

Critical Resistance's Transcription Guidelines for *The Abolitionist* Newspaper

1. **Accuracy.** *Type everything you hear on the recording:* every word that is spoken in the audio file, and write out everything else you hear—filler words and phrases, stutters, repetition, long pauses or expressions of emotion, tech issues, etc—**CR's editors need to see it all.**
 - **Phrases or words you don't understand** should not be omitted. Instead, they should be **flagged with a yellow highlight** with a **timestamp in brackets** after [e.g. 1:12:14] to indicate you are not sure what is being said and where the editor can find this in the recording. This way a member of the editorial collective will listen back to the recording or follow up with the speaker to decipher the accurate transcription.
 - **Anything that isn't directly spoken by a speaker** on the recording (like notes of background noises, notes in changes in tone, etc) should be **put in [brackets]**.
 - If you're **unsure what the correct spelling** of a word is, try your best and **highlight it green** so an editor can double check.
2. **Name each speaker with their full name first** if you have it, and **then abbreviate to first or both** initials throughout rest of transcript and put a **colon after** to indicate a change in speaker.

Example - You're transcribing an interview with someone name Maria Velasquez. If her name is spelled out once at the top of the transcription, the rest of the dialogue markers can be...

Maria: or M: or MV: I can't believe...

4. **Include timestamps in brackets every few minutes**, so that if you or an editor need to listen back at a particular place of the recording, you'll be able to line it up with the transcript easily and efficiently.
 - Ex: [5:14] for at 5 minutes & 14 seconds, [1:04:01] for 1 hour, 4 minutes and 1 second.
5. **Use basic US English grammar.** Mark the end of sentences with periods and use commas for lists and slight pauses. Ellipses for longer pauses.

- **Write out all words rather than abbreviate** (Ex: “u” for “you”). If the speaker uses abbreviation that is fine, and you can abbreviate the speakers’ names to their first or both initials to mark the dialogue.
 - **Contractions** are fine, and if the speaker isn’t speaking in “correct” grammar, instead **type what you hear verbatim. Do not correct speakers’ grammar.**
6. **Do Not Paraphrase.** Do not correct the speakers, shorten what a speaker is saying, rearrange words or select different words for them. Also, do not cut words that you think are off-topic, irrelevant or redundant. Any words not spoken should not be included. Type the actual words spoken.
7. **Do Not Add Additional Information.** If you know about the topic being discussed or know more background information on the speaker, do not include it. If you have questions or comments, do not include it. Share this information in a separate email with *The Abolitionist* Project Coordinator or point editor you’re working with.
8. **“Quote” and place in italics all the quotations, anecdotes, or dialogues a speaker uses as evidence or description.**
- Example - *If a speaker, Maria, is describing what a guard did to another imprisoned person, you would transcribe it like the following:*

Maria: Then the CO grabbed Vikki’s arm and shouted, *“You can write all the grievances you want. No one will listen to you anyway.”* And this isn’t the first time that CO has said that us.

Transcript Formatting

In most cases, the file you will be transcribing will be the entire recording that the editorial collective is transforming into an article. In some cases, the file you transcribe is part of a larger audio file or recorded conversation, or you told the Project Coordinator you’re available to transcribe only a portion of it based on your capacity and availability that week (or within the requested deadline). **If you’re transcribing only a part of a larger file or conversation**, make sure you **identify the time range of the segment your transcription is for** in the document title AND you **add the word “Segment” after “Transcript” in the heading.**

Formatting Steps:

1.) **Add a header to the document including the following:**

- The label “Transcription” first in upper left corner, followed by
- Number of Words or entire transcription OR time segment your transcription is for if you’ve only taken on a part of a larger conversation / file (in middle of header)
- The date of your transcription (last in the upper right corner of header)

2.) Add **a title** (centered) in **BOLD, large font** with the topic of the recording, speakers’ names, and transcriber (your) name as the by line for the first lines of the document under the header

3.) As you begin to transcribe what you hear on the recording, **indicate different speakers** by writing their name and then initial followed by a colon every time they speak.

4.) When a new speaker talks, **begin** what they are saying **on a new line**.

5.) Try to **chunk what speakers are saying into paragraphs**. This can be a little tricky since we might talk in a way that goes on much longer than a typical paragraph. Listen for when the speaker slightly changes topics, or moves on to add more about another point, is about to provide a more detailed example, etc.

6.) **Single space** (word & line spacing) your transcript, but **give an extra line space or paragraph break between speaker dialogues**.

7.) **Bold Interviewer questions**.

8.) When adding **timestamps**, they can go in **[brackets]** either before speaker markers or within the text of what a speaker is saying.

9.) **Put all your notes / descriptions of other things you hear** besides the verbatim words from a speaker also in **[brackets]**. Example:

Mohamed: So, then we decided to create a steering committee [mic cut out for a few seconds. Interviewer interrupts speaker to repeat].

Billy: Mohamed, your mic cut out for a second or two. Can you repeat what you said after steering committee?

M: Oh damn, can you hear me now?

B: Yup, you’re good.

M: Yeah, so I was saying the steering committee included...

10.) And as explained in the general guideline above, put quotations in “*quotation marks and italicize*” the phrases the speaker seems to be quoting or referring to someone else’s words with, **highlight what you can’t hear or aren’t sure of in yellow** and **suspicious spellings in green**.