

Timekeeping 101

Texas Forum 2014 Boot Camp presentation

February 28, 2014

Janet L. McDaniel, CP

Definition: Timekeeping is the recording of all time spent performing activities during the workday.

Ethical Timekeeping: can only bill for work that is traditionally performed by attorney.

Why is accurate timekeeping important?

Practice of law is a business; timekeeping provides the basis for billing clients for legal services. Time entries **MUST** be accurate; the more descriptive the invoice – the higher probability of collecting the fee.

- Billing practices: communication with the client before case is accepted; such items as long distance phone calls, copying, fax and postage expenses; third-party expenses – expert fees, court reporters' fees, filing fees. Travel expenses, delivery charges, etc.
- Billing for technology: i.e. Westlaw Next or LexisNexis research; ProDoc – billing reflect actual amount of time spent for the online service

Record time promptly – as task is completed, record it – versus waiting until the end of the day or the end of the week – easy to forget everything worked on in each matter.

What can be recorded?

Write or record everything

- Include in your daily record or notebook Client reference: Client/matter # or some code identifier used by your firm to identify the client and the matter worked on –
- May have a client that utilizes the firm for “General or Miscellaneous” legal matters; major litigation matters; corporate matters, etc. Each different matter under the same Client Number may have a different number/code.

Track Non-billable time: paralegals can't bill for clerical work; copying work – still need to track your time in case you need to account for non-billable hours.

Timekeeping in Insurance Cases:

- Avoid block billing: --block billing is the practice of listing a group of tasks in a block summary under a single time entry: i.e. "Draft interrogatory requests; telephone conference with Dr. Brown re: expert report; summarize deposition of Mr. Smith; review and revise correspondence to opposing counsel. 7.3 hours"
- Good words v. bad words
 - Remember your audience (client): client as well as others may be reviewing the bill;
 - Avoid abbreviations – can be confusing to reader
 - Avoid slang/complex jargon
 - Client billing policies -- can be found in client's retention letter or engagement letter (includes staffing limitations, budgetary guidelines, and specific timekeeping guidelines – particularly important with insurance companies and corporations.)

Billing increments and Rounding: usually time is billed in increments of one-tenth (.10) hour. This means that time billed for a task should be rounded up to the nearest .10 hour, and that .10-hour will be billed for tasks that take less than 6 minutes. (.20 = 12 minutes)

Timekeeping/Billing software:

Time capture software v. time entry software

- Abacus
- Professional 55
- Time Slips
- Tabs5
- FreshBooks (not QuickBooks)
- Omega
- CaseFox
- CLIO –laptop, Ipad

This list is certainly not all-inclusive, but a good start.