



McGowan
transcribe + translate

0800 158 3747

Our free eBook guide



Recording your audio files – our best tips!

TABLE OF CONTENTS



Introduction



General Recording Guidelines



Depth Interviews



Group Discussions



Telephone Interviews



Cloud Applications



And finally...



McGowan Transcriptions

INTRODUCTION



Introduction

Since 1993 we have been transcribing nearly 600 hours of recordings weekly, with over 23,300 satisfied customers, which we believe makes us experts in what constitutes a great recording, and what pitfalls can be avoided.

We have put together some guidelines that will enable you to produce a good-quality recording, which will give us the best chance of transcribing every single word spoken.

We receive thousands of recordings over the course of a year and our transcribers often work nothing short of a miracle to transcribe a fuzzy, low-toned, atmospheric, poor-quality recording.

When you listen to your recordings you might think, 'I can hear what's being said,' but you may have the benefit of having already heard the conversation once in person. Furthermore, hearing a conversation and being able to decipher every word are two very different things. To a transcriber who is coming to your recording for the first time, it is like walking into a dark room, trying to piece together what's going on without any foreknowledge of what they are about to hear.

For transcribers, who have to wear headphones, they will also hear at full volume the plate being dropped in the canteen kitchen or the screech of a chair being scraped across the floor. This is sometimes why we have to tell clients that their recording presents a health and safety issue. We value our transcribers' ears!

Your words are our business, and we hope the following pages are of benefit to you.



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GENERAL RECORDING GUIDELINES



General Recording Guidelines

Voice recorders: whilst smartphones are great for many things, they are not brilliant when it comes to producing a crisp recording. It's worth investing in a decent digital voice recorder that will help to ensure your valuable research is recorded clearly and accurately.

Can I send you my cassette tape? Not since the Millennium, unfortunately. We work with digital audio files that can be either uploaded to our secure system, or for which you can provide a link for us to download the material.

Audio file format: most new digital recorders on the market will create audio files in a format that can be played back on a computer. The formats that are best for transcription purposes are .WAV and .MP3.



Invest in a good voice recorder so that we can produce as accurate a transcript as possible for your analysis

Guidelines continued

Test your new recorder: some of our tips are simple common sense, but it's worth noting that doing a trial run and listening back to your recording is a good idea. It will give you an idea of what a transcriber will have to work with when they receive your file. See more below about dos and don'ts whilst recording.

Batteries – make sure you have spares! Always pop a few extra batteries in with your recorder as the recording quality does distort as the battery starts to wear low.

Backing up: it's so easy to omit this step but you may live to regret it if you do. It may even contravene your organisation's data protection and ethics requirements if you don't back up the file and quickly remove it from your voice recorder. All recordings are deleted from our systems 90 days after completion.



Be prepared; ensure you've tested your new recorder and that you have a spare set of batteries

Guidelines continued

Mobile phones are a distraction to your participants and respondents, and an unpleasant noise distortion for transcribers. So, it's always advisable to make sure they are switched off before you start. Putting them on silent will stop the interruption, but it will still affect the recording, as phones regularly search for a signal. Switching them to silent and moving them away from the recorder will ensure little to no distortion.

Location, location, location! Continual loud background noise is one of the main contributing factors to recordings being a health hazard to transcribers. So please choose your interview location wisely. We are unfortunately unable to transcribe files if we think they present a health and safety issue.



Even professional viewing facilities can get microphone positioning wrong, so it's a good idea to take your own recording device as a back up!



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DEPTH INTERVIEWS

Interviews

Positioning the device: whilst your focus in terms of research is on the respondent, the transcriber will be trying to hear your questions as well as the answers – especially if you require full verbatim transcripts. If possible, position the voice recorder so that all speakers can be heard clearly. If placing the recorder on a table between you, put it on top of a book or a soft object to avoid dialogue being missed due to the clunks and thuds of the furniture. Please ensure refreshments are as far away from the recording device as possible – crisp-crunching can be surprisingly loud!

Hm-mm... in the course of conversation, we all make sounds confirming that we have heard the other speaker. On a recording, however, these sounds can drown out part of the respondent's reply.

Also see the tips for Group Discussion recordings overleaf!



Where possible, keep conversational courtesies such as hm-mm and aha to a minimum so that they do not obscure any words.



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GROUP DISCUSSIONS

Group Discussions

Microphones: interviewers sometimes place recorders or microphones close to themselves rather than the participants, which means the people on the other side of the room are virtually inaudible. If you are regularly recording group discussions, it is worth investing in omnidirectional or additional microphones.

Interruptions: unavoidable perhaps with a group, but it's worth reminding the participants that talking over one another will make it impossible for each speaker to be clearly heard on the recording.

Identifying participants: most interviewers will do this, but sometimes in a formal meeting the initial introductions are overlooked. If you need us to identify speakers by name or initial, we need to hear them say their name so that we can identify the sound of the voice with a particular person from the beginning.



Groups present their own transcribing challenges and so, more than ever, movement and ambient sound needs to be kept to a minimum



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TELEPHONE INTERVIEWS

Interviews by Telephone

Call adapters: we sometimes receive beautiful recordings of the moderator conducting a telephone interview, but often the respondent is almost inaudible. Call recording adapters help to ensure the best possible recording.

Interruptions: whilst the occasional comment from an interviewer during a respondent's reply can cause issues in depth interviews, during a telephone discussion this can result in parts of the dialogue being missed altogether. The occasional word thrown in by the interviewer can sometimes knock out the respondent's voice entirely, leaving no potential for the transcriber to discern what is being said by rewinding and listening again.

Speakerphones: recording with speakerphone switched on produces a very poor recording so it is best to avoid this altogether.



It is particularly important to ensure you have the right equipment to produce a clear telephone recording – speakerphones are not first choice!



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CALLS IN THE CLOUD



Cloud Applications

Skype, Google Hangouts, Zoom and other cloud-based solutions: usually, recording via the microphone in your computer will produce a passable audio file. However, you can find recording software online to download which is usually quite inexpensive - or even free of charge - that will produce a better-quality recording.

Google Plus conferences: a very clever way of sharing your Google Plus video conferences is to upload them directly to your YouTube channel; then simply provide us with a link to download them at our end.



There are many cloud-based solutions so it's worth doing a little research to find one that suits you and that produces clear recordings.



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AND FINALLY...



And finally...

To our clients: we want to thank all of you who, over the years that you have been sending your transcription projects to us, have made every effort to ensure that the recording is as close to crystal clear as it can be. We do appreciate you and so does our fabulous team of transcribers!

We hope this eBook is read in the way it is intended; as a gentle guide to assist you in your work and to help us provide a first-class service to you.

**With thanks from us all
at McGowan Transcriptions**

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www.mcgowantranscriptions.co.uk

