoint.

Transcribing Equipment

Fortunately, most of your work as a transcriptionist will come to you as an electronic file. It is unlikely that you will ever need to own a physical tape transcriber. Don't invest in one. In the unlikely event that you do run into a need for one, you can find good deals on eBay. Unless you have a need, the expense just doesn't make any sense.

The most commonly used transcription software is available for FREE. It's called ExpressScribe and you can download it here:

<http://www.nch.com.au/scribe/>

It's easy to use. Read the user's manual. But, basically, you just load the files and play them back using either Hotkeys or a foot pedal. I prefer a foot pedal. It's the way I was trained and I work faster using one. Of course, there's nothing wrong with using the Hotkeys to start or if you have a physical challenge that prevents you from using a foot pedal.

Hotkeys are the function keys (F1, F2, F3, etc.) on the top row of your keyboard. I forget which keys are assigned to which function, but you can print out the guide from the ExpressScribe user's manual. Basically, it's something like F4 to play, F8 to rewind, F9 to stop -- like that.

If you're going to do video time coding (and I suggest you learn this skill), you'll need special software. Video time coding requires inputting time stamps into your document at set intervals. The best software for the job is Start/Stop. It's not cheap, but it's the best software out there for time coding. You can purchase it at:

<http://www.startstop.com/sst2.asp>

The cost, as of this writing, is \$189 and it comes with a free set of headphones.

You can download a demo version of another program called InqScribe and use it for free to practice. I think the full version is available cheaper than Start/Stop, but it lacks many of the intuitive features that Start/Stop offers. Here's the download link:

<http://www.inqscribe.com>

Another program that you can download for free that will allow you to do video time coding is FTR (For the Record). It's actually used in court reporting and is compatible with their proprietary recording software. However, they do allow you to download just the player for free. It accepts most, but not all, types of video files. That might be one of its major drawbacks. I downloaded and tried it. I prefer Start/Stop. However, free is free, so here's the download link:

<http://www.ftrgoldstore.com/>

A three pedal foot control with a USB connection can be purchased for approximately \$70 to \$80. It looks like this:



You can Google for sources and the best buy. eBay would probably be a good place too. I purchased mine from:

<http://www.transcriptiongear.com>

Transcription Gear is a great source for all things related to digital transcription. I wouldn't purchase one until you need it though. You can certainly start out using the Hotkeys and buy one when you know that you're going to stick with this profession.

Headphones

Choosing the best fit, comfort, and sound for transcription is essential. With so many choices for headphones, this can be a confusing task. My personal preference is the under-the-chin, stethoscope style. You'll need the kind with a 3.5mm input jack that will be connected to your computer's headphone connection.



I own several different types of headphones, but these are the most comfortable. There is nothing to wear on your head, so you won't ruin your hairdo. Of course, working from home means that we really don't have to worry so much about what we look like. That's a double-edged sword. I'm in my bathrobe and slippers right now. It's comfortable, but I feel lazy and sloppy sometimes. Comfort is important though and, for me, wearing headphones that wrap around your head and press on your ears becomes uncomfortable. Some transcriptionists prefer them. There are also the ear bud type of headphones. I have a set that are made of brass and offer excellent sound quality. However, those brass buds in my ears actually start to hurt after a few hours of wearing them. The one thing that I can't stress enough is that you need to purchase the best quality headphones that you can afford. Fortunately, they can be had for around \$20 to \$30. Again, I purchased mine at:

<http://www.transcriptiongear.com>

You probably already own some type of headphones that you can start out with. If they're not of great quality, though, your accuracy will suffer and you'll become frustrated. Great quality doesn't have to mean expensive. It's a matter of having the right tool for the job. Those expensive (\$300) stereo headphones may not really be the best tool for audio transcription.

File Transfer Software

Depending on the client, there are several methods you can use to have them submit their audio files to you. Some larger clients will have their own FTP (file transfer protocol) site. You will be given login directions to access their files for download to your computer. In this case, you will need FTP software installed on your computer. You can install CorePro for free. It's a great little FTP server that hasn't failed me yet. You can download it here:

<http://www.coreftp.com/download.html>

In other cases, you will have to provide the client with a method to transfer their audio files to you. This can't be done via email because the files are too large. A few of my favorite programs for this are:

www.yousendit.com

www.box.net

www.sendfree.com

All of the above offer free and paid versions. The paid versions are very low cost. Don't lose professionalism by using the free version. Pay the couple of bucks and give your client their own file space. I prefer box.net over the other two because of their fast file transfer time and dependability.

There are still some clients who are in a time warp and continue to use handheld recorders. That's fine with me as long as their device is digital and the audio files can be uploaded via their computer to a file transfer site. If you come across a client who's in a time warp and still thinks it's 1984, have them unload that cassette recorder and invest in a digital recorder. Buy it for him if you have to! It'll be worth it. I do NOT accept work on micro-cassettes. I haven't had a cassette player in many years and don't plan to buy one.

Lastly, you can set your client up with a phone-in dictation system. I'll let you do your own research for pricing. It's surprisingly inexpensive, but not widely used -- except, among doctors, and we're not talking about medical transcription in this course. Suffice to say, it's available for those who want it.

Oh, I almost forget -- CDs and DVDs. These are both still popular methods of sending audio/video files. No problem, except for the fact that we have to rely on snail mail for delivery.

Most clients will gladly accept your completed transcripts via email. As an alternative, you can upload the transcripts to the file transfer site that you have designated for that client.

As you can see, the point here is to try to accommodate our clients in any way possible. It would be very rare indeed to hear me say, "No, I can't do that" -- except in the case of cassettes. You need to make every effort to provide your services and deliver your product to the client in the way that's best for them. Don't be afraid to ask, "How are you handling that now? How is that working for you? What do you like about that particular method? What don't you like?" Anything you can do to make their job easier will be greatly appreciated and will garner loyalty and repeat business.

Transcription Style

Transcription is the act of typing what you hear. If you can type and have good hearing, you'll be able to transcribe audio into text files. Generally speaking, there are two main styles of transcription most often referred to as "standard verbatim" and "strict verbatim." The difference between the two is:

Standard verbatim means that we type exactly what was spoken, but clean it up slightly. For instance, all uh's, um's, you know's, stutters, and false starts are left out.

Here's an example of what someone actually said:

Um, you know, I don't know if I agree with that statement. Uh, I'll have to think about it and get back to you. But, if you don't hear from me by Tuesday, give me a call.

Under "strict verbatim" rules, you would type it exactly like that. This can be very tricky. You have to listen very closely to hear all of the um's and uh's. Under "standard verbatim rules," this would be changed to read:

I don't know if I agree with that statement. I'll have to think about it and get back to you. If you don't hear from me by Tuesday, give me a call.

Important Notes:

Gonna is always changed to *going to* -- even in verbatim transcripts.

'Cause may be used if that was what was spoken in a verbatim transcript. In standard transcription, always change it to the full word, *because*. Please note the use of the apostrophe preceding *'cause*.

Use contractions if that is what was said, whether standard or verbatim! I recently had a new hire change every single contraction to its two-word equivalent. Ugh! She really wasn't a bad transcriptionist, but she came from the world of medical transcription. In medical transcription, it's the generally accepted format to change contractions to their two-word equivalents. In general transcription, we do not do that. I don't think I need to spell these words out for you, but here are a few examples anyway:

Cannot = can't

Would not = wouldn't

You are = you're

Do not = don't

Listen carefully and transcribe it as spoken. Be careful of confusing "its" and "it's." "Its" denotes possession, as in:

I like to keep everything in its place.

"It's" is the contracted form of "It is."

Generally speaking, strict verbatim is used for "on camera" interviews and legal depositions where it is important that the transcript captures exactly what was said. The standard verbatim style is used in documents to be published and almost all other types of work.

Sometimes, you might be asked to use a combination of the two styles. For instance, the interviewer's questions will be standard verbatim and the respondent's answers will be strict verbatim. There are also times when you will be asked to transcribe only the "gist" of the interviewer's questions with strict verbatim answers. Those are nice jobs -- less typing for us! You'll have to clarify with your client before accepting an assignment which style is expected.

Skills

Excellent Keyboarding Skills

If you type with two fingers, you aren't going to make any money. Time is money in this field and don't let anyone tell you differently. However, excellent keyboarding skills go beyond just typing itself. You also need to be a master at Microsoft Word (the most commonly used word processing software). Do you know how to format margins and tabs, create tables, insert headers and footers, and use shorthand keys? All are important to be a productive transcriptionist. You might be tempted to skip this section if you're already confident in your skills. That's fine. I think you might pick up something useful here though. Please note that this is **not** a full Microsoft Word tutorial. It's just the tips and tricks you'll need to know to be a top-rate general transcriptionist. I'll assume that you already know how to use MS Word and its Help feature. So, first things first. How's your typing speed? Don't know? Here's a link to a test you can take to find out your WPM (words per minute).

<http://www.sense-lang.org/typing/Test/index.php?lang=EN>

How did you do? If you're typing less than 50 WPM, I'd suggest a little practice. Here's the link:

<http://www.sense-lang.org/typing/>

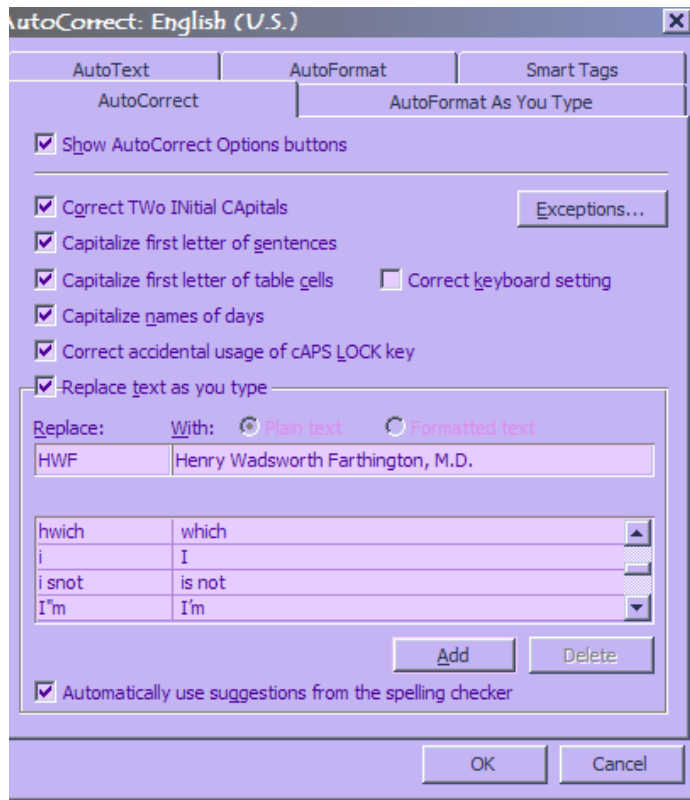
How to Use Text Expanders and Shortcut Keys

You can save hours of typing everyday by typing faster and more accurately. Microsoft Word has a built-in auto correction feature. Did you know that you can add to it? Setting up shortcuts in a text expander is a great way to save time and reduce typos. Text expanders, and there are others besides the MS Word built-in feature, can improve your productivity and can save you over 30% of keystrokes and typing time. This will improve the quality of your typing because it minimizes mistakes. And, since time is money, this increases your bottom line. Not only that, but text expanders will save wear and tear on your hands and wrists. Repetitive stress injury is a real concern in this profession. Anyway, let me show you how and why to fully utilize your AutoCorrect feature.

Examples

You will be typing the same person's name over and over again each time they speak. Do you really want to type Henry Wadsworth Farthington, M.D. each time he speaks? In this case, before beginning the transcription (or as soon as I know his/her name), I would cut it down to just three keystrokes: **HWF**. By using your AutoCorrect feature, each time you type "HWF," MSWord will automatically "correct" it to type out "Henry Wadsworth Farthington, M.D." That's a savings of 31 keystrokes every time he speaks! Here's how it's done:

On your MS toolbar, click "Tools."
 Click "AutoCorrect Options."
 This screen will popup:



You'll see that I've typed in the shortcut, HWF, in the "Replace:" box and typed the full name in the "With:" field.

Click "Add."
 Click "OK."

Ta Da! You've just shaved off a boatload of time! AutoCorrect is your friend. Embrace it!

I'm not going to give you a complete list of words to add to your expander. It will differ for everyone and with every job. Besides, I find it impossible to remember someone else's shortcuts. You'll get familiar with what terms your clients use frequently and jargon that is specific to an industry. Just add them to your expander as in the example above. Be sure not to use frequently typed characters for your text expanders. For example, the first time I made a text expander for "[inaudible]," I used "ina." Unfortunately, as soon as I would begin to type the words "in a," which are very frequently used, the auto text feature would kick in and immediately expand it to "[inaudible]." That, of course, caused me to have to delete that and retype it again -- not exactly a timesaver is it? I've now changed that particular expander to "indb." It's one more keystroke, but there's no conflict with frequently used words.

Spell Checking

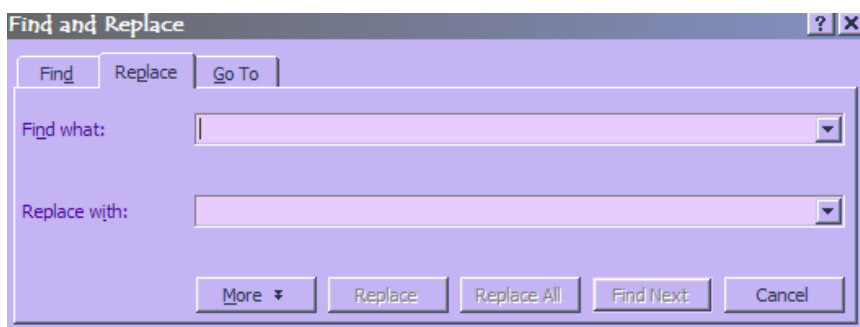
Don't trust it! It's a very useful tool and absolutely essential for catching blatant errors and typos. However, it also has a lot of freaky-deaky things in it that are just plain wrong. Some compound words are shown as two separate words. It's not going to recognize industry-specific terms. And, it's a little behind the times in terms of "modern" English usage. For example, many words that were once hyphenated no longer are (i.e., it's email, not e-mail). A strong vocabulary is essential and due diligence is expected. Due diligence is Googling (yes, that is now an accepted verb) for unfamiliar words, terms, phrases, or names. Clients will not tolerate spelling errors.

Speaking of modern usage, many, if not most of us, were taught to type two spaces after the terminal end of a sentence. Please note that the newer and most often used format is one space at the end of a sentence. It takes a little getting used to. Until you get it down, I would suggest doing a "search and replace" after your final proof to make sure that you didn't inadvertently leave any two spaces where there should only be one. MS Word will tip you off by showing you a little squiggly grey line whenever you use two spaces between sentences, but it seems many people just ignore it. I'm not saying that using two spaces is wrong, it's just old school. Both are technically correct, but I don't have any clients who request two spaces anymore. I just convinced my last hold out a couple of weeks ago to switch over to the new format.

Search and Replace

Search and replace can also be used for other changes that need to be made to an entire document. Let's say, for instance, that you've been transcribing a document and don't find out until near the end that the person you've been identifying as "Male Voice" is actually "Bob." You can use "Search and Replace" to change "Male Voice" to "Bob" throughout the whole document. Here's how you do it:

Hit "Control and H" together. This screen will popup:



In this example, you would type "Male Voice" (without the quote marks) in the "Find what:" box and type "Bob" (without the quote marks) in the "Replace with:" box. Then, click "Replace All." That's it. Quick and easy -- all instances of "Male Voice" in your document are now changed to "Bob." This can be used for any number of universal changes that need to be made.

Commonly Used Transcriptionists' Notes

[inaudible] = cannot make out a word

[unintelligible] = same as above, but less commonly used

[inaudible words] = several words cannot be understood

[speaking simultaneously-inaudible] = overlapping speakers blocking each other out

[sp] = spelling of a word is unknown

[sic] = intentionally misspelled

[sounds like] = unsure of words and give best guess

[foreign] = speaking a foreign language

[audio skip] = a cut out or break in the recording

[makes sound] = mumbling, audible non-word

Other frequently used conventions:

Mm-hmm = an affirmative response

Uh-huh = an affirmative response

Um-um = a negative response

Please place commas before and after any *uh's*, *um's*, and *you know's*.

Sentences can begin with *And*, *But*, *Well*, and *So*. There are some differences of opinion here. Most commonly, when beginning a sentence with one of the above conjunctions, a comma should follow it. However, I have a client who likes us to really clean up their dictation and we omit about 90% of all *And's*, *But's*, *Well's*, and *So's* from the beginning of their sentences. I have another client who doesn't want a comma placed after *And*, but does want them placed after *But*, *Well*, and *So*. Go figure.

Many people, too many in my opinion, overuse the word "like" in their conversation. I'm sure they don't realize it unless they were to see their speech in print. When this happens, "like" is also preceded and followed by a comma. Example:

Sheila was, like, you know, all, like, crazy that day.

Now, if the person is overusing "like" or "you know" to the extent that it's almost ridiculous, remove some of them. This would apply to strict verbatim transcripts. In standard verbatim, we're going to remove all of those unnecessary words anyway.

Standard verbatim of the sentence above would read:

Sheila was crazy that day.

Organizational Skills

I honestly believe that the hardest part of this job is remembering which clients want which format and conventions (i.e., strict verbatim versus standard verbatim). Stay organized. Take notes, make samples, and keep folders.

There are many different formats that clients will want you to use when transcribing for them. The one that I seem to use the most is the "hanging indent" style. It's straightforward and makes for easy reading and editing on the client's end. Here's how it would look. You'll find the actual MS Word template in the Forms folder.

Male Voice: This is a male voice speaking.

Female Voice: This is a female voice speaking.

Male Voice: This is a male voice speaking as a long paragraph. This is a male voice speaking as a long paragraph. This is a male voice speaking as a long paragraph. This is a male voice speaking as a long paragraph. This is a male voice speaking as a long paragraph. This is a male voice speaking as a long paragraph. This is a male voice speaking as a long paragraph. This is a male voice speaking as a long paragraph. This is a male voice speaking as a long paragraph.

00:00:00 Male Voice: This is a male voice speaking with a time code.

End of recording.

Another commonly used format is the cell format. There's a copy in your forms folder, but here's a preview.

Title

Q	Question or gist of question.
Speaker ID	The speaker's words go here.

Again, there are no rules about this. It seems every client has their own ideas about what they want. Also, Times New Roman 12 point is a good overall font to use. I haven't used it exclusively in this document, but I would suggest it as your default font.

Time Coding

A note on time coding: as shown in the hanging indent template, this type of job requires that time stamps be placed at set intervals (usually every 30 seconds). There are examples in the practice files. As mentioned previously, you need special software to do this because these are actually video, not audio, files. You'll need to input the time codes according to the on screen time and not the elapsed time as shown on your playback software. You'll see this in action, but I'll explain it briefly here.

Whenever you're playing back a file for transcription, whether audio or video, your player will tell you the total duration of the file and a slider bar will show you where you are in the file or how far you've progressed. If you're playing back audio files in ExpressScribe, or any other player, there is no video display, so you just listen and type. If you're working with a video recording, your software will play along with a small video screen (you can resize it to keep it out of your way). You'll be able to watch the video as you're listening and transcribing. The video will have a time display that may differ from your audio slider bar. The slider bar is just showing you the amount of time that you have already transcribed. For example, let's say a file is 35 minutes in length. As you progress through the file, you'll notice that the slider bar keeps moving and will count up from 00:00:00 (Hour:Minutes:Seconds) until you get to the end of your file. So, 15 minutes into your transcription, the elapsed audio time will read: 00:15:00. When you've finished the entire file, it will read: 00:35:00.

When transcribing video files, the on-camera time may actually show the hour that the video was taped, or may be slightly off from the audio elapsed time. So, a 35 minute video file may actually show an onscreen time of 04:15:00 when you're 15 minutes into the file. This is because the video shows the hour that the video was shot, which will not be apparent in the audio slider bar control. Make sense? If not, don't worry too much. I'm a visual learner. As soon as you see it in action, you'll get it.

Critical Thinking Skills

You'll often have moments when transcribing when you can't hear clearly what is being said or voices are talking all over each other. Some of this is to be expected and the standard "flags" for these portions of bad audio are either [inaudible] or [unintelligible]. I cannot stress this enough, so please read carefully: I would rather have a page full of [inaudible] than an inaccurate transcript. Seriously! We simply cannot guess at what we think a person *might* have said -- ever. It's not the transcriptionist's fault if the person can't be understood because the audio is terrible, the speaker has a very heavy accent, or three people are talking at once. My rule of thumb is three strikes and you're out. In other words, I will rewind and listen three times. If I still can't get it after the third try, I flag it, and move on.

Now, having said that, I feel I must stress once again the importance of due diligence and using your critical thinking skills. By that I simply mean, try to Google what you think you heard. You just might find out you were right! Critical thinking also means taking into consideration the content of what you're transcribing. If something doesn't make sense, you're probably not hearing it right. Making quick but confident decisions is key to getting tasks done quickly and accurately. If you run into a case where the audio is just altogether bad or you simply cannot understand most of what a person is saying, contact the client immediately and discuss with them how they would like you to proceed. I recently had a two and a half hour audio file (which is very long by the way) of absolutely terrible audio quality. It was a classroom setting and no one was properly microphoned. It appeared to me that the only microphone used was the one attached to the camcorder. So, I could hear the camera man perfectly -- too bad he wasn't the one they wanted captured. It was just awful. Long story short, they acknowledged that they knew the audio was bad and asked me to just try to capture as much as I could. It ended up being 87 pages of mostly [unintelligible], but they insisted that was okay with them. It gave me an awful headache and I hated life that day, but they paid me well for the job. So, when in doubt, always ask the client.

Income

The big question: How much money can I earn as a transcriptionist? That depends on the size of your practice, your geographic location, and the rates that you set. You can view my published rates at:

<http://www.zoomtranscription.com>

I prefer to charge by the audio hour/minute method because I find it's the most accurate way to give the client an exact price for the job. I publish my rates right on the first page of my website so there are never any questions about the cost. Of course, always be prepared to negotiate. I'm willing to accept less with a guarantee of future work or if the job is particularly easy.

The rule of thumb is that a good transcriptionist works on a 4:1 ratio. That means that one hour of audio will take you four hours to transcribe. The superstars report a 3:1 ratio. Personally, even though I type 85 wpm and have loads of experience, I can only reach the 3:1 ratio when the job isn't "strict verbatim," has great audio quality, and maybe we're only typing the responses and not the questions. My point here is not to undercut your rates. Assume that one hour of audio will **always** take you at least four hours to transcribe. If it takes you less time, great!

Other methods commonly used are the "per line" or "per page" rates. I don't like these because it's very hard to tell a client upfront what their cost is going to be. If you choose this method, I would start with 10 to 15 cents per line or \$2.00 to \$3.00 per page. You can calculate your line count using Microsoft Word. **HOWEVER**, don't ever use the line count total that the Microsoft tool calculates for you. For some reason, this calculation is inaccurate and you'll end up cheating yourself.

How to use Microsoft Word's line count utility:

After you've finished your document, click on "Tools" on the menu bar. Then, click on "Word Count." A window will pop-up showing your total words, number of lines without spaces, number of lines with spaces, and more. You want the number of lines with spaces, but we will not use the number that is already calculated for you. Transcription rates are based on the standard 65 character per line method. Take the **character with spaces** figure and divide that by 65. This is your correct and accurate line count. You would then multiply your line count by your rate to get the total price for the job.

There are programs out there, some of them free, that will also calculate this for you automatically with the same accuracy as the method described above. I don't see any reason to download another program, though, when we already have this feature built into MSWord and can use it with accuracy by employing some basic math skills.

Another method that is used is the hourly rate. What you do here is basically calculate the hours you will spend transcribing, using the 4:1 ratio, and charge your hourly rate. So, if the audio file is 60 minutes and you want to make \$15 per hour, you would charge the client \$60.00 (\$15 X 4 hours).

There is a whole section on starting your own transcription business. However, to get started, you might want to consider working as a subcontractor for a bigger transcription company. You will probably start at somewhere in the range of .75 cents per audio minute. That's my starting rate. In some areas of the country, that's a pretty decent rate of pay. In the larger cities, it's probably a little low. But, you have to start and gain experience somewhere.

A note about competition: This field is constantly being undercut by outsourcing to India, the Philippines, and Mexico. We simply cannot compete with people who are willing to work for \$3.00 an hour and even less. My reply to someone who expects me to work for those wages is "you get what you pay for." There is no way that someone who is not a native-English speaker will be able to transcribe with the same level of accuracy as a native English speaker. I hope that I haven't offended anyone. It's not personal. I have nothing against these people and I applaud their efforts in trying to make a living. However, they're killing us American transcriptionists. We simply cannot compete with those wages.

Grammar and Punctuation

This chapter may seem remedial, but it's necessary. Too often, I've been disappointed by the weird usage of punctuation that transcribers have submitted to me. The English language employs rules for proper grammar and punctuation. Since general transcriptionists work mostly on verbatim transcripts, we usually cannot change what was said to make it a grammatically correct sentence. Therefore, our use of punctuation is critical in providing a readable and coherent transcript. Let's get some clarity about the most common rules of punctuation, particularly, how they apply to transcription.

Punctuation Exercise

First, a test of your present knowledge -- print out and insert colons, semicolons, dashes, quotation marks, italics (use an underline), capitalization, periods, question marks, and commas wherever they are needed. The answers are on the following page. Don't cheat! No one's grading you, but an honest assessment will show you where you need to concentrate honing your skills.

1. Arriving on the 8 10 plane were Liz Brooks my old roommate her husband and Tim their son
2. The men in question Harold Keene Jim Peterson and Gerald Greene deserve awards
3. When the teacher commented that her spelling was poor, Lynn replied all the members of my family are poor spellers Why not me
4. Several countries participated in the airlift Italy Belgium France and Luxembourg
5. He used the phrase you know so often that I finally said no I don't know
6. Only one course was open to us surrender said the ex-major and we did
7. The automobile dealer handled three makes of cars Volkswagens Porsches and Mercedes Benz
8. Judge Carswell later to be nominated for the supreme court had ruled against civil rights
9. Whoever thought said Helen that Jack would be elected class president
10. In baseball a show boat is a man who shows off

Punctuation Exercise Answer Key

1. Arriving on the 8:10 plane were Liz Brooks, my old roommate; her husband; and Tim, their son.
2. The men in question (Harold Keene, Jim Peterson, and Gerald Greene) deserve awards.
3. When the teacher commented that her spelling was poor, Lynn replied, "All the members of my family are poor spellers. Why not me?"
4. Several countries participated in the airlift: Italy, Belgium, France, and Luxembourg.
5. He used the phrase "you know" so often that I finally said, "No, I don't know."
6. "Only one course was open to us: surrender," said the ex-major, "and we did."
7. The automobile dealer handled three makes of cars: Volkswagens, Porsches, and Mercedes Benz.
8. Judge Carswell, later to be nominated for the Supreme Court, had ruled against civil rights.
9. "Whoever thought," said Helen, "that Jack would be elected class president?"
10. In baseball, a "show boat" is a man who shows off.

How did you do? Just remember that the English language is a living language that is constantly evolving. There are also some conventions that are applied to transcription that are not necessarily in agreement with what you may have learned. And, there are clients who will insist that you do something a certain way, even when you know that it is wrong. Just go with it.

Punctuation Overview

Punctuation marks are signals to readers. When we speak, we pause, stop, or change our tone of voice. In writing, we use punctuation to emphasize and clarify our meaning.

Semicolon :

A semicolon is used to join related independent clauses in compound sentences. A semicolon may also be used to separate items in a series if the elements of the series already include commas.

Members of the club include Joe Jones, President; Mark Jacobs, Vice President; and Harold Lowe, Treasurer.

Colon :

A colon is used in the following situations:

- after a complete statement in order to introduce one or more directly related ideas, such as a series of directions, a list, or other comment illustrating or explaining the point. Please see above for an illustration.
- in a business letter greeting.
Dear Ms. Jones:
- between the hour and minutes in time notation.
5:30 pm
- between chapter and verse in biblical references.
Genesis 1:18

Hyphen -

First, a hyphen is used to bring two words together as a compound word that may be written separately. Please note that, in modern usage, the English language is giving up the use of hyphens more and more lately. Many words that were once hyphenated are now written as one word. Examples would be: email, not e-mail; hairstylist, not hair-stylist). Your spell checker will often show some of these compound words as two separate words with no hyphen. Confused? I know! Again, this is where consistency counts. Personally, I do not use the hyphen whenever I can disregard it. However, if you do use it, make sure you use it consistently throughout your transcript. Don't type it as hair-stylist one time and use hairstylist later in the document.

A hyphen is also used to join two or more words serving as a single adjective before a noun, as in "one-way street," "chocolate-covered cherries," etc.

The hyphen is also used with compound numbers -- sometimes!

The patient is a 63-year-old male. Correct usage.

I am not 63-years-old. Incorrect usage. It should read: *I am not 63 years old.*

Note: More on transcribing numerals will follow.

A hyphen is also used with prefixes:

Ex-husband

Mid-September

Pre-Civil War

Mid-1900's

Parentheses ()

Parentheses are used occasionally and sparingly in transcription. They are used to separate extra, nonessential material included in a sentence. Please note that some transcription clients will not want you to use parentheses at all. If you can use commas instead, use the commas.

Em Dash --

The em dash is used when a speaker has had an abrupt change of thought in his speech. Learn to use the em dash. You'll need it often when transcribing. People rarely speak in complete sentences and often change thoughts midstream. This is when you use the em dash.

As you can tell, there are many rules of -- hey, what are you doing?

The em dash is typed as "space hyphen hyphen space" or, in other words, two hyphens preceded and followed by a space. Please see the above example.

The em dash is also used when a speaker has been interrupted. Example:

Mary: I was just on my way to the store when --

Kathy: -- Did you see the bathing suits on sale?

Mary: -- No, I didn't.

Please note that the em dashes are placed at the point where the first speaker was interrupted, at the beginning of the rude interrupter's comment, and again when the first speaker picks up again.

Important Note #1: Whether employing verbatim or standard transcription conventions, if you have a group of people or even an interviewer who constantly mutters affirmative responses whenever someone speaks (*Yeah, Mm-hmm*), it is correct to leave them out. Don't break up someone's sentence for these utterances. They aren't moving the conversation forward and don't add anything. It's just someone who hasn't developed very good listening skills! On the other hand, if there's a break in the speech, or it is a direct response to a question, of course they must be included. Again, use your best judgment. We want accurate, but clean, transcripts. I've had interviewers who said, "Yeah" about every other word as a person was responding to a question. It would be really stupid, not to mention a big pain in the butt, to try and include every utterance of "Yeah." The context of the speaker's response would be broken up in too many places.

Important Note #2: The em dash is used incorrectly all the time. I honestly believe that most people are unfamiliar with the em dash. The correct usage of the em dash, as it applies to transcription, is what you've just learned. However, I do have a client who never uses the em dash and wants commas placed where the em dash would normally go (an abrupt change in speech). I know this is wrong, but I can't convince them. You might encounter some of these files in your practice dictations. If that happens during practice, and the answer key shows a comma where you placed an em dash, just know that you were right. However, we do what the client wants. I always give instructions to my transcribers prior to the start of any job, so they always know which conventions to employ.

Ellipsis...

An ellipsis is used when a speaker has trailed off into oblivion. He hasn't had an abrupt change of thought, he's just not finished whatever he was going to say.

It was a great benefit to me, so...

The speaker just didn't finish their statement. The ellipsis is indicated by three periods with no space before or between. You'll be using this notation often as well.

Quotation Marks " "

Quotation marks are used in the following situations:

- to enclose direct quotations. Please note that commas and periods always go *inside* the quotation mark.

She said, "I don't care what you think."

- to indicate words used in some unusual way. Don't overuse them in this way or they will lose their impact.

Italics

Italics are used:

- to indicate titles of books, magazines, newspapers, films, television programs, plays, etc.

Generally speaking, there are other uses of italics. However, in transcription, it's pretty much limited to the above usage only.

Commas

Some commas are strictly a judgment call. They're optional. When that is the case, just be consistent throughout the document. In many cases, your final transcript will be "cleaner" if you leave out commas that aren't essential. Break up long sentences into shorter sentences, whenever possible, rather than overusing commas.

When to use commas:

- Introductory clauses are dependent clauses that provide background information for the main part of the sentence.

If they want to win, athletes must exercise everyday.

Introductory clauses start with adverbs like *if, although, as, because, when*, etc.

- compound sentences are two independent sentences linked by a coordinating conjunction (and, nor, but, so, for, or, and yet). A comma in these cases is, technically, optional. However, it is very often used. This is one of the cases where consistency is key.

The wind blew fiercely, and the rain poured down.

- to separate items in a series, as in:

She wore a dress with yellow, green, and purple polka dots. Whew! That would be ugly!

There are other usages of the comma, colon, semicolon, etc. Here are two great links for any punctuation questions you encounter:

<http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/home.html>

<http://owl.english.purdue.edu>

Spelling

Words that Sound Alike

Accept/Except

Accept = a verb meaning to receive or to agree.

Except = a preposition meaning all but or other than.

Affect/Effect

Affect = a verb meaning to influence.

Effect = a noun meaning result or consequence.

This is a tough one. Here's a simple way to remember. **RAVEN**: **R**emember, **A**ffect is a **V**erb and **E**ffect is a **N**oun.

Advise/Advice

Advise = is a verb that means to recommend or suggest.

Advice = is a noun that means an opinion or recommendation about what could be done.

Conscious/Conscience

Conscious = an adjective meaning awake.

Conscience = is a noun meaning the sense of obligation to be good.

Idea/Ideal

Idea = a noun meaning a thought, belief, or conception held in the mind.

Ideal = a noun meaning something or someone that embodies perfection.

Ideal = an adjective meaning embodying an ultimate standard of excellence.

Its, It's

Its = a possessive adjective (the possessive form of the pronoun it).

It's = a contraction for it is (an apostrophe is used when two words are shortened into one).

Lead/Led

Lead = a noun referring to a dense metallic element

Led = past tense of the verb to lead

Than/Then

Than = used in comparison sentences; used in statements of preference; used to suggest quantities beyond a specified amount.

Then = a time other than now; next in time, space, or order; suggested a logical conclusion.

Their, There, They're

Their = possessive pronoun

There = a place

They're = contraction for "they are"

To, Too, Two

To = preposition, or the first part of the infinitive form of a verb.

Too = very, also; can also be an intensifier (one "o" too many)

Two = the number "2"

We're, Where, Were

We're = contraction for "we are"

Where = a location

Were = past tense of the verb "be"

Your, You're

Your = possessive pronoun

You're = contraction for "you are"

One Word or Two?

All ready/already

All ready = used as an adjective to express preparedness

Already = an adverb expressing time

All right/alright

All right = used as an adjective or adverb. This is the older and more formal spelling. Some scientific, journalistic, and business publications will insist on this spelling always and will never use "alright."

Alright = Alternate, modern spelling of "all right"

When in doubt, "all right" is always correct.

All together/altogether

All together = an adverb meaning considered as a whole, summed up

Altogether = intensifying adverb meaning completely, entirely

Anyone/any one

Anyone = pronoun meaning any person at all

Any one = a paired adjective and noun meaning a specific item in a group

Anyway/any way

Anyway = adverb meaning in any case or nonetheless

Any way = a paired adjective and noun meaning any particular course or direction

Awhile/a while

Awhile = adverb meaning for a short time

A while = a paired article and noun meaning a period of time; usually used with "for"

Maybe/may be

Maybe = adverb meaning perhaps

May be = form of the verb "be" (i.e., This may be it.)

Spelling out names or words:

Sometimes, the interviewer will ask the respondent to state and spell their name, or someone will clarify the spelling of a specific word for clarity. Here is the correct way to transcribe spelled out words or names:

Interviewer: Please state your name and spell it.

Janet Shaughnessy: My name is Janet Shaughnessy. That's J-A-N-E-T, S-H-A-U-G-H-N-E-S-S-Y.

Please note the comma in between the first and last name. However, if there was a break between the first and last name, it would be transcribed differently.

Interviewer: Please state your name and spell it.

Janet Shaughnessy: Hi! My name is Janet Shaughnessy. That's J-A-N-E-T and Shaughnessy is spelled S-H-A-U-G-H-N-E-S-S-Y.

Stuttering

Another problem, again only applying to verbatim transcripts, is stuttering. Bless the poor souls, but you'll want to pull your hair out if you encounter a stutterer. Now, we all stutter start from time to time. I think it's because our thoughts get ahead of our mouths! At any rate, here is the correct way to transcribe stuttering.

John Smith was a sev-, sev-, sev-, severe stutterer.

Please note the hyphen and comma between each instance of stuttering.

Different clients will prefer different flagging conventions based on their needs. It's imperative that you clarify with your client what conventions will be used. In almost all cases, though, when confronted with a word or name that can't be verified, you would spell it phonetically and place it in brackets **only the first time** that it is used. Then, just use the same spelling throughout the rest of the document. Some clients do not want the word bracketed, but will want you to use the [sp] notation right after the word in question. Again, continue to use the same spelling throughout the rest of the document. There are no hard and fast rules here, but the above notes are commonly used and accepted.

Formatting a Transcript

Oh, where to begin? There are as many different formats as there are clients. I prefer to use the hanging indent style shown in an earlier chapter. However, I also have clients that prefer a cell format or a slightly different version of the hanging indent. Again, this is something that needs to be discussed with the client. Whatever the format, you will need to identify the speaker, place a colon after the speaker's name, tab once, and start transcribing the spoken word. It's simple really.

You also want to break long passages up into smaller paragraphs. My rule of thumb is approximately eight sentences to a paragraph. Obviously, this doesn't always work out exactly. You don't want to start a new paragraph until there is a natural break of sorts in the current dialogue. However, some people can be extremely longwinded, so it may be necessary to break their speech up into smaller passages by using some common sense. No one wants a transcript that is just one long paragraph!

Speaker Identification

Although we must try to identify speakers by name when possible, this isn't always possible. We're not mind readers or psychics -- or, if you are, you can probably make more money doing readings! Here are some common speaker identifications:

Male Voice:

Female Voice:

Male:

Female:

Woman:

Interviewer:

Respondent:

Facilitator (for focus groups):

John:

John Smith:

John Smith, M.D.:

Note on transcribing focus groups: At the beginning of the session, the facilitator will usually go around the room and have the participants introduce themselves. Listen carefully to their voices and try to note any distinctions that will make it easier to identify them later on. Does Lorenzo speak with an Italian accent? Does Mary have a little baby voice? Sometimes, the facilitator will help you with identification by calling on the people by name. However, many times, people will just start talking and you'll have no idea who it is. They also speak over each other making it even more difficult to distinguish who is saying what.

Have I told you that I hate to transcribe focus groups? They're a real headache at times. However, they can be a very good money maker for us, so we take the good with the bad. Some clients won't even expect you to try and ID the speakers. Male Voice and Female Voice is good enough for them. I believe that is because it is the opinions that are important and not necessarily who said them. Focus groups are held for a number of reasons, but most commonly for market research. There are also focus groups held on health issues, financial issues, social issues, and any other number of subjects. Do not, unless specifically asked to do so, identify the speakers as "Male Voice 1," "Male Voice 2", etc. No doubt, you'll never be able to keep it all straight anyway, so don't even try. The focus group leader is always identified as "Facilitator."

Naming Your Files

Again, an item to be discussed with the client, but the general rule of thumb is to name the file exactly the same as the audio file.

Time Coding

00:00:00 representing Hours:Minutes:Seconds

These three sets of numbers are always used. If there are no hours, keep the preceding zeros in the time code. For instance, a time code is placed at 30 seconds into the transcript. It would be noted as:

00:00:30

Easy, huh?

And, as mentioned earlier, use the time code displayed in the video itself, not the time shown as elapsed in your player. Time codes should only be placed at the beginning of a sentence. Never break up a sentence to insert a time code just because you've been instructed to time code every 30 seconds. Place the time code as close to the 30-second interval as possible.

Off Camera Dialogue

In a video or talking head interview, there is usually some discussion of camera angles, noises in the room, etc. Do not transcribe the off-topic conversation. There are two commonly used notations.

[Director's comments]
[B-roll]

[Director's comments] is used to notate the off-topic conversation.

[B-roll] is used to designate silent footage of scenery, landscapes, crowds, etc.

Transcribing Numbers

Generally, spell out numbers less than ten. 11 through infinity are transcribed using numerical representation. However, there are exceptions to this rule. Here are some of the exceptions:

Addresses (3 Oak Street)

Money (\$5; if the amount is in the millions or billions, transcribe it as \$5 million)

Dates (type as they appear in the calendar -- June 6, 2009) Please note: if the speaker simply says, "The report will be ready on June 6th," type it exactly that way. We can't assume that he/she means June 6th of this year or ten years from now, can we?

Measurements

This can get tricky; particularly, if you're transcribing medical or scientific data. However, for general transcription purposes, I would transcribe a 6-by-9 piece of plywood using the numerical representation rather than spelling it out.

Highways (U.S. Route 9)

Percentages

Unless otherwise instructed, always use the % sign rather than spelling out the word "percent." (8% -- not eight %, not eight percent, and not 8 percent).

Time

8:00 a.m.

However, how you transcribe it will depend on what was said. For example, the speaker says, "I will meet you at three o'clock." It should be transcribed exactly like that. We have no way of knowing whether they mean three in the morning or three in the afternoon. If the speaker said, "The next session will start at 3:00 p.m.," it should be transcribed using the numerical method, including the "p.m." if that was what was said. If the speaker says, "I'll meet you at 3:00," transcribe it that way. The speaker did not say "o'clock" or "p.m." in the last example.

Another important note about numerical representation:

When using a numerical representation, add an *s with an apostrophe* to indicate plurality, such as, *In my 20's, I began to question my career choices.*

Also, when years are shortened, the first two digits can be replaced with an apostrophe, as in, *"The '60's were a time of great social upheaval."*

A Few Miscellaneous Conventions

It is always Internet (capitalized)

Website is one word.

When referring to a website by name, transcribe it exactly as you would type it in your browser window (i.e., www.zoomtranscription.com -- not www dot zoom transcription dot com).

Practice Dictations

Now, it's time to practice. I realize that the preceding chapters may have seemed elementary to some of you. I've learned the very, very hard way that, without a grasp of the basics of written communication, you will never succeed at general transcription. Sorry to be so blunt. Believe me, your time wasn't wasted. Even if you are an English teacher, I would bet my last dime that you sometimes make typos. If nothing else, reading the preceding chapters will remind you of what to look for when proofreading your work.

You can purchase the audio and video practice dictation files by clicking here:

<http://zoomtranscriptiontraining.webs.com>

The cost is \$34.95 and the files are available on three CDs or one DVD. The only difference between the two options is that DVDs can hold more data, so the entire set can fit onto one DVD instead of three CDs. As long as you have a DVD player on your computer, the DVD is a better option. Please be sure to specify CDs or DVD when ordering.

If you encounter any technical difficulties, please contact me at once:

janet@zoomtranscription.com

or

845-337-7647

The files are broken down by category; interviews, focus groups, conferences, video with time coding, etc. Practice, practice, practice, and compare your transcripts with the answer keys. Some files are more difficult than others. That's just the nature of the business. We all love the easy jobs, but the reality is that sometimes the audio just plain sucks or the speakers have such heavy accents that we can barely understand them. Do your best and keep going.

Important Tip #1:

I find that it saves a lot of time to just jot down unfamiliar terms while transcribing and keep on going. When you've finished your first draft of the transcript, you can Google for all of the unfamiliar terms at once. This saves you the time of going back and forth between your transcript and researching words. Remember, this is a production business. Every minute counts. When you've found the correct spelling or name, you can go back in and do a global search and replace, replacing all of the incorrect spellings with the correct spellings.

The next step is, of course, to proof your transcript to the audio file. Finally, run a spell check on the document.

Important Tip #2

This is just from my personal experience and it might sound funny. However, trust me. It works. When you're doing your re-listen/proof of the transcript, turn the speed up slightly. How far to turn it up depends on the speaker, but you'll find the right tempo. I would start at about 120%. For some reason, when you're re-listening at the faster speed, you'll hear words more clearly than you did the first time through. I can't really explain why this is. It probably has to do with the flow of the context of the speech. When we're slowed down by trying to keep up with the speaker the first time through, we may miss words or mishear words. When you're just reading and listening, without typing, it becomes more cohesive. And, don't forget, speeding it up also reduces the time it takes to re-listen; hence, time saved for you. That's my own personal cheat if you will. It works.

So, start practicing now. Refer to these notes when necessary. If you put forth the necessary effort, there is no reason why your services won't be in great demand. Feel free to contact me with any questions. I'd love to hear from you!

Notes about the dictation files:

Note #1: These are real-world audio and video files that were compiled from my archive of completed jobs. Every effort has been made, where the information contained in the file may be deemed confidential and/or sensitive, to conceal the identity of the speakers. In some cases, names are clearly stated and this is allowed only because enough time has elapsed that this information is already in the public domain. I fully respect my clients' confidentiality and would not publish it for use outside of these stated guidelines. By downloading these files, you are agreeing that these files are the sole property of Janet Shaughnessy/Zoom Transcription Services and you will not share them in any way. Besides the potential sensitive nature of the audio/video files, these transcripts, along with this eBook, represent many, many hours of my hard work. I've seen online general transcription classes offered for \$1500 or more and they claim to take a year. If you pay thousands of dollars and take a year to learn this stuff -- well, I won't say it. Let's just say you're being ripped off.

Note #2: As stated above, these are real-world audio/video files and transcripts. I've seen courses where all of the files were dictated by the author. This is not a good way to learn how to transcribe. You will need to contend with accents, bad audio, background noise, and many other issues. Using real recordings is the only way to become proficient as a general transcriptionist. Since my files were compiled from a variety of clients, several different formats/conventions have been applied. When checking against the answer keys to see how well you did, you should only concern yourself with checking your work for accuracy in content, spelling, and punctuation. Don't be concerned if you used a different style (i.e., hanging indent versus no hanging indent) as this will differ based on the needs of the client. Some of these files are verbatim (all uhs, ums, and stutters included) and some are standard (edited slightly for clarity). You might want to try transcribing some of them both ways for extra practice. You can always take a sneak peak at the answer key, if you'd like, just to see what style applies to the file you are about to transcribe. Just don't cheat!

Note #3: Don't bite off more than you can chew! You can return and work on more practice files whenever you're ready. Work at your own pace and don't try to do it all in a day!

Note #4: Time yourself. Just note your start and end time. Compare this to the audio file length to get an idea of how long it's taking you to complete the transcription. You'll get quicker as you practice.

I'm done with the course. Now, who's going to hire me?

Anyone with some audio that needs to be transcribed!

You might choose to specialize in a particular type of work, but it's much more lucrative to keep yourself open to a variety of clients as word spreads about your services. Variety also keeps boredom from setting in. And, yes, expect to be bored sometimes. Some of this stuff can be very dull. But, you're home. You're in your comfy clothes. You're not spending money on commuting, lunches, childcare, and all of that stuff. So, keep the faith and keep on transcribing.

Ooh, I just have to digress here. Have I shown you the transcriptionists' theme song? This was the result of collaboration with another transcriptionist, whom I've never met in person by the way, on a day when we were just emailing back and forth and bitching about the particular jobs we were working on. Here it is:

Every Breath You Take Redux by Karen and Janet:

Every "um" you say,
every false start you make,
Every time you burp,
Say "uh, ooh, or erp"
I'll be transcribing you....

Every single sound,
'Til my toes wear down.
'Cause my rewind key
Gets used constantly,
I'll be transcribing you...

Bridge:
Oh can't you see,
I'll type every sneeze.
How my poor hands ache,
With each "you know" you make.
You stuff your mouth with food,
Your chewing's very rude.
Whenever will you learn,
to speak only when it's your turn.

I keep crying...paychecks, paychecks,
PLLLLLLAAAASSSEEE!

Every "um" you say,
Every false start you make,
I'll be transcribing you.

Well, whatever you think, we cracked ourselves up! ☺

You'll find yourself hitting the transcription boards, not only to find work, but to communicate and, yes, sometimes commiserate with other transcriptionists. No one said this was glamorous. Personally, though, I wouldn't trade my freedom from the corporate world for anything. I like being independent. I love the flexibility. I hate the 9-5 world.

Okay, back to work. Who will hire you?

Larger Transcription Companies

It is very likely that you will get your first job(s) by working for a larger transcription company. Some of you may even choose to continue to work that way without forming your own company. That's wonderful. You still receive all of the advantages of working for yourself without the added burdens and expense of marketing, incorporation, etc. Here's a list of companies who hire transcriptionists. I would suggest applying to as many as you can. Be prepared to take a test. If you've completed the course, you'll do very well and be hired.

<http://www.transcriptionstudio.com/transcribers.htm>

<http://www.verbalink.com/transcription-jobs/>

<http://www.htsteno.com/employment.html>

<http://www.avtronics.com/careers.html>

<http://www.ctran.com/employment.html>

<http://www.cyberdictate.com/company/employment/>

<http://www.escriptionist.com/employment.htm>

http://www.e-typist.com/Employment_work_at_home_transcription.html

<http://www.execuscribe.com/Team.htm>

<http://www.masstranscription.com/employment.php>

<http://www.emediamillworks.com/careers.htm>

<http://www.mountainwestprocessing.com/page5.html>

<http://www.mulberrystudio.com/jobs.htm>

<http://www.nettranscripts.com/index.asp>

<http://www.ontherecordreporting.com/transcribe.html>

<http://www.productiontranscripts.com/jobs.php>

<http://www.professionalsupportservice.com/Employment%20Opportunities.htm>

<http://www.rapidtext.com/employment.html>

<http://www.speak-write.com/employment/>

<http://www.talk2type.net./transcriber.html>

<http://www.tereden.com/Employment.html>

<http://www.tigerfish.com/employment.html>

<http://www.transcription-services.org/support.html>

<http://www.typewp.com/9786.html>

<http://www.usetask.com/description.html>

<http://www.voba.co.uk/careers.htm>

<http://www.waywithwords.us/>

<http://www.edecree.com/contactUsUI.aspx>

<http://www.malloytranscription.com/Contact.html>

<https://www.avtranscription.com/contact.php>

That's just some to get you started. I can't guarantee which ones are hiring at any particular time. Do a Google search and find more if you want to.

Teleseminars

Teleseminars are held over a special phone line that allows multiple users (sometimes hundreds or thousands!) to be on a special phone line at once. Transcribing teleseminars can be a challenge. The quality of the audio is sometimes poor, making it difficult to discern words. And, of course, there's usually a lot of back and forth discussion with voices stomping all over each other. There may be background noise as well. Just stay focused and don't stress over getting every little utterance. It's impossible.

Podcasts

Most podcasts involve two or three voices at one time. It's unlikely that you'll have background noise issues. It is becoming more popular to provide printable transcripts for podcasts. The show hosts enjoy having the text content available on the website as it helps them build up their search engine ranking.

Videocasts

These will require use of a video transcription system like Start/Stop or InqScribe. It is possible to play the video in ExpressScribe and proof it by replaying the file in it's video version with Windows Media Player. I don't recommend this workaround method. It's time consuming and can be quite frustrating. If you're serious about providing video transcription services, I highly recommend Start/Stop. You can also command a higher rate for providing screen shots and time codes with this software.

Tutorials

Tutorials are often provided as an audio, video, or screen capture video. The client will want you to transcribe the audio portion of the training session into text to be added to their website for future training sessions, or several other purposes. These are often rather easy to transcribe as there is only one speaker throughout the presentation. However, I have had instances where the audio quality wasn't great and/or the speaker had a very heavy foreign accent.

Web Conferences

This is much like a teleseminar. Sometimes, there are sound quality and volume issues as users have different kinds of microphones and connects that impact the quality of the audio. Many times, the audio quality is excellent.

Interviews

Usually, these are one-on-one interviews and may be videotaped or audio only. A lot of authors, researchers, documentary filmmakers, and others hire transcriptionists to create clear, verbatim transcripts to save the writer/filmmaker time in editing.

Where do I connect with these clients?

This is actually a large topic concerning all areas of marketing. Some transcriptionists have had success with freelance sites like:

www.elance.com

www.guru.com

www.shelancers.com

By all means, I wouldn't discourage anyone from approaching any avenue of promoting their services. My personal experience with elance.com, though, was not favorable and my opinion was shared by many on the discussion forums. There are plenty of transcription jobs available on elance, but they are all being snatched up by providers who are willing to work for peanuts. Most of them are outside of the U.S. As Americans, we simply cannot afford to work for the amount of money that is being paid. I know I've said this before, so please forgive me if I'm beating a dead horse. It's a real bone of contention with me.

So, those are some options to get you started. But, when you're ready to really start building up your business, it's time to start promoting your services.

Target Market

Some people will decide to focus on a specific market for their business based on what they like. Some choices would be:

Health Coaches
Marketing Professionals
Speakers
Authors
Podcasters
Realtors
Small Business Experts
Documentary Filmmakers
Trainers
Finance Professionals

Remember, just because you enjoy a particular market, it may not be a target market that is growing. If your target market isn't part of a dynamic and growing industry, you probably won't have a very sustainable business. You'll have to do some research to determine if your particular segment of the market is worth targeting for your business.

Research

Doing your research will help identify market trends, best practices, and client preferences. Look at what other transcription companies are doing. Review their websites, check out their price structure, and don't be afraid to "swipe" what's good. I am **not** suggesting that you steal copyrighted material or anything illegal, but you can certainly take a good idea and use it to your best advantage. Doing research will help you find who are the heavy users of transcription services and help you focus your efforts. I, personally, enjoy working with authors and filmmakers. Those are the folks I target. That doesn't mean I don't accept other assignments, but those are the people whose work I most enjoy. And, if you're enjoying it, it really isn't work, is it?

Know Your Competition

This sort of goes with spying on your competitors as mentioned above. It is critical to the success of your business, as well as to the success of the industry in general, to know what your competitors are doing.

Use this information not to copy exactly what the competition is doing, but use it so you can determine how to make your business better and more competitive.

When first starting out, you may need to price yourself a little lower than the competition. That's okay. A lower price will help you generate the business needed to encourage word-of-mouth buzz about your skills. Word-of-mouth referrals are the best advertising available. It's free and the client is already sold before they even talk to you! Do a great job and people will be calling and emailing you with more work offers than you can handle. Be careful, however, not to set prices so low that it devalues your professional services.

Written Plan

A written business plan is a great way to get focused as you begin your journey into self-employment. Absolutely anyone with any business acumen will tell you that a written business plan is a must before even thinking of starting your own business. I've developed a business plan template that shouldn't take more than an hour or two to complete. All you need to do is fill in the blanks. Please try to use it. ☺

By following your plan from the onset, you'll have a much better chance of turning a profit more quickly. One thing I was very careful about was keeping records. I have recorded every penny spent and made on my business and have receipts for everything. You definitely don't want to miss out on any tax deductions that you might be entitled to because you didn't keep receipts. The home office deduction alone is a fantastic benefit! Everything related to your business is deductible including software and equipment purchases, ink, business cards, website hosting, expenses, phones, paper, postage, etc. Get a good accountant!

Business Plan

Because I'm lazy, I've developed a quickie business plan. The first section is just a series of questions to help you start the planning process.

Why am I in business?

What are the core services of my business?

Which markets will I serve sufficiently well in order to gain repeat business?

What growth areas can I identify within my business?

What trends are developing in the market place that I can capitalize on?

What are my competitors doing?

What are your top five business strengths?

What are your top five business weaknesses?

Now that you have some clear ideas of what your business will or will not be, it's time to write your plan. Here's the outline:

Be sure to write out a cover sheet to place before the business plan. Include the name, address, and telephone number of your business, as well as the name of all principals. Describe the unique aspects of your business and how or why they will appeal to customers. Emphasize any special features that you feel will appeal to customers. Identify goals and objectives. Clarify why you want to be in business.

1) Business Plan

This section is divided into three primary sections: business description, product or service description, and marketing.

1.1 Business Description

Briefly explain your business structure: sole proprietor, partnership, or corporation. Outline the licenses or permits you will need.

Business type (i.e., Service)

Describe your services.

Explain why your business will be profitable. What are the growth opportunities?

When will your business be open? If you're working for yourself from home, this is, in a sense, irrelevant. However, some municipalities have regulations about home-based businesses. **Be sure to check with an accountant and/or attorney about the requirements before setting up your business.** For me, personally, I get all of my work via the web. No clients ever visit my home office. My town doesn't care that I work from home and no special permits or licenses were required. **But**, this is not the case everywhere.

What have you learned about your business from outside sources?
(I hope you learned something from this course!)

2. Product/Service

Describe the benefits of your service from the customer's perspective. Successful business owners know what their customers expect of them.

Describe:

- The services you are providing
- How your services will benefit the customer
- Which services are in demand
- What is different about the services that your business is offering?

3. The Marketing Plan

The key element of a successful marketing plan is knowing your customers. What are their likes, dislikes, and expectations? By identifying these factors, you can develop a marketing strategy that will allow you to fulfill their needs.

At first, target only those customers who are most likely to purchase your services. As your customer base expands, you may need to modify your marketing plan to include other customers.

Answer these questions to develop your marketing plan:

- Who are your customers? Define your target market(s).
- Are your markets growing? Steady? Declining?
- Are your markets large enough to expand?
- How will you increase your market share?
- What pricing strategy have you devised?

3.1 Competition

It is important to know your competitors. Answer the following questions:

- Who are your top five competitors?
- How are their businesses? Steady? Increasing? Decreasing?
- What have you learned from their operations and their advertising?
- What are their strengths and weaknesses?
- How does their service differ from yours?

Remember, spy on the competition relentlessly. It's crucial to your success!

3.2 Pricing and Sales

Get a feel for what your competitors are charging and determine your value statement to explain and justify your own prices. With a home-based business transcription business, luckily, the overhead is low. We don't need to continually buy inventory or rent office space. All you really need to do is scout out the current rates of your competitors and monitor constantly to ensure profits.

3.3 Advertising

There's no getting around it. How you advertise your services may make or break your business. You may have the best service in the world, but if no one knows about, you really don't have a business, do you? Advertising and promotion is the lifeline of your business. The more care and attention you devote to marketing, the more successful you will be.

Promoting your transcription services will involve positioning yourself where clients will find you. First, set up a website.

If you've never created a website, there are several website builders that require no html knowledge. I use www.godaddy.com, but there are others that are just as easy to use. You can get a basic five-page website hosted at godaddy for \$4.99/month. They offer a wide array of design templates and colors. Everything is made as user-friendly as possible, and their customer service is great as well. I've had questions and they responded quickly, were friendly, helpful, and never made me feel stupid -- and, most importantly, their help was free! They do charge for advanced design services, but I have yet to need them. My method of website design was to draw out my website on paper and then build it online. Take the time to think about what you need to include -- services, rates, turnaround time, etc.

Hot Tip: Although you will see sites that ask the client to contact them for a quote, I strongly advise against this approach. Put yourself in the client's shoes. Are you really going to go to the trouble of emailing the company for a quote, or are you going to contact the company who makes it easy for you to do business with them by posting their rates right up front? My rates are on the first page of my website. There's no guessing involved. There's a simple form for the client to complete with the details of their job.

You will need to purchase a domain name. I believe there are thousands of articles that have been written about choosing a domain name. Keep it simple is my best advice! You can also purchase a domain name at www.godaddy.com. There are many other domain name registries, but use the one that's associated with whatever website builder you're using. It'll be easier than purchasing the name somewhere else and then redirecting it to the generic website URL you were given with the site builder. That really isn't a complicated process either, but why bother if you don't have?

If you really want to go all out and have tons of bells and whistles, you can hire a webmaster to build a site for you. I'm too cheap and don't feel the need. My site may not win any design awards, but it has all the elements needed to inform and attract clients.

Blogging is another method of promoting your services. I'm not going to suggest any specific one. They're all relatively easy to use. You might already know more about blogging than I do. With the demands of my transcription business, I find it very hard to keep up with all of the social networking stuff. Everyone will tell you how important it is, and I can't deny that it's probably true. I simply don't have the time to update my Facebook, MySpace, LinkedIn page, various blogs, and Twitter all the time. Where do these people get the time to do all this stuff? I have a presence on all of the social networking sites, but I'd be lying if I said I updated regularly. Again, do as I suggest, not as I do.

Search Engine Optimization, PPC, AdSense, and All the Rest

I'm not going to go into great detail on this subject. I'm not an expert. There's an avalanche of material available on Internet marketing written by people who are interested in this stuff and understand it better than me. My purpose with this course is to make you an exceptional transcriptionist, not an exceptional Internet marketer. I'll tell you what I have learned.

Search engine optimization is hard! From what I understand, the rules are changing all the time and getting indexed is difficult. In order to increase your ranking, you will need to be sure to include keywords related to your service on your site -- well, duh! Of course, I have keywords related to my service on my site -- words like "transcription service," "affordable transcription service," etc. Another way to increase your ranking is to have as many links as possible back to your site. This is where all that social networking and blogging can pay off. Spread yourself around like a virus. If you can exchange links with a related service, wonderful! The other method of gaining a higher ranking involves paying for placement -- forget it. You'll go broke.

Advertise for free wherever you can. But, be careful. A lot of those free ad sites are going to bombard you with ads from everyone else who joined the club.

Do not purchase visitors to your site. I sincerely believe it's all a big scam. You won't gain one single client and your wallet will be significantly lighter.

Advertising offline is effective. Join the Chamber of Commerce. Volunteer for community activities. It's called networking. Keep in mind, though, no one wants to be "networked." Do you? Think about it. Do not attend an event and immediately start pitching to everyone you see. Networking is about building relationships (that applies to the online world as well). Just talk to people or, more importantly, listen to them. Simply asking someone what they do, will almost always prompt them to ask you what you do. Tell them and let it go. Be friendly. Be positive. Have fun! You'll make friends and people will remember you. Maybe they won't need your services at that particular moment; but, you can bet that if they do later on, the first person they'll think of is you.

Internet forums are also a good source for networking. The best way to do this is to comment on someone else's article. Follow the rules of the forum and include a descriptive link in your signature line. If you participate in conversations and make thoughtful contributions, you'll get noticed by your target market.

Referrals will be your greatest source of gaining clients. Don't forget to send a thank-you to the referrer with a little something special for them.

I've found that direct mail is also very effective. Design a brochure or have it done for you. Actually, a simple, well-written letter with your business card is quite effective. Postage is becoming increasingly expensive though, so target your audience wisely.

You must have business cards. Drop them everywhere. You really never know who might need your services. The absolute best deal for business cards can be found at:

www.vistaprint.com

Lastly, the *Yellow Pages* can be quite costly, but boy are they effective! I'm surprised all the time by the amount of calls I get from my *Yellow Page* listing. Personally, I rarely use the good old phone book anymore, but apparently many people still do.

Organization and Management

Excellent customer service is THE key to developing and maintaining your business. Never, ever, ever miss a deadline. Be available during business hours. Many of us have a tendency to work strange hours (read that as too many late nights). However, there is no need to allow clients to call you at all hours of the day and night. What is important is that you keep them apprised of the status of their work and to meet and exceed their expectations.

Some tips:

- Use a business email address. It's an important part of your professional image.
- Create folders within your email program for each of your clients.
- Create folders on your computer for each client as well.
- Back up your computer regularly. In my case, I purchased an external hard drive for about \$90. It backs up every time I make a change to a document.
- Make sure your anti-virus, spyware, and registry cleaner is working. Get rid of the clutter and defrag often. Your computer is your lifeline in this business. Keep it working at optimal performance levels.
- Be considerate of your clients. Throw them a special (10% or 20% off) every once in awhile to thank them for being loyal to you.
- Put a percentage of your income each month back into advertising and equipment upgrades.
- If you get a big contract or are beginning to acquire more clients than you can handle, hire help. It's common practice in the transcription world to hire subcontractors. They are not employees in the sense that they do not work a set number of hours and are not subject to payroll taxes. You will have to send them a 1099 form at the end of the year. Consult your accountant if you have questions. However, **don't outsource work to a transcriptionist whose work you have not seen!** Have I made that clear enough? If you're outsourcing work because you haven't got the time to complete all the work you have, paying for poor work will only mean that you'll be doing the work yourself anyway and giving away your profits at the same time! Don't do it. You can easily develop a test for new transcriptionists from the materials in this course. Use it. Don't rely on resumes.
- Pad delivery time. Always leave yourself a little leeway. I'd rather under promise and over deliver than vice versa. Life happens. You may think you're going to get that job done in four hours, but then your baby is teething and wants to be held all day, the dog runs away, and your mother-in-law shows up unannounced -- with a friend! Life happens. Always leave yourself enough time to get the job done and done right, which includes adequately proofing your work.

Expanding Your Business

Okay, so now that your transcription business is profitable, you'll want to think about expansion.

Expand Your Services

- Are there additional services that clients ask for that you can personally provide? Are you fluent in a foreign language? Perhaps, you can provide translations and offer the completed document in both English and another language. Where there is a problem, there will always be an opportunity. Where are your clients' problems?
- Become a larger supplier. Take on subcontractors and absorb a larger portion of the available business in your market. You can, in essence, work more than 24 hours a day if you focus on the marketing side of the business and work more as a project manager. You can easily charge more per project and keep the difference between what you charge your client and what you pay your transcriptionists.
- Are there additional services that you could offer? Examine the services being offered by top competitors in your market. There may be opportunities to form joint ventures with other complementary service providers in order to offer a broader array of services. If your clients also require graphic design services, consider partnering with a graphic designer whose work you admire and discuss the potential for a partnership.

That's it! Have fun and remember this phrase from the *Transcriptionists' Theme Song*:

Every um you say, every false start you make, I'll be transcribing you...



What are you waiting for? Start practicing!

<http://zoomtranscriptiontraining.webs.com>