



BREAKING INTO  
**TRANSCRIPTION**

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# Breaking Into General Transcription

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## Outline:

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# Getting Started in General Transcription

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There are dozens – maybe hundreds – of ways people [earn money online from home](#). Service providers top the list, offering everything from photo manipulation to website design to ghostwriting.

One of the most popular choices, if you've got nimble fingers, is transcription. Simply put, transcription is the task of turning spoken words into a written document. This report is a how-to guide to transcription and is broken down into 10 different sections to guide you through the basics of transcription, from what it is and who uses it to how you can build your transcription business.

## What is Transcription?

A lot of people confuse transcription with dictation. They are two completely different things even though they both involve typing (transcribing) spoken word. The difference is that dictation is done 'live' whereas transcription is done with a recording.

For example, in a courtroom you'll often see a court reporter sitting near the judge with a stenotype machine. She is recording what each person is saying as it happens. This is dictation. Transcription is where you listen to what someone is saying after an event (a webinar, teleseminar, podcast interview, etc) and transcribe that to text. So, let's take a look at transcription and the definition of transcribe.

According to dictionary.com, the definition of transcribe is:

*to make a written copy, especially a typewritten copy, of (dictated material, notes taken during a lecture, or other spoken material).*

When you think of transcription you may think of medical transcription, as that's a common thing that most people are familiar with. Medical (and legal) transcription are actually highly specialized areas that require certification in order for you to find employment. That's not the type of transcription we're discussing here.

In this case we are talking about general transcription. And to take that a step further, as mentioned above, we're talking about taking podcast, webinar or teleseminar material and having it transcribed into a text document (transcript).

In years past transcription was done using analog files – either standard or micro cassettes. It was time consuming because the cassettes had to be mailed via snail mail to whoever was doing the transcription. And not only was having to mail bulky cassettes via snail mail an inconvenience, the analog files weren't the best quality. Meaning, they were often challenging to transcribe because of poor audio quality.

Thanks to the evolution of technology over the years, it's easier than ever to do transcription because of digital formats such as MP3 and WAV files (MP4 for video) that get uploaded to transcription software where the audio can be played back. Digital formats not only make transcription easier because they can be sent via the internet but they are better because the audio quality is so much clearer.

Another area that is important to talk about is the benefits of transcription. So, let's take a look at that right now.

## Benefits of Transcription

Because people absorb information in different ways, content needs to be provided in different formats including transcripts. Some people prefer to read content, some prefer to listen, and some prefer video. By offering a variety of formats, website owners can attract a larger audience.

So, let's talk about some of the benefits of transcription and how it can help a business owner.

- **Reach a broader market** – people that have hearing impairments may come across content and if it's not offered in a text format such as a transcript of a recent podcast episode, or webinar/teleseminar, they won't be able to benefit from the content because they can't hear it. A transcript allows them to have access to podcasts, interviews, teleseminars and other recorded material they might not otherwise be able to listen to. A transcript also gives that person who can't have computer speakers turned on to listen to the audio access to the content as well. And of course there are those that just prefer to read rather than listen. A transcript gives them that choice.
- **Information Products** – one of the great things about transcripts is that they make it easy for a business owner to put a bunch of them together in a way that makes sense and flows nicely, to create information products to sell. For example, if someone has a podcast and they do a weekly series where they interview a successful business owner about a specific topic (blogging for example), each one of these interviews can be transcribed and put together to create a special report. Or they can use the report as a 'bribe' to get people to opt-in to their mailing list.
- **Repurpose the transcripts** – another benefit of transcription is that the content from a transcript can be repurposed. Blog posts, articles, special reports and more can be created from the content. Transcripts can even be used as a video script. Bits and pieces of the content can be used as Twitter posts or Facebook messages. The content could also be used to add to a newsletter mailing. The options are nearly limitless.
- **Search Engine Friendly** – Google and other search engines like Bing and Yahoo can't search audio and video files. Having transcripts of content (assuming they are posted on the web where they can be accessed) make it easier for the search engines to 'crawl' the content. To make the content even more SEO friendly, a keyword/keyword phrase should be used naturally throughout the transcript if possible.
- **Get your name in front of more people** – If you have a podcast or interview series, a transcript of each episode may be given to the interviewee, so that he or she can share it with his or her audience. This gets is an excellent way to introduce yourself to a much larger audience, just by having your podcast or interview transcribed.

These are just five of the benefits of transcription. There are more, but these should give a good enough idea to understand how it can be beneficial to business owners – and why transcription is in such high demand.

In fact, not only is transcription beneficial for online business owners, but also for their audience, giving them additional ways to consume the content. Some are visual, some are audio and some learn best through reading. Providing a transcript is a great way to reach a broader audience, as mentioned above.

## Who Uses a Transcriptionist?

Now you may be wondering who would use your transcription services. As mentioned above in the benefits section, you can clearly see that just from the benefits mentioned, many people could use your services.

Here are some people that could use the help of a transcriptionist and why:

- **Life Coach** – they could have their coaching calls transcribed and give them to their clients (and keep one on file for themselves) so that they (the client and coach) have a reference sheet for what was talked about in the call.
- **Business Coach** – again, just like a life coach and what was mentioned above, a business coach could also have their coaching calls transcribed and give it to their clients.
- **Writers** – maybe a writer has several pages of notes jotted down or they recorded some ideas, they could have these transcribed so that they have a more organized way of looking at their notes/thoughts so it will help them in the writing process.
- **Speakers** – when a speaker does a presentation, they can have it transcribed and then send out the transcript to all the participants as a bonus. If they're going to turn the presentation into an information product, the transcript can be an added bonus.
- **Information Product sellers** – again, this goes back to the different ways people like to consume information. A product seller could have a video or audio presentation transcribed and turn it into a written information product.
- **Podcasters** – A transcript of a podcast episode might be offered on a website as a free download, added to Amazon as a Kindle book, or compiled with a series of episodes into an information product to sell.

The list could go on and on but this gives you a general idea of people who could use your services. Now that you know the people that can benefit from transcription services it's up to you to determine those people you want to work with.

For example, let's say you want to provide your services to authors. Get more specific than just the generalization of authors. Do you want to work with women authors? Women authors who write non-fiction? Women authors who are baby boomers? Women authors who write romance novels? Women authors who write self-help books?

Get specific! The more specific you can be about whom you want to work with the easier it will be to market and find clients. You'll learn more about marketing in a later section of this report.

## Recording Podcasts, Webinars and Teleseminars

You may be wondering how you'll get the files that you will transcribe. As mentioned above, audio files are MP3 or WAV (just to name a few, there are other file formats too) and a video file format is MP4. Your client can send via email (if it's a small enough file), or through a file-sharing service such as DropBox or Google Drive.

This information can be helpful if you get a client who isn't quite sure how transcription works. You can use this information to teach them. And don't forget to make sure you're using an affiliate link to recommend services to clients ;-). So, let's jump right in and take a look at how to record podcasts, webinars and teleseminars.

### Webinar and Teleseminars

Obviously the content has to be recorded so that you can transcribe it. Webinars and teleseminars can often be recorded right within a service that hosts webinar and teleseminars.

For example, Instant Teleseminar is one of the services available for teleseminars and webinars and it has a cool feature where as soon as the event starts, it automatically starts recording. You can also manually record (still using their software and not needing any special tools to do it) which is nice for if you are using a PowerPoint Presentation because it will record the audio and slide show presentation.

Instant teleseminar is just one example of services available but there are many others out there. Just to name a few others – GoToWebinar, WebEx, and Adobe Connect. When it comes to choosing which service to use, there are several aspects to think about. How many virtual seats will be needed? Some services only allow up to 100 and charge extra for more after that or may not even have the ability to provide more 'room' for more than 100 people on a call/webinar.

Will there be video or a slide show? Some services don't give you the capability or running a video event or sharing slides. What about the audience? Do you want them to be able to chat amongst each other? If so, again, make sure the service you're looking at has that capability.

### Podcast

When it comes to your podcast, this is where additional tools are needed to be able to record. One popular method of recording is using software called [Audacity](#). If you're doing an interview, a popular way to record this is via Pamela for Skype. But then you'll still need software like Audacity to be able to combine the interview with your intro and closing, add in music, etc.

As a side note, maybe you can offer an add on (upsell) to your transcription services by offering to handle the 'technical' aspect of downloading the files you'll need in order to do the transcription for your client. And maybe it's not even the matter of promoting it as handling the technical aspect, maybe it's more of your client not having the time to do all that and it would

just make more sense to give you access to go in and download the file(s) you'll need so it's pretty much a total hands off experience for your client.

So, now that you know how podcasts, webinars and teleseminars are recorded. Let's take a look at what equipment a general transcriptionist needs.

## The Tools of a Transcriptionist's Trade

The next step in transcription is to make sure you have the proper equipment you need to transcribe podcasts, webinars or teleseminars. General transcription really only requires five main pieces of equipment/tools and those are:

- Computer
- Microsoft Word (or other word processing software)
- Headphones
- Transcription Audio Software
- Foot Pedal

Now, let's take a look at each of these in a little more depth.

Obviously, you'll need a computer. That's pretty common sense and doesn't require much explanation. Microsoft Word (or Open Office) is what you'll need so you can type the text into it as you listen to the audio file and transcribe it. Again, this doesn't require much explanation as it too is pretty common sense.

Moving on, let's talk about headphones. While these aren't necessary, as you can listen to audio through speakers on your computer, they can make it easier to hear the audio. And they'll also help keep out noise distractions around you. Or vice versa – they'll keep the distraction away from people around you (if you're in a public setting or common room in your home). Having the ability to hear the audio through headphones can make it easier to understand if someone has a thick accent or the audio quality is poor. A noise canceling headphone works best. My favorite is the Cowin E7 Active Headphones.

Next, you'll need transcription audio software that gives you the capability to play, stop, rewind or fast forward the audio. One of the most common out there is [Express Scribe](#). One of the great things about this software is they offer [a free version](#) as well as a pro version. The free version works great if you don't plan on doing any video transcription. If you want to have the capability to play video files (MP4 and many other formats) you'll have to get the pro version.

And last but certainly not least, you'll need [a good foot pedal](#). Again, while this is not a requirement it truly does make a transcriptionist's life a LOT easier. In a job where you're getting paid per word, time equals money, and the faster you're able to do your job, the higher your pay.

Many foot pedals just plug right into a USB slot on your computer and don't require running any software to set them up. A good option to go with is a three button pedal where the left button

can be set up as rewind, the middle button (usually a larger button than the left and right ones) as play and stop, and then the right button as fast forward.

The reason a foot pedal makes things easier is because you have your hands free to continue typing and not have to worry about stopping your typing to use what's known as a hot key (function keys) on your keyboard. You'll use your foot (hence the name foot pedal) to control the play/stop, rewind and fast forward without having to remove your fingers from the keyboard.

As you can see, there's not a lot of investment when it comes to starting your transcription business. You most likely already have a computer and word processing software, so all that remains are the transcribing tools.

## What Skills Does a Transcriptionist Need?

There are some industry-specific skill sets that a transcriptionist may need based on the market he or she works in. For example, a medical transcriptionist would need to be familiar with medical terminology. A legal transcriptionist would need to be familiar with legal jargon. But for the sake of this report, we're referring to general transcription – transcription of podcasts, webinars, teleseminars, etc – so let's take a look at the basic skills needed for this.

The first skill a general transcriptionist needs to possess is the ability to multi-task. While multi-tasking isn't always an effective thing to do, in this case it's a positive thing. Being a transcriptionist requires the ability to listen, understand, type and run a foot pedal (if being used) at the same time.

The next skill is the ability to listen. While listening is a skill that everyone has, when it comes to transcription, listening takes on a bit of a new meaning. You have to be able to listen very closely, especially if the audio quality is poor or there is an accent or more than one person talking.

Another skill a general transcriptionist should possess is the ability to type quickly, and not just quickly but also accurately. Transcribing audio/video is a long process and the quicker you type, the faster the process will go. While there are lots of different variables here and no set 'rule', a 60 minute audio can take 3-3.5 hours. Of course, if the audio is poor quality, there are lots of speakers or a heavy accent it can take a lot longer.

Another skill needed is good grammar and a good understanding of punctuation. While you want to type as verbatim as possible, meaning you type word for word what is said, you need to be able to use punctuation and clean up a poorly structured spoken sentence. For example, if someone speaks the same word three times, more than likely you can delete two of them. If someone speaking stumbles over their words and then speaks a clear sentence, you can clean that up. Let's look at an example:

Spoken sentence/transcribed to text:

*uhm yes you could well you can while it's not necessary to peel the carrots before you put them in a juicer you can*

As you can see (or in the case of transcribing, you would hear) the person was stumbling over their words. So your job as a transcriptionist would be to clean that sentence up so it has proper grammar and would like this:

Cleaned up transcribed sentence:

*While it's not necessary to peel the carrots before you put them in a juicer, you can.*

The more you do transcription, the easier it will be for you to know when things need to be cleaned up and fixed. It's normal to remove words like uhm and ah also.

These are just some of the basic skills that a general transcriptionist should have. You should also be able to easily use Google (or other search engines) to search for information if needed. Sometimes you may have to Google something to try and figure out a word that was used, a person's name or a company that was referenced, or a product, etc.

## Should I get Transcription Training?

As a general transcriptionist, technically all you need is good listening, typing, and grammar skills. However, there are 3 big reasons why you may want to consider getting some training before diving head first into your first paid gig:

1. A course prepares you for the real world of transcribing, by putting you through the entire process of transcribing from start to finish. **In the world of business, first impression is everything.** So many people go into transcribing without any prior practice, and end up burning valuable opportunities and bridges due to not knowing what they are doing.
2. A course shows you all the tricks of the trade to work more efficiently when you transcribe, such as how to use text expanders, set up timestamps quickly, and deal with poor audio. In transcription, the bottom line is, the faster the work, the more you earn. Just this point alone makes it worthwhile to invest in a course that will help you work more efficiently from the get go.
3. A course helps distinguish you from the herd when you apply for your first transcription job. Let's face it, the entry to becoming a general transcriptionist is very low. As such, there is a surplus of workers compared to companies that are looking to hire them. Having some education under your belt greatly elevates you from the rest of the pack when you apply for your first job.

In other words, while you don't need any training to do transcription work, it's highly recommended.

One of the best video courses on general transcribing is Chelsea Flint's "[Learn Beginning to Advanced Transcription Skills](#)". As a transcriptionist herself, Chelsea knows exactly what skills you need to master to succeed, and delivers them to you in a video format that's easy to digest and fun.

The course is also super affordable, at \$25 or less when on sale ([check latest price](#)). I've seen some similar courses that cost hundreds of dollars more without being as actionable and helpful as this one.

If you decide that a course isn't for you, I still highly recommend that you at least practice transcribing on your own first. The worst time to practice and get a handle on the software and expected guidelines is on the job.

## Determining Your Rates

Pricing can be a tricky thing. Should I charge per hour? Should I charge per project? Or should I charge per audio minute? For transcription, it's normal to price per audio minute. Keep in mind that you should set up different levels of rates. Meaning, you can (and should) charge more for more speakers, poor audio quality, etc.

Another pricing option would be to set up different rates based on different delivery deadlines. For example, you could offer an economy option where it's a 15 business day turnaround time but they pay a pretty inexpensive price of \$0.75 (or whatever you decide) per audio minute. Then you could have an Express turnaround of 1 business day where they would pay a high price, for example \$1.99 per audio minute (or again, whatever you decide). And then add a few other options between those two.

If you choose to charge per hour, it doesn't take much to break that down into what the rate works out to be per audio minute and then list that too so people can see the breakdown.

If you choose to charge per project, the price will probably vary depending on what you're doing. Maybe a client wants the transcript branded with their name/company logo and information and then turned into a report with headings, formatting, etc. You'll have to decide a price that is fair for both you and your client. Take into consideration the time it will take to transcribe it and then the time it will take you to format it for them. Ultimately, you want to make a profit.

One thing about pricing is you need to make sure you're offering a competitive rate – one that isn't outrageous, one that isn't so low you're not really making any money (because remember, transcribing audio can be very time consuming), but one that you feel comfortable offering and that your clients won't have a problem paying. Do some research of your competitors and see what they're charging to help get an idea of what the going rate is.

And one great thing about pricing is that just because you choose a rate right now, doesn't mean you're stuck charging that forever. As you get faster, you can increase your rates. As you do more projects where it's not just transcription but formatting into a report (if you choose to do this), you'll learn to gauge how long it takes and can then charge accordingly.

Of course, you have to be comfortable with what you're charging and know that it's a fair price your customers will be willing to pay. You don't want to just one day decide to raise your rates then end up losing clients because they're not willing to pay what you're charging. That's not to say you can never increase your rates, though. Just be sure to let current clients know and give them a time frame for when the new rates will be charged (for example in 30 days).

## Landing Your First Clients

General transcription is a lot easier to get started with than specialized fields such as medical transcription. Those fields may require you to have a degree/certificate to even be considered for a job. Now, keep in mind that just because it's easier to get started with, it doesn't mean it's going to be as simple as 'build a website and they'll come.' Nothing ever works that way, including getting started as a general transcriptionist.

### Work for a Transcription Agency

The quickest way to break into the transcription industry is to work for a transcription agency. These companies act as the middle man between you and clients, taking a percentage of your earnings.

Start by going through [this list of updated transcription jobs](#) from agencies you can apply today to start working.

### Work for Yourself

One way you can break into working for yourself as a transcriptionist (where you generally earn more per hour) is to find someone in the industry who already has a successful transcription business. Approach her and find out if she would be willing to mentor you. Of course, it has to be a win/win situation. So while you will be gaining experience and getting mentored by a successful transcriptionist, there needs to be a benefit for her as well. In this case, it would be you doing some 'free' work.

Of course you shouldn't look at it that way. Instead look at it as you're gaining experience and being taught the ins and outs of general transcription from someone who went before you. They'll probably teach you mistakes to avoid, and so much more valuable information you can use in the long run. There's nothing better than hands on learning!

Again, another way is for more hands on learning. This suggestion is to just ask! Reach out to people in your circle of influence, explain to them that you're just starting out as a transcriptionist and you would be interested in doing a transcription project for them in return for a testimonial. Make a decision that you'll do, for example, 5 free transcription projects for 5 different people. If you know the market you want to serve, it would be a good idea to reach out to 5 people in that market.

Maybe you could even ask someone if they had an audio that was poor quality, had several speakers, or had someone with an accent – these would be great ways to get experience in handling these types of situations that will more than likely arise somewhere in the future when you're doing transcription.

Once you've built some experience and gained some testimonials it's time to begin marketing your services. Let's take a more in depth look at how to market transcription services.

## How to Market Your Transcription Services

The first thing you need to do before you begin marketing your transcription services is determine who your target market is. Who do you want to serve? Take some time doing to consider this and be as specific as possible. When you know exactly who your target market is, it's much easier for marketing purposes.

Once you know who you want to target it's time to start marketing to them and getting your name out there. You definitely want to take advantage of social media platforms like Twitter, LinkedIn, and Facebook. Depending on whom your market is, more than likely they are hanging around on social media. Facebook gives you the opportunity to build a fan page which is a great way to interact with your audience without using your personal account if you want to keep personal and business separate.

Another way you can market your services is by blogging and writing content that uses the keyword phrases people will search for when they're looking for a transcriptionist. This will help bring you targeted traffic. Once you're blogging, you can share links to your content on your social media platforms. A word of warning – you shouldn't just be promoting your stuff all the time, you want to be interacting with your audience and building relationships with them. If you're doing nothing but self-promotion all the time, people will lose interest in you and probably stop following you.

Guest blogging is another popular option and a great way to expand your reach and get your name in front of people you wouldn't normally have access to on your own. Of course if you go this route, make sure that you are only guest blogging on sites that are in your target market. The idea is to put yourself in front of those people that are looking for your services.

Podcast interviews are another marketing option. Do some research and find some people in your market that have a podcast and pitch them. Make sure you do your research and follow any guidelines they have in place about pitching yourself as a guest. And whatever you do – do not pitch to someone without having ever listened to at least one of their episodes!

And don't forget about using video to market your transcription services too. Remember, like mentioned above – people have different ways of consuming information, some like audio, some like video and some like reading. Use video to market to those who prefer video over other formats. Create videos and submit them to places like YouTube, Vimeo and other video sites.

These are just a few marketing ideas. There are so many options available. And get creative – think outside the box and see what unique things you can come up with.

## What Makes a Great Transcriptionist?

In this last section, let's talk about the things that you can do to stand out as a good transcriptionist. As mentioned above, general transcription is fairly easy to get started with so it's becoming more and more popular and you're starting to see more people offering this service. So, it's up to you to stand out above the crowd and to give your clients top notch service.

Here are some things that make a good transcriptionist:

**Common Sense** – you have to be able to use common sense and 'troubleshoot' on your own. Meaning, sometimes when you are transcribing a sentence won't make sense. A good transcriptionist can use common sense to put the sentence together in a way that makes sense and reads correctly.

**Detail Oriented** – don't just rely on Microsoft Word's spelling/grammar tool. Proofread the transcript and make sure there are no spelling errors or obvious grammar/punctuation issues.

**Meet Deadlines...Ahead of Time** – one thing that will really make you stand out is meeting a deadline early. Tell your client you'll have it ready Friday and turn it in to them on Wednesday.

**Professionalism** – return emails (or phone calls) within a timely manner, if your client points out something you overlooked (for example they found a spelling error or grammar/punctuation error) fix it right away and send the corrected document back to them.

**Discreetness** – it's your responsibility to be discreet about information that is heard and transcribed. You should also keep your clients anonymous unless they choose to provide you with a testimonial to put your site or they choose to mention that they're working with you.

**Organizational Skills** – you'll need to keep your client files organized in a way that make them easy to find. Of course in the beginning this will be easier because you probably will only have 1-2 clients you're working with. It will become more important the busier you get. If a client comes to you several months down the road asking for a file because they can't find it, you don't want to have to spend a lot of time searching your computer for it. Good organizational skills will let you find it quickly.

**Go above and beyond what is expected** – if your client is expecting just a plain Word Document with the transcribed text, add footer with their business name, website, etc. Add a header title. Or as you're transcribing if there are things that you can clearly tell should stand out as a header, make it bold. Let your client be surprised by the extra work you did that wasn't expected.

Really, it's not that hard to stand out as a good transcriptionist. It's a matter of providing quality work, being reliable and meeting deadlines (preferably ahead of time).

Getting your new transcription business off the ground isn't difficult once you know the basics. Start with a good understanding of what transcription is and who needs the services you provide, make sure you have the right equipment to get the job done, and start putting your name out there.

Before you know it, you'll have a thriving transcription business and be working from the comfort of your own home. And let's face it – isn't that the dream of everyone who heads off for that 9 to 5 job day in and day out?

## Conclusion

I hope you've enjoyed this mini course on transcription I've prepared for you. Working as a transcriptionist offers many unique benefits that can't be quantified with money alone. You get to set your own hours, choose the number of hours you work, and who you work with. You can even work remotely from anywhere in the world. To many people that's worth more than a higher paying 9-5 job.

-Kate Winston

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