

Phone/Text/Email Charges

I wanted everyone's opinion on what the normal practice is for billing for phone calls, texts, emails, fax etc.

I have in my contract to bill in 15min increments but I just feel like billing a client for a 3 to 5 min phone call with a 15min increment sometimes being \$50 or \$75 per call depending on respective hourly rates isn't reasonable. How does everyone generally bill.
thanks

w billed at a tenth of an hour, or for every 6 minutes

Erin M. Schmidt, Ohio

I bill in 6 minute increments, so it's tenths of an hour. Easier math for me and it aides in billing for the little things like phone calls.

Clark V. Stewart, Mississippi

Can't claim the planning credit. This is what the state requires for time entry in indigent defense, so it's the first way to bill I learned after passing the bar!

Clark V. Stewart

We do the same - though of course we're not lawyers. And, if I'm honest, I exercise a lot of discretion when it comes to billing for short phone calls. I frequently bill it at \$0 as a courtesy to the client.

Disclaimer: Did I mention we're not lawyers? Oh, yes, I see that I did. Nothing more to see here, move along. Go on. The disclaimer is over. Get back to work. Why are you still reading this?
Go.

Ben M. Schorr, Arizona

My Biglaw firm went from quarters to tenths around the time Bill Clinton was elected. I stayed at tenths afterwards, though I find that most tasks get me into the 2nd 6 minutes by the time I look at the file, make notes and return to something else. I always show every tenth on the bill, and apply a "courtesy adjustment" at the end to make it reasonable.

Wendell Finner, Florida

In addition to .1 increments making it easier to bill for short calls, some courts insist on it if you submit a fee application. (Don't know if that applies to your practice, but it's worth keeping in mind.)

David M. Nieporent, New York

I want my client to know (or remember) that I made a phone call, but sometimes I just leave a quick message. It may take 6 min. of my time (I can bill in 3 min increments), but unless the call advances the matter, the client won't see the value in it. Remember, it is always the VALUE of your services the client pays attention to. So while I always keep track of these short calls, I will often bill them at \$0.00. This seems to make clients happy and make them feel like they are being taken care of without being nickeled and dimed to death.

Also, if these little calls have added up at the end of the month, I can decide to go ahead and bill all or some of them.

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Nanci Bockelie, Utah

My retainer agreement spells out minimums - with a .3 for phone calls.

Received that advice from an experienced lawyer who gave me a copy of his well used retainer - lays out minimums for letters, phone calls, pleadings, court appearances, etc. Never had a problem with using these and a client has never complained. What most of us fail to consider is the time to get the file, make notes, consider the call and information in advance. It has made it easier in my office for billing purposes and I do not believe clients are being overcharged. If I call and leave a message, I will log the call in timeslips but put a "no charge." If the call was really just a few words I will adjust accordingly. I also don't over the .3 unless it was a really long call. My office tries to log all calls in timeslips (especially those who call five times a day), even if they do not speak to me - but the client is "no charge" for the call. This creates a good time-line of the case. However, if a client calls ten times to speak to the paralegal (whose time I rarely ever bill), who, of course, has to discuss the call with me, I reach a point where I will bill for her time.

I have enough "no charges" on a client's bill as a rule that they do not feel "ripped off." It also reminds them of their many interactions with the office.

Emails, correspondence, court appearances, etc., all have minimums. That way, unless I drive an hour one way to court, I do not bill for travel time. And those clients who I do drive an hour each way know in advance they will be billed for travel time (although many times I will log the travel time on the bill but "no charge" the time.

Pat

Patricia Dennis, Illinois

I don't track everything. Some calls are just leave short msg. I do track what advances the case. I waive charges if the bill is getting larger than I think it should. I also waive charges for items that are more for my knowledge than this particular case. My billing may not be perfect, but it works for my cases and I get paid.

Mitchell Goldstein, Virginia

I haven't reviewed my fee agreement in a while. I'd love to see a fee agreement/retainer letter that spelled out minimums like that. It sounds easier for clients and staff.

Chris Vaughn-Martel
