



A Digital Court Reporter's Guide to a High Quality Recording



When clients hire digital court reporters, they come with high expectations, created by the promise of technological efficiency. Digital court reporters who take the time to set the room well for recording accuracy will be able to meet, maybe even exceed, these client expectations simply and efficiently, leading to retention. **As digital court reporters grow more comfortable with and confident in setting up rooms, the process will grow simpler and simpler, and scaling will become easier as well.** To help you get started, here is a quick guide to setting up a room in a way that guarantees a high quality recording for your clients.



Step One: Choose the Best Microphones



Room Setup that Guarantees a High Quality Recording

As always in business, start with a goal in mind. List the most common scenarios your team faces, then list what could impact the recording in these scenarios, and how many microphones you need. Following are recommendations for the best microphone types for common situations digital court reporters encounter. *For example, our team recommends using Behringer brand. We are not affiliated with the Behringer, but have had a good experience with their microphones.*

Step Two: Choose the Type of Microphones

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Microphone Type for Depositions in Small and Controlled Environments

Dynamic microphones are ideal for many digital court reporters. They have a low sensitivity to details, so if the person next to the speaker whispers, it won't throw off the recording. However, for the same reason, they cannot cover long ranges, which means it is often best to bring one microphone per speaker. For further accuracy, look for a **cardioid pickup pattern**, which only picks up sound that's directly in front of it. This will tell your microphone to ignore noises in the room, even if they come from the person sitting right next to the speaker. *For example, our team recommends dynamic cardioid microphones, such as Behringer's M1800S and XM8500 microphones.*

Microphones for Court Hearings that Require Lawyers to Move Around the Room

When lawyers move around the room, it's very challenging to capture their voice, unless their microphone moves with them. The easiest way to do it is to use a **lavalier microphone**, which digital court reporters can clip to lawyers' clothes. Look for an **omnidirectional pickup pattern**, so that the microphone picks up a bit of sound from additional directions. While it's important to focus the recording on the speaker, in this case, if a cardioid microphone moves on the lawyer's shirt, it's possible it won't pick up all sentences fully. *For example, our team recommends using a condenser omnidirectional microphone such as Behringer's ECM8000 microphone.*

Microphone Type for Packed Rooms Without Space for Enough Microphones

Lavalier microphones can also be clipped to speakers' clothes if there isn't space on the desk for enough microphones, yet a **cardioid pickup pattern** is best in this case, to keep the microphone focused on its one speaker, and ignoring other noises in the room.

Microphone Types for Court Reporters Who Commute, Change Recording Environments Often and Carry Equipment to Work

When court reporters commute with equipment on a regular basis, and need to carry it and install it in space after space, the size of the microphones matters. In this case, **condenser microphones** could be best, as they come in many sizes. The lavalier microphones mentioned above, for example, are a small example of condenser microphones. The challenge is that they are very sensitive to noises, so any whisper or cough could interfere with the quality

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of the recording. Therefore, it is likely better to bring condenser microphones into non-crowded proceedings, or study the microphone's environments to be able to control the quality of the recording better.

A **cardioid pickup pattern** could be best in some of these situations, as it focuses the microphone on capturing solely the sound that's in front of it. However, it is important to ensure access to an **omnidirectional pickup pattern** as well, in case a situation requires it. Therefore, the best solution for court reporters who switch rooms on a regular basis is to look for **hybrid microphones**. Some microphones provide a **combination of dynamic and condenser capabilities**, and some offer **combined pickup patterns**, so digital court reporters can switch back and forth as needed.

Recommended condenser cardioid microphones: Behringer's C1, C-1U, C-2 and C-4 microphones. **Recommended hybrid condenser microphones, with both cardioid and omnidirectional pickup patterns:** Behringer's B-5 and C-3 microphones.

Whose Needs Matter More in the Room Setup, Audio or Video?

Some court reporting companies do choose to qualify their digital court reporters in videography as well. Others choose to hire videographers, and leave their digital court reporters to focus on audio. Either way, both aspects need to be accommodated in the room setup, yet audio recording requirements (such as where to set up relevant equipment) often need to be prioritized, since a high quality recording is critical for an accurate transcription.

Step Three: Important Considerations When Distributing Microphones Across the Room

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The quantity of microphones needed will vary. Ideally, there will be one microphone per speaker, including the lawyers, the witnesses and the judge. Sometimes that won't be possible and more than one person will be recorded using the same microphone. But more on this in a moment. Meanwhile, no matter how many microphones you place, try to avoid placing them near potential sources of noise, such as an air conditioner or a group of people who will hardly need to use them, like jurors, yet might find themselves whispering or moving around in their chairs, adding unnecessary noise to the recording. If avoiding that is impossible, turning the microphones off when they are not needed, and back on when they do, could help. If microphones are placed on desks, make sure the parties have plenty of space to place their documents, so that they can do their jobs properly. If the microphones have **cardioid pickup patterns**, let the speakers know that the microphones will only be able to record them if they speak directly to them.

Step Four: Set Your Recording to Success

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Once microphones have been chosen and distributed across the room, it's time to connect them to the recording system, and ensure the recording software can differentiate between speakers.

Channel Distribution and Assignment in Microphones

When there aren't enough microphones for all speakers, or when a proceeding includes speakers that only tap into the discussion once or twice, digital court reporters sometimes record multiple channels using the same microphone. This can be predefined in recording systems.

It is crucial to identify speakers correctly to ensure transcription accuracy. Therefore, providing each of the key speakers, such as the judge and the lawyers, her or his own channel, is essential. In cases where channels need to be shared (for example, if a microphone is passed from juror to juror), it is important to annotate the transfers in the recording software.

Step Five: Connect Your Microphones to a Digital Recording Software

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To put it simply, microphones are connected to digital mixers, and digital mixers get connected to computers, where the digital recording software is installed. A digital mixer is an audio console that converts sound into digital media. As shared above, Behringer is a good place to find high quality equipment, including digital mixers. Once everything is connected, the digital recording software installed on your computer will be able to capture and save the audio, so that it can then be shared with clients and transcription providers.

Last Six: Test Everything Before Each Proceeding

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The work of digital court reporters is a lot more complex, and involves many more aspects than it initially seems. **To set a recording to success, create a checklist of all the aspects that need checking, and test each one before every proceeding to avoid unwanted surprises.** It's the small details that bring the big picture of client retention, company growth and, most importantly, justice, to life.