# Quick Transcript Review Method

**The following step-by-step instructions for TypeWell mentors and service coordinators were published as a series of posts by Judy Colwell in 2010, on the "Kyp's Tips" blog.**

Supervisors often ask me how to judge the quality of a meaning-for-meaning transcript. How can they really know if such transcripts express clearly and accurately what the speakers said, in a format that is easy for a reader to understand quickly in real-time? What's needed is a quick method that a busy supervisor can use to get reliable information about transcript quality.

I'll post here a series on a practical Quick Review Method. This method is the simplest way I know of to quickly and objectively judge the quality of a meaning-for-meaning transcript. It takes about one hour to do and gives a pretty good measure of these 3 aspects of a transcript:

- Completeness of information

- Factual accuracy and wording clarity

- Reading ease

The steps of the Method are:

**Step 1: Get an appropriate unedited transcript.** You may also want to record the class or meeting.

**Step 2: Read the transcript deeply**, looking for certain specific items, such as fact errors.

**Step 3: Get help from "content experts"**, if needed.

**Step 4: Discuss what you learn** with the service provider.

In the future posts in this series, I'll give you details about doing each of the steps, above. If you are interested in full details *now*, check out the proceedings of a PEPNet 2008 presentation in which I discussed the whole area of analyzing meaning-for-meaning communication access. Go to the link below and then scroll to page 70. Look for the paragraph beginning, "A common question administrators have . . ." http://pepnet.org/sites/default/files/91%20Conf%20proceedings%202008.pdf.

  -- Judy

## Step 1:  Get an appropriate transcript

The first step of the Quick Review Method is to have the service provider give you an *unedited* transcript from a typical class or meeting. (Make a paper copy of the transcript, to use in Step 2.)

- Choose a class/meeting that is representative of the kind of setting in which that transcriber usually works.  A lecture class with some class discussion is a good choice to show off a variety of transcriber responsibilities.

- If you are able to arrange ahead of time to record the class/meeting, do so!

- If your service provider is a TypeWell transcriber, tell the transcriber to write down for you the Self-test abbreviation results at the end of the class/meeting.  (The TypeWell transcriber will know how to access the Self-test in the TypeWell program.)

### Arrange to record the class or meeting

Having a record of what was actually said is very helpful when reviewing transcripts.  Arrange to make an audio recording *and* take notes.

- Record the class/meeting:

  - To get a good-quality audio recording of the class/meeting, ask the instructor to wear a lapel microphone and small MP3 recorder.  Or, if you have only a larger, non-wearable recorder, arrange to put it very close to the person who will be speaking the most.

  - Be sure to listen to a test recording to be sure there is no noise from clothing brushing the mic, papers rustling nearby, or noise from the instructor pounding the lectern to emphasize his/her points!

- Make notes about the class context:

  - Sit in during the class/meeting and take notes on what the instructor writes on the board, demonstrations, etc. The class context information will supplement the recorded audio information, and thus add necessary information for interpreting the meaning-for-meaning transcript (in Steps 2 and 3).

  - If you can't sit in during the class yourself, arrange for someone to do that for you.

## Step 2:  Read the transcript deeply

Once you have a printed copy of an appropriate transcript and, preferably, recorded the class and taken notes**,** you are ready for Step 2 of the Quick Transcript Review Method: reading the transcript deeply.

Plan at least 30 - 45 minutes to do this step.  That may seem lengthy considering your busy schedule, but there's no shortcut.  To really judge the quality of the transcript, you have to *read deeply and understand what the transcript says and implies.*  So, shut your office door; turn off your phone and pager; and get ready to read!

Start reading at the beginning of the transcript, and think hard about the *meaning* of what you read.  Look specifically for the problems listed below, and **mark** any that you see.

A.  Unclearly worded sentences

B.  Gaps or jumps in the information flow

C.  Wrong facts

D.  Hard-to-read sections, due to typos, very long paragraphs or unrelated text jammed together.

Here's an example of problems B and D:

> *If the thermal energy is a lot less than the cohesive forces, you have a*
> > *There is only one class of liquids, but there are two classes of solids: crystalline and*
> *amorphous.*

That unfinished thought at the end of the first line is problem B, a gap in the information flow.  The text is also hard to read (problem D) because there is no blank line between the first topic and the second one, to put the new topic into a new paragraph.

For examples and practice identifying each type of problem above, see the Example Problems for Analyzing a Meaning-for-Meaning Transcript document:
http://user.typewell.com/mentor/AnalysisProblemExamples.pdf

Also, download and print out a Transcript Analysis Checklist to use as a guide:
http://user.typewell.com/mentor/QuickTAC.pdf

## Identifying "fact errors"

In Step 2 of the Quick Transcript Review, you will read the transcript deeply to identify problem areas.  One type of problem is a fact error (problem C).  This is where the transcript says something that's different, or even opposite, in meaning to what the speaker said during the lecture.

Sometimes you can spot a fact error by reading the transcript carefully.  For instance, in this transcript excerpt:

> *Evaporation is the conversion from a gas to a liquid state*

There's a fact error because "gas" and "liquid" have been swapped.  This particular fact error is obvious, but despite being obvious, it still introduces confusion for the reader.

Much worse are fact errors that *sound* plausible but get the facts wrong. Here's an example of such a non-obvious fact error from a math class transcript:

> *It's well known that the numerator is always below the denominator.*

A reader who is just learning a new subject cannot detect such a "backwards" error, and as a result will learn the material incorrectly and get a poorer grade on tests. Fact errors are an instance where "something" in a transcript (wrong information) is worse than "nothing" (missing information). Because of this it's particularly important to identify any tendency of a transcriber to make factual errors, and help overcome that processing problem.

In Step 3, I'll cover when and how to get help from "context experts" to check fact accuracy about an unfamiliar topic, and to determine the cause of any information gaps in the transcript.

## Step 3: Get help from "content experts"

Your own deep reading and analysis works well in step 2 of the Quick Transcript Review Method, *if* you know the topic of the class, or if you heard the lecture "live" or via a recording. But if you don't know the subject area, you may well not know what's a fact or not, what's clearly-worded or not, etc. Or maybe the information in the transcript seems to jump all over the place. Is that because of the service provider, or did the class/instructor jump around?

Here are some ways to solve those mysteries:

a. Ask an "expert" in the topic to read the transcript and note any fact errors or poor wording clarity. Ask the instructor to recommend someone in the class who really understands the class information. Or get notes from a class note taker. Those can be used for fact checking, and to indicate if any gaps in the flow are from the service provider or from the professor.

b. To see if gaps are due to the professor's style or the service provider's abilities, get a transcript from that same service provider for a different course or different teacher. It would be unusual for different instructors to have the same "gappy" style.

c. To help explain "gaps", look for notations of silent activities (e.g., [Class working quietly.]). If there are no notations of silent activity, it means either that the service provider did not note them (but should have), or that the class was active, but the service provider missed information and had gaps in the flow.

d. Another rule of thumb is that a meaning-for-meaning transcript is typically about 8-10 pages for an hour class. If a particular transcript is a lot less than that, or if a particular service provider often has much shorter transcripts from all her classes, you should probably be concerned.

Next we'll talk about the final step of the Quick Transcript Review Method: following up with the transcriber.

# Step 4:  Discuss with the service provider

When you've finished analyzing the transcript and marking problems on the page, count up the number of problems of each type (i.e., gaps, unclear wording, fact errors, typos/hard-to-read text).  The service provider's *strengths* are those areas where you've noted very few problems.  For example, few unclearly-worded sentences indicate good planning and grammar skills.

Conversely, a high number of errors of any type show where the service provider needs to improve.  Many gaps in the flow, for example, could mean the service provider does not have enough background knowledge of the topic to understand the instructor's meaning.  Prep time to review course materials could be the way to overcome that problem.

Once you have a general idea of the provider's strengths and weakness, meet with the service provider to discuss what you've found.  Together, **choose one or two goals to work on** to improve future transcripts.

That's it!  You now know a quick method for getting objective measurement of the quality of a transcript.  This is a "quick" method but makes a great first step to measuring transcript quality, *and* to providing on-going support and education for service providers.