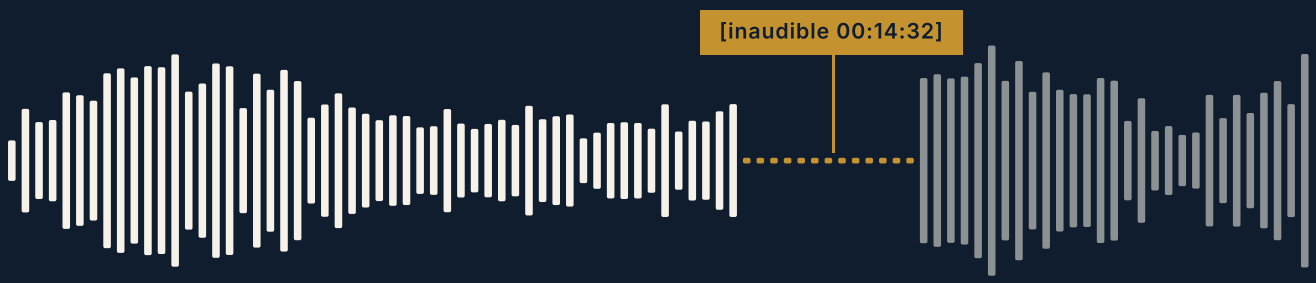
Transcribe Refinery

ACADEMIC & LEGAL TRANSCRIPTION, REFINED

A FREE FIELD GUIDE

Record it right.

How to make recordings that come back as an accurate written record, and what to do before, during and after the conversation.



FOR RESEARCHERS

Qualitative interviews, focus groups and fieldwork that has to survive an ethics review.

FOR LEGAL PRACTITIONERS

Consultations, statements and hearings where a wrong word costs more than the transcript.

FOR ANYONE

Who needs a recording turned into a document they can quote, cite and rely on.

EDITION 1 · 2026

transcriberefinery.com

BEFORE ANYTHING ELSE

A transcriber can only write down what the microphone heard.

Every word a recording loses becomes one of two things on the page: a guess, or a gap. Most of what decides which, and how many, is settled before anyone presses record.

A GUESS

"She signed the after David on the Tuesday."

Plausible, fluent and wrong. Nothing on the page tells you to check it, so nobody does.

A MARKED GAP

"She signed the [unclear: affidavit? 00:14:32] on the Tuesday."

Honest, and it tells you exactly where in the recording to listen. Better still is a recording where the word was never in doubt.

98%

Sounds close to perfect. It is about 20 wrong words in every 1,000. A one hour interview runs to roughly 9,000 words, so a 98 percent transcript of it carries something like 180 errors. Clear audio is how you move that number, and nearly everything in this guide costs nothing.

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A brief you can fill in, and a fifteen minute check on what comes back.

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One page. Print it and keep it with the recorder.

The kit matters less than where you put it.

A recent phone, placed well, beats an expensive recorder at the far end of a table. Distance is the single biggest thing you control.

The device

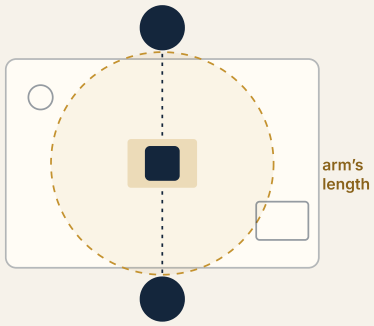
- **A recent phone is enough** for most one to one interviews, provided it sits close.
- **A clip on microphone**, a hand's width below the chin, beats anything on the table for a single speaker.
- **For a group**, one recorder in the middle, the same distance from everyone, not at the end beside the chair.
- **Record on two devices** when it matters. A second phone is a backup. A full memory card is not.

The settings

- **Choose WAV,** or M4A or MP3 at 128 kbps or above. Skip "voice" or low quality presets that compress hard to save space.
- **Check the space.** An hour of WAV takes roughly 300 to 650 MB.
- **Flight mode, or Do Not Disturb.** A notification chime, or a phone buzzing on a table, lands on top of whatever was being said.
- **Charge it, and bring a power bank.** Recording drains a battery faster than you expect.

The room

- **Soft rooms are quiet rooms.** Curtains, carpets and couches absorb echo. Tiles, glass and bare walls throw it back.
- **Switch off what hums:** fans, air conditioners, bar fridges, projectors. Close windows on the street side.
- **Avoid cafés.** Background talk is the hardest noise to separate from speech, because it is speech.
- **Plan around noise you can predict:** generators, building work, the school run.



Where the microphone goes

- **Within an arm's length of every speaker**, and as near the same distance from each as you can manage. The quieter voice decides the placement.
- **On a folded cloth or a notebook,** never straight onto a hard table. Every tap, pen click and cup set down travels through the wood into the microphone.
- **Away from laptops, glasses and paper.** A laptop fan is a steady hiss, and shuffled paper lands squarely on the words.
- **Microphone end towards the speakers.** On most phones that is the bottom edge.

The thirty second test

Before every session, record half a minute in the real seat, in the real room, with the door closed. Then listen back **on earphones, not the phone speaker**. It is the only check that tells you the truth. If you have to strain to follow it, a transcriber will too, and so will anyone reading the transcript in a year.

Thirty seconds at the start saves hours later.

Read a short opening onto the recording. It labels the file for good, puts consent on the audio and hands over every name and spelling up front.

READ THIS ALOUD

"This is project name, interview P07. Today is Tuesday 14 October 2026 and we are at place. With me is name or participant code, spelled M-A-Y-A. Do you agree to this conversation being recorded?"

Wait for a clear yes on the recording. For legal work, add the matter reference and the role of each person present: attorney, client, witness, interpreter. For a focus group, go round the table and have each person say their name or code once, so the transcriber can learn the voices.

While you record

- **One voice at a time.** Overlap is where words are lost. When two people talk at once, ask for the point again.
- **Spell what matters, aloud.** Names, places, organisations, case numbers, medication, technical terms.
- **Say what the recording cannot see.** "She is pointing to clause four." "He has nodded." A nod is silence on the audio.
- **Read numbers out in full**, especially amounts, dates and reference numbers.
- **Keep a time log.** A line in a notebook with the time on the recorder: a knock at the door, someone leaving, a passage you want checked.
- **Stop and start as little as you can.** One continuous file is easier to transcribe, and to cite, than ten fragments.

CALLS AND ONLINE MEETINGS

- **Record in the platform itself,** at its highest quality, not with a phone held to a speaker.
- **Separate tracks, where you can.** Some platforms, Zoom among them, can save each participant's audio as its own file. One voice per track is close to a studio recording.
- **Earphones with a microphone, for everyone.** Laptop speakers feed the other voices back in as echo.
- **When the line breaks up, stop** and ask for the point again. A dropout is not in the file, so nobody can recover it.
- **Tell everyone it is being recorded**, and get the yes on the recording, exactly as you would in a room.

A time log, in practice

RECORDER	WHAT HAPPENED	TELL THE TRANSCRIBER
00:03:10	Knock at the door, conversation paused for a minute	Nothing missed, no action
00:17:45	P07 named a colleague, spelled D-L-A-M-I-N-I	Replace the name with [colleague]
00:31:20	Generator started outside, P07 spoke more quietly	Hard passage; listen twice

How closely should the page follow the recording?

It depends on what the transcript is for. Decide before the work starts, because the mode changes what the transcriber listens for, and changing it afterwards means starting again.

CLEAN VERBATIM

RESEARCHER 00:00:04
Thank you for speaking with me, Maya. What was the first term like for you?

MAYA 00:00:16
At the beginning, I felt overwhelmed. I travelled from Khayelitsha to Rondebosch three evenings a week, so getting to class on time was difficult.

FULL VERBATIM

RESEARCHER 00:00:04
Um, thank you for speaking with me, Maya. What was that, the first term like for you?

MAYA 00:00:16
At the beginning, um, I felt, I felt overwhelmed. I travelled from Khayelitsha to Rondebosch three evenings a week, so, so getting to class on time was difficult.

Demonstration extract. The names and the interview are fictional.

MODE	WHAT IT KEEPS, AND WHEN TO CHOOSE IT
Clean verbatim also called intelligent verbatim	The speaker's meaning, made easier to read. Repeated false starts and incidental fillers come out. Meaningful pauses, laughter and interruptions stay in. **Right for most thematic analysis, reports and records.**
Full verbatim also called strict verbatim	Speech exactly as spoken: repetitions, fillers, stutters, significant pauses and overlap. **Choose it when how something was said matters as much as what was said**: discourse and conversation analysis, or evidence where hesitation is part of the point.
Edited	Grammar and presentation tidied, still traceable to the recording, and labelled as edited. **For minutes, published interviews and anything read by people who were not there.** Facts and positions are never changed.

Check before you choose

Researchers: your methodology, your supervisor or your ethics protocol may already specify a mode. Legal practitioners: the forum may have its own format for transcripts it will accept. A two line question now is cheaper than a second transcript later. And whichever mode you choose, ask how uncertainty is marked. A passage that cannot be heard should read **[inaudible 00:14:32]**, and a probable word **[unclear: word? 00:14:32]**, so you can go straight to it.

A recording is personal information. Treat it that way.

A recorded voice, and the transcript made from it, is personal information under the Protection of Personal Information Act. Interviews about health, beliefs or criminal matters can also hold special personal information, which carries stricter conditions.

Seven habits worth keeping

- **Consent twice.** In writing, and again on the recording itself.
- **Say who will hear it.** Tell participants a transcriber will listen to the recording, and why.
- **Researchers:** confirm your ethics clearance covers sending recordings to a third party, and whether your committee wants a signed confidentiality agreement from the transcriber. Many do.
- **Codes, not names,** in file names, folder names and email subject lines. “P07_2026-10-14.wav” tells a stranger nothing.
- **Never attach a recording to an ordinary email.** Agree a secure transfer first, and send any password by a different route.
- **Agree the ending.** What happens to the audio and the transcript once the work is delivered, and how long anything is kept.
- **Ask about machines.** Will the recording be uploaded to an automated service, or used to train one?

Practical guidance, not legal advice. Your institution, your professional body and your ethics committee have the final word on what your project requires.

FIVE QUESTIONS FOR ANY TRANSCRIPTION SERVICE

1. **Is every transcript finished by a person, against the audio?**
   Not skimmed after a machine draft. Checked against the recording.
2. **How do you mark a word you cannot hear clearly?**
   The answer you want is “with its timestamp”, never “we make our best guess”.
3. **Will my recording ever be used as training data?**
   It should be a plain no, in writing.
4. **How do I get the file to you securely?**
   A good service agrees the route with you before anything is sent.
5. **Will I have a written price before you start?**
   Including what changes it: speakers, mode, timestamps, difficult audio.

Our answers: yes, with its timestamp, never, before anything is sent, and always. Recordings are handled under POPIA and nothing is quoted or reused without your written permission.

A good brief is the cheapest accuracy there is.

Ten lines, sent with the first file, answer the questions a transcriber would otherwise answer by guessing. Fill this in once per project.

Project, and what it is for thesis, matter, report, minutes	
Recordings how many, and the total length	
Speakers how many, and how to label them	
Language and any switching between languages	
Mode clean verbatim, full verbatim, edited	
Timestamps at intervals, at each speaker change, none	
Spellings names, places and terms; attach a list	
Format a template from your institution or forum	
Deadline and the date behind the date	
Confidentiality agreement, codes, deletion after delivery	

Checking what comes back

Fifteen minutes with the audio and the document side by side is enough to know whether you can rely on it.

1. **Listen to three passages** while reading along: two minutes from the start, two from the middle and two from the hardest stretch.
2. **Search for every marker,** `[inaudible` and `[unclear`, and listen at each timestamp. Decide for yourself, or ask for a second pass.
3. **Check every name, place and term** on your spelling list.
4. **Follow the speaker labels** through one long, fast exchange. That is where they slip.
5. **Send corrections as one list,** each with its timestamp. A good service fixes them without argument.

Print this page. Keep it with the recorder.

PAGE 8 · PRINT ME

The day before

PREPARE

- [ ] Device charged, power bank packed
- [ ] Enough storage free · up to 650 MB an hour
- [ ] Recording format set to WAV, or 128 kbps or above
- [ ] Second device ready as a backup
- [ ] Consent forms printed, or ready to sign
- [ ] Spelling list of names, places and terms

Setting up

ARRIVE EARLY

- [ ] Quietest available room, door closed
- [ ] Fans, air conditioning and fridges off
- [ ] Phones on flight mode or Do Not Disturb
- [ ] Recorder within an arm's length of everyone
- [ ] On a cloth or notebook, not the bare table
- [ ] Thirty second test, played back on earphones

The first thirty seconds

READ ALOUD

- [ ] Project name and interview code
- [ ] Date and place
- [ ] Names or codes of everyone present, spelled
- [ ] Roles, for legal work · attorney, client, witness
- [ ] "Do you agree to this being recorded?"
- [ ] A clear yes, on the recording

During

LISTEN

- [ ] One voice at a time; repeat what overlapped
- [ ] Spell names and terms as they come up
- [ ] Say aloud what the recording cannot see
- [ ] Read numbers, dates and amounts in full
- [ ] Note the time of every interruption
- [ ] Glance at the recorder: still running?

Afterwards

BEFORE YOU LEAVE

- [ ] Stop the recording, then check the file plays
- [ ] Rename it with the code and date, no names
- [ ] Copy it to two places, one off the device
- [ ] Write up the time log while you remember

Sending it

SAFELY

- [ ] Brief written · page 7
- [ ] Transfer route agreed, nothing attached to email
- [ ] Password sent by a different route
- [ ] Deletion after delivery agreed

Got a recording that already went wrong? Tell us about it and we will reply with a written quote, usually within one working day.

WhatsApp +27 71 665 6361

Transcribe Refinery

ACADEMIC & LEGAL TRANSCRIPTION, REFINED

Now send us the recording that matters.

Every transcript we deliver is finished by a person, against the audio. Where a word will not come clear, we mark it with its timestamp rather than guess, so you always know exactly where to check.

Get a written quote.

Describe the recording and what the transcript is for: the room, the speakers, the deadline. We reply with a written price, usually within one working day, and agree a secure way to get the file across. Nothing is sent, and nothing is charged, until you accept.

R14.50

FROM, PER MINUTE

1

Tell us about it

WhatsApp, email or the form on the website. No recording yet, just the project.

2

We agree the details

Mode, timestamps, deadline and a secure route for the file, with a written quote before any work starts.

3

You get a document

An editable Word file, in South African English, with every uncertainty marked.

TURNAROUND	DELIVERED	PER RECORDED MINUTE
Standard	3 to 5 business days	**R14.50**
Express	Within 48 hours	**R16.50**
Urgent	Within 24 hours	**R18.50**

All inclusive. English and Afrikaans. Minimum order 15 recorded minutes. Rates as at October 2026; the full rules are at transcriberefinery.com/pricing.html.

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