FREE CHECKLIST · STILLSCRIPT

Interview Transcription Rules and Anonymization Checklist for Theses

A short, printable set of rules for transcribing interviews consistently and clearly while protecting your participants' privacy, from the recording to the final transcript.

1. Why consistent rules matter

Your transcripts are the basis of your analysis. If you keep every "um" in interview 1 but leave them out in interview 5, the interviews can no longer be compared reliably. Clear rules make sure that

- your transcripts **stay comparable**, even if you transcribe over several weeks,
- your committee **can see** how you went from the conversation to the written text,
- you can **quickly find any quote** in the recording and verify it.

Recommendation: Set your rules before the first transcript, describe them in your methods chapter and include them as an appendix. The rules below are based on common practice in qualitative research. Adapt them to your field and to your advisor's requirements.

2. Transcription rules at a glance

Topic	Rule	Example
Verbatim or clean verbatim	Choose one approach and use it throughout: *verbatim* (keep filler words, false starts and repetitions) if you analyze language and interaction, *clean verbatim* (lightly adjusted to written English, meaning unchanged) if you focus on content.	verbatim: "So I, um, I kinda did it." · clean: "I did it."
Speaker labels	Interviewer = **I**, participants = **P1**, **P2** and so on (or **R1** for respondent). Start a new line at every change of speaker.	`I:` · `P1:`
Timestamps	At every change of speaker, or at least every 2 to 3 minutes, in the format **[hh:mm:ss]**.	`[00:04:12] P1: That was in the summer.`
Pauses	Short pause (about one second): **(.)** · Longer pauses with the number of seconds.	"That was (.) difficult." · (4 s)
Unclear passages	**(inaudible)** with a timestamp. If you can make a reasonable guess, add the word with a question mark in parentheses.	(inaudible [00:12:31]) · (seminar?)
Laughter and other sounds	In parentheses, brief and neutral.	(laughs) · (sighs) · (phone rings)
Numbers	Spell out zero to nine and use numerals from 10 upward. Always use numerals for years.	"three semesters" · "45 participants" · "2019"
Dialect and informal speech	Use standard spelling by default. Keep the original form only if dialect is relevant to your research question.	"'cause" → "because"
Punctuation	Punctuate for meaning and readability. Mark interrupted sentences with **/** and stressed words in CAPITALS.	"I wanted / well, actually I did NOT want to."
Overlapping speech	Mark with **//** at the beginning and end.	`I: //Mhm.//`

3. Before and after: a short example

Fictional sample dialogue. Left: the unedited version. Right: the same passage after applying the rules above (clean verbatim and anonymized).

BEFORE (UNEDITED)

```
I: How did the new job start?

P1: So yeah, I started at Becker Logistics in
Columbus in March. And my boss, Mr. Hughes, said
right away, uh, this is gonna be stressful, haha.
And it was, uh, yeah, it really was.

I: What did you do then?
```

AFTER (RULES APPLIED)

```
[00:02:58] I: How did the new job start?

[00:03:05] P1: I started at [Employer 1] in [City
A] in [month]. My manager, [Person 1], said right
away that it was going to be stressful. (laughs)
And it was. (3 s) Yeah, it really was.

[00:03:21] I: What did you do then?
```

4. Anonymization checklist

Goal: No one should be able to identify a real person from the transcript, not even by combining several details.

☐ **Names** of people replaced with placeholders such as [Person 1] or [Colleague 2], or with a consistent pseudonym.

☐ **Places** (cities, neighborhoods, streets) described in general terms, e.g., [large city in the Midwest] or [City A].

☐ **Institutions** such as schools, universities, hospitals or clubs replaced, e.g., [University 1].

☐ **Employers and companies** described neutrally, e.g., [Employer 1] or [mid-sized software company].

☐ **Dates** made less specific: "March 12, 2021" → [spring 2021]. Give ages as a range if needed.

☐ **Rare details** checked: unusual jobs, roles, illnesses, events or hobbies that could identify someone.

☐ **Pseudonym key** (which placeholder stands for whom) stored in a separate, protected file, kept apart from the transcripts.

☐ **Audio files** stored securely, not shared and not included in your thesis.

☐ **Deletion** planned: When will the audio files and the key be deleted? Agree on deadlines with your advisor, make sure they match your consent form and write them down.

☐ **Final review:** Read the finished transcript once from start to finish, looking only for identifying details.

5. Workflow in five steps

1. **Record:** Choose a quiet room, make a test recording and place the device close to the speakers. Get consent beforehand.
2. **Transcribe:** Type a first draft yourself or have one created automatically, following the rules you have set.
3. **Check against the audio:** Listen to the entire recording and correct errors, speaker labels and timestamps.
4. **Anonymize:** Work through the checklist above and store the pseudonym key separately.
5. **Export:** Use consistent file names (e.g., Interview_P1.docx) and save backup copies for your analysis and appendix.

6. Your rules (to fill in)

Record your decisions here and carry them over to your methods chapter.

Verbatim or clean verbatim:

Speaker labels:

Timestamps (interval):

Pauses and unclear passages:

Special cases (e.g., dialect, other languages):

> **Note:** With Stillscript, you can transcribe 60 minutes a month for free. If you need more, there is the Pro Pass: $24 one-time for 3 months, no subscription, 14-day money-back promise.
>
> stillscript.com · info@stillscript.com

Not legal advice. Please follow the requirements of your university and your advisor. The rules in this checklist are based on common practice in qualitative research and are meant as practical guidance.