Style Guide

For Clean Verbatim Transcription

Introduction

The following Style Guide outlines formatting guidelines for Clean Verbatim transcription style, tag usage, grammar, and punctuation. These rules have been implemented to meet the particular demands for transcription at TranscribeMe, and Transcribers and QAs are expected to adhere to these standards in their submitted work.

General Expectations

You will be held to the following expectations in your work at TranscribeMe:

- **Style guidelines** on the right of the WorkHub screen must be strictly followed. This includes adhering to the correct style, Clean Verbatim or otherwise, and the proper spelling (i.e., American or [Commonwealth English](#)). **Check the style guidelines for *every* file.**
- **Accuracy:** You must strive to capture all speech relevant to the file. For words you cannot understand, use the appropriate tag(s) as detailed in the [Speech Tags](#) section.
- **Research** every name, company, and term mentioned in the audio to determine the proper spelling and formatting. If you find multiple accepted spellings, choose one and be consistent.
- **Spelling and grammar:** You should demonstrate a strong grasp of English grammar, spelling, and punctuation. Carefully proofread and spell-check each file before submitting it.
- **Be consistent** in each file. This includes consistency in spelling and punctuation style.
- **Communication:** When you encounter something unusual, such as an entirely silent or foreign file, **please send a Help Desk ticket.**

Difficult Audio

Some files may be difficult to transcribe due to poor audio or the speakers' speech patterns (thick accents, speaking fast, etc.). We don't expect perfection in such cases, but please give your best effort even when transcribing poor-quality audio. Here are some tips for handling tricky audio:

1. **Replay problem sections,** adjusting the audio speed down *and* up. Using a built-in audio enhancing program or extension may help reduce background noise or clarify fuzzy audio.
2. **Context is key.** Relistening to the entire file is crucial to deciphering words you struggled with the first time. Perhaps the word or phrase was said more clearly later in the file, you become accustomed to the speakers' voices, or you deduce what was said based on context.
3. **Read for clarity.** If what you have transcribed makes little or no sense, you have likely misheard something. For example, if you type, "*Funs* of people will be there," listen again and decide what fits: "*Tons* of people will be there." Don't transcribe words that don't make sense in context.
4. **Use tags when necessary.** If you cannot decipher the words after trying the above steps, then use the appropriate tag(s) as described in the [Speech Tags](#) section.

Spelling and Formatting

Spacing

One Space Between Sentences

At TM, we leave **one** space between sentences, not two. Only press the spacebar **once** after each sentence. You can use the [Find function](#) to search for extra spaces.

Change of Speaker, New Line

To indicate a change of speaker, simply create a new line in the transcript by pressing Enter/Return **once**. Pressing Enter twice is also fine but unnecessary. It will look like this (speaker identification is *not* added at the transcription phase):

> Hi, I'm Don.
> Hi, I'm Jill.
> And my name is Dave. Welcome to our podcast.

Paragraphing

In addition to creating a new line for each change of speaker, we also split long single-speaker monologues into paragraphs at obvious changes of topic. As with a change of speaker, hit Enter **once** to create a new line. Although paragraph sizes will vary, a paragraph shorter than 40 seconds is likely too short, while monologues over 2 minutes may need to be broken up at a logical topic change.

Spelling

Regardless of the speakers' accents in the audio, we transcribe using **American spelling and punctuation** unless otherwise specified (see *Commonwealth Spelling* below). For grammar and spelling issues not addressed in this Style Guide, TM defers to the **Chicago Manual of Style** (CMOS) and **Merriam-Webster** dictionary (M-W). Note that purchasing a subscription for CMOS or M-W is *not* required.

TM-Specific Spellings

Please adhere to these spellings in your work at TM:

Yes → **okay** / **all right** / **a lot** / **etc.** / **US** and **USA** / **email** / **internet** / **healthcare**
No → OK or 'kay / alright / alot / et cetera / U.S. or U.S.A / e-mail / Internet / health care

Commonwealth Spelling

We also receive special accent files that require Commonwealth English spellings. These files will show the accent's associated country code in the style guidelines: **GB** (British), **AU** (Aussie), **NZ** (Kiwi), **SCT** (Scottish), or **IE** (Irish). To gain access to such files, you must pass the corresponding Accent Exam on your Exams tab.

Spelling Words Out

Individual letters are capitalized. If a speaker spells out a word, we transcribe the letters spoken, with each capital letter separated by hyphens. **Don't** hyphenate acronyms, codes, or serial numbers unless the

conventional format for the acronym or number includes a hyphen (see [Research](#) and [Conventional Formatting](#) for more examples).

> The next letter after J is, obviously, K.
> I expect you to treat each other with respect, R-E-S-P-E-C-T.

Email Addresses

Format email addresses as per standard convention. If a speaker says, "My email is Frank at Yahoo dot com," then transcribe: My email is **frank@yahoo.com**. If the speaker spells out, "My email is F-R-A-N-K at Y-A-H-O-O dot com," then transcribe: My email is **frank@yahoo.com**.

However, if the speaker both says *and* spells out the address for clarification, e.g., "My email is Frank, F-R-A-N-K, at Yahoo, Y-A-H-O-O, dot com, C-O-M," then transcribe: My email is **Frank, F-R-A-N-K, at Yahoo, Y-A-H-O-O, dot com, C-O-M**. Another example: My email is **Frank, F-R, A as in apple, N as in Neptune, K, at yahoo.com**.

Research

It is your responsibility to research any names and terms mentioned in your file to ensure you format them properly. Format company names as in the main text of their website (not the stylized logo), or refer to the copyright at the bottom of their web page. See [Conventional Formatting](#) for more examples.

adidas / iPhone / MEDITECH / Toys"R"Us / 7-Eleven / NBA / Johnson & Johnson

Exception for Medications

For brand-name medications stylized in all caps, we capitalize the first letter only. Generic drug names are lowercase. We recommend referencing drugs.com to distinguish brand names from generic.

Tylenol / Tums / Zyrtec / acetaminophen / ibuprofen / cetirizine

Clean Verbatim

The default transcription style at TranscribeMe is Clean Verbatim (CV), an approach to transcribing that ensures the transcript is clear, succinct, easy to read, and accurately conveys the audio's speech. For our Clean Verbatim product, we want to clean up the speech to make it easier to read, but we don't *edit* what was said. The most common features of speech altered in CV are stutters, stammers, filler words, informal pronunciation, feedback, and false starts. This section will describe how to transcribe your audio file using TranscribeMe Clean Verbatim.

Conversation to Include

At TranscribeMe, we transcribe the main speaker(s) and their dialogue with anyone else in the file, even if the conversation seems irrelevant. This will sometimes require breaking up another main speaker's dialogue. For example, if the interviewer (a main speaker) mutes the phone to have a side conversation with a coworker while their interviewee (another main speaker) continues talking, all three speakers' dialogues must be transcribed.

Automated Voices

We transcribe *relevant* automated voices, such as prerecorded phone messages. Treat such speech as you would human speech, putting each "voice" on a new line.

Exclude Background Speakers

If people are speaking in the background but the file's main speakers don't interact with them, **do not** transcribe the background speech. Background speech can include conversations of other diners not at the speakers' table in a restaurant, a PA system announcement, or voices coming from a TV or radio. But if the main speakers interact with or acknowledge the other speaker(s), they become relevant to the transcript and must be included.

For example, if a waiter at a restaurant takes your main speakers' orders, this exchange must be transcribed, but don't transcribe the same waiter taking an order at another table. Likewise, transcribe speech coming from a PA system, TV, or radio if the main speakers comment on it.

Stutters and Stammers

We remove repetitive words and sounds made while a speaker is stumbling over their thoughts. If, however, the repetition adds meaning or emphasis, include it.

Said: Re-repeated s-s-sounds such as st-st-st-stammers and stutters should, should not be, be tr-transcribed. But it is **very, very** important to include words that are repeated for emphasis.
Yeah, yeah, yeah. People **do do** that sometimes.

Type: Repeated sounds such as stammers and stutters should not be transcribed. But it is very, very important to include words that are repeated for emphasis.
Yeah, yeah, yeah. People do do that sometimes.

Filler Words

Remove filler words such as *uh*, *um*, *er*, *hmm*, *uh-uh*, or *mm-hmm* unless it adds crucial meaning, e.g., being the only answer to a direct question. In such cases, we adhere to these spellings:

Affirmative: uh-huh / mm-hmm
Negative: uh-uh / nuh-uh / mm-mm

Note in this example how filler words are excluded unless they are the *only* answer to a question.

Said: Did you go to the store?
Mm-hmm. Yeah, I went last night. Mm-hmm.
Hmm. Did you get milk?
Uh-huh.
Uh-huh. Okay. Thanks. Hmm. Are you ready for, uh, dinner now?
Mm-hmm. Hey, did you see the news tonight?

Type: Did you go to the store?
Yeah, I went last night.
Did you get milk?
Uh-huh.
Okay. Thanks. Are you ready for dinner now?
Mm-hmm. Hey, did you see the news tonight?

Thinking Sounds

Do not transcribe meaningless thinking sounds.

> **Said:** I want a... buh... tk tk tk... pizza.
> **Type:** I want a pizza.

Informal Speech

People often speak in ways that do not conform to formal writing conventions. This section will outline how to handle common transcription situations that aren't addressed by standard grammar rules.

Conjunctions and Interjections

Include conjunctions and interjections at the beginning, middle, or end of sentences as spoken. If a speaker finishes their thought with *or*, *so*, or *but*, we offset it with a comma.

> And I wanted to get a new dog, but.
> Ah, okay. Yeah, yeah, yeah. So why didn't it work out?
> Well, it was just like, "This dog won't work."
> Aw, that's too bad. So was that the only reason, or?
> Oh, and he kind of smelled too, so.
> Ugh. That's a shame.

Contractions

Transcribe contractions as spoken. If a speaker says *they're*, transcribe *they're* **NOT** *they are*. If they say *they are*, transcribe *they are*, etc. The contractions for *could have* and the like are *could've* **NOT** *could of*, etc.

> **No** → could of / should of / would of
> **Yes** → **could've** / **should've** / **would've**

Informal Pronunciation

Transcribe informal words with their proper spelling, *not* based on pronunciation or accent. We make an exception for the following frequently used words, with these spellings: ***gotcha***, ***y'all***, ***ain't***, and ***I'ma***. Note that we only use these spellings if the speaker actually says it that way; if they say *got you*, then transcribe *got you*.

> **No** → gonna / gotta / wanna / kinda / sorta / coulda / 'cause or cuz / goin' / ya
> **Yes** → **going to / got to / want to / kind of / sort of / could've / because / going / you**
> **Yes** → **gotcha / y'all / ain't / I'ma**

> **Said:** Pacifically, I axed 'im if he was gonn' go ta 'em stores where they be sellin' milk. I coulda just gone myself, but.
> **Gotcha**. Well, **y'all ain't** gonna believe this, but **I'ma** talk ta him 'bout that right now. Ya hear me?

> **Type:** Specifically, I asked him if he was going to go to them stores where they be selling milk. I could've just gone myself, but.
> Gotcha. Well, y'all ain't going to believe this, but I'ma talk to him about that right now. You hear me?

Incorrect Grammar

Transcribe incorrect grammar as spoken. This can range from violation of subject-verb agreement rules to plain bad English. Do not edit their speech, and do not use a [sic] tag.

> Them trees, they got so much locusts in them.
> My dad want me go to store because want a apple.

Slang and Unconventional Words

Nonstandard words and slang should be included as spoken, using the most common or logical spelling you can find. If a speaker makes up a word, spell it out as best you can.

> Then you do the same steps, da, da, and then da. Sha-doo-bop. That's all it is.
> We had an abso-freaking-lutely fantabulistic day.

Profanities

We transcribe what is said without censoring. If you feel uncomfortable transcribing a file for any reason, you may cancel out.

Crutch Words

A crutch word is an utterance (often a verbal tic) that adds no meaning to what is said. At TranscribeMe, we **ONLY** remove the crutch words *like* and *you know* when they are inessential to the sentence. **All other crutch words should be transcribed**.

> **Said:** You know, **I mean,** if the speaker, like, says this**, okay,** we kind of want to, like, make it, you know, **sort of** readable, **right**?
>
> **Type:** I mean, if the speaker says this, okay, we kind of want to make it sort of readable, right?

In these examples, there are no crutch words to remove:

> He was like, "What do you think?"   (*Like* is often used to introduce a quote)
> She was gone for like a week.   (*Like* is an approximation in this instance)
> Do you know what time it is?

False Starts

When a speaker corrects their speech or changes direction of thought mid-sentence, causing them to begin a phrase or sentence over again, we refer to their error as a *false start*. Indicate a false start by typing double dashes (press the hyphen key twice) followed by a space before the next letter. The dashes attach to the word **before but not after** them.

> Here's an example of-- this is a false start.
> Did you just say-- wait, can you repeat that?
> Here's an example where the speaker decides to-- I'm changing direction mid-sentence.
> My son said the lion was his-- the tiger was his favorite animal at the zoo.

Cleaning Up False Starts

If a false start consists of **three or fewer words**, omit the error and transcribe the corrected sentence. In doing so, remember we only remove what's to the **left** of the dashes. Partial words should not be transcribed or

included in the word count. **DO NOT** remove false starts of four or more words, **even if the speaker--** even if the speaker repeats the exact same thing.

> **Said:** We're out of oran-- apple juice, and I have to eat-- leave soon. Do you want to go **to the mall with--** to the store with me to get groceries? I mean, we **really need to get--** really need to get more orange juice-- more apple juice.
>
> **Type:** We're out of apple juice, and I have to leave soon. Do you want to go to the mall with-- to the store with me to get groceries? I mean, we really need to get-- really need to get more apple juice.

When a speaker says multiple false starts in a row, we abide by the three-and-under removal rule for each false start.

> **Said:** Here's an example of-- an example-- **here is a case--** here is-- **I guess I'm using a--** there's a lot-- this is a lot of false starts.
>
> **Type:** Here's an example of-- here is a case-- I guess I'm using a-- this is a lot of false starts.

Exceptional Cases

If a short false start conveys crucial meaning, include it. A common example is when a speaker says something to correct him- or herself before moving on such as *or*, *I mean*, *I'm sorry*, or *excuse me*.

> I went **to the mall--** I mean, to the store and bought groceries.
> He attended **East Middle--** or, wait, West Middle School.
> The most famous cartoon is **Donald--** I'm sorry, Mickey Mouse.

Interruptions

In conversation, speakers often interject or talk over one another. If an interruption occurs as a speaker is finishing their thought, end their line with closing punctuation then begin a new line for the interjecting speaker as normal. We don't indicate the interruption in such cases.

> What is your name and your age, please?
> Fernando, and I'm 54 years old.

Continued Interruptions

When a speaker interrupts someone in the middle of their sentence and the interrupted speaker continues the same thought after the interjection, we mark their broken-up speech with double dashes. Attach the dashes to the last word before the interruption, then create a new line for the interjecting speaker as normal (with a capital letter and no dashes). On the next line, we continue the interrupted sentence with double dashes, **no space**, then the next word in lowercase (except for proper nouns).

> Now I'm going to tell you **exactly--**
> Wait a minute.
> **--what** I did in the 30 years I worked for the company.

Unfinished Interruptions

If the speaker doesn't finish their sentence after being interrupted, mark the interrupted thought with double dashes, but begin their *new* thought as normal, with a capital letter and no dashes. For unfinished questions, place a question mark after the dashes with no space in between.

> I think--
> So did you--?
> Sorry, you go ahead.
> Did you have a good time--
> I didn't catch that. What did you--?
> --at the party the other night?
> Oh, yeah. It was great.

Feedback Words

We define feedback words as any *generic* word or phrase spoken while another person is talking, when the purpose is merely to show that they are listening or to passively acknowledge what the other speaker says. We **remove feedback** unless it leads to further speech by the same speaker or someone responds to it. Common feedback words include, but are not limited to, phrases such as *yeah*, *right*, *okay*, *got it*, and *great*.

> **Said:** So I walked all the way to the mall yesterday.
> Right. Gotcha.
> I got a new job working for--
> **A job. Sounds great.**
> --a family friend--
> Yeah. Great.
> --at one of the kiosks in the parking lot.
> **Okay. Great. Yeah.** And which kiosk are you working at?

> **Type:** So I walked all the way to the mall yesterday. I got a new job working for--
> A job. Sounds great.
> --a family friend at one of the kiosks in the parking lot.
> Okay. Great. Yeah. And which kiosk are you working at?

Notice in the above example that we include longer phrases and *specific* comments, such as in ***A job. Sounds great.*** We also transcribe words (which would otherwise be removed as feedback) if they lead into other speech by the same speaker, as in the example of ***Okay. Great. Yeah.*** *And which kiosk...*

Tags

Carefully adhere to the following tag guidelines. **DO NOT** use tags that are not listed below. **Your work may be rejected for misspelling or using incorrect tags.** Ignore nonverbal sounds not addressed by our listed tags.

Tags are always in **lowercase letters**, even at the beginning of a sentence, and within **square [ ] brackets.** The only exception to the tags-are-always-lowercase rule is the Guess tag, which adopts the text and formatting of whatever your guess is.

Punctuating Tags

- **Speech tags** - [inaudible], [crosstalk], [foreign], and the Guess tag - are punctuated like regular text because they take the place of speech.
- **[silence]** always sits on a line by itself with no punctuation.
- **[music], [applause], and [laughter]** are placed on the same line as the surrounding text (i.e., not on a line of their own). If these tags fall at the end of a line, place the tag **after** the line's ending punctuation.

Speech Tags

[inaudible]

Use the [inaudible] tag in place of speech you cannot make out due to the speaker's accent, poor audio quality, a noise obscuring the words, or a term you couldn't figure out after researching.

> I thought it might be fun to [inaudible].
> I'm sorry, I couldn't [inaudible] you said over the sound of the engine.

[crosstalk]

Use the [crosstalk] tag when you cannot make out what a speaker says because another primary speaker is talking over them. **DO NOT** use this tag to "represent" where a speaker interjected over another. Remember that each speaker gets their own line; assume in this example that you can hear everything the first speaker said but not the second speaker:

> Did you go to the store when I asked you to, or--
> [crosstalk].
> --did you forget again?

But if you understand both, you don't need the [crosstalk] tag. It helps to focus on one voice at a time to pick apart the conversation.

> Did you go to the store when I asked you to, or--
> Oops. No, I forgot.
> --did you forget again?

[foreign]

The [foreign] tag is used for anything you cannot understand because they are non-English words. If, after researching, you can't decipher a word or phrase and you know it is a foreign term, then use the [foreign] tag instead of [inaudible].

> He told me he wanted a [foreign]. I was like, "I'm sorry, I don't know Polish."

If a speaker uses a foreign term or phrase that you *can* find, **include it**, and there is no need for a tag. You may use special characters in this case, such as accents and macrons, but *not* a different alphabet (e.g., Arabic or Chinese characters). However, **DO NOT** copy into the WorkHub from a web page; first copy/paste the text into your browser's search or address bar to remove any formatting, then copy it from there into the WorkHub.

- So he turns to me and goes, "Mi casa es su casa, as we say back home. Cómo estás?"
- The French and Italian words for hand, main and mano, come from the Latin manibus.
- One of the foundations of whānau is whakapapa, which has great importance in Māori society.

Entirely foreign conversations should be tagged as [foreign]. **Do not** include English words you may hear scattered within a foreign conversation. If the speakers are speaking a foreign language, the whole line(s) should be represented with the [foreign] tag.

Bilingual and Entirely Foreign Files

We sometimes receive bilingual files, which may be noted in the file's style guidelines. In such cases, transcribe any English conversation you hear and use a [foreign] tag for non-English conversation. **DO NOT** transcribe any English words or place names, etc., that are interspersed in a foreign conversation. If your **entire** file is in any language other than English, submit a Help Desk ticket with the Job or Session ID.

Guess Tag

If you're not sure what is said but you can make a reasonable guess that fits the context, put your guess, followed by a question mark, into brackets: **[your text here?]**. Unlike the other tags, the Guess tag is formatted (i.e., capitalized or not) to reflect your guess. The text within the tag can comprise a single word, like **[this?]**, or it may be a short phrase, **[something like this?]**. The full guess goes into one tag.

> She vacationed in [Mongolia?] and [Siberia?] for spring break [last year?].

If you can't tell if a speaker is saying one thing or another, **DO NOT** put two guesses within the same tag. Decide what is most fitting based on context.

> **No** → He gave away [three/free?] kittens.
> **Yes** → He gave away [three?] kittens.
> **Yes** → He gave away [free?] kittens.

Solid Block of Tags

With poor audio where it's difficult or impossible to follow the dialogue (e.g., due to loud noises in the audio, mumbling speakers, excessive crosstalk, or a completely foreign conversation), instead of cluttering the transcript with consecutive tags, simply mark with one tag and punctuation. In other words, if you have more tags than actual text, it's best to use just one tag. But if you can pick out meaningful phrases, then please do so, even if multiple conversations are happening simultaneously. Focus on one voice at a time for best results.

> **Heard:** Okay, class. Discuss amongst yourselves for a few minutes.
> [crosstalk] the [crosstalk].
> But [crosstalk].
> [inaudible] [laughter] [inaudible].
> I think [crosstalk].
> [crosstalk].
> Yeah, [inaudible].
> Okay. Are we all finished?

> **Type:** Okay, class. Discuss amongst yourselves for a few minutes.
> [crosstalk].
> Okay. Are we all finished?

Speech Tag Summary

The [inaudible], [crosstalk], [foreign], and Guess tags stand in for speech you are unable to decipher. **Please strive to discern what is said before using these tags.** For example, if there's a loud noise in the audio but you can still hear the speaker, then transcribe the words, NOT a tag. If you can find the term(s) through research or by replaying the audio at a slower speed, then please do so. Likewise, if two speakers are talking over one

another but you can understand one or both, then transcribe the words and only use the [crosstalk] tag for the words you couldn't catch. If the speakers include a foreign word or phrase that you can find with an internet search, transcribe what they say.

The speech tags belong within punctuation on their respective speaker's line as the text would have been. If a speaker says something but you cannot understand *any* of it, the tag rests on its own line with appropriate punctuation. Remember that **each speaker gets their own line.**

> We're going to keep talking even though [inaudible], and then we can [inaudible].
> What? I can't [inaudible]--
> [foreign].
> Hey, don't interrupt me. Was he even [speaking English?]?
> [Go ask them?] [crosstalk]--
> Let's go over to that super [busy coffee shop?]. I'm sure [laughter] [inaudible].

Nonspeech Tags

The tags we use to represent nonspeech sounds are **[silence]**, **[music]**, **[applause]**, and **[laughter]**. Ignore any nonspeech sounds (coughs, sneezes, sighs, ringing phones, barking dogs, nuclear explosions, etc.) not addressed by these tags.

[silence]

Use the [silence] tag to denote at least **10 seconds** of no speech, music, applause, or laughter. Remember to place this tag on its own line with no punctuation. During the period of silence, ignore other noises or utterances that aren't usually transcribed, such as filler or feedback words, thinking sounds, etc. If most or all of your file is silent, send a Help Desk ticket and include the Job or Session ID.

> Okay, class. Take five minutes to write your answers.
> [silence]
> Time's up. Let's see what you wrote.

[music] and [applause]

Place the **[music]** tag to note music *relevant* to the audio, such as the introductory theme music to a podcast. **Do not** use this tag for background music, e.g., something playing on the radio or at a restaurant (unless the main speakers mention the music). Use the **[applause]** tag to represent relevant applause.

> [music] Please give a warm welcome to Dr. Frankenstein. [applause] He's discovered a permanent cure for allergies [applause] and is ready to share it with the world.
> Thank you for that introduction, Mary. Play the slides, please. [music]

[laughter]

The [laughter] tag is placed at the point where *loud or relevant* laughter occurs in the file. **DO NOT** place this tag on its own line, and **don't** tag every giggle or chuckle scattered throughout a conversation unless crucial to context. If the [laughter] obscures a speaker's words, you may have a [laughter] tag followed by [inaudible].

> Someone once asked me, "What do you do if someone rolls their eyes at you?" and I said, "Well, I usually just roll them back." [laughter]
> Ew, Dad. That's gross. That's like the time you told me to put a frog [laughter] [inaudible] bath.
> Well, both you and the frog survived, didn't you?
> [laughter] I guess so.

Numbers and Symbols

When transcribing numbers and symbols, it is important to convey what the speaker says in a suitable format. When in doubt about the speaker's intent, you may spell out the numbers as spoken.

> So how much was the burger, and what time did you get back home?
> It was about six fifty.
> What was? The burger or the time you got back?

General Rules

Numbers

Spell out single-digit numbers (zero through nine), and format multi-digit numbers (10 and above) as numerals. There are exceptions to this General Rule, however, for certain categories of numbers. Read the following sections for details.

Symbols

We use the symbols for *percent*, *dollars*, *pounds*, and *euros* (**%**, **$**, **£**, and **€**) *if* the speaker says the word. **Do not** use a symbol if the speaker did not state it. Except for conventional formatting or a trademarked name, spell out other signs and symbols.

- I paid $500 for my college physics course and got a B plus.
- I'll bet you €50 that it's at least negative two degrees outside right now. I'm like 90% sure.

Do not use symbols for general references, nonstandard numbers, ranges, or currencies not listed above.

- How many US dollars are in a Canadian dollar?
- What percent of my time would you need?
- It'd be around 30-something percent.
- I can't believe you paid 60 bucks for a pair of socks.

Exceptions

Numerical Ranges and Series

For a range or series, spell out any common denominator shared between values, but follow our standard rules for formatting the rest. We spell out the word *to* when used in a range. Use a comma between numbers if the speaker doesn't use a connecting word such as *or*, *to*, or *and*.

- It would take 13 to 14 hundred man-hours to get this done.
- I need 30, 40 thousand widgets by next week.
- There were maybe three to four hundred thousand people there.

Symbols should be spelled out if they apply to multiple numbers spoken in the immediate context.

- Maybe 50 or 60 percent of my time is actually useful.
- We had three donations of 30, 40, and 50 thousand dollars.

Consistency

Where multiple numbers occur within the same sentence or paragraph, format them consistently in the immediate context. If, according to our rules, you must use numerals for one number in a certain category, use numerals for all in that category. Items in one category may be formatted as numerals while items in another are spelled out.

- A mixture of buildings - one of 103 stories, five of 50 or more, and a dozen of only 3 or 4 - has been suggested for the area.
- He had 15 ties but only 2 socks.   (Both are the same category, articles of clothing)
- It's $3 for one and I had five of them.

Conventional Formatting

Transcribe common terms and names according to standard convention, even if it clashes with our usual style for spelling, numbers, symbols, and punctuation.

- Q&A / R&D / M&A
- and/or / 50/50 / 24/7
- Mazda 6 / Windows 7 / iPhone 5s
- Elizabeth II / World War I   (Said: *Elizabeth the second*, *World War One*)
- type 2 diabetes
- 6'2"   (Said: *six two* or *six foot two* or *six foot two inches*, referring to height)
- a Title IV school
- Interstate 7
- 2x4s / 8.5x11   (Said: *two by fours*, *eight and a half by eleven*)
- 401(k)
- K-8   (Said: *K through eight*, *K to eight*, or *K eight*)

Military Time:
- 0600 hours   (Said: *oh six hundred hours*)
- 1400   (Said: *fourteen hundred*)

Phone Numbers:
- USA: 1-508-555-2232 / 1-800-686-MORE
- UK: 44 7700 900632

Social Security Numbers:
- USA: 123-45-6789
- UK: QQ 12 34 56 C

Serial Numbers:
- Patient ID number 0543268
- Product number 2256-4012   (If the dash is spoken or known from context)

Numbers That Are Always Spelled Out

Fractions

Spell out fractions. Any whole number preceding the fraction will follow our standard number rules.

- Eleven-thirteenths
- Three and a half apples
- 12 and one-tenth of a percent

Inexact Numbers

When a person gives a rough estimate of a large number, spell it out in words.

- Tens of thousands of birds ate a couple hundred pancakes.
- It cost hundreds of dollars to fix dozens of fallen fences.

Exact numbers used as part of an estimation still follow our usual rules.

- Eight or so cats
- 30-some thousand bean bags
- 50-plus years old

Very Large Numbers

The word *million* and larger numbers - *billions*, *trillions*, etc. - are spelled out; however, the number part follows our usual rules. Use numerals for very specific large numbers.

- Five million chocolate bars
- 15 billion gallons
- 10,506,012 diapers

Numbers That Are Always Numerals

Money, percentages, decimals, scales, times, dates, addresses, religious references, and math equations should be written numerically, with our approved symbols when spoken.

Money

We transcribe money in numeric form. **Do not** use a currency symbol unless it is stated, and remember to only use our approved currency symbols ($, £, and €).

- The hat cost 11.50.   (Said: *eleven fifty*)
- I wish I had $5 million, but I only have about 15K.
- 8 grand / 12 sterling / 5 bucks / 8 cents

Inexact numbers are still spelled out.

- My car is worth thousands, but my house is worth hundreds of thousands.

Percentages

We format percentages as numerals. Remember to use the % sign except for ranges.

- 2%
- Between 6 and 7 percent

Decimals

Decimals should be formatted as numerals. If the number is less than one, we include a leading zero to make the decimal more readable (e.g., transcribe *point six* as *0.6*). You can also transcribe decimals based on context, even if the speaker doesn't say the word *point*.

- The average score was 65.3, give or take 0.75.   (Said: *sixty-five point three*, *point seven five*)
- The renovation cost 1.5 million.   (Said: *a million five*)
- My favorite burger costs 3.99.   (Said: *three ninety-nine*)

Scales

For survey-type questions when an interviewer asks for a rating on a scale of one number to another, we format these numbers as numerals.

> On a scale of 1 to 7, with 7 being extremely likely, how likely are you to recommend this product to a friend or colleague?
> I'd say probably about a 5.
> 5. Okay. And what would it take for it to be a 7?

Time

Express time in numerals. If you are certain that the speaker is indicating a time, then format it as such, e.g., *5:00*, even if they do not use an explicit indicator such as *o'clock*. If the speaker says *o'clock*, then use a plain numeral with the word *o'clock*, e.g., *5 o'clock*. Capitalize AM and PM.

- I got up at 5:00 AM this morning and left for work at 6:00.   (Said: *five AM*, *six*)
- 9 o'clock was when the train crashed.   (Said: *nine o'clock*)

Measures of Time

The time-is-always-numerals rule does not apply to *measures* of time. These follow our usual rules for numbers (spell out zero to nine; use numerals for 10 and above).

- It took me 30 minutes to drive two miles.
- It's five minutes past 3:00.
- I spent two weeks in Hawaii.

Dates

Use numerals for dates. If a speaker says a date in short format, use slashes.

- He was born in the 2nd century CE.
- That's August 5th, 8/5.   (Said: *August fifth, eight five*)
- I was born in the late '80s, 12/11/88 to be exact.   (Said: *eighties, twelve eleven eighty-eight*)

Addresses

Numbers in an address should be formatted as numerals.

- He lives on 2 Bourbon Street.
- Mail it to 414 East 63rd Street, Apartment 5.

Religious References

Use numerals and follow conventional written formatting for chapter/verse references of religious texts.

- Acts 27:1   (Said: *Acts 27 verse 1*)
- 2 Corinthians 11:28-30   (Said: *Second Corinthians chapter 11, verses 28 to 30*)

Math Equations

Use numerals for math equations, but fractions are still spelled out. Also, spell out math symbols as spoken, e.g., *plus*, *minus*, *divided by*, or *negative*.

- One-half times 4 minus 4 equals negative 2.
- It's 3 to the 3rd power.

Punctuation

You are expected to demonstrate a firm grasp of sentence structure and punctuation in your work at TranscribeMe. This Style Guide is not intended to be a thorough reference for English punctuation; however, what follows may be helpful for situations specific to transcription and to prevent common mistakes.

Sentence Structure

Run-On Sentences

Whenever possible, break up long-winded or run-on sentences into separate full sentences. In doing this, it's okay to start a sentence with a conjunction, but don't make the sentences choppy.

Sentence Fragments

Don't break up long sentences by separating them into sentence fragments, i.e., incomplete sentences. Even if a speaker pauses between clauses, please punctuate as per standard English conventions. It helps to proofread and punctuate without listening to the audio so as not to be influenced by the speaker's style of speech.

> **Yes** → I love speaking in long sentences, although they can be tough to transcribe.
> **No** → I love speaking in long sentences. Although they can be tough to transcribe.

Single Dashes

We use single dashes to offset information within a sentence when either **a complete sentence** or a **list of items** is inserted into the main sentence, providing we convey the speaker's intent and the sentence outside the dashes would still flow if the text between the dashes were removed. Place a space before and after each dash.

- As soon as we go to the bookstore - there are several of them down this street alone - we can go home.
- We talked to three major tech company founders - Bill Gates of Microsoft, Sergey Brin of Google, and Steve Jobs of Apple - about what they feel made those companies succeed.

If the additional information is neither a list nor a complete sentence, use commas rather than dashes. If the surrounding sentence would not be cohesive if you removed the additional information, treat it as a false start.

- As soon as we go to the bookstore, which is down the street, we can go home.
- The teacher, who is obviously really smart, thought my idea was inventive.
- As soon as we go to the bookstore-- there are several of them down this street alone. After the store, we can go home.

Punctuation between Single Dashes
For questions inserted between dashes, punctuate with a question mark before the closing dash. Use a semicolon rather than a period to separate two sentences between single dashes.

- After we left the theater - have you seen Avengers yet? - we decided to get ice cream.
- We need to make the desserts - you make apple pie; I'll make a cake - before we are ready to leave.

Colons and Semicolons

Colons and semicolons should be used sparingly in transcription. Only use a **colon**:

1. When you have a complete sentence introducing a list.
   - I will need very few supplies for school: pens, paper, and highlighters.

2. For a complete sentence introducing another complete sentence or thought.
   - Let me assure you of this: our potential with Africa is limitless.
   - The word was out: smoking causes cancer.

And you may use a **semicolon**:

1. To join two closely related sentences without a conjunction.
   - I don't like ice cream; I prefer cake.

2. To separate items in a complex list where the items contain internal commas. The semicolon in such cases clearly distinguishes each list item.
   - I'm going to the beach, and I'm going to bring, A, an alligator-shaped beach towel, which I will lie down on all day; B, a butter sandwich, so I'll have something to eat; and C, my favorite crime TV show downloaded to my tablet.
   - Adelaide, Australia; Rotorua, New Zealand; Taveuni, Fiji; and Hauula, Hawaii are my favorite vacation spots.

Commas

This section will outline a few quick guidelines to prevent common comma errors. If you need more help with comma usage, you can find explanations for specific rules on the Grammarly Blog.

When to Use a Comma

Before a Conjunction between Two Complete Sentences

Use a comma before a conjunction connecting two complete sentences. You may omit the comma for short sentences of fewer than 10 words.
- She looked over my proposal, and she approved of the whole thing.
- She looked over my proposal and she approved it.

Oxford Comma (a.k.a. Serial Comma)

When transcribing a list of three or more items, place a comma after each item, including the final item before the conjunction. If the list items are separated by conjunctions, do not use commas.
- We had apples, bananas, and strawberries in the fruit salad.
- We had apples and bananas and strawberries in the fruit salad.

Direct Address

When a speaker addresses someone, offset their name (or title, etc.) with a comma or a pair of commas.

I told you, sir, that this wouldn't work.
Jim, you didn't even give it a chance.
Thanks for your input, Nancy.

Interjections and Adverbs

Interjections and adverbs are usually offset with a comma (or two).

- Oh, I don't know about that.
- Fortunately, he agreed with my idea.
- He wasn't paying attention and ran into a fence, basically.
- The toddler was wearing a sturdy helmet, thankfully, the day she fell off her tricycle.

When NOT to Use a Comma

Comma Splices

A comma splice refers to a comma that links two or more complete sentences without a conjunction between them. Do not use comma splices at TranscribeMe. They should be separate sentences.

Yes → These are separate sentences. Don't join them with just a comma.
No → This is a comma splice, these should be separate sentences.

After a Conjunction

Don't use a comma after a conjunction unless it is required for a dependent clause that follows.

Yes → So I decided to get a new job as a professional mime.
No → So, I decided to get a new job as a professional mime.

Yes → But I didn't want to overstep my boundaries.
No → But, I didn't want to overstep my boundaries.

Either of these are acceptable according to our style:

Yes → But, although I wanted to go, I didn't want to overstep my boundaries.
Yes → But although I wanted to go, I didn't want to overstep my boundaries.

Between a Subject and Verb

Never separate the subject from its verb with a comma.

Yes → She looked over my proposal and approved it.
No → She looked over my proposal, and approved it.

To Represent Speaker Pauses

Although people sometimes speak in halting and unusual ways, **do not** add commas just because a speaker pauses. Remember that you are creating a written transcript and whoever reads it may not have the benefit of listening to the audio while they are reading. Commas should follow standard writing rules as much as possible.

Quotation Marks

Use quotation marks for direct and hypothetical speech, whether **spoken, thought, or written**. This can sometimes be a judgment call, so remember that the goal is readability. If quotation marks lend clarity to the text, use them.

Punctuate quotes using standard American English conventions, remembering to capitalize the first word of the quote. At the end of the quote, punctuate the quoted sentence and then close the quotation marks.

- So she said to me, "This is the best coffee shop in the world."
- "Why do we have to study math, Mr. Edwards?" the children asked.
- In a class for my master's, I had to start every answer with, "My answer is blah, blah, blah."

If the **sentence outside the quote** requires punctuation other than a comma or period, place it *outside* the quotation marks.

- Did you really come all this way just to say, "I lost my pencil"?

If a quote is **nested** within another, **use single quotation marks** for the inner quote. Remember to close both sets of quotes.

- I heard a guy say, "My favorite movie line is, 'Dreams die hard, and you hold them in your hands long after they've turned to dust,' but I can't remember what movie it's from." So I told him, "Dude, it's from Dragonheart. The next part goes, 'I will not be that naive again.'"

Don't use quotation marks for **indirect** quotes.

- He told me that he really wanted me to come on this trip.

Interrupted Quotes

When a speaker interrupts their quote by inserting additional information before continuing, use commas or single dashes as per our usual rules to offset the interruption, and do not capitalize the second part of the quoted sentence. If each part of the quote is a separate sentence, then start the second quote with a capital letter.

- He told me, "I walked all the way out there," which is quite a long walk, I assure you, "to the mall." Then he goes, "But once I got there" - I can't remember how long it took him - "it was already closed."
- She told her team, "Let's decide next week," but a minute later, she said, "Actually, let's decide now."

If a quote is interrupted by another speaker, use double dashes inside the quotation marks.

> So I told him, I says, "I was on my way to the polls--"
> As in voting?
> "--and I got into a car accident."

Media Titles

Titles of books, movies, etc. are written as you normally see titles, with capitals for the first and important words, such as The Lord of the Rings or Cooking Light. Do not use quotations or italics for titles.

Other Punctuation

Apostrophes

Use apostrophes as per standard English conventions. **Plurals** generally **do not** take an apostrophe. Most **possessives** are formed by adding *apostrophe S*, but for **plurals ending in S**, make the possessive by adding just an apostrophe.

- Eight cats / 12 TVs / the 1990s
- My father's house / the TV's antenna / Kansas's state legislature
- All 12 TVs' antennas / our fathers' houses

If a year is abbreviated, an apostrophe takes the missing digits' place.

- It happened in the summer of 19-- or rather, in the fall of '08.
- I wish I'd been alive in the '70s.

Hyphens

Hyphens are commonly used in transcription when multiple words combine to make a compound adjective. At TM, we hyphenate compound adjectives only when they precede the noun. Never attach a hyphen to the end of a word ending in *-ly*.

- I have a custom-built computer. It's custom built because I built it myself.
- The employee of the month is usually a smartly dressed individual.

Spoken Punctuation

When a speaker dictates punctuation, please punctuate as instructed in addition to using standard punctuation throughout the text. In other words, use the punctuation dictated, but don't limit yourself to only that punctuation. This style is often used in medical notes.

Said: Patient presented with a runny nose, comma, sore throat, comma, and red, itchy eyes, stop.
Type: Patient presented with a runny nose, sore throat, and red, itchy eyes.

If the spoken punctuation is used for emphasis, then type the word(s).

Said: She was, quote unquote, friendly to me, and I wanted to respect that, period.
Type: She was, quote-unquote, "friendly" to me, and I wanted to respect that, period.

No Parentheses or Ellipses

We don't use parentheses to offset information within a sentence, and neither do we use ellipses. They may, however, be used for conventional formatting, e.g., *401(k)* or *Wait Wait...Don't Tell Me!*

Tips and Reminders

- **Tags** are always lowercase (except for the Guess tag, which is formatted based on your guess), within square brackets [ ]. The [inaudible], [crosstalk], [foreign], and Guess tags are punctuated as you would text. The [silence] tag sits on a line by itself with no punctuation. We recommend making snippets of your tags to avoid errors.
- **Never paste into the WorkHub** from an external text-processing document. **All work must be completed online on our WorkHub.** If pasting from a website, first paste into your browser's search or address bar to strip formatting, then copy-paste from there into the Hub.
- **Spell-check** every file with a program such as Grammarly or Word to avoid typos and other errors. Remember not to paste from an external program into the Hub, however.
- Send a **Help Desk ticket** if you ever accidentally submit a file or encounter something unusual such as an entirely silent or foreign audio.

Update Notes from Version 3.1 (08-Jul-2020)

- Clarified that although special Latin characters are allowed, entirely different alphabets (such as Arabic, Chinese, or Russian) are not. (p. 12)
- Added that foreign conversation should be tagged [foreign]; do not transcribe English words interspersed within a foreign conversation. (p. 13)