

How to Dictate

Alright, I love the idea of dictation but I really don't know where to begin. Are there any good resources for teaching yourself how to dictate or do I just need to get a digital recorder and begin to see what works?

Keep in mind if you learn to dictate you are entirely dependent upon a secretary who may not be dependable or particularly competent.

If you learn to type quickly and accurately on a computer - you are self sufficient and more efficient, so your costs to your client (and yourself) are less.

Susan Zinder, New York

I'm interested in the firm's answer as well. I'd say just do it a few times and see what you get back.

I'm not great at dictation. I think it is a generational thing - those of us who grew up learning to type quickly don't find keyboarding to be particularly slow, so we don't do it much and thus don't have a lot of practice. Plus, we tend to easily compose while typing but not do as well composing while speaking. But it is nice for a first "get it on paper" draft. I don't find it to be time saving at all for short letters - a note to my assistant to write a letter that says this, then revising it myself before printing works better for me.

Best use for me is when rattling off an answer ("paragraph 2 deny, paragraph 3 admit...") - but then you need a skilled, real person on the other end. It hasn't worked well for me in my current position, but I did it a few times with success at the large firm (where my secretary vetted it before it got back to me).

Cynthia V. Hall, Florida

After you dictate, someone has to be able to play it back, pause, rewind, and play a portion again to get the thing typed. This process usually requires a playback device with a foot peddle of similar control - - the typist's hands are busy on the keyboard. So you might have to buy additional hardware.

There are services available to solve the hardware problem. You dial up a number and use the keypad on your phone to control a recorder at the location of the service - -record - rewind - play - etc. The typist at that location prepares the document and emails it back to you. You can mark it up and email or fax the markup back for revisions, etc. You might want to look into Dragon Naturally Speaking.

Curtis D. Drew, Arizona

Well do you want to dictate for someone else to do something with or to dictate to the computer to type it out.

If it's to a computer, most of what I have seen that people like is Dragon Speaking Naturally. It takes awhile to train to your voice, but once you have it it works well.

It is very nice when your working with papers and such to keep your hands free dealing with that versus typing. Also you can use headphones w/ mike so you can pace etc

Erin M. Schmidt, Ohio

I'm an excellent typist (best class my mom ever made me take in high school), but I got into dictation for certain types of documents when I was at big law (e.g., a memo to file to re-cap a meeting, short cover letters, etc.). I think it is a good tool to have in addition to the ability to type. I bought a Sony digital recorder that came with a version of Dragon Naturally Speaking. I dictate into the recorder, plug it into my computer, and the software transcribes it. I can then paste it into an e-mail or Word document and format, etc. (if I need to). It's very easy and gets around the need for a live person to transcribe it. I recall the recorder didn't cost much more than any other good digital recorder. Great for when you are away from the office (e.g., in the car).

Joel Ankney, Virginia

Ever consider using Nuance Dragon Dictate? It self-trains based on your vocabulary and pronunciation and gets better over time. I have used it in the past and found the corrections to be too time consuming but I recently bought a new 'puter and with the faster speed, more memory, and latest version of Dictate I find it much faster, overall, even when I do have an assistant to "clean it up and final" the dictated document. I am not a fast touch typist so maybe if you already were a skilled and fast typist this may not be the way to go for you.

Michael Boli, California

Whether I type or dictate depends on what I am doing.

Much of my dictation is instructions and other things where efficiency dictates that I can give a few commands and my secretary will do the work so I can move on to other things. Sometimes, I can merely say, "send to client with an appropriate cover letter," and I will have spent ten seconds on something rather than the time it would take for me to do it myself.

Other things, I will dictate for my secretary to start a skeleton of something that I will, then, open and work on. It would be inefficient to dictate the whole thing, but it is efficient for her to get it started for me.

Finally, for legal briefs and the like, I type them myself because there would be no efficiency in dictating, and my typing produces a better product because of the thinking process that occurs while I am typing.

Very truly yours,

Timothy A. Gutknecht, Illinois

You should start with the free Dragon Dictation app for your iPad and your iPhone. Try that and see if you like it and if it meets your needs. There are software and hardware solutions for using with a secretary, too, but if you are your own, typing and/or Dragon Dictation are both more efficient.

T. B. Patterson, Jr. ("Brownie"), South Carolina

Sent you my ebook/report Digital Dictation 101 off list. Anyone else that wishes a copy, let me know. (Feedback greatly appreciated!)

Dictation is a tool. You learn how to use it and every person uses it differently.

Equipment:

Portable recorder - I recommend Philips and Grundig models for those who prefer a slide switch. <http://www.americandictation.com>

iPad/iPhone App - Dictamus (\$15) <-a little bird told me it may shortly be going up in price and those who grab the current version will get a free upgrade (in the App store)

Dictation software: Express Dictate www.nch.com.au

Some services offer dial in dictation. Dial the toll free, enter your user ID and you are connected to a dictation server and control dictation commands such as pause, rewind, etc. are communicated through the keypad. Turns any standard phone into a dictation capture tool - no app required (and for larger environments no need for on site servers; software; upkeep; licensing and all that).

What can you do with dictation?

We have clients who use it just for your standard letters, pleadings and what not; and we have very customized workflows that include secretarial and administrative functions requested through my tech and performed through others.

All depends on the tech, people and processes in place at a firm.

However, I do wish to point out that dictation is much, much more than just keystrokes on a page. Will your efficiencies increase if you use speech recognition vs. typing yourself - probably. However, along with getting keystrokes on a page, dictation is the perfect solution for delegating tasks to someone to handle on your behalf.

-- NotanAtty--

Andrea Cannavina

I don't dictate as much nowadays as I did when I was other-employed. But, I do like to use for certain things: on my way home from court I will dictate a letter to the client recapping what just happened. When I get to the office, I upload my dictation, copy it to my "LegalTypist" folder in Dropbox, and the next day I have my doc. One thing I did was to send a pdf of my finished letter to my LT asst so that she could see what I was looking for in a finished product. Now, my docs come back even more complete than before. In my opinion the Dropbox set up that LegalTypist went to is just so much easier than the old way.\

The problem I have with Dragon is that I did not learn to dictate by dictating out the punctuation. My first secretary had an English degree (hmmm, actually my first two secretaries had English degrees (my third one was from New York and apparently did not understand my "standard English pronunciations" and we abandoned dictation altogether)) so she put in punctuation based on my inflections and pauses---something DNS cannot do.

In the end, the cost to "try" dictation is minimal: an hour, maybe two of billable time. You need a recorder and you need a transcriptionist. AND, it doesn't have to be an all or nothing situation. If you can replace one hour's worth of weekly work with dictation, then you have parlayed well.

Go forth and dictate.

Jimmy Mac

Jimmy McMullan, Alabama

Is there anyone under the age of say, 40, who dictates? Is it a dying art?

Jeena R. Belil, New York

To start with, it's much easier to dictate simple letters and memos to the file, as opposed to memos of law or pleadings. And when you dictate, whether for a secretary or machine, you simply speak the punctuation as you go, including stating "new paragraph" at the end of each paragraph. You'll get used to it very quickly.

Once you've dictated short letters and memos, you can move on to memos of law, etc. It helps to have a good outline to work from, w/ the relevant excerpts from cases inserted into the outline. iPad note taking apps make this much easier to do these days. For example, I recently used the Paperport notes app to create a very effective outline. These types of apps make it really easy to create a text outline while inserting files, screen shots from the web, images, or audio files. Interestingly, Paperport also allows you to insert text via speech-to-text dictation.

I learned to dictate when I started my second job as a litigation associate back in '98. I didn't enjoy the learning process but am glad I learned how to dictate because it's coming in very handy now that speech-to-text dictation is becoming all the rage. In fact, I just drafted a post about using the iPhone's built in speech-to-text dictation function, which will be published at the Lawyerist blog this Friday.

In any event, best of luck with it!

Niki

Nicole Black, New York

As a transcriptionist, allow me to offer the following pointers:

1. Speak slowly and clearly.
2. If it's an uncommon word or odd spelling, spell it out.
3. Do not hold the dictation device too close to or too far away from your mouth.
4. Dictate in a quiet area if possible. There's nothing more difficult than trying to figure out what you are saying when there's a lot of background noise. For example, a crowded subway is probably not the best place for dictation.
5. See number 1.

Anna D. Collins Ford, Paralegal
