

PROOFREADING

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As verbatim transcribers, we cannot omit the *like, you know, I mean* and retain only the *I went to town*, nor can we add the implied *I* to “never heard of her,” as editors might demand. We do not have the privilege of saying, “Wait; that phrase should go over there” or “This verb should end with -ing.” We work in the realm of “What you hear is what you get.” But the challenge is more than reproducing the words we hear. That’s only half the job. The other half is fitting them into a framework that:

1. Reflects the speaker’s intention without distortion; and
2. Allows readers to grasp the message as quickly as possible.

Simple sentences pose no problems; but when people slip into stream-of-consciousness narratives, and especially when two or more speak at the same time, complications arise. So achieving the goal of skillfully transferring that is heard into what can be easily read and understood requires, therefore, more than understanding rules. Sometimes there just aren’t any rules which work. There are, however, helpful principles.

Although debatable, the primary elements which make speech intelligible to readers are, in possible order of importance are: Punctuation; Spelling; and Capitalization.

PUNCTUATION WHILE PROOFING

Punctuation marks come in various weights. Heaviest are the period and the question mark. They end sentences. The colon approaches a period in weight. The colon divides related thoughts with almost as much emphasis as the period. The semicolon is a middleweight, half way between a period and a comma. The comma is a very light mark, usually showing important turning points in a sentence. Being a lightweight, it is often abused. [Refer to your Gregg Reference Manual for verification.]

The specialized marks, such as the quotation mark, apostrophe, hyphen, dash, parentheses, and exclamation point, which have special uses, should not be overworked.

When two punctuation marks may satisfy a situation and you’re debating which to use, opt for the lighter weight mark. Thus, when possible, prefer a comma to a semicolon, or a comma to a dash. The lightest weight punctuation of all is **none at all**. If a mark isn’t needed, don’t use it.

All transcripts [except rough drafts] **MUST** be proofread before efilng and serving counsel. The transcript should be printed out and then the CD (or JAVS Archives) played back from start to finish, reading the hard copy while listening to JAVS. Some common errors might be “two” instead of “to” or “too;” or the word “no” will come out as “know,” or visa-versa; or the word “know” will come out as “now.” Although it can be

very time-consuming and tedious, proofreading is an important part of producing an efficient, professional transcript.

Save your transcript both in Word format and PDF format (for e-filing). If you need to file under seal take out your digital signature print the transcript, sign the original. Make a copy. Then stamp the original with an original stamp and the copy with a copy stamp. See sealing a transcript

SPELLING

Rather than including a lengthy recap of the complex rules of English spelling, we'll hope you possess some level of skill in this area. **When in doubt, check it out!** Onelook.com is one of the best on-line dictionaries at your disposal. Also **Google** is very helpful. Do not depend solely on your spell check, as it will not catch everything. It will happily bypass valid English words which are both nonsensical and embarrassing in any context. Getting letters reversed, leaving one out or slipping one in, or missing those dreaded homonyms.

When it comes to names, the recorder bears the burden of providing the transcriber with spellings. This is sometimes difficult, as when a witness who has trampled off many proper nouns manages to flee the courtroom before the recorder can make the appropriate inquiries.

Many resources are available for transcribers to consult **before even considering** the use of [phonetic] in the transcript. An obscure place name in Vermont? Consult an atlas or Google. A medical term or a drug name nobody seems to know how to spell? Consult a medical dictionary or *Physician's Desk Reference* or Google. Legal jargon? Consult *Black's Law Dictionary*, which has appendices with many pages of standard abbreviations and what they stand for. Skimming through the briefs in Odyssey may help find what you are looking for.

Over the years many transcribers and recorders have put together lists of difficult spellings they've encountered. Please see the Spellings folder in the RECORDERS folder. There is a folder for names containing names of Interpreters, Parole and Probation Officers, attorneys, and some doctors. Nevada Legal Directory should be used on every transcript to double check the spelling of attorneys' names and titles on the caption page. There is a folder for case law that has been cited over and over. And there is a folder for uncommon words, i.e. medical terminology, DNA testing, etc.

When reference sources fail, asking another transcriber or recorder may help. Making a quick phone call to a local business in that particular industry to inquire what particular "it sounds like" phrases are all about. Just don't give up and resort to [phonetic] until you have exhausted all other possibilities.