



Style Guide

Guidelines for Clean Verbatim

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Introduction

The following Style Guide is designed for transcribers and QAs to use in their work at TranscribeMe and details guidelines for transcribing in TranscribeMe Clean Verbatim, proper tag usage, punctuation and grammar, and formatting styles specific to transcription. This document is by no means an exhaustive explanation of English grammar and syntax, as the rules outlined here have been implemented to meet the particular demands of transcription for TranscribeMe.

Understanding This Guide

This general Clean Verbatim style guide is divided into two parts: **Basic** and **Advanced**. The first half comprises the Basic portion, which outlines the minimum rules of transcription you are expected to adhere to in order to pass the Entrance Exam and begin work in the General Transcription Pool. At the end of some of the Basic sections, you will notice an orange box referring you to the **Advanced** appendix pertaining to that particular topic. The **Advanced** section at the end delves into further detail regarding common formatting issues you will encounter in transcription, but it is not required to follow these Advanced rules as a beginner.

We recommend that you begin by **thoroughly studying ONLY the Basic style, i.e. the main text and not the Advanced appendix**. Adequately applying these **Basic** guidelines will enable you to pass the Entrance Exam, and you will be expected to apply these rules in your transcription work at TranscribeMe. **QAs may reject work that does not follow these Basic guidelines.**

Further Opportunities - Advanced Style

If you wish to advance your career at TranscribeMe and earn a higher pay rate, you must also study and apply the **Advanced** guidelines at the end of this document. Gradually integrating these Advanced Guidelines into your work as you become more familiar with transcription at TM is a great way to add them to your skillset as you prepare for advancement exams and Special Teams.

QA Changes

When you transcribe short chunks on the Jobs tab, the QA will edit your work to conform to the Advanced guidelines. Note that, while all changes the QA makes are reflected in your change percent, the "Advanced" changes will not be held against you or be rejectable offenses. Carefully study the QA's edits and the relevant sections of the Advanced Guidelines to gain proficiency with our Advanced style, lower your change percentages, and prepare for advancement opportunities. You can view these

changes in a side-by-side comparison of your work to the QA edits by clicking the View button next to the job on your Work History page. The Yammer community is also an excellent resource for any Style Guide questions you may have.

General Expectations

In all your work at TranscribeMe, you will be held to the following expectations:

- **Guidelines** located on the right of the workhub screen must be strictly followed. This includes adhering to the appropriate style, Clean Verbatim or otherwise, as well as the proper English spelling to be used, e.g., American or British. **Check these guidelines at the start of every job.**
- **Accuracy:** You are expected to accurately capture all speech relevant to the file. For what you are unable to transcribe, use the appropriate tags as detailed in the Tags section.
- **Research:** Every name, company, and term mentioned in the audio should be researched to determine the correct spelling and formatting. If there is more than one accepted spelling, choose one and be consistent.
- **Professionalism:** You are expected to have a good grasp of correct sentence structure and punctuation. Be sure to proofread for typos or formatting errors before submission.
- **Communication:** When you encounter something unusual, such as a file that is entirely silent or contains only foreign speech, please report it to the Help Desk by raising a ticket.

Fundamentals - Basic

Spacing

At TranscribeMe we only use **one space** after a full stop. Please only insert one space after a sentence.

Different Speaker, New Line

Each speaker has their own line in the transcript to represent what they say. As such, at each change of speaker, you must create a new line in the transcript. Pressing the carriage return **one time** is sufficient. Doing so automatically creates extra space between lines in the final output.

Paragraphing

As mentioned, each change of speaker gets a new line. However, even single-speaker monologues should be broken up into paragraphs, meaning you should create a new line of text at clear changes of topic. This can occur either in single-speaker files, such as a lecture, or an interview where the interviewee speaks for a long period of time. Remember that new ideas should always start in new paragraphs. If you have an extended idea that spans multiple paragraphs, each new point within that idea should have its own paragraph.

Although paragraph sizes will vary, remember that they should neither be too long nor too short. A golden rule to live by is that, *usually*, a paragraph **shorter than 40 seconds** is too short, while anything **2 minutes or more** *should* be broken up at a logical breaking point. If a speaker drones on for 2 minutes or more, try to break it up at or around a clear **change of topic** or in the middle (or thirds, etc.) of the monologue, again, at the most logical topic change.

Difficult Audio

There are several **programs that can help** with difficult audio files. We like both the FxSound Enhancer and the Ears for Chrome extension. Depending on the audio issues, using one of these or turning it off may help you to make out sections of poor audio.

Above all, if there are trouble spots, please **re-listen to the segment** you are having trouble with. First, try changing the speed up AND down and playing with your FxSound/Ears for Chrome settings, including OFF. If you still can't make it out, then you can use the [inaudible] tag as described later in this guide. Just remember that any audible portions must be transcribed to the best of your ability, even if the file has poor audio quality. This will help the client remember the conversation and fill in any parts that we can't hear.

Often, **after listening to the whole file**, words that were inaudible on the first run through will make sense if you **listen again**. Perhaps the word(s) were said later in the file more clearly, or you become accustomed to the speakers' voices, or **context helps you** decipher what it might be. For this reason, always do a search for the [inaudible] tags and listen one more time prior to submission to see if you can make them out.

Make sure that sentence structure is clear and coherent. Even if you have trouble picking out everything being said, the text will look more polished if you **pay special attention to punctuation**.

Research

It is your responsibility to research every name/company/term mentioned in your file.

Always use Google to search and format given names correctly. In the case of company names, go by the name in the main text of their website, not the logo, as those are often stylized. For example:

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

Hint: You can often find the version of a company name to use in text at the bottom of their webpage in the copyright data.

The registered names of companies and products should be written as the company prefers, regardless of whether it fits with our usual style conventions for spelling, spacing, numbers, and punctuation.

An exception to this rule is **medications**, which are often stylized using all caps; simply capitalize the first letter of the word, not the whole thing, e.g., **Tylenol** not **TYLENOL**. (Note that **generic drug names are not capped**, e.g., *acetaminophen*.)

Spelling

You may reference any well-known dictionary for spelling. Always check the file guidelines to know whether US or British spelling is required. Also remember that your transcripts are *professional* documents, not social media posts. Choose spellings accordingly, and be consistent. Remember to spell check your file prior to submitting.

British vs US Spelling

American spelling and punctuation is the default at TranscribeMe, regardless of the spoken

accent. For each new job, always check the Guidelines to the right-hand side of the screen. If there is no spelling listed, or it is listed as NA, **use American English and punctuation.**

However, we sometimes receive files that request other spellings. These will be marked on the right with **British** (BE), **Aussie** (UE), **Kiwi** (KE), **Scottish** (SE), or **Irish** (IE). To unlock these special files, please check out the Accent Exams on your Exams tab.

Note that, regardless if US or BE spelling is specified in the guidelines, we **always use US punctuation.**

For advanced guidelines, please refer to the [Fundamentals - Advanced](#) appendix.

Clean Verbatim - Basic

The default transcription style at TranscribeMe is **Clean Verbatim** (CV). Clean verbatim is an approach to transcribing which ensures that the transcription is clear, succinct, and easy to read, while at the same time preserves essential information and meaning.

We want to accurately represent everything that is said in the audio. However, for our clean verbatim product, we do want to clean up their speech to make it easier to read. We just don't want to **edit** their speech. The most common features of speech altered by clean verbatim are stutters and stammers, filler words and crutch words. This section will lay out specifically how to transcribe your audio file using TranscribeMe Clean Verbatim.

Stutters and Stammers

If a speaker repeats a word or sound, while thinking aloud or tripping over their thoughts, such repetitions should be removed:

No → Re-repeated **s-s-s**-sounds such as **st-st-st**-stammers and stutters should not **be**, be **tr**-transcribed. **This**, this includes when a speaker **says**, says the same word twice.

Yes → Repeated sounds such as stammers and stutters should not be transcribed. This includes when a speaker says the same word twice.

If, however, the repetition adds meaning or emphasis to what is said, it must be included.

Yeah, yeah, yeah. It is **very, very** important to include words that are repeated for emphasis, because people **do do** that sometimes.

False Starts

Speakers commonly make mistakes or change the direction of their thoughts, which can prompt them to begin a phrase or sentence over. This is referred to as a **false start**. Please use dashes to indicate where the speaker broke to change their sentence. **Do not offset false starts with just a comma.**

Here is an example of-- this is a false start.

Cleaning Up False Starts

If the speaker corrects him- or herself a few words into a false start, you may omit the error and transcribe the correct sentence, removing the false start. But please use good judgment. Do not over edit speech or leave out anything that changes the meaning of what was said. **When in doubt, type it out.**

With false start: I went to **the mall--** the store, and I bought some milk there.

Corrected false start: I went to the store, and I bought some milk there.

The first three words (*I went to*) are part of the corrected sentence, so they are not counted in the false start. The false start is only the part that the speaker went back and replaced (*the mall*). This two-word false start is short enough to be omitted.

You also leave **par--** unfinished words out.

For advanced guidelines, please refer to the [False Starts - Advanced](#) appendix.

Interruptions

When speakers interject or talk over one another, there are two ways to handle this:

When the first speaker is near the end of a sentence or phrase and the second speaker starts talking, it is usually best to go ahead and finish the first speaker's paragraph and then pick up with the first word of the second.

What is your name and your age, please?

Fernando, and I'm 54 years old.

It's not clear from the transcript that Fernando interrupted, but it is absolutely clear and easy to follow the conversation.

On the other hand, sometimes the interruption has to be in place for the transcript to make sense, or the first speaker is going to continue much too long to reasonably finish their thought before getting to the interruption. In this case, we mark the interrupted and resumed speech with dashes.

Now I am going to tell **you--**

Wait a minute.

--what I think about the company.

You can also use dashes when the speaker is interrupted and never finishes their sentence or question.

I think it's time to--

So shouldn't we--?

Sorry, you go ahead.

For advanced guidelines, please refer to the [Interruptions - Advanced](#) appendix.

Filler Words and Thinking Sounds

In clean verbatim, utterances such as *uh*, *um*, *er*, *hmm*, *uh-uh*, or *mm-hmm* **should be removed**. However, if such words **answer a question** or **add meaning**, you may use them sparingly, using these spellings:

Affirmative: **uh-huh** or **mm-hmm**

Negative: **uh-uh**, **hmm-mm**, **mm-mm**, **huh-uh**, **nuh-uh**

Thinking sounds should be ignored.

No → I want a **buh, buh, buh, hmm...** pizza

Yes → I want a pizza.

However, non-standard words that have meaning in the sentence can be included according to what the speaker actually says. Please check Google and use the most common spelling you can find.

Yes → Then you do the same steps, **da, da**, and then **da**. That's all it is.

For advanced guidelines, please refer to the [Filler Words - Advanced](#) appendix.

Crutch Words

A **crutch** word or phrase is an utterance that a speaker consistently uses that **does not add meaning** to what is being said. They are usually used when a speaker is searching for a thought or deciding how to properly express what he or she is trying to say. Some speakers use crutch words as verbal tics, which can render a transcript difficult to read. Common examples are *like*, *you know*, *right*, *kind of*, and *sort of*. Always remove *like* and *you know* when they **do not add meaning to the sentence**.

So, ~~you know~~, if the speaker, ~~like~~, talks like this, then, ~~you know~~, please, ~~like~~, remove the crutch words to make it, ~~you know, like~~, readable.

If the speaker talks like this, then there are no crutch words to remove:

He was **like**, "What do you think?" (Like, *in this case, is an introduction to a quote*)

She was gone for **like** a week. (Like *is used as an approximation and should be included*)

Do **you know** what time it is?

And that's when the bear growls at you, and you're like, "OMG," **you know**?

Yeah, I know exactly what you mean. (*The other speaker answered, so we leave it.*)

In regards to other crutch words, **do not remove too much**, especially with phrases such as *kind of* or *sort of*, which are often used as approximations rather than crutch words. Use your best judgment when deciding what to remove. **When in doubt, type it out.**

I'm **sort of** tired. It was **like** 1:00 AM when I went to bed. That's **kind of** late, **you know** what I mean?

For advanced guidelines, please refer to the [Crutch Words - Advanced](#) appendix.

Feedback Words

At TranscribeMe, we consider feedback words to be anything that someone says while another person is talking, when the **sole purpose** of these words is to let the speaker know they are still listening or to passively acknowledge what they're saying. Such utterances are to be removed **unless they lead immediately into further speech** by the speaker who said the feedback word or result in a response directly related to the feedback word. Common feedback words include, but are not limited to, phrases such as *right, okay, got it, yeah, great*, etc.

DO NOT interrupt the main speaker's speech like this:

So I went all the way to the mall--
Right.
 --and I found a new job.
Okay. Great.
 I'm working at one of the kiosks.
Okay. Great. Yeah. And which kiosk did you pick?

Note in the example above that the **feedback may come in the middle of the main speaker's train of thought or during a pause between sentences**. In either case, the feedback words clutter the transcript, and so we remove the feedback, leaving us with a much cleaner product:

So I went all the way to the mall, and I found a new job. I'm working at one of the kiosks.
Okay. Great. Yeah. And which kiosk did you pick?

Note that the same words (*Okay. Great.*) that were removed as feedback are included **when they lead into other speech** (*Yeah. And which kiosk...*).

However, **do** include longer phrases that **add meaning** or serve to **comment** on the speaker's statement.

So that's pretty much the plan we've established.
Sounds great. ← **DO NOT** remove
 And now we can get started.
Yeah. Right. ← Remove
Yeah. Right. That sounds great. ← **DO NOT** remove

To recap, feedback words can be removed when they:

- Sit on a line by themselves (*i.e., doesn't lead into other speech*)
- Don't answer a direct question
- Aren't acknowledged by anyone
- Add no meaning and **are not directly commenting** on the topic at hand

Conjunctions and Interjections

We know your English teacher taught you never to start a sentence with a **conjunction** - *and, but, so, or, then*, etc. - but at TranscribeMe, all such words at the beginning, middle, or end of sentences **should be transcribed**. If a speaker ends their sentence with a conjunction, we offset it with a comma and end in a period, **so**.

Interjections such as *well*, *oh*, or *ah* should also be included:

And I wanted to get a new dog, **but**.
 Yeah, yeah, yeah. **So** why didn't it work out?
Well, it was like, "This dog won't work."
Oh. But that's too bad.
Eh, and he kind of smelled, **so**.
Ah, that's a shame.

Idiosyncrasies Of Speech

The following section covers situations specific to transcription that you may encounter, which often are not cohesive with the standards of formal writing. An easy way of looking at these rules is that we correctly *spell* what the speaker says, regardless of **how** they say it - i.e., regardless of *accent* or *pronunciation* - but we do not *edit* or *alter* **what** they say, incorrect or unconventional though it may be.

Informal Pronunciations

Informal words should be transcribed using their proper spelling, **not** based on pronunciation:

No → gonna, gotta, wanna, kinda, sorta, coulda, 'cause/cuz
Yes → going to, got to, want to, kind of, sort of, could've, because

Pronunciation Based on Accents

A golden rule of transcription is to transcribe grammar as said but NOT based on pronunciation. **Do not** spell words based on a speaker's accent or their pronunciation.

No → **Pacifically**, I **axed** 'im if he was **gonn'** go **ta** that **thur stoar** and all 'em **stoars** where they be **sellin'** milk.
Yes → **Specifically**, I **asked him** if he was **going to** go **to** that **there store** and all **them stores** where they be **selling** milk.

Note that we DO NOT truncate -ing endings to -in'.

Regional Slang Words

Slang words (the ones found in a standard dictionary) **should be included**, using the spelling from that dictionary.

Said: **Gotcha. Y'all ain't gonna believe this.**
No → **Got you. You all aren't going to** believe this.
Yes → **Gotcha. Y'all ain't going to** believe this.

Incorrect Grammar

Painful though it may be, we transcribe grammar as it is spoken. This can range from non-native speakers consistently violating subject/verb agreement rules to just plain bad English. Do not *edit* their speech for them.

Said: ***There's so much locusts in them trees.***

No → There are so many locusts in those trees.

Yes → There's so much locusts in them trees.

Said: ***My dad want me go to store because he want a apple.***

No → My dad wants me to go to the store because he wants an apple.

Yes → My dad want me go to store because he want a apple.

Note that we **DO NOT** use a [sic] or (sic) tag. Type what is said, grammatical errors and all.

Profanities

We transcribe what is said without censoring. If you are ever uncomfortable with an audio's topic, language used, or overall quality, you are welcome to cancel out.

Made-Up Words

If a speaker makes up a word or pronounces a word in such a way that you're not sure what, if any, word they were trying to say, spell it out as best you can.

We had an **absafruitly fantabulistic** day.

Contractions

We transcribe contractions as spoken. If the speaker says *they're*, transcribe **they're** NOT *they are*. If they say *they are*, transcribe **they are**, etc. **Please note** that 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**

Background and Side Conversations

As a general rule, we transcribe the **main speakers and their interactions with anyone else in the file**. When deciding what to include or exclude from the file, note that, if the main speakers have no interaction with those speaking in the background, the background does not need to be transcribed. However, if the main speakers interact with or somehow acknowledge the other speaker(s), they become relevant to the transcript and must be included.

Background Conversations

This includes things such as conversations of other diners **not** at the speaker's table in a busy restaurant, the waiter taking someone else's order, or a hospital or school PA system announcement. However, that same waiter must be transcribed when he or she speaks to the participants in the file to take their order or interact with them, and the announcement must be transcribed if the main speakers comment on it or it affects the flow of the transcript.

Students in a classroom lecture **are** considered participants in the lecture and therefore you should transcribe what you can make out, using [inaudible], [crosstalk], and Guess Tags as needed.

If a TV or radio is playing in the background and the main speakers have no interaction with it, you

may ignore it. However, if the speakers comment on any videos or audio clips in the file, they become relevant and must be transcribed.

Side Conversations

A side conversation is when the participants in the file break away from the main topic to have a conversation amongst themselves that does not include other participants in the file. It may be two people close to the mic making lunch plans, or a group in a lecture not paying attention to the professor but talking about the weekend. **This also includes when an interviewer mutes the phone to have a side conversation with a coworker**, even if that coworker does not speak at any other point in the file. You must make every effort to **capture what the main speakers are saying**, even if it requires breaking up another main speaker to do so and even if the topic being discussed has no apparent relevance to the rest of the file.

Tags - Basic

Carefully read and understand the following tag guidelines. Tags are ALWAYS in lowercase letters in square [] brackets. Make snippets for your tags to avoid mistakes. The only exception to the tags-are-always-lowercase rule is the Guess Tag, which takes on the text and formatting of whatever your guess is.

DO NOT use any tags that are not listed below. Using incorrect tags or misspelling these tags could result in your work being rejected.

Tags That Take the Place of Speech

The first four tags mentioned here are to be used when you are unable to decipher something said in the recording. It is your responsibility to do your best to capture all speech relevant to the audio and to accurately represent the words you are *not* able to make out with the appropriate tag. There will be times when you cannot understand what is being said; this is normal, but please use these tags appropriately. **Do not** simply ignore speech that you can't understand.

[inaudible]

This tag takes the place of one or more words that you cannot make out due to a difficult accent, poor audio quality, a noise like a cough obscuring the words, or a word that you couldn't decipher after thorough research.

[inaudible] is the best **[inaudible]** I've ever heard of.

Remember that, even at the beginning of the sentence, **this tag is lowercase**. Also remember that you are expected to use all reasonable means to determine the correct words before resorting to this tag. For example, if there is a cough on the audio, but you can understand the speaker anyway, then you would include the words said and NOT use this tag. Similarly, if you are able to find the correct terms through research or by playing the audio back at a slower speed, then please do so.

[crosstalk]

The [crosstalk] tag functions the same way as the [inaudible] tag, in that it stands in for words that you are **not** able to decipher. The only difference is the *reason* for not being able to understand the words. This tag is NOT used to "represent" *where* a speaker interjected over another. It is only used to **stand in for a speaker's words that you cannot understand due to another primary speaker talking over them.**

Did you get the papers and [crosstalk]?

Yeah, [crosstalk] the papers, definitely.

If two speakers are talking over one another but you *can* understand one or both, **then transcribe the words as spoken**, and there is no need for the [crosstalk] tag. You can often pick out what at least one of the speakers is saying by playing the audio back at a slower speed. It helps to focus on one voice at a time to pick apart the conversation.

Did you get the papers and **file them**?

Yeah, **I filed** the papers, definitely.

Different Speaker, New Line

If one speaker interrupts in the middle of another's speech and it does not seem to be feedback but you cannot make it out, then you need to represent the interrupter's speech with a [crosstalk] tag **on a new line**. Always remember that **each speaker has their own respective line** to represent what they said: **different speaker = new line**. Assume in the below example that you can understand everything the first speaker said but not the second speaker.

No → Did you go to the store when I asked you to, or [crosstalk] did you forget again?

Yes → Did you go to the store when I asked you to, or--

[crosstalk].

--did you forget again?

Please make every effort to make out all spoken words before resorting to using the [inaudible] or [crosstalk] tags. In addition to listening, read the transcript to make sure it makes sense; if it doesn't, there is probably a mishear in there. Remember that **context is key in the world of transcription**. For example, if you hear, "Funs of people will be there," listen to the audio again and ask yourself what makes sense. "**Tons** of people will be there." **Do not include words that make no sense** to the context of the file.

[foreign]

If one or more speakers are *conversing* in a foreign language, please represent the dialogue with the [foreign] tag. If your file is entirely foreign, always submit a Help Desk ticket with the file ID so the TM admins can act appropriately.

If, however, they are *speaking* English and throw in a foreign word or phrase that you can find with an internet search, transcribe what they say. It is okay to use special characters in this case, such as accents and macrons. However, **DO NOT** copy directly from a webpage; first copy/paste the text into the Google Search Bar, then copy it from there into the workhub to remove any formatting that may be present.

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.

Al Arabiya was traditionally taught in **madāris**, or schools, which often contained a **masjid**.

If you can't find the term after searching, then use the [foreign] tag instead of [inaudible].

He told me he wanted a **[foreign]**. I was like, "I'm sorry, I don't have one."

A **[foreign]**? What's that?

No clue. I think it's Polish.

The Guess Tag

If you are not sure what the words are, but you are able to make a reasonable guess that would fit the context of the file, then put your guess into brackets followed by a question mark: **[your text here?]**. Unlike the other tags listed in this section, you are expected to modify the Guess Tag to reflect your guess. The text within the tag can comprise a single word, like **[this?]**, or it may be a short phrase, **[like this?]**.

Note that the full guess goes into the same tag. **Do not** put each individual word in its own tag.

No → She went to visit Mongolia **[and?] [Siberia?]** for spring break.

Yes → She went to visit Mongolia **[and Siberia?]** for spring break.

Also note that, if you can't figure out if a speaker is saying one thing or another, **you cannot put two guesses** within the same tag. Pick what is most appropriate based on the context of the file.

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

Yes → He gave away **[three?]** kittens.

Yes → He gave away **[free?]** kittens.

Optional Tags

The following tags may also be used but are not required: **[laughter]**, **[music]**, **[applause]**, **[silence]**.

[laughter]

This tag may be used to represent laughter relevant to the file, but note that **the [laughter] tag never appears on its own line**.

Sometimes there are small laughs scattered throughout a conversation. It is not necessary to capture every giggle or chuckle as long as the general mood is captured. Roaring laughter, however, which makes it difficult to decipher anything being said at that time, should be captured using this tag. If the laughter obscures the words of a speaker, you may have a [laughter] tag followed by [inaudible], like this:

Then Wile E. Coyote jumped [laughter] [inaudible] away.

[music]

This tag is used to note music relevant to the recording, 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).

[applause]

If there is relevant applause heard in the recording, please use this tag.

[silence]

If there is no human speech, music, or applause for a notable length of time, then use the [silence] tag, regardless if there is other "noise" - cars, dogs, coughs, etc. - or not.

Remember that not every pause or momentary silence should be tagged. Short silences can be ignored, while overly long stretches of silence, such as 10 or more seconds, **should** be tagged.

Other Noises

Non-verbal or non-human sounds - coughs, sneezes, ringing phones, honking cars, barking dogs, nuclear explosions, etc. - **should be ignored**. We only transcribe *speech* and use these specific tags. **DO NOT use any tags that are not listed above. Using incorrect tags or misspelling these tags could result in your work being rejected.**

For advanced guidelines, please refer to the [Tags - Advanced](#) appendix.

Numbers and Symbols - Basic

When dealing with numbers and symbols, it is important to both capture what the speaker says and format it in a way that reflects their intent. If they are discussing money, format it as you would for money. If they are discussing a time, format it as you would for time.

Yes → The train ticket cost **\$102.34**, and that's in US dollars.

Yes → I had to work from **9:00** to **5:00** starting on the 1st of April.

However, be consistent with using either the words or the symbols. Also, do not include both the symbol *and* the word for the symbol.

No → It cost **\$5 dollars**. I only had \$3.52 **cents**.

Yes → It cost \$5. I only had \$3.52.

No → It was between 3 **percent** and 5% of the total.

Yes → It was between 3% and 5% of the total.

Said: **We have three of those.**

No → We have **3.00** of those. (*Decimal was not spoken and cannot be assumed*)

Yes → We have three of those.

Whenever there is doubt about the speaker's intent, it is best to include simply the numbers or words 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?
Hold on a second, I need to take this call.

For advanced guidelines, please refer to the [Numbers and Symbols - Advanced](#) appendix.

Punctuation - Basic

You are expected to demonstrate a strong grasp of basic sentence structure and punctuation in your work at TranscribeMe. This style guide is not intended to be an exhaustive or complete guide to English grammar and syntax; you should research appropriate grammar and spelling on your own. However, what follows may be helpful for situations specific to transcription and to prevent some common mistakes. Do not get so absorbed in punctuation that you mishear a word.

Run-On Sentences

Whenever possible, please break up long-winded or run-on sentences into several full sentences. In doing this, it is okay to start a sentence with a conjunction. Just be careful not to make the sentences too choppy.

Long run-on sentences, as well as sentence fragments, should be avoided in transcription whenever possible. But since we have to accurately portray what the speaker says, sometimes we are not able to control the length of the sentences and simply have to write out everything that the speaker takes the time to say. However, when you see an opportunity to break up a long sentence, take it.

Sentence Fragments

Do not break up long sentences by separating a dependent clause on its own. Dependent clauses are marked by words like because, although, or whenever.

No → I really like long sentences. Although they can be tough to transcribe.
Yes → I really like long sentences although they can be tough to transcribe.

Even if the speaker pauses between clauses, we want to use proper grammar in transcription, if we can do so without changing the actual words spoken. It helps to do an extra proofreading phase without listening to the audio to punctuate as grammatically correctly as possible without being influenced by the speaker's style of speech.

Commas

A common mistake in transcription involves when and whether to use a comma with a conjunction. Here are a few quick guidelines to prevent these common errors:

No Comma After a Conjunction

Never use a comma after a conjunction, unless it is required for a dependent clause that follows. In that case, the commas should come as a pair surrounding the clause.

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

Yes → So I decided to get a new job as a professional mime.

No → And, he took me to the Super Bowl that year.

Yes → And he took me to the Super Bowl that year.

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

Yes → But I didn't want to overstep my boundaries.

Yes → And, although I wanted to go, I had to stay home because I was sick.

Yes → And although I wanted to go, I had to stay home because I was sick.

But other words, such as interjections and adverbs, attached at the front or back of your sentence often do take a comma. Grammarly can usually help you decide how to punctuate such situations.

Well, I thought about it.

Fortunately, he really liked my idea.

Between Two Complete Sentences

Use a comma before a conjunction between two **complete sentences**.

She looked over my proposal, and she approved of the whole thing.

*Note: This comma can be omitted for **very short sentences of 5-10 words** total.*

She looked over my proposal and she approved it.

Don't Separate the Subject and Verb

But never separate the **subject** and *verb* from each other by a comma.

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

Yes → **She** looked over my proposal and approved it.

Comma Splices

If two or more complete sentences are joined together without the use of a conjunction, you have a comma splice. Do not use comma splices at TranscribeMe. They should be separate sentences.

No → This is a comma splice, these should be separate sentences.

Yes → These are separate sentences. Don't join them with just a comma.

No Commas Due to Speaker Pauses

Do not simply add commas whenever a speaker pauses. People speak in halting and unusual ways at times. Remember that you are creating a written transcript and the reader likely will not have the

benefit of the audio to listen to while they are reading. Commas should follow the rules of writing to the extent possible.

If you need additional help with comma usage, you can find explanations for specific rules on the [Grammarly Blog](#).

For advanced guidelines, please refer to the [Commas - Advanced](#) appendix.

Hyphens

The hyphen [-] is most commonly used to form compound words and to link prefixes to other words. Identifying compound words is important because failing to do so may alter the meaning of a sentence. Richard Lederer offers the following example to this end:

Father to be stabbed to death in bar
Father-to-be stabbed to death in bar

The two previous sentences have two different meanings based on the omission or inclusion of hyphens. In compound words, the hyphen shows that the words, when linked together, have a combined meaning. The main type of compound word you will encounter in transcription that needs to be hyphenated is the compound adjective. A compound adjective is when multiple words join together to make an adjective. These are usually hyphenated **only when they directly precede the noun**.

I have a **custom-built** computer. It is **custom built** because I built it myself.

Plurals and Possessives

Many people have trouble with when to use an apostrophe with an S. Here is a quick run-down of the guidelines:

When you have several of something, there should be no apostrophe.

Many people like to drink **cokes**.
 How many **Qs** are in that sentence?
 We have 35 **TVs** in our house.
 The **1990s** were a strange time.

When you want to show ownership, use an apostrophe.

It was my **father's** house.
Odysseus's story is an interesting one.
 My **TV's** antenna is broken.

When showing ownership of a group of things or people where the plural of the word ends with an S, put the apostrophe after the S.

Both of our **fathers'** birthdays are today.
 All 35 of my **TVs'** antennas are broken.

If the plural doesn't end with an S, add the apostrophe S as normal.

Do you know those **people's** names?
Everyone's new TVs have arrived.

Colons and Semicolons

The colon and the semicolon can be useful in formal writing. However, they should be used very sparingly in transcriptions. Please only use the marks in these specific instances:

Use a **colon** only when you have a **complete sentence introducing a list**.

I will need very few supplies for school: pens, paper, and highlighters.

Use a **semicolon** (instead of a comma splice) to join two closely related sentences without a conjunction.

I don't like ice cream; I prefer cake.

In a list with very complex items, you can "promote" the top level of commas to semicolons for clarity.

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.

Quotation Marks

Do use quotation marks for direct and hypothetical speech and spoken punctuation, e.g., if a speaker says *quote* or *quote*, *unquote*. Generally, quotations should be set off by a comma, and punctuation should go inside of the quote marks.

So she said to me, "This is the best coffee shop in the world."

For advanced guidelines, please refer to the [Quotations - Advanced](#) appendix.

Dashes

Single dashes may be used to set off additional information within a sentence - it will look like this - providing the speaker's intent is conveyed and the sentence *outside* of the dashes would still flow if the text between the dashes were removed. Note that when using single or double dashes to offset additional information or a sentence within a sentence, there should be one space before and after each dash.

For advanced guidelines, please refer to the [Dashes - Advanced](#) appendix.

No Parentheses

We **DO NOT** use parentheses to offset information. Please use commas or dashes.

Ellipses

Like colons and semicolons, we avoid ellipses when possible. Specifically, DO NOT use ellipses in the middle of a sentence to indicate that the speaker paused, regardless of the length of that pause.

No → I think I want... that one.

Yes → I think I want that one.

The only time we use ellipses is to mark an incomplete sentence (never finished), **followed by at least three seconds of silence**. This is really rare and 99.9% of the time a double dash can be used.

I think I want... So yeah, please go get me one of those.
You wanted the...?
Oh, sorry, the orange juice.

If the silence is **shorter than three seconds**, then please mark the change of thought with dashes instead.

I think I want-- so yeah, please go get me one of those.
You wanted the--?
Oh, sorry, the orange juice.

Tips and Reminders

- **Never** copy text directly from a **Word document** or **website** and paste into the WorkHub. You may copy from a format-free program such as Notepad (Windows) or TextEdit (Mac).
- Check for updates on **Yammer**.
- Always use **spell-check software** such as [Grammarly](#) to help identify typos and other errors.
- **Early submission:** If you accidentally submit a file before it was completed, please raise a ticket with the Help Desk *immediately* and include the **Session or Job ID**, found on your work history page. An admin will be able to send it back to you.
- **Silent file:** If you come across a file that is all or mostly silent, please raise a ticket with the Help Desk and include the Session ID.
- **Foreign files:** If your full file is any language besides English, please raise a ticket with the Help Desk and include the Job or Session ID. We at times will receive files that are bilingual. The style guide will usually note this. **Never transcribe the non-English parts.**

Fundamentals - Advanced

Spelling - Advanced

In general, we follow the primary spelling used in the [Merriam-Webster](#) dictionary. Always check the file guidelines to know whether US or British English is required. For words not found in Merriam-Webster, use another standard dictionary (Oxford, Cambridge), the most common Google result, or the industry-standard spelling.

For the sake of consistency, we adhere to these specific spelling rules:

- **okay** (NOT ok, OK, or 'kay)
- **all right** (NOT alright)
- **a lot** (NOT alot)
- **etc.** (NOT et cetera)
- **US or USA** (NOT U.S. or U.S.A.)
- **email** (NOT e-mail)
- **internet** (NOT Internet)

Spelling Words Out

If a speaker spells a word out or says the name of an individual letter, we write the letters as spoken. Words spelled out in letters should be capitalized and separated by single hyphens.

B-I-N-G-O and Bingo was his name-O.

Single Letters

A single letter mentioned on its own should be capitalized. This also applies to math formulas.

The next letter after **J** is obviously **K**.
Did you know that **X** plus **Y** equals **Z**?

When making a single letter plural, if adding the S to a single capital letter makes a word (Is, As, Us), it is permissible to use an apostrophe for clarity.

Dot your **I's**, cross your **T's**, and you'll get all **A's** in your classes.

Email Addresses

If a speaker says, "bob@yahoo.com," then we transcribe: **bob@yahoo.com**.

If they ONLY say (spell out), "F-R-E-D at R-A-I-N-B-O-W-L-A-N-D dot com", then we transcribe: **fred@rainbowland.com**.

If they say **both**, "Fuzzy, F-U-Z-Z-Y, at kiwifruit, K-I-W-I-F-R-U-I-T, dot com, C-O-M," then we transcribe: **Fuzzy, F-U-Z-Z-Y, at kiwifruit, K-I-W-I-F-R-U-I-T, dot com, C-O-M**.

One more example: **Email me at name, that's N-A, M as in Mommy, E, at gmail.com**.

Manual of Style

There are far too many possible transcription scenarios to include a format for each one. A few common cases are addressed below, and TranscribeMe follows the latest version of the [Chicago Manual of Style](#) for any format questions that are not directly addressed in this document.

This includes the [Q&A sections](#) available to the public, as well as their excellent quick reference to hyphenation. It is the Chicago Manual that gives us our preference for Merriam-Webster mentioned above, so when the two conflict, the Chicago Manual should take priority.

Common Brands

Sometimes a brand name becomes so entrenched in our culture that we start to use it like any other word. At this point, we can drop the capital letter when using the brand as a verb.

How do you **xerox** a fish?
I don't know; **google** it.

Job Titles

Although "ego capitals" are common in everyday English, in transcription, we prefer to lowercase job titles unless they are used as part of a name.

My name is Sophie Turner, and I am the **chief executive officer** or CEO.
He was the newest associate engineer, so we called him **Engineer O'Brien**.

Military Branches

In an effort to avoid any perceived disrespect to our clients, though, we do capitalize military branches as in common use.

He was a **Navy SEAL** for over 50 years.
Are you going to join the **Army** or the **Marines**?
My sister-in-law is a **US Army** vet.

Religious Figures

For the same reason, we prefer to capitalize religious figures and scriptures according to common use.

My **pastor** is never found anywhere without her **Bible**.
And then he said, "Oh my **God**, what is that?"

Time Zones

Time zones should be written in lowercase except for proper nouns. Abbreviations, when spoken as a series of letters, should be capitalized.

- eastern standard time; EST
- central daylight time; CDT
- mountain standard time; MST
- Pacific daylight time; PDT
- Greenwich mean time; GMT
- daylight saving time; DST

Clean Verbatim - Advanced

False Starts - Advanced

False starts must be indicated with **double dashes**, and **the letter following the double dash is always lowercase**, even if it begins a new sentence. An exception would be if the word following the dashes is a word that is always capitalized. The dashes **connect** to the word **preceding them** and have **a space after** the dashes. You create the double dash by striking the hyphen key twice.

You would think that people would-- wait, what was I going to say?

False starts of **three words or fewer** are **REMOVED**. False starts of **four words or more** are **NOT REMOVED**, even if the speaker repeats the exact same words before continuing on.

No → We should be ready to **eat--** leave soon. (*One word, remove*)

Yes → We should be ready to leave soon.

No → He thought **they shouldn't be--** I would go too. (*Three words, remove*)

Yes → He thought I would go too.

Here is an example where-- here is a case you need to leave it. (*False start is five words*)
But **what if they say--** what if they say the exact same words? (*You still include it if it's four or more words*)

Sometimes, counting the words in a false start can be tricky because false starts don't always happen at the beginning of the sentence. A tip is to count how many words must be removed to make the sentence make sense. If that is four or more, the false start must stay. If it's three or less, it should be removed.

I went to **Walmart last night to--** Target yesterday to get school supplies. (*Four words, stays*)

Some speakers just cannot seem to get their thoughts together and might have multiple false starts in a row. These, too, will follow the three-and-under rule for removal.

Here is an example of-- here is a case-- ~~here is--~~ **right here, I'm using--** ~~this is a--~~ this is a lot of false starts in a row.

Please note that we always **remove words from the LEFT** of the double dashes, never from the right. Occasionally, you may have a situation where removing a false start of three or fewer words results in a sentence that doesn't make sense, particularly when a speaker says something to correct themselves before moving on. **In these cases, you should include the short false start to accurately capture the meaning of what was said.** Examples of words that speakers commonly use to correct themselves are *or, I mean, I'm sorry, excuse me*, etc.

He went to **East Middle--** or, wait, West Middle School.
The most famous cartoon is **Donald--** I'm sorry, Mickey Mouse.

Interruptions - Advanced

Interruptions are indicated with **double dashes**. The double dashes are directly connected to the last word before the interruption, with no space in between. The new speaker's words begin with a capital and are on a new line. When we pick up the interrupted speaker again, we insert the double dashes, with no space, followed by the next word they say in lowercase, unless it is a word that is always capitalized.

Now I'm going to tell **you--**
Okay. Go ahead. I'm listening.
--what I think of that movie.

If the interrupted words are a question that is not completed, put a question mark after the dashes. If it is completed later, put the question mark at the end of the question.

Did you have a **good--**
 I'm sorry. What were **you--?**
--time at the party?
 Oh, yeah. It was great.

Filler Words - Advanced

Remove **all** instances of filler words unless it is the **ONLY** answer given to a direct question.

Did you go to the store?
~~Mm-hmm~~, I went last night. (*Mm-hmm is not transcribed because there are words said after it that answer the question*)
 Is that all you bought?
Mm-hmm. (*Transcribed because it is the only answer to the question*)
 Okay. Thanks. Are you ready for the next question?
Mm-hmm. Hey, did you see that game last night? (*Transcribed because the words after do not answer the question that was asked*)

Crutch Words - Advanced

The **ONLY** crutch words that are removed are **like** and **you know** when they do not add meaning to the sentence. **All other crutch words are included.**

We can **sort of** end up ~~like~~ with a sentence **kind of** like this, **right**, but we ~~you know~~, **sort of** have to **kind of** keep all of the **sort of** crutch words in, ~~like, you know~~, even though, ~~like~~, it's **kind of** messy and **sort of** annoying, **right**?

Tags - Advanced

Tags Inside of Punctuation

The **[inaudible]**, **[crosstalk]**, **[foreign]**, **Guess**, and **[laughter]** tags all go inside of punctuation. *Inside of punctuation* is defined as any place **between the sentence's beginning capital letter and its ending punctuation**. A tag placed **after** the ending punctuation and **before** the next sentence's beginning capital letter would be **outside** of punctuation.

The first four tags - [inaudible], [crosstalk], [foreign], and the Guess Tag - take the place of speech. As such, they should always be placed **inside of punctuation and on the correct speaker's line**, exactly as the missing text would have been. If one of these tags is on a line by itself because you can't make out anything the speaker is saying, it should be followed by terminal punctuation, i.e., a period to end a statement, or a question mark if you can tell by inflection that the speaker is asking a question. If it seems the speaker was interrupted or did not finish what they were saying, end with double dashes.

We're going to keep talking even though those kids keep screaming and you **[inaudible]** me. What? I can't **[inaudible]**.

[inaudible].

Wow. That one was really loud. Do you think we **[crosstalk]**?

[crosstalk] to go ask them **[crosstalk]**--

Let's go over to that really busy coffee shop. I'm sure that will be **[better?]**.

The **[laughter]** tag **marks the spot where the laughter occurs** - regardless of who is doing the laughing - and also belongs **inside of all punctuation**. As such, **the [laughter] tag never appears at the start of a new line or on a line of its own**, but in the **middle** or at the **end** of the sentence that caused the laughter. If you cannot place the laughter tag so that it follows these rules, leave it out. For example, if the file begins with laughter, you cannot have the tag before the first sentence, so ignore it. If laughter occurs during quoted speech, the [laughter] tag should be placed **inside** the quotation marks and any ending punctuation.

No → Did you hear the one about the string that went into a bar? **[laughter]**
Is that the one where the punchline goes, "I'm a frayed knot"? **[laughter]** I love that one.

Yes → Did you hear the one about the string that went into a bar **[laughter]**?
Is that the one where the punchline goes, "I'm a frayed knot **[laughter]**"? I love that one.

Tags Outside of Punctuation

[music] and **[applause]** go outside of punctuation. This means that they can only go at the *beginning or after the end of sentences*.

[music] Please give a warm welcome to Dr. Frankenstein. **[applause]** He came all the way from Germany to be with us tonight and says he's made a fantastic discovery. Play the slides, please. **[music]**

[silence] is always **on its own line with NO punctuation**. For our Advanced Style, you *must* use this tag to represent exactly **10 or more seconds of silence**. In doing so, **ignore filler words or other non-transcribable utterances** that come in the midst of the silence. Mark it with **[silence]** and pick up again with the next transcribable utterance.

Sample Transcript Using Tags

Please wait a minute while we set up the mic.

[silence]

Please welcome our next speaker. **[applause]**

[music] Thank you for coming all this way. I wore my pink socks for you tonight **[laughter]**.

Did you see my new **[inaudible]** that match my socks? My shoes even **[crosstalk]** **[my hat?]**.

How'd you **[crosstalk]** to match those socks **[laughter]**?

I knew someone would ask **[crosstalk]**--

[crosstalk].

I think someone has a question all the way in the back. Yes?

[inaudible]?

Solid Block of Tags

In the event where you might have a solid block of back-to-back-to-back tags, such as main speakers mumbling back and forth unintelligibly, so much simultaneous crosstalk that it's not possible to follow any one train of thought, or an entirely foreign conversation, instead of peppering the transcript with multiple consecutive tags, simply mark with one appropriate tag and punctuation. A good rule of thumb is, **if you have more tags than actual text, it's best to use just one tag**.

Example with **[inaudible]**:

Let's step away from the mic to have this discussion so the transcriber can't type it.

No → **[inaudible]** there.

[inaudible]?

No, **[inaudible]**.

[inaudible].

Yes → **[inaudible]**.

This one **[inaudible]** tag represents the back-and-forth distant muttering. Again, you still must make an effort to transcribe any meaningful phrases that you can hear.

Example with **[crosstalk]**:

Okay, class, discuss amongst yourselves for a few minutes.

No → **[crosstalk]** the **[crosstalk]**.

But **[crosstalk]**.

[inaudible] **[laughter]**.

I think **[crosstalk]**.

[crosstalk].

We **[inaudible]**.

Yes → **[crosstalk]**.

However, if you can pick out meaningful phrases, you must do so, even if there are several simultaneous conversations happening that you can pick up. Try to focus on one voice at a time to better hear what is being said.

Yes → Hey, did you see the new [crosstalk] movie this [crosstalk]?
 But he wasn't going to [crosstalk] so I left.
 I did. It was [laughter] [inaudible].
 I think [crosstalk] the right thing.
 [crosstalk].
 We [inaudible] listening now.

Example with [foreign]:

Hold on a second please, my uncle doesn't speak English and he needs something. [foreign]?

No → [foreign]?
 [foreign].
 [foreign].
 [foreign].

Yes → [foreign].

Remember that, if the speakers are conversing in a foreign language, it doesn't matter if they say a word or two that you can understand, such as the name of a city or country, or a phrase such as *okay* or *yeah*, etc., or even if you understand the language they're speaking. If they're speaking in a foreign language, use the [foreign] tag.

Foreign Translation Throughout a File

There are two possibilities when dealing with a translated file. Please read the following to decide which is most appropriate for your audio.

Interactive Translator

In a file which has a primary foreign speaker, a primary English speaker, and a translator actively interacting between them, it might look like this (*the speaker IDs are only shown here for clarity; never include speaker IDs on the Jobs tab*):

S1: [foreign].
S2: She says, "Please tell him everything I'm saying in English."
S3: Oh, great. I'd appreciate that. So my first question is, what is her actual job?
S2: [foreign]?
S1: [foreign].
S2: She says she works for TranscribeMe.

Translator Commentating

In a file which has mostly or only foreign speakers and there is a translator speaking over them to provide English for the recording, while not actually interacting with any of the people he/she is translating, we create a new paragraph for each foreign speaker, but they will all have the same

speaker ID, since it is the same translator speaking English:

S1: Okay, so now we are speaking Swahili, and Jude will translate so that it can be transcribed.

S1: That sounds great, thank you.

S1: First of all, what is your actual job?

S1: I am a transcriptionist working for TranscribeMe.

Numbers and Symbols - Advanced

General Numbers Rule

For general numbers, we **spell out numbers zero to nine**. We use **numerals** to represent numbers **10 or above**. However, certain types of numbers cause exceptions to this rule. Each category listed here is explained in more detail below.

Always Spelled Out: Fractions; Inexact Numbers

Always Numerals: Decimals; Money; Percents; Addresses; Time; Dates; Phone and Serial Numbers; Biblical References; Mathematical Equations

Exceptions:

- **Ranges:** When one symbol or descriptor refers to multiple numbers, spell it out as spoken.
- **Consistency:** Numbers describing the same type of thing should be formatted in the same way, even if it means using numerals for 0 to 9 or spelling out symbols you normally wouldn't.
- **Convention:** When there is an industry-standard way of formatting a number in a name or term, use it.

Thousands

Use numerals for thousands and separate the digits with a comma, **regardless of how it is said**.

- **1,400** years ago (*Said: fourteen hundred or one thousand four hundred*)
- **2,000** books
- **13,000** attendees

Exclude the comma for years and addresses.

- I went to med school from **2000** to **2006**.
- I live at **1346** Rose Avenue.

Symbols

The **ONLY** symbols we use are the following: **\$**, **£**, **€**, and **%**. Symbols not mentioned herein should not be used.

Currencies

If the currency is said, use the symbol for money depending on the country. **If the currency is not said, don't use the symbol.** We use symbols for three currencies: **dollars, pounds, euros**. All other currencies should be spelled out (25 rupees, 5 pesos). Please note that **money is always expressed in numerals**. This is explained further below.

- **\$5** (*Said: five dollars*)
- **£9** (*Said: nine pounds*)
- **€15** (*Said: fifteen euros*)
- I had **12 pesos** left after my trip to Mexico.

If the type of dollar is specified, abbreviate the type before the \$ sign: US\$, NZ\$, Can\$, HK\$.

- **US\$10** (*Said: ten US dollars*)
- **NZ\$5 million** (*Said: five million New Zealand dollars*)
- **\$4,000** (*Said: four thousand dollars, even though you know it refers to Hong Kong dollars*)

Except for general references and non-standard numbers.

Did you see all those **dollars** in the pot?
How many **US dollars** are in a **Canadian dollar**?

Percents

Use the % symbol.

I only had **5%** of my money refunded to me.
He took **2.5%** off the margins.

Except for general references and non-standard numbers.

What **percent** of my time would you need? (*No number*)
I think it would be **30-something percent** full.
I ate **13 and a half percent** of the pie.
I am **a million percent** behind that.

Signs

Write out positive and negative symbols per what is spoken.

I got a **B plus** in physics.
The answer is **negative three**.
It's **plus** or **minus 32** degrees.

Numerical Ranges and Series

Sometimes, a speaker will use a sort of shorthand to denote several large numbers in a series. In this case, we spell out any common denominator after a series, and we follow the standard rules for formatting the rest.

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

Symbols should also be spelled out if they apply to **more than one of the numbers spoken directly prior**.

Maybe **50** or **60 percent** of my time is actually useful.
Her change rate was just **3** to **4 percent**. (*Percents are always numerals*)
We had three donations of **30, 40, 50 thousand dollars**.
The upgrades will cost something like **1, 5**, or maybe **8 dollars**. (*Money is always numerals*)
It'll give a return of **2 and a half** to **3 percent**.

When transcribing a range of numbers, please write out the word "to" whenever it is spoken. Do not use a dash to represent a range.

We have **three to four** good options.
It will be somewhere between **1 to 2 hundred** dollars.
We have **3 to 4** good options, or maybe as many as **20**.
He changed it from **15 to 20**.
My company has **800 to 1,000** employees.

Exceptions for Consistency

Where multiple numbers occur within a sentence or paragraph, maintain consistency in the immediate context. If, according to the rule, you must use numerals for one of the numbers in a given category, use them for all in that category. If you must spell out one symbol, spell out that symbol for the whole category. In the same sentence or paragraph, however, items in **one category** may be given as numerals and items in **another category** spelled out.

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.
After **five** days it was only **15%** complete.
A mixture of buildings - **one** of **103** stories, **five** of more than **50**, and **a dozen** of only **3** or **4** - has been suggested for the area.
I used to have the **iPhone 6**, but now I have the **7**. Do you have the **8** yet?
The return will be **2 and a half percent**, or maybe up to **5 percent**.

Values that Follow the General Numbers Rule

Start of a Sentence

Note that we follow our **General Numbers Rule** even for numbers at the start of a sentence.

18 years ago, we experienced the Y2K craze. (*10 and up are always numerals*)
Four score and seven years ago (*Zero through nine are spelled out*)

Ordinals

Likewise, ordinals follow the **General Numbers Rule**: values zero through nine are spelled out, while 10 and up use numerals.

- The **first** example
- The **28th** audio file
- The **eighth** grade

Very Large Numbers

Millions and larger numbers - billions, trillions, etc. - are spelled out; however, the number part follows the General Numbers Rule.

- **Five** million chocolate bars
- **15** billion gallons of water
- **Three** trillion plankton

When a large number is too specific to write out this way, then use numerals.

I wanted **10,500,012** babies.

The cost was **1,500,000**. (*Said: a million five*)

Articles with Numbers

At times, a speaker may say something like **a** hundred, **a** thousand, or **a** million. When **a** is used as an article to a number phrase, you should consider it to mean exactly one. That is, *a hundred* means exactly **100**. You will use numerals in this case, as usual. However, *a* can become *1* only when it is written as part of a larger numeral, never on its own. In other words, *a hundred* can become *100*, *a thousand* can become *1,000*, but *a* million will not be *1* million. When typing *a hundred* as *100*, do not add an extraneous *a* before the numeral.

No → The company has **a hundred and twenty** employees.

No → The company has **a 120** employees.

Yes → The company has **120** employees.

No → He had **a thousand** reasons why he didn't want to go, but he went anyway.

No → He had **a 1,000** reasons why he didn't want to go, but he went anyway.

Yes → He had **1,000** reasons why he didn't want to go, but he went anyway.

No → She felt like **1** million bucks. (*Said: a million bucks*)

Yes → She felt like **a** million bucks.

No → The house cost **\$1** million. (*Said: a million dollars*)

Yes → The house cost **a** million dollars.

Sometimes a speaker will merely say *hundred* or *thousand* to mean exactly **100** or **1,000**. Here also, we write the value as a numeral *but keep the accompanying article*. For example, **the hundred** and **the thousand** would be **the 100** and **the 1,000**, just as **a hundred-percent** increase or **a thousand-dollar** loss would be **a 100% increase** and **a \$1,000 loss**. In these cases, the articles *a* and *the* are modifying *increase* and *loss*, respectively, not *hundred* or *thousand*, hence we keep them.

Said: **He had a hundred-dollar watch.**

No → He had \$100 watch.

Yes → He had **a** \$100 watch.

Said: **It was a million-dollar decision.**

No → It was **1** million-dollar decision.

No → It was a **\$1** million decision.

Yes → It was **a** million-dollar decision.

Values that are Always Spelled Out

Fractions

Spell out all fractions, even if the values are above 10. Note that any **whole number** that precedes the fraction will follow the General Numbers Rule.

- **One-thirteenth**
- **Two-thirds**
- Three and **one-fifth**
- Three **and a half** apples
- 5 **and a half** million dollars (*The whole number, 5, is money, which is always numerals*)
- 12 **and one-tenth** percent growth

Inexact Numbers

There will be times when a person gives a rough estimate of a large number. These should be **spelled out** in words, as spoken.

- **Tens of thousands** of birds
- **Hundreds** of dollars
- A **couple hundred** pancakes
- **Several thousand** people

However, when an exact number is used as part of an estimation, follow the **General Numbers** Rule for the exact portion.

- **Eight** or so cats
- **30-some** thousand bean bags
- **50-plus** years old
- Around **150** waffles

Values that are Always Numerals

Decimals

If a speaker states a decimal, e.g., by using the word *point*, then please type the number as said, in numerals. This is **only** if the speaker actually speaks it as a decimal (the exception being money; see below). **Spoken fractions are never converted to decimals when transcribing** (e.g., *one and a half* is **not** transcribed as 1.5).

For decimals less than one, you may include a leading zero to make the decimal more readable, even if it is not spoken. If the decimal is spoken, use numerals to write the number even if the digits are below 10.

It came out to less than **0.75**. (*Said: point seven five*)
 The average score was **65.3**. (*Said: sixty-five point three*)
 We had **2.5** days to complete the project. (*Said: two point five*)

Money

Money is always written in numerals. The appropriate decimal places can be assumed based on what is spoken.

She gave me **\$5** to go shopping, but the dress cost **11.50**.
 I wish I had **\$5 million**, but **50 million** would be best. (*Said: five million dollars, but 50 million would be best*)
 I had **50 cents** in my pocket.
 The company was worth **\$1.5 million**. (*Said: one point five million dollars*)

But, again, inexact numbers are spelled out.

My car is worth **thousands**.
 We have **a couple hundred dollars** in the bank.

If a slang term for money is used, spell out the slang term, but still use numerals.

- **8 grand**
- **15K** (*Said: fifteen K*)
- **12 sterling**

Percentages

Percentages should always be given in numerals.

Is this a **2%** change?
 No, I think it's actually **5**.
 Oh wow, **5%**? That's great.

But again, fractions are always spelled out.

2 and a half percent is a really low return on investment.

Addresses

When transcribing addresses, always use numerals.

- **2345** Southwest **7th** Street.
- **2** Bourbon Street.
- I live on **9th** Street.
- Mail it to **414** East **63rd** Street, Apartment **5**.

Time

Time always uses numerals. The format depends on what is said. If you are certain that the speaker is indicating a time, then it should be formatted as such, even if they do not use an explicit indicator like o'clock. If the speaker does say *o'clock*, then use a plain numeral with the word *o'clock*, e.g. **5 o'clock** not **5:00** o'clock. **Always capitalize AM and PM.**

I got up at **5:00 AM** this morning. (*Said: five AM*)
9 o'clock was when the train crashed. (*Said: nine o'clock*)
 I got up at **6:00** and worked until midnight. (*Said: six*)

Measures of Time

Note that the time-is-always-numerals rule does not apply to *measures* of time. Such values follow the **General Numbers Rule**.

It is **five** past 3 o'clock. (*Zero through nine are spelled out*)
 Meet me at **a quarter** to 2:00.
 I spent **two weeks** in Hawaii.
 I just need **15 minutes**. (*10 and above are always numerals*)
 He was gone for **five years**.

Military Times

Said as:	Transcribed as:
oh six hundred hours	0600 hours
fourteen fifty	14:50
fourteen hundred hours PM	1400 hours PM
oh six hundred	06:00
oh six hundred AM	06:00 AM
seven hundred	7:00

Dates

Always use numerals.

- **5th** of October, **2016** (*Said: fifth of October*)
- October **5**, **2016** (*Said: October five*)
- The **2nd** century AD

If a year is abbreviated, use an apostrophe to stand in for the missing digits.

Where were the three of you in **'88**?
 It happened in the summer of 19-- or rather, in the fall of **'08**.

When a date is given in short format, by just stating the numbers, please type them in the order given and separate them with forward slashes.

I was born **31/12/82**.
 That's August **5th**, **8/5**.

Phone Numbers

Use the conventional formats.

- USA: 508-555-2232/1-508-555-2232
- UK: 07700 900632/44 7700 900632

When letters or words are given as part of a phone number, please use capital letters. Dashes should separate individual words as well as the typical number groups.

- 1-800-686-MORE
- 292-CALL-JAY

Serial Numbers

Use the numeric format as spoken.

- Patient ID number 0543268
- Product number 2256-4012 (*When the hyphen or dash is spoken or known from context*)

Religious References

References to religious texts are given in numerals only; chapter and verse are separated by a colon with no space following it. A dash may be used in this case to indicate a range of verses, but only when following a colon.

- **Acts 27:1** (*Said: Acts 27 verse 1*)
- **2 Corinthians 11:28-30** (*Said: Second Corinthians chapter 11, 28 to 30*)
- Look at verses **10 to 12**.

Math Equations

Remember that the ONLY symbols we use are those specifically mentioned above: \$, £, €, and %. However, please use numerals for math equations, spelling out any symbols mentioned. Note that **fractions are still spelled out**.

2 plus 2 equals 4.
It's 3 to the 3rd power.
One-half times 3 is 1 and a half.

Conventional Formatting

Always do your research! Use an internet search to format given names correctly.

- Mazda 6, 3 Series BMW
- Windows 10
- iPhone 6
- iPhone 5s
- Elizabeth II (*Said: Elizabeth the second*)

- 7-Eleven stores
- type 2 diabetes
- a Title IV school
- World War II
- 5 Parklands Avenue
- Interstate 7
- 2x4s
- 8.5x11 paper (*Said: eight and a half by eleven paper*)

Punctuation - Advanced

Commas - Advanced

Before because - Usually, there is no need for a comma before because. You would only include a comma if not having it would cause confusion as to the meaning of the sentence.

Yes → We had our best quarter ever because of the new products.

No → We didn't go because we were afraid it would rain. (*This implies we didn't go for some other reason that isn't stated*)

Yes → We didn't go, because we were afraid it would rain. (*Makes the reason for not going clear*)

No → She heard the man was murdered because the women were gossiping at the salon. (*What?! Gossip got the poor guy killed?! What were they gossiping about?*)

Yes → She heard the man was murdered, because the women were gossiping at the salon. (*Oh, okay. That makes more sense.*)

Oxford Comma - When transcribing a list of 3 or more items, place a comma after each item, including the final item before the conjunction.

We had apples, bananas, and strawberries in the fruit salad.

If the list items are separated by a conjunction, there is no need for the comma.

We had apples and bananas and strawberries in the fruit salad.

Commas with To - Do not add commas between items in a list that are joined by to. Think of it as more of a *journey* than a true list, and the commas are not needed.

They went from store to store to store looking for the best deals.
The food came from the farm to the chef to the table.

Quotation Marks - Advanced

Quotation marks are used only to quote actual or hypothetical speech by a person or group.

He said, "I hope things are going well for you."

They asked us, "How many people do you think will be joining?"

The children would be like, "Why do we have to study math, Mr. Edwards?"

In a class for my master's, I had to start every answer with, "My answer is, blah, blah, blah."

Note in the examples above that we use a comma, space, quotation mark, and then a capital letter. At the end of the quote, we punctuate the quoted sentence and then close the quotation marks.

If the quote is broken up by other words in the sentence, then we would use commas to offset the interruption, and we would not capitalize the second part of the quoted sentence. If the first and second parts of the quote are actually both complete sentences, you would start the second part of the quote with a capital letter.

Then he goes, "I walked all the way out there," he said, "to the mall."

She was planning to tell the committee, "I recommend that we postpone this decision until next Wednesday," but when it came time to make the announcement, she said, "Let's decide right now."

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

So he told me, he said, "I was on my way to the polls--"

As in voting?

"--and I got into a car accident."

If the overall sentence has punctuation (other than commas and periods) that are not part of the quote, then please place them outside of the quotation marks.

Did you really come all this way just to say, "Thank you"?

If quotes are nested within one another, then please alternate between double and single quotes for each level. Remember to close each level of quotes.

I went over to John and was like, "Hey, I know that you were talking about me, going, 'She doesn't know what she's talking about.'"

Do not use quotation marks for indirect quotes, where the speaker is giving the content of the quote but not the exact words.

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

Finally, all titles, books, movies, and so on are written as you normally see titles, with capitals for the first and all important words, such as *The Lord of the Rings*, or *The Wall Street Journal*, or *Cooking Light*. Please do not use quotations or italics to indicate titles.

Dashes - Advanced

There are only two situations where single dashes may be used to offset information within a sentence: when either a **complete sentence** or a **list of three or more items** is inserted into another complete sentence. In doing so, single dashes must come in pairs. They may not be used to offset information at the beginning or end of a sentence. As a test, if you remove the inserted part, both sentences will make sense on their own. If they don't, **DO NOT** use single dashes. There must be a **space on either side of each dash**.

No → As soon as we go to the bookstore - which is down the street - we can go home.

Yes → As soon as we go to the bookstore - there are several of them down this street alone - we can go home.

Please note that if the inserted sentence is a question, you should put a question mark before the ending dash.

After we left the theater - did you see Avengers yet? - we went to get ice cream.

If there is more than one sentence inserted, you may separate them with a semicolon. **Never** use a period between the dashes.

We need to make the desserts - you make apple pie; I'll make a cake - before we are ready to leave.

Additional information added to the beginning or end of a sentence, or a dependent clause added in the middle, must be offset with commas.

The teacher, who is obviously really smart, thought my idea was inventive.
Things have changed a lot in the last year, mainly for the better.
Hoping to get more ice cream, the child gave his grandma a hug.

You may also use dashes to offset a **list of three or more items** from the surrounding sentence. Again, the surrounding sentence must make sense when the list is removed.

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 part of the sentence is repeated after the interjection, then it may be more appropriate to use a double dash indicating a false start.

As soon as we go to the book store-- there are several of them down this street alone. After the store, we can go home.

Spoken Punctuation

When the speaker dictates punctuation, please use the actual punctuation given, in addition to the standard punctuation we would use throughout the sentences. In other words, use the punctuation spoken, but don't limit yourself to only that punctuation.

No → She was quote unquote friendly to me, and I wanted to respect that, full stop.

Yes → Correct: She was "friendly" to me, and I wanted to respect that.