



Spoken language vs writing

There are many differences between speech and writing, and understanding these differences is crucial as it will help you analyse spoken texts.

The main difference is in their relationship to time and space; writing is permanent and physical whereas speech is often spontaneous. Spontaneous speech is rarely entirely fluent; speakers can pause, restart what they were saying, use a word or phrase by mistake and then repair or correct themselves. Written language must rely entirely on form, structure, language and punctuation to convey meaning and attitude whereas spoken language can use a range of other tools to convey meaning.

This written record of spoken language is called a transcript. Like speech, transcripts do not use punctuation marks. Similarly, they do not contain capital letters for the start of sentences, though proper nouns and names of specific people and places are still capitalised as is the pronoun 'I'.

Spoken language transcript key	Meaning
(.)	Micropause
(2)	Timed pause (in seconds)
ca.	Incomplete word
//	Overlapping speech
=	Latching
{ <i>laughs</i> }	Paralinguistic features
bad	Emphatic stress
[unclear]	Speech that is unclear
Real:::ly	Stretched or prolonged speech
↗brilliant	Rising intonation
↘brilliant	Falling intonation
Accel	Speech that is getting faster (underlined)
rall	Speech that is getting slower (underlined)

Spoken language: What do we consider?

Participants: who is speaking (relationship, status, etc.).

Purpose: why they are speaking.

Context and genre: when, where, who and why...

Sequencing: openings/closings, phatic speech, adjacency pairs, three-part exchanges.

Turn-taking: who decides who speaks when; overlaps, interruptions.

Topic management: who decides what is talked about – topic shifts and loops.

Repair of misunderstandings.

Non-fluency features: um... er...

Prosodic features: intonation, stress, pace, pauses (both timed and micro).

Paralinguistic behaviour (non-verbal, e.g. pointing, nodding, raising an eyebrow, coughing, laughing).

What are some ways that turn-taking is managed?

In some formal situations, turn-taking is pre-decided, such as in an interview or a classroom setting.

Tag questions (questions attached to the ends of statements, e.g. 'We're going to be late, aren't we?') can be used as a cue that the person being addressed should speak.

The use of **vocatives** also indicate that you want someone to speak, e.g. 'What do you think, Freya?'

Concluding, often **declarative** statements function as verbal cues, e.g. 'That was that' or 'I haven't spoken to her since'. They can demonstrate the clear end of someone's speaking turn.

Prosodic features such as a falling **intonation** are used to indicate the end of a speaking turn, or perhaps a rising intonation might form an **interrogative**.

Paralinguistic features (eye movements, nodding of head etc.) can be a sign of impatience, conveying the message 'yes, yes, you don't need to say anymore'.