

10 Tips & Tools for Transcribing Genealogy Documents

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At some point, every genealogist needs to transcribe a document. A one-of-a-kind document only accessible in-person at an archive. Or a document scanned as an image but not converted into usable text. Here is an overview of how quickly and easily transcribe handwritten and difficult-to-read documents.



Transcribing Tools

- Transcript** helps you transcribe text on digital images of documents. Free for personal use; pro version allows access to special features including search and replace and image manipulation. Uses a “split screen,” meaning the image being transcribed is open in the top window of the program while the window below displays typing as the document is transcribed.
<https://www.jacobboerema.nl/en/Freeware.htm>
- Dragon Naturally Speaking.** Use your computer’s microphone to dictate, using commands such as “next line,” “backspace,” and more. **Dragon Mobile Assistant** is free and perfect for use at archives for genealogy research or dictating source citations.
<http://www.nuance.com/dragon/index.htm>
- GenScriber** transcribes census population schedules and birth/marriage/death indices. Uses a split screen to view the document being transcribed as well as the ongoing transcription. Use document format (for letters, diaries, and general text documents) or spreadsheet format (for creating indices or transcribing indices).
<http://genscriber.com>
- Google Voice Typing** is one of the tools available in the popular office productivity suite, Google Drive, is the ability to transcribe voice to text. Create a blank document in Google Drive, go to Tools, select Voice Typing.
<https://drive.google.com>

Transcribing Tips

- Include everything!** Goals include documenting facts as they are found; interpretation of facts should not be part of the transcribing task. Even if information seems incorrect, transcribe it “as is.”
- Display missing letters and words.** If a specific letter or word is illegible, use a blank underline in brackets [_____].
- Use Wolfram |Alpha to help decipher missing letters.** Wolfram |Alpha can determine missing letters in a word. Type the word with blanks and letters such as “h__w_y” in the search field and hit Enter. A list of possible words appears.
- Use brackets for notations.** Use “[sic]” to point out errors or a note for interpretation purposes in brackets. Do not include lengthy notes in the text; use footnotes if needed.
- Consider the formatting.** Some transcribers format the text the same as the original including line endings and page length.
- Donate transcription to original repository.** Most repositories appreciate receiving the digital transcription of any document a researcher has taken the time to transcribe. An easy way to give back to organizations.

Check out the **Transcribing Genealogy Resource List** on the back page!

Transcribing Genealogy Resource List

- **Citizen Archivist (NARA)**
<https://www.archives.gov/citizen-archivist/transcribe/citizen-archivist/transcribe/tips>
- **Dragon Mobile Assistant**
<http://www.nuance.com/for-individuals/mobile-applications/index.htm>
- **Dragon Naturally Speaking**
<http://www.nuance.com/dragon/index.htm>
- **GenScriber**
<http://genscriber.com/>
- **German Genealogy Records Transcription Group (Facebook)**
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1454015278205406/>
- **Google Alerts**
<https://www.google.com/alerts>
- **Google Voice Typing**
<https://drive.google.com/>
- ***How to Read Old Handwriting***
<http://www.genealogyintime.com/GenealogyResources/Articles/how-to-read-old-handwriting-page1.html>
- **iTranslate Voice**
<http://itranslatevoice.com/index.html>
- **Old Weather**
<https://www.oldweather.org/>
- **Textgrabber**
<https://www.abbyy.com/products/mobile/text-grabber/en/>
- **Transcribe | Citizen Archivist (NARA)**
<https://www.archives.gov/citizen-archivist/transcribe>
- **Transcript**
<https://www.jacobboerema.nl/en/Freeware.htm>
- **Wolfram | Alpha**
<https://wolframalpha.com>