



Punctuation and Spacing

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Basic Style Guide

Courtesy of [Global Medical Transcription](#) and [MT Daily](#)

The 2005 changes made by AAMT are not included in this style guide. These are the generally accepted rules of medical transcription as taught by GMT. Client preference will always take precedence. We encourage your input for additions to this page. Include them in an email to [The GMT Webmaster](#).

We created this list for our students as a quick reference of generally accepted rules of medical transcription. It is not intended to supplant any other publication regarding transcription style. We publish it here solely as a service to the MT community. We hope you find it useful.- GMT

Caveat: In medical transcription, the Golden Rule applies.
"Those with the gold make the rules." Therefore, client preference always takes precedence.

Basic Rules of Transcription

I. Spacing With Punctuation Marks

Do Not Type a Space ...

- following a period with an abbreviation
- following a period used as a decimal point
- between quotation marks and the quoted material
- before or after a hyphen
- before or after a slash
- before or after a dash
- between a number and percent sign
- between parentheses and the enclosed material
- between any word and the punctuation following it.
- between the number and the colon used to indicate a dilute solution or ratio.
- on either side of the colon when expressing the time of day
- before an apostrophe
- before or after a comma used within numbers
- before or after an ampersand in abbreviations, e.g., C&S
- on either side of the colon when expressing ratios e.g. 1:1
- after the closing parenthesis if another mark of punctuation follows

Type One Space...

- between words
- after a comma
- after a semicolon
- after a period following an initial
- after the closing parenthesis
- on each side of the x in an expression of dimension, e.g. 4 x 4

Type Two Spaces...

- after punctuation at the end of a sentence
- after a colon except when expressing time or a dilution ratio

II. Numbers

- Spell out WHOLE numbers zero through nine, use numerals for 10 and above (this may change in the near future as the AAMT is trying to standardize using numerals only. When the next edition of the AAMT Book of Style is published (Spring 2002), you can probably expect new [guidelines](#)).
- Use numerals when numbers are directly used with symbols.
- Use numerals when expressing ages.
- If it is an approximate age, spell it out.
- Use numerals to express size and measurements.
- Use numerals for everything metric. Centimeters, millimeters, liters, etc.
- Use numerals in all expressions pertaining to drugs - this includes strength, dosage and directions. Z-PAK 2 daily on day 1, then 1 daily on days 2-5.
- Spell out and hyphenate fractions standing alone. He drank one-half a gallon of apple juice.
- Use numerals to express mixed fractions. 1 1/2 years.
- Use commas only if there are 5 or more digits when expressing numbers. e.g. 10,000, 4000.
- Use numerals when expressing vital statistics including height, weight, blood pressure, pulse and respiration.
- Substitute a hyphen for the word "to". He is to take 1-2 tablets of Tylenol every 4-6 hours p.r.n.
- Leave a space between numerals and measurements unless they form a compound modifier. It is 6 cm below the It is 1200 ml..... A 4-cm nevus..... A 2 x 2-mm lesion.....
- Always use 0 in front of the decimal point if the number is not a whole number. 0.75 mg
- Use decimal fractions with metric measurements. 1.5 cm
- Use mixed fractions with English system measurements. 1 1/2 inch
- Use numerals for: Ages, units of measure, vital statistics, lab values and in other instances where it is important to communicate clearly the number referenced. Examples: 4 inches, 3-year-old. She has three dogs who have eight fleas each. A total of 7 basal cell carcinomas removed from his left arm. (7 for clarity)
- Do not start a sentence using a number. Spell out the number or recast the sentence.
- Dictated as: 10 milligrams of Reglan was administered stat. Transcribe as: Reglan 10 mg was administered stat.
- Exception - It is acceptable to begin a sentence with a date. Example - 2000 is going to be a prosperous year.
- **Plurals** - do not use an apostrophe to form plural numbers.

- 4 x 4s
- She was in her 20s or twenties (this is acceptable because it is not a definite number).
- She was born in the 1970s.
- **Series of numbers** - Use numerals if at least one is greater than nine or if there is a mixed or decimal fraction.
- Example - Jeff has 1 job, 1 place of employment and 18 hours a day to do the work.
- Cranial nerves - Preferred: Roman numerals I-XII
- Diabetes type 1 and type 2, not Roman numerals I and II - this was recently standardized by the American Diabetes Association.
- Apgar scores - Use numerals for ratings and spell out numbers relating to minutes. Rationale - to draw attention to the scores. Example: The Apgar scores were 6 and 9 at one and five minutes. Apgar is not an acronym.
- **Time Examples**
- 8:30 a.m. - morning
- 8:30 p.m. - evening
- noon, not 12:00 noon
- midnight, not 12:00 midnight or 12 'o'clock or 12:00 p.m.

III. Measurements

- Spell out all nonmetric measurements. Feet, inches, pounds, ounces, yards, grain, dram, etc.
- Exceptions:
 - Use tsp for teaspoon
 - Use tbsp for tablespoon
- Abbreviate all metric measurements.
- Use F for Fahrenheit IF accompanied by the symbol for degree. 98.6° F
- Spell out Fahrenheit IF degree is spelled out. 98.6 degrees Fahrenheit.
- Use C for Celsius IF accompanied by the symbol for degree. 36.6° C
- Spell out Celsius IF degree is spelled out. 36 degrees Celsius.
- **In tables and technical documents:**
 - Use ft or ' for feet
 - Use " for inches
 - Use yd for yard
 - Use pt for pint
 - Use oz for ounce
 - Use fl oz for fluid ounce

Abbreviate most **unusual** units of measure when accompanied by numerals

Dictated as	Transcribed as
0.8 centimeters squared	0.8 sq cm
22 milligram of mercury	22 mmHg
3.0 liters per minute	3.0 L/min
40 millimeters per hour	40 mm/h
8 grams percent	8 gm%

IV. Symbols

- Spell out a symbol when used alone (with no number).
- Use symbols when they are used with numbers

Common Symbols

Dictated as	Transcribed as
Four to five	4-5
Number 3 0	#3-0
Twenty-twenty vision	20/20
BP 120 over 80	120/80
Grade two over six	2/6
A positive	A+
Three point five centimeters	3.5 cm
Point five centimeters	0.5 cm

V. Capitalization

Capitalize...

- Abbreviations when the words they represent are capitalized
- The first word following a colon if it begins a complete sentence or is part of an outline entry
- Most abbreviations of English words
- The first letter of chemical elements
- The names of the days of the week, months, holidays, historic events and religious festivals
- The names of specific departments or sections in the institution only when the institution name is included
- The names of diseases that include proper nouns, eponyms or genus names
- The trade or brand names of drugs
- A quote when it is a complete sentence
- The names of races, peoples, religions and languages. Black, as a race designation would be capitalized, however client preferences may differ.

Do Not Capitalize...

- The spelled out names of the chemical elements
- The seasons of the year
- The common names of diseases
- The names of viruses unless they include a proper noun
- Generic drug names
- The common noun following the brand name. Example - Tylenol tablets
- The names of medical or surgical specialties
- Designations based on skin color, like "a tall white man."

VI. Hyphenation

These prefixes do not require the use of a connecting hyphen in compound terms:

ante	intra	semi
anti	micro	sub
bi	mid	super
co	non	supra
contra	over	trans
counter	pre	tri
de	post	ultra
extra	pro	un
infra	pseudo	under
inter	re	weight

Examples - antecubital not ante-cubital Also Correct - antithesis, bitemporal, counterproductive, defibrillated, extrapyramidal, infraumbilical, interpersonal, intracranial, microhematuria, midline, nontender, nondistended, nonfocal, nonspecific, noncontributory, noncompliance, nonicteric, nonsmall, overestimate, overweight, preoperative, postoperative, posttraumatic, pseudogout, semicircular, sublingual, superimposed, supramammary, transvaginal, ultraviolet, underweight, weightbearing.

Do use a hyphen with prefixes ending in a or i and a base word beginning with the same letter.

Example - anti-inflammatory.

Do use a hyphen when compounded with the prefix self.

Example - self-administered, self-monitored.

For Clarification - Use a hyphen after a prefix if **not** using a hyphen would change the meaning of the word. Examples - re-cover (to cover again) versus recover (regain)

VII. Cancer Classifications

- Stage and grade - do not capitalize either one if it does not begin a sentence.
- Use Roman numerals for cancer stages.
- Use Arabic numerals for cancer grades.
- For clarity, use capital letters or arabic suffixes without spaces or hyphens.

Here are some examples:

stage 0

stage I stage IA

stage II

stage III stage IIIA stage IIIB

stage IV

grade 1

grade 2

grade 3

grade 4

VIII. Drug Terminology

- If dictated q.day - transcribe q.d.
- If dictated q. four hours - transcribed as q.4h. not q. 4 hours.
- When referring to drugs including strength, dosage and directions - Use Arabic numerals only. Example - The patient was prescribed penicillin 500 mg t.i.d. for 5 days.
- If there is no whole number, always add a 0 in front of the decimal point for clarity - this is a general rule when transcribing numbers, not just medications. Example - Dictated as Synthroid point 75 mg a day. Transcribe as Synthroid 0.75 mg q.d.
- Be aware that some drugs are commonly dictated in either milligrams or micrograms. Example - Synthroid 0.05 mg or Synthroid 50 mcg.

IX. Lab Test Punctuation Guidelines

- Use commas to separate multiple **related** test results. Here are some examples:
 - Creatinine 1.2, BUN 42, phosphorus 4.3.
 - WBC 12.4 with 72 segs, 9 lymphs.
 - CBC reveals an RBC count of 10.2, WBC 6.8, platelets 220,000, reticulocyte count 1 with 3 monos, 1 eos and 0 basos.
 - Electrolytes reveal a serum sodium of 138, potassium 4.0, chloride 100 and glucose of 80.
- Use periods to separate **unrelated** laboratory test results. For example,
 - Potassium 3.7. TSH 1.0. Albumin 4.0.

X. Miscellaneous

- Keep logically connected items on the same line. Drug doses, names, dates, sets, etc. Examples:
 - Lopressor 100 mg. Keep all 3 items on the same line.
 - Dr. Fred Farnsworth. Keep the doctors title and full name on the same line.
 - January 14, 2000. Keep the entire date on the same line.
 - 100 pounds. Keep both words on the same line.
 - 5 inches. Same rule.

Names

- Names with junior or senior attached. Use a comma before and a period after the abbreviation or use neither.
 - Example - Jeramiah Johnson, Jr. or Jeramiah Johnson Jr
 - Incorrect - Jeramiah Johnson Jr.
- Names with ordinals. Do not use comma between name and ordinal.
 - Example - Bernie Schwartz III
 - Incorrect - Bernie Schwartz, III

XI. Report Section Notes

History of Present Illness - Mainly in present tense, but mixed tense may be appropriate.

Past Medical History - Use past tense.

Allergies

- Allergies are typed either ALL CAPITAL LETTERS or bold font depending on client preference. Example - If the allergy is dictated pcn, type PENICILLIN.
- If the patient has no allergies use the phrase, "No known drug allergies."

Medications

- Transcribe in continuous paragraph format, even when the doctor numbers the medications. Example: Penicillin 500 mg t.i.d. for 5 days, levothyroxine 0.75 mg q.d. and Lopressor 50 mg b.i.d.
- Capitalize brand name medications. DO NOT capitalize generic medications.
- Use Latin drug abbreviations. Example - if dictated every day - transcribe q.d. If dictated every four hours - transcribe q.4h. not q. 4 h.
- Don't mix Latin and English terminology. Example: If dictated q. day - transcribe q.d. NOT q. day.
- When referring to strength, dosage and directions - Use Arabic numerals only.
- If there is no whole number, add a zero in front of the decimal point for clarity. This is a general rule when transcribing numbers, not just medications. Example: Dictated as Synthroid point 75 milligrams a day. Transcribe Synthroid 0.75 mg q.d.

Physical Examination

- Transcribe in present tense in ALL of the major report formats.
- Vital Signs - Should look like this: Temperature 98.0, BP 140/80, pulse 76 and regular, respirations 16.

Assessment/Diagnosis/Impression

- Typed entirely in upper case.
- No abbreviated medical terminology. Type the entire term or phrase. Example - If the doctor dictates CAD, type coronary artery disease.
- Numbers follow the same rules for any section of the transcript. Example - A 31-YEAR-OLD FEMALE. 5 MG.
- Abbreviate units of measure, e.g. MG, MM, CM, etc.
- The title Doctor is written out, not abbreviated.

Verb tenses

- Use past tense:
 - In the past history of a report
 - In discharge summaries EXCEPT for the History of Present Illness and the Physical Examination sections.
 - When discussing expired patients
- Use present tense:
 - To describe the physical examination
 - Use the correct verb tense to communicate the appropriate time of the action. Even if the dictator inadvertently changes tense during the dictation.

XII. Things to check when proofreading a document

- Fill in blanks or make notes
- Consistent pronouns - he or she?
- Consistent tense - was or is?
- Consistent left and right alignment
- Singulars versus plurals - sclera or sclerae?
- Headings - Are they labeled properly?
- Sound-Alikes
- Unnecessary awkward repetitions
- No abbreviations in diagnoses or procedures
- Drugs correctly capitalized
- Formatting, headings and indentations
- Proper use of hyphens
- Dates
- Complete sentences
- Punctuation

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