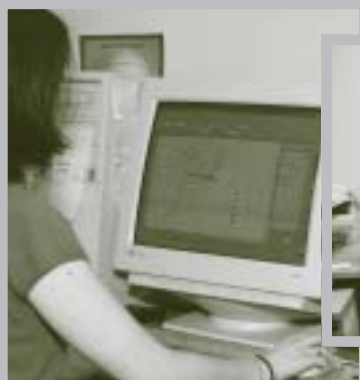


# Braille Transcription Getting Started



AMERICAN PRINTING HOUSE  
FOR THE BLIND, INC.

Braille Transcription

**A**ccording to a national survey conducted by the American Foundation for the Blind (AFB) in 2000<sup>1</sup>, there is a critical shortage of braille textbook transcribers across the United States.

The survey indicated that 375 additional transcribers were needed in the year 2000 to meet the need for braille textbooks for blind students. Further, the survey estimates that by 2005, 750 more transcribers will be needed, and by 2010 the need jumps to over 1,000 additional braille transcribers.

## **Incidence of Blindness Increasing**

It is estimated that there are about 10 million blind and visually impaired people in the United States today. Unfortunately, this number is growing. Medical advances at both ends of the age spectrum have resulted in an increased incidence of blindness. Premature babies are being saved but can be faced with lifelong disabilities. Older adults are living longer and can develop degenerative eye diseases.

According to a 2002 report by the National Eye Institute of the National Institutes for Health and Prevent Blindness America, many more Americans are facing blindness than ever before. The number of blind people in the U.S. is expected to double over the next 30 years as the Baby Boomer generation ages.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Survey on the Training and Availability of Braille Transcribers, American Foundation for the Blind (AFB) Textbook and Instructional Materials Solutions Forum, 2000. Access through the AFB website: [www.afb.org](http://www.afb.org).

<sup>2</sup>"Vision Problems in the U.S.: Prevalence of Adult Vision Impairment and Age-Related Eye Disease in America," Prevent Blindness America and the National Eye Institute, 2002. Access through [www.preventblindness.org](http://www.preventblindness.org) and [www.nei.nih.gov/eyedata](http://www.nei.nih.gov/eyedata).

The U.S. Department of Education currently serves 93,600 blind and visually impaired students across the country (K-12) in special education programs. In 2002, the American Printing House for the Blind (APH) registered 57,148 blind and visually impaired students eligible to receive adapted educational materials through the APH Federal Quota Program.

## Same Textbook – Same Time

For children who are blind, braille can mean literacy. It is often the key to their success – both in school and in their adult lives – if they are to live independently and realize their full potential. According to *No Child Left Behind*, the education law passed by Congress in 2001 and signed by President George W. Bush in January, 2002, the federal government will “ensure that all children have the opportunity to obtain a high quality education and reach proficiency on challenging state academic standards and assessments.” Students who are blind or visually impaired must receive their textbooks at the same time as their sighted peers if they are to reach these goals set by the federal government.

For several reasons, this task is much easier said than done. Major factors impeding this goal include:

- **Producing textbooks in braille is a time-consuming and expensive endeavor.**

Since the vast majority of students in the U.S. are sighted, textbooks are published with this in mind. They convey an enormous amount of information through visual displays (photographs, maps, charts, etc.). Typical geography, math, and science books, for example, often have several graphics on each page to explain key concepts. Blind students are entitled

to – and required to – learn the same information as their sighted peers, so this information must all be transformed into an accessible format. One of the first steps in the editing process is making decisions about how each graphic can be replicated in a non-visual way.

While proper braille transcription and formatting are being conducted, tactile graphics must also be developed so that the blind student receives the same information as the sighted student. A complicated textbook can take up to a year to transcribe, and will result in many more volumes than the print version of the same book.

- **Changes in educational practices in recent decades have resulted in a significant environmental shift in the population of blind students.**

Until the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century, 90% of blind students in the U.S. were educated together in residential schools across the country. With the move toward “mainstreaming” disabled students, 90% of blind students now attend local or neighborhood schools. Combining this trend with the current practice of selecting textbooks at the local level means that it is becoming increasingly difficult to provide *every* blind child, with *every* braille textbook he needs, in *every* school across the country.

- **Historically, the majority of braille textbook transcription has been provided by volunteers.**

In years past, volunteers (generally mothers of blind children) learned braille and transcribed textbooks at home. Unfortunately, this generation of braille transcribers is disappearing. A national campaign is currently underway to transform the field of braille transcription

to a paid professional career. Much progress has been made toward this goal, including the development of a certification program at the community college level and increased recruitment and training efforts.

## **Braille Transcription Certification**

**B**est practice” standards dictate that braille transcribers be certified by the National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped (NLS), a division of the Library of Congress. Certifications offered by NLS include literary braille, music braille code, The Nemeth Braille Code for Mathematics and Scientific Notation, and braille proofreading. The certification course for literary braille transcription is available by correspondence through NLS (contact information on back).

## **Work Options**

There are two settings in which most braille transcribers work:

- employment with a braille production company, and
- “cottage industry” contract braille production.

Since there are few large braille production companies across the U.S., the vast majority of braille transcribers work on a contractual basis, either individually or through small businesses.

## **Employers of Braille Transcribers**

The following list includes some of the major companies in the United States that employ full-time braille transcribers, and may also contract with “outside” transcribers as needed:

### **American Printing House for the Blind**

1839 Frankfort Avenue  
Louisville, KY 40206-0085  
Toll Free (800) 223-1839  
Telephone (502) 895-2405  
Fax (502) 899-2274  
Website: [www.aph.org](http://www.aph.org)  
Email: [info@aph.org](mailto:info@aph.org)

### **National Braille Press**

88 St. Stephen Street  
Boston, MA 02115  
Toll Free (888) 965-8965  
Telephone (617) 266-6160  
Fax (617) 437-0456  
Website: [www.nbp.org](http://www.nbp.org)  
Email: [orders@nbp.org](mailto:orders@nbp.org)

### **Braille International, Inc.**

3290 SE Slater Street  
Stuart, FL 34997  
Telephone (772) 286-8366  
Fax (772) 286-8909  
Email: [linda@brailleintl.org](mailto:linda@brailleintl.org)

### **Clovernook Center for the Blind**

7000 Hamilton Avenue  
Cincinnati, OH 45231-5297  
Telephone (513) 522-3860 (Voice and TDD)  
Fax (513) 728-3946  
Website: [www.clovernook.org](http://www.clovernook.org)  
Email: [clovernook@clovernook.org](mailto:clovernook@clovernook.org)  
(offices also in Dayton, OH and Memphis, TN)

### **Associated Services for the Blind**

919 Walnut Street  
Philadelphia, PA 19107  
Telephone (215) 627-0600  
Fax (215) 922-0692  
Website: [www.asb.org](http://www.asb.org)  
Email: [asbinfo@asb.org](mailto:asbinfo@asb.org)

## **Salary Ranges**

According to the AFB survey, the range of annual salary for full time, certified transcribers is \$18,000 to \$50,000, plus benefits. When paid by the hour, the range of payment is \$6 to \$18. Fees commanded by braille transcribers depend upon their level of certification, previous experience, and the difficulty of the work assignment.

## Rates for Contracted Services

Rates paid when transcribers contract their services depend upon the level of difficulty of the project, transcriber qualifications, and who owns the equipment, materials, and paper used (contractor or contractee). Current pay ranges are:

By the page	\$0.25 to \$5
By the hour	\$8 to \$35
By the project	\$75 to \$5,000

## Contract Braille Services

The following is a partial listing of government entities and companies that provide braille materials to people who are blind. These are the primary groups with whom individual and small business transcribers contract for work.

- **State schools for the blind** (currently 48)
- **State departments of education, special education divisions**
- **State departments for the blind**
- **Local school districts**
- **Library Services for the Blind and Physically Handicapped**
- **State Instructional Materials Resource Centers (IMRC).**  
(Sometimes called Instructional Materials Centers (IMC) or Instructional Resource Centers (IRC).)
- **Businesses** (restaurants, theatres, banks, utilities, transit systems, etc.)



## Key Resources

The most complete reference and referral resource available to identify organizations in the blindness field and available products and services is the ***AFB Directory of Services for Blind and Visually Impaired Persons in the United States and Canada***, published by AFB Press, American Foundation for the Blind (see below). This resource includes a listing of organizations that produce braille in each state.

The American Printing House for the Blind manages a database called **Accessible Media Producers (AMP)**, containing the names, qualifications, and contact information for over 100 organizations and individuals that produce braille, large print, sound recordings, and computer braille files. Braille transcribers are encouraged to list their services on this database, free of charge. This list may also offer opportunities for beginning braille transcribers to sub-contract with those more established in the field.

**Blind Readers' Page** is a website that may be a good source of information. It contains listings of materials in alternative media, including braille. The **NLS Reference Directories** can also be accessed through the internet at [www.gov/nls/reference/directories](http://www.gov/nls/reference/directories).

## Select National and International Organizations in the Field of Blindness

Following is a partial listing of national organizations that may need braille transcription services or may be of help in identifying employment or contract opportunities:

**American Council of the Blind**

1155 15<sup>th</sup> Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20005  
Toll Free (800) 424-8666  
Telephone (202) 467-5081  
Fax (202) 467-5085  
Website: [www.acb.org](http://www.acb.org)

**American Foundation for the Blind**

11 Penn Plaza, Suite 300  
New York, New York 10001  
Toll Free (800) 232-5463 (Voice and TDD/TTY)  
Telephone (212) 502-7660 (Voice and TDD/TTY)  
Fax: (212) 502-7777  
Website: [www.afb.org](http://www.afb.org)  
Email: [afbinfo@afb.net](mailto:afbinfo@afb.net)

**Braille Authority of North America (BANA)**

c/o Eileen Curran  
National Braille Press  
88 St. Stephen Street  
Boston, MA 02115  
Telephone (617) 266-6160 (TDD/TTY)  
Website: [www.brailleauthority.org](http://www.brailleauthority.org)  
Email: [ecurran@nbp.org](mailto:ecurran@nbp.org)

**International Braille Research Center**

1800 Johnson Street  
Baltimore, MD 21230  
Telephone (410) 659-9314  
Fax (410) 685-5653  
Website: [www.braille.org](http://www.braille.org)

**Lighthouse International**

111 East 59<sup>th</sup> Street  
New York, New York 10022  
Toll Free (800) 829-0500  
Telephone (212) 821-9200  
Website: [www.lighthouse.org](http://www.lighthouse.org)  
Email: [info@lighthouse.org](mailto:info@lighthouse.org)

**National Braille Association**

3 Townline Circle  
Rochester, New York 14623-2513  
Telephone (716) 427-8260  
Fax (716) 427-0263  
Website: [www.nationalbraille.org](http://www.nationalbraille.org)  
Email: [nbaoffice@compuserve.com](mailto:nbaoffice@compuserve.com)

**National Council of Private Agencies for the Blind**

8770 Manchester Road  
St. Louis, MO 63069  
Telephone (314) 968-9000

**National Council of State  
Agencies for the Blind**

1213 29<sup>th</sup> Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20007  
Telephone (202) 333-5841  
Fax (202) 333-5881

**National Federation  
of the Blind**

1800 Johnson Street  
Baltimore, MD 21230  
Telephone (410) 659-9314  
Fax (410) 685-5653  
Website: [www.nfb.org](http://www.nfb.org)  
Email: [nfb@nfb.org](mailto:nfb@nfb.org)



**National Industries for the Blind**

1901 North Beauregard Street, Suite 200  
Alexandria, VA 22311-1727  
Telephone (703) 998-0770  
Fax (703) 671-9053  
Website: [www.nib.org](http://www.nib.org)  
Email: [info@nib.org](mailto:info@nib.org)

**National Library Services for the Blind and  
Physically Handicapped**

Library of Congress  
1291 Taylor Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20011  
Telephone (202) 707-5100  
Telephone (202) 707-0744  
Fax (202) 707-0712  
Website: [www.lcweb.loc.gov/nls](http://www.lcweb.loc.gov/nls)  
Email: [nls@loc.gov](mailto:nls@loc.gov)

**Vision World Wide**

5707 Brockton Drive, Suite 302  
Indianapolis, IN 46220-5481  
Toll Free (800) 431-1739  
Telephone (317) 254-1332  
Fax (317) 251-6588  
Website: [www.visionww.org](http://www.visionww.org)  
Email: [info@visionww.org](mailto:info@visionww.org)