

# Dictation Tips

Following these simple steps can help ensure that your final document requires little more than pushing the print button and adding your signature, thus avoiding unnecessary editing and cleanup because the transcriptionist could not understand you or did not have all the necessary information on hand.

## Technical Tips

### Phone-in Dictation

**Speakerphones**— Avoid using a speakerphone. Your voice will sound hollow and tinny and pick up other noises in the room unnoticeable to you (PC motor, A/C unit, fans, etc.). If you prefer “hands-free” dictation, a high-quality headset is recommended.

**Cell Phones**—Turn the phone off for one minute and then back on to “reset” it to the nearest tower for the best reception. Play back the first few seconds of dictation to make sure the connection is clear. If it isn’t, consider using a land line phone (if one is available), trying another location, or trying again at a later time. If you are using a headset, try removing it to see if you get better sound quality. If removing the headset improves the sound, you may want to consider upgrading to a higher-quality headset if you like the hands-free freedom.

### Portable Tape and Digital Dictation Units

Always use fresh batteries to ensure the best performance of the unit. Set the mic to “dictation” mode rather than “conference,” if that is an option. **Never use the “voice activated” (VOX) feature** as this will cut off the endings of words. **Never use the “extended play” feature** which is designed to give you the maximum amount of recording time per tape or digital memory chip; **always use the highest quality (shortest recording time) settings** to ensure the best clarity.

With tape units, rewind the tape to the beginning before and after dictating. Be sure to indicate the end of the dictation as well, if it’s necessary to flip the tape over. Make sure the tapes have been erased if previously used. If you must use a tape recorder, standard cassette tapes are far superior to microcassettes. The shorter the tape time, the better the clarity of the tape; thus 30-minute tapes are better than 120-minute tapes, which can result in voice distortion as the tape plays up to and past the halfway point.

### Before you Begin

**Noise Factors** — To reduce background hums and other interference, turn off all extraneous noise in the room such as television or music sources. Sit as far away as possible from fans and A/C motors or other “blowing” noises, or turn them off. As much as possible, avoid dictating in noisy environments such as restaurants, hotel lobbies, airports, cafeterias, or windy outdoor locales.

If you must dictate in such environments, try to minimize the extraneous noise by finding the quietest spot available. In a vehicle, close the windows and turn off the radio; turn off the heater or A/C or sit in the back seat, if possible, to distance yourself from the loud hum.

When traveling by plane, try to reserve or find a seat that is not over the wing where the motor can be heard very loudly, or near the beverage/service area. If you are dictating from home, try to find a quiet spot in a room with the door closed or away from kids playing, babies crying, dogs barking, etc.

## **Dictation Tips**

Avoid creating your own noise. Under no circumstances should you ever chew gum or eat or drink anything while the recorder is turned on. The sound (that you may not even notice) is magnified many times by the recorder and is more than merely annoying—it is absolutely gross.

**Gather Your Materials** — Have all of the necessary materials or information on hand before you begin to dictate, such as:

1. Complete names and addresses (with correct spellings and ZIP codes) of all addressees, including cc'd individuals or companies.
2. All pertinent reference line information (subject line, file numbers, etc.)
3. All numerical information such as dollar amounts, totals, figures, appointment or follow-up dates, etc.
4. Correct spellings of medical or other special terminology, individuals or companies mentioned in the document, citation references, etc., as well as website and e-mail addresses that will be included in the dictation.

### **Begin the Dictation**

Speak in a natural voice, enunciating clearly and distinctly. Avoid speaking so fast that you slur or mumble your words.

Begin the dictation with the following information:

1. Identify yourself as the speaker.
2. State the current date.
3. State the type of dictation (letter, memo, form, etc.) and whether or not specific templates, letterhead, or forms will be used.
4. Dictate any special instructions (i.e., “This will be the same letter going to three different people, so I will need three separate letters.”)

5. State whether the dictation is priority or rush status.

**Priority Status** — Work is done in the order it is received and will usually be delivered within 48 hours from receipt of the dictation, unless prior arrangements have been made for same-day delivery. If you are dictating several pieces of correspondence or documents and you wish to have one or more of them done ahead of the others, then mark those files as priority (by pushing the \* key on the keypad at any time) in the dictation process and they will be transcribed ahead of the others in the daily batch. If you are in doubt as to whether you have already pushed the \* key, just push it again, as it will toggle the priority status on or off. A voice will tell you whether it has been turned on or off, and you can retoggle it back on, if necessary.

**Rush Status** — Please alert us prior to dictating a “hot rush,” so that we can examine our work schedule and determine what the turnaround time will be and make sure that we can meet the deadline. If it is an especially long file, or if there is a real crunch for time, it is best to break up the dictation by ending it every ten minutes or so and begin a new file (by pressing “9” on the keypad), so that we can receive partially completed file and begin the transcription right away; that way, by the time you have finished dictating, the finished transcript will be delivered in the shortest amount of time.

**The Flow**— Dictate things in the order that they will be typed. For letters and memos, start with the date, followed by the recipient(s) information (with complete address for letters), subject/reference lines, salutation (Dear Mr. Smith, or Dear Joe), the body of the letter, closing, cc and bcc notations (with complete name and address), as well as enclosures or attachments.

For forms, have a blank form in front of you and follow along in the order that it will be filled in. Clearly state when you have moved on to another field. When dictating a “fill-in-the-blank” merge form, indicate the “stop number” for each new piece of information. In merge forms, you don’t need to indicate what the information is, only the stop number.

For example, if the merge form is a letter that includes, “File No.: [stop 3] and the salutation appears on the merge form as “Dear [stop 4]:” – you would dictate, “stop 3, 54343; stop 4, Joe,” rather than say “for stop 3, the file number is 54343; for stop 4, put Dear Joe.”

**The Dictation**— Enunciate your words as clearly as possible. Listening to words on tape is more challenging than watching them speak those same words face-to-face; sounds can easily be blurred or misheard. It is very important to spell everything that may be subject to being misheard or misinterpreted or for which the correct spelling may not be familiar to the transcriptionist.

Indicate all punctuation, including indentations and paragraphs, capitalizations, any words that have multiple spellings (Brian, Bryan; Glenn, Glen, etc.), plural words, especially if they are followed by a word that begins with an “s” sound, numbers that sound similar (50, 15), etc. Spell all street names and any cities that are not blatantly obvious (such as New York, St. Louis, etc.).

Names that may seem obvious to you might not be to the transcriptionist. Is it Anderson or Andersen? Are you saying Hutchison or Hutchinson (the “n” may not be heard clearly)? Also indicate whether you want Arabic numbers, Roman numerals, or the numbers spelled out.

While it is important to include as much detail as possible in your dictation, it need not be laborious for you or the transcriptionist. Below are examples of preferred dictation styles that will ensure you receive a finished work product in a timely fashion that is ready to go and doesn't require a lot of editing or cleanup.

The author's special instructions are indicated in brackets.

**AVOID:** Our two experts, Brian Phillips and Katherine Fischer-McGraw, will meet with us at 1615 Glen Ridge Lane to discuss the main issues surrounding this case.

*This passage leaves the transcriptionist guessing: Brian or Bryan? Phillips or Philips? Katherine or Catherine? Fischer or Fisher? McGraw or Macgraw? 1615 or 1650? Glen Ridge or Glenridge? Issue or issues?*

**PREFERRED:** Our two experts [*comma*], [*cap B-r-i-a-n, cap P-h-i-l-l-i-p-s*] and [*cap K-a-t-h-e-r-i-n-e, cap F-i-s-c-h-e-r, hyphen, cap M, lowercase a-c-g-r-a-w, comma*], will meet with us at [*Arabic 1-6-1-5*] Glenridge [*Glenridge is one word*] to discuss the main issues [*plural*] surrounding this case.

*This passage includes all the necessary instructions with minimal effort.*

**AVOID:** Mr. James' sister has organized the Bolan Neighborhood Beautification Association (hereinafter referred to as the "Association"). *Absent any instructions, the operator did her best to get this right, but unbeknownst to her, she still missed something.*

**PREFERRED:** Mr. James' [*s apostrophe*] sister has organized the [*all caps, B-O-L-N, initial (or "inish") caps Beautification Association, paren*], hereinafter referred to as the [*quote, cap Association, close quote, close paren, period*].

*This passage is instructive with minimal wording and no backtracking.* If you have spelled a proper word or unusual terminology once in the document, there is no need to spell it every time.

Dictating punctuation is recommended if you are planning to give your dictation to someone new or temporary. Once the transcriptionist becomes familiar with your personal style of punctuation, you may find it easier to omit the punctuation instructions.

**Frequently Used Words** — If you will be dictating regularly and engaging in frequent use of the same terms that are unique to your company or industry, including contact names, industry brand names, and other special terminology, it is helpful if you can provide us with hardcopies of these spellings so that we can build our own custom reference lists and this will minimize the amount of instructive spelling you have to do as time goes on.