

# IRENE BOSTON TRANSCRIPTION SERVICES

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## VIDEO TAPES AND DIGITAL DVD FACILITATION GUIDELINES & RECORDING TIPS

We have a wealth of experience in what works and what doesn't work for video tape and digital dvd recordings. These guidelines are divided into **facilitation advice** and more **technical recording tips**, as well as addressing any specific **transcription issues**. We hope that this will help our clients to make recordings of the highest quality which will, in turn, cut down on **transcription** times and costs.

Please see our [video tape transcription](#) and [digital transcription services](#) pages for details of the services we offer and our [Equipment](#) pages for further advice.

### FACILITATION GUIDELINES - PLEASE DO...

**Obtain necessary permissions** from your subjects beforehand. Ensure that they're aware they'll be filmed and that the subsequent recording will be transcribed. If they suddenly object on arrival, you may have to abandon the filming. If it's important to capture on the recording that they give their permission, do so at the beginning. This will protect you from any conflicts in the future and show clearly that you have addressed these issues.

**Brief the transcriber** on exactly what you need transcribed - see our [definitions](#) page for clarification on the type of transcript. Decide if you need any housekeeping issues or background transcribed. After the session, provide the transcriber with a **list of questions** or any supporting background material. This will cut down on transcription time or reduce any issues over unclear sections of the recording. Decide if you want your questions to be typed in shortened format and only the responses in full.

Think about the **filming location**. Recording in a quiet, indoor environment is critical to ensure the best quality of sound recording. If it's being professionally filmed in a studio, this shouldn't be an issue but if you're choosing the location yourself, **consider the acoustics of where you'll be filming**. A large room with a high ceiling ('church' like conditions) will produce significant echo resulting in a 'booming' on the recording which could make it difficult to hear, especially if anyone has a quiet voice.

**Filming set-up** - if the filming session is a meeting or a focus group situation with multiple participants, don't automatically assume that the camera will help the transcriber to **identify each speaker**. If only one camera is used, that will mean that half the participants will be sideways on, or with their backs to the camera and it will be impossible to tell who is talking each time a comment is made.

**Brief the participants** - some people will be understandably nervous about being filmed. You may have to spend some time at the outset reassuring people who are not used to it. As part of the brief about the subject to be covered, it would also be helpful to remind them to speak clearly, not all at once and to minimise any additional background noise that could impact on the recording.

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### FACILITATION GUIDELINES - PLEASE DO... cont/d.

**Turn off all mobile phones.** Text messages or voice mails emit a radio frequency which is inaudible to the human ear but your recording equipment will pick it up, and the resulting buzzing noise will drown out whatever is being said at the time. Turning mobile phones to 'silent' or 'vibrate' mode is not enough - they need to be turned off.

**Ensure everyone can be heard.** If any speakers have quiet voices or mumble, they'll not be picked up by the camera, however sophisticated it might be. If you can't hear what they're saying, then the chances are we can't either on the finished recording.

**Ask people to speak up or repeat anything** you don't hear clearly. Invariably, people don't realise they're speaking softly - we rarely 'hear' our own voices. If they regard taking part in a filming session as important enough to set aside time, the chances are they'll want their contribution heard. Most are happy to speak up if asked to do so.

**Be firm** during the filming session. Although it may be difficult to interrupt for fear of putting people off, if they begin to go off at a tangent, you may have to. When people become animated about a topic, they invariably speak over each other. You may need to **remind the participants to speak individually** or their contributions will be lost.

**Assist in clarification** - if materials such as products or adverts are being shown during the session, **don't automatically assume the camera will pick them up** without a close up. It would be a good idea to say what IT is for the recording. Letting someone say, 'we preferred that to that one' doesn't help if you can't clearly see what they're referring to! You may remember what 'that' is at the time but will you later on when it comes to analysing the transcript?

**Ask people to spell out any names, places or complex terminology** that's unclear, either at the time or at the end, if you don't want to interrupt the flow of the filming.

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### FACILITATION GUIDELINES - PLEASE DO NOT...

**Record in a noisy environment** such as restaurants, open spaces, airports, pubs, trains, cafes if it can be avoided. Background noise is often more intrusive on recordings than we realise at the time. Voices can easily be swamped by extraneous noise, especially when people are softly spoken. If people talk about what to them are sensitive issues, they'll invariably drop their voice so anyone nearby can't hear what they're saying. If they do, the camera may not pick them up. **Record indoors if you have a choice.**

**Leave windows open** - however hot the day may be, windows need to be closed. Noise from traffic, roadworks and aeroplanes will all impact on your recording. Unless using a noise cancelling microphone, most mics are not as selective as the human ear and can't filter out extraneous noise in the same way we can. They record everything they hear and the loudest noise will dominate.

**Sit near noisy machinery** such as air conditioning, photocopiers, heaters or computers - even radios in the background can dominate a recording and make it impossible to hear.

**Have crockery near the microphone.** It's tempting to have tea or coffee to relax the participants. If the cups are too near any microphones, the clattering of the crockery will be the loudest sound on the recording.

**Shuffle papers** near the microphone. As this may be the source of the nearest noise, that's what the microphone will hear and it will drown out whatever is being said. If you need to refer to a list of questions, it may be worthwhile either having them on one side of A4, if possible, or on cards for ease of reference.

**Write near the microphone** if you can avoid it. We have often heard recordings where the scribbling of a pen is the loudest sound we hear throughout the recording!

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### RECORDING TIPS - PLEASE DO...

**Use recording equipment that is fit for purpose** - we would urge all clients to **use digital format recordings**. Although digital video presents many of the problems associated with analogue video, it still produces a better quality recording. The sound quality on digital is always far superior to analogue. This will cut down on transcription time, minimise the number of inaudibles and reduce costs. Please read our [comparison](#) between digital and analogue recordings. Most professional film studios can also produce a digital audio recording at the same time as the film - this will save the transcriber having to convert the video and will also save you money.

**Digital video compatibility** - check that the digital video format you are using is compatible and can be converted into a digital audio file, either by yourself or by the transcriber. Digital transcription software will only transcribe from an audio file so this conversion is essential in order for it to be transcribed. If it is not compatible, then it may be possible to rerecord the video onto audio - this takes 'real time' so does add to the turnaround time.

**Video tape compatibility** - check that the videos which you're producing are compatible with the player which your transcriber uses. In Europe, our format is PAL and in America NTSC is used. So, in this instance, the location of your transcriber IS important.

**Camera positions** - if you're making a video of a meeting or a focus group and wish speakers to be identified, think about the camera positions. Unless the faces are clearly visible, it may not be possible to identify who is speaking.

A **seating plan** will help enormously, especially as it's rare for a camera image to be clear enough to enable name cards in front of the participants to be read. But unless there are multiple cameras, there will always be some people around the table who will have their backs to the camera, so you'll need to ask each participant to introduce themselves at the beginning of the recording.

Or you'll need to **make a speaker voice brief** and make notes as the filming progresses to give the transcriber a clue as to which voice belongs to which name.

**Please remember that the transcriber will never have heard these voices before**, so it's impossible to ascribe names to voices without help.

**Test your equipment** - record something, preferably with enough people round the table to simulate the meeting you're filming, to check that there are no technical problems with your equipment.

**Test the sound levels** - use headphones to check the recording levels. What you hear through the headphones is a fair indication of what the transcriber will hear. If it's too faint, the microphones may need to be repositioned. Once you can hear their voices clearly, we probably can too.

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### RECORDING TIPS - PLEASE DO... cont/d.

**Use sufficient external microphones** - most built-in microphones are of poor quality with limited control over volume levels, and this can apply to on-camera microphones as well. Use a sufficient number of good quality, external microphones, whether that be overhead or table-top models. Using only the on-camera microphone may mean that speakers furthest from the camera, or anyone with a quiet voice can't be heard. We discuss microphones in more detail on our [Equipment](#) pages.

It may sound obvious but make sure that the **camera is running** before you start! I've heard horror stories from clients that they've spent time, money and effort arranging a filming session only to find the camera wasn't on.

### RECORDING TIPS - PLEASE DO NOT...

**Use the time-stamp bleep.** Some recorders come with an option to insert a bleep at intervals. Please turn this off! Each time the recorder inserts a bleep, it drowns out any voices and will result in an incomplete transcript. Our transcribers are experienced in inserting time stamps where required without electronic help.

**Send copies of video tapes** - original video tapes will always be clearer than copies, regardless of the quality of the copying equipment. To ensure greater accuracy, please ensure that **only** original tapes are sent. Transcribing from a copy increases transcription time and costs. Digital files do not degrade when copied - all analogue media does.

These guidelines relate to digital video or video tape and dvd transcription and recording. Please use the above links for guidelines designed for any other recording situation.

If you have any questions relating to video tape or dvd filming and transcription not covered on this page, please contact us on 01485 543746 or [Boston@ibss.fsnet.co.uk](mailto:Boston@ibss.fsnet.co.uk) and we would be happy to help.