



The Perfect Dictator

Dictate
NOW
Transcription &
Digital Dictation Services

There is a growing acceptance that dictation can improve efficiency and allow individuals more time to spend on valuable activities, but there is perhaps a misconception that it's just about talking normally into a dictation machine.

When it comes to accurate business, legal or medical dictation, it's important to follow a few simple rules that will make transcription easier and more accurate, whilst helping businesses save money too.

We undertake thousands of transcriptions each week and there is a huge variation in the quality of the dictations, which affects the time it takes to transcribe and the accuracy of the finished document.

There is little training for individuals wanting to dictate, with most people assuming it's simply talking into a dictation machine, remembering to put commas in the right places and when to start new paragraphs; but it's more complicated than that.

The question we are most often asked about achieving high quality dictation is what machine to use. When the same question was put to a professional photographer, the reply was, "the one you have with you" and the same is true for dictation. Given that many service providers offer free dictation apps for Smartphones, you can ensure you always have your dictation machine with you, ready to work wherever and whenever you need it.

The choice of machine is entirely personal, but whichever machine you use, dedicated dictation machine or Smartphone app, it's important not to hold it too close. You should hold the microphone of the machine about six inches from your mouth to prevent a variety of unwanted sounds. Words beginning with a P or a B, like "probate" or "bankrupt" will cause a burst of air to hit the microphone and distort the sound.

When you get too close, in addition to this 'plosive' effect as it is known, the machine is likely to pick up breathing sounds as you exhale, which again can cause your words to be muffled, with the potential for misinterpretation or errors in the final transcription. When preparing to dictate, your surroundings and

frame of mind will affect the final quality of both your dictation and the accuracy of the resultant transcription. Ideally you should know what you want to say, be relaxed when you say it and in a quiet environment that allows you to focus on the job in hand – quite literally.

Recognising the challenging and competitive working environment of most regular dictators, work will often be done on the go, in the car, sat outside court or even running for a train, all of which poses different problems for those tasked with transcribing the digital sound files. However, noises close to the microphone are more of a problem and at the very least, dictators should avoid shuffling papers and tapping away at their keyboard.

Keeping background noise to a minimum is essential for clear dictation. Whilst this can be tricky in a busy office or chambers, with phones ringing, doors slamming and colleagues chatting, it's better to find somewhere quiet, rather than constantly stopping and starting your recording when it gets too loud. If you like to use time wasted travelling, it's a good idea to turn off your sat-nav instructions, which can cause a lot of confusion for transcription typists.

Although microphones will often pick up background noise, you can experiment with its sensitivity settings to reduce the distance at which the microphone will pick up sounds and ensure your voice is the focus of the recording.



You now have your machine of choice in hand, the right distance from your mouth and are ready to dictate. It's important to pause after you press the record button and again before you stop recording to prevent your first and last words being clipped each time. Practice makes perfect and you will soon get used to how quickly your machine or app begins recording after you start recording.

Perhaps the most obvious, yet most important point to appreciate when dictating, is the need to speak slowly and as clearly as possible; the better your diction, the better the dictation. If you send your dictation externally for transcription, it is worth bearing in mind most service providers will charge by the length of the dictation. It might be tempting therefore to speak more quickly, but it's more important to avoid as many 'ums' and 'ers' as possible, which will naturally lengthen your dictation, add nothing to your work and cost you more.

Experienced, qualified legal transcription typists will understand that the only punctuation they will use throughout a document is that explicitly required by

the dictator. Nothing else will be added as an errant comma or apostrophe could change the meaning of what was intended, quite significantly, particularly when working with legal or medical transcriptions.

A good example of the effect of unwanted or unintended punctuation can be seen in 'Drafting Errors: The Case of The Million Dollar Comma'. The case involved Rogers Communications Inc., Canada's largest cable television provider and the termination of a contract, which hinged on the presence of a comma in the English language contract, that was absent in the French language version – possibly more a translation error than transcription, but someone inserted that comma where it was not intended.

For this reason, you must dictate all punctuation and not just the obvious full stops and commas, but the apostrophes, new paragraphs and new lines. You must dictate both opening and closing quotation and parentheses marks or they will not appear and require you to spend longer putting them into the returned transcription.

Punctuation

Full Stop	.	Align (direction)	←
Comma	,	Indent	→
Exclamation Mark	!	Open Parentheses	(
Question Mark	?	Close Parentheses)
Colon	:	Apostrophe	'
Semicolon	;	Quotation Marks	" "
Paragraph	¶	Slash	/
New Line		Ampersand	&



Often your transcription will require the formatting of text and whilst some dictators prefer to add their own to the final transcription, it will save you time in the long run if you add it into your dictation.

When you want to underline, capitalise or bold certain elements of your text, simply say STOP and then issue instructions for how the next word, words, sentence etc., should be treated.

STOP	Centred
STOP	In bold type
STOP	In italics
STOP	Underline type
STOP	Spelled/Spelt
STOP	In capitals

In general, the 'Spelled/Spelt' command need only be used for obscure words, names and addresses, etc. Most experienced, qualified transcription typists will not only have a good working knowledge of the English language, but also commonly used legal expressions, including Latin terms, along with specialist medical terminology.

Foreign language words, complicated technical expressions or difficult terms or names should be spelled out, following the pronunciation of the word or words in question. For example, when dictating the obscure legal term 'mesne profits', where mesne is pronounced 'mean', you might need to spell it out as; M for Mike, E for Echo, S for Sierra, N for November, E for Echo.

We recommend the following phonetic alphabet, which will be recognisable to most.



The International Radiotelephony Spelling Alphabet

A	Alpha	J	Juliet	S	Sierra
B	Bravo	K	Kilo	T	Tango
C	Charlie	L	Lima	U	Uniform
D	Delta	M	Mike	V	Victor
E	Echo	N	November	W	Whiskey
F	Foxtrot	O	Oscar	X	X-Ray
G	Golf	P	Papa	Y	Yankee
H	Hotel	Q	Quebec	Z	Zulu
I	India	R	Romeo		

Numbers present a different set of problems for transcription typists and should always be dictated in the same way to reduce the chance of confusion. Whether you say nought or zero is a personal choice, but as long as it remains consistent throughout there should be no problem; just try to avoid interchanging them or suddenly switching to 'O'.

You will also need to dictate any relevant reference numbers at the start of your dictation to identify the client or case to which the work refers.

Typically, dictators can speak direct to the typist about to undertake the transcription and discuss any unique needs or complicated instructions. Dictation software will also typically allow clients to include notes with their sound files, where typists can view any special instructions from the dictator concerning their dictation.

In simple terms, to ensure you receive accurate transcriptions that save you time typing initially and time correcting the returned work, pay attention to the quality of your dictation and remember, press record and speak clearly.

How to pronounce numbers

0	Zero or Nought - Never 'O'
1,000	One Thousand - not 'a thousand'
1977	Nineteen seventy seven
3.18	Three point one eight
12,700	Twelve thousand seven hundred

DictateNow is part of the



DictateNow has a large team of UK-based qualified and experienced secretaries available 7 days a week including evenings, on a pay-as-you-go basis. No work goes abroad, in compliance with the Data Protection Act, which also ensures work is of the highest possible quality. The average turnaround time for standard dictations is 45 minutes.

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