

WHAT I WISH I KNEW ABOUT...TIME ENTRIES

Real-world lessons for legal support professionals

Because nobody hands you the manual for this job.

The Reality

Nobody really teaches legal support professionals how to write effective time entries.

Most people learn by trial and error, cryptic attorney edits, rejected bills, or the universal legal industry training method known as “figure it out and hope accounting doesn’t email you.”

But strong time entries matter.

Good billing entries:

- demonstrate value
- protect billing integrity
- help attorneys justify invoices
- accurately reflect litigation work
- reduce write-downs
- create cleaner client communication

And perhaps most importantly, they tell the story of the work happening behind the scenes.

Legal support work is not “miscellaneous.”

The right time entry shows that.

What Actually Makes a Strong Time Entry

The best time entries usually answer four questions:

1. What did you do?
2. For whom?
3. Why did it matter?
4. What was the purpose or outcome?

A simple structure:

Action Verb + Task + Context + Purpose

Weak:

- Worked on discovery
- Emails with client
- Trial prep
- Updated file

Stronger:

- Review and organize discovery materials for attorney preparation for upcoming felony trial.
- Communicate with client regarding outstanding records request and hearing preparation requirements.
- Prepare exhibit binders and witness materials for upcoming jury trial.
- Update case management system and calendar deadlines following court scheduling order.

The goal is not to sound robotic.

The goal is clarity.

Clients are paying for legal work, strategy support, organization, preparation, communication, and risk management. Your entries should reflect that.

Things That Are Not Time Entries

Let's all agree to retire a few classics.

The Hall of Fame for Vague Billing

- "Worked on file"
- "Emails"
- "Attention to matter"
- "Miscellaneous tasks"
- "Prepared documents"
- "Trial prep"
- "Research stuff"

If your entry could apply equally to legal work or assembling IKEA furniture, it probably needs more detail.

Specificity matters.

Not because anyone expects a novel.

But because vague entries create confusion, billing cuts, frustrated attorneys, and invoices that clients question immediately.

Stronger Action Verbs

Small wording changes make a huge difference.

Instead of:

- Worked on
- Did
- Helped with
- Handled
- Took care of
- Talked about



Try:

- Review
- Analyze
- Draft
- Prepare
- Organize
- Coordinate
- Communicate
- Research
- Compile
- Finalize
- Confer
- Summarize
- Update
- Process
- Manage

These words better explain the actual work being performed.

And yes, “coordinate” sounds far more valuable than “dealt with whatever chaos landed in my inbox at 4:42 p.m.”

Professionally speaking, of course.

Litigation-Specific Tips

Litigation support work often involves dozens of moving parts happening simultaneously.

Your entries should help explain:

- preparation
- organization
- communication
- strategy support
- compliance
- scheduling management
- document coordination

Example Entries

- Coordinate subpoena materials and compile records for attorney review in advance of suppression hearing.
- Review incoming discovery production and organize materials for attorney case strategy analysis.
- Prepare witness coordination materials and trial exhibit notebooks for upcoming circuit court trial.
- Communicate with clerk’s office regarding scheduling updates and filing requirements.
- Analyze case file and update internal litigation deadlines following receipt of court order.

A strong entry helps tell the procedural story of the case.

That matters more than many people realize.

Transactional Paralegal Tips

Transactional work deserves the same level of clarity and value demonstration as litigation work.

Strong transactional entries should help explain:

- document preparation
- due diligence
- deadline coordination
- client communication
- closing preparation
- corporate organization
- filing management
- compliance support

Example Entries

- Prepare and organize closing documents for commercial real estate transaction.
- Review corporate formation documents and coordinate state filing requirements.
- Compile due diligence materials and organize records for attorney review related to business acquisition.
- Communicate with client regarding outstanding signature requirements and transaction deadlines.
- Update entity records and prepare annual filing documentation for corporate compliance purposes.

Transactional work often involves extensive organization and coordination happening behind the scenes.

Your entries should reflect the amount of preparation and attention to detail required to keep matters moving efficiently.

Family Law Time Entry Tips

Family law work often involves significant client communication, sensitive timelines, and ongoing case management.

Good family law entries should reflect:

- organization

- communication
- preparation
- documentation
- scheduling coordination
- court compliance
- client support

Example Entries

- Communicate with client regarding outstanding financial documentation and upcoming custody hearing preparation.
- Organize and summarize discovery materials related to support and equitable distribution issues.
- Prepare filing materials and coordinate service requirements for emergency custody motion.
- Review incoming records and update case chronology for attorney preparation for mediation.
- Coordinate scheduling and document preparation related to guardian ad litem communications.

Family law clients are often navigating some of the most stressful moments of their lives.

Your time entries should still remain professional, clear, and focused on the legal support work being performed.

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What Works Better

Practical Time Entry Habits

Enter time contemporaneously whenever possible.

Waiting until the end of the day usually leads to vague entries, forgotten tasks, or the legal support version of archaeological reconstruction.

Separate tasks when appropriate.

Avoid massive block billing entries when the work involves unrelated tasks.

Focus on value.

Ask yourself:

If a client read this entry, would they understand why the work mattered?

Keep context concise.

You do not need a paragraph.
You do need clarity.

Remember that administrative work and legal support work are not always the same thing.

The wording should reflect legal support value whenever possible.

Final Thought

One of the biggest misconceptions about legal support work is that the most important tasks happen in the spotlight.

In reality, some of the most valuable work happens quietly:

- organizing
- preparing
- tracking
- coordinating
- preventing problems before they happen

Strong time entries help make that work visible.

And visibility matters.

Especially in a profession where some of the best work is often the work nobody notices because everything went smoothly.

