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How To Track Time with a Billable Hours Chart: What to Know

Katie Langer · Tuesday, June 3rd, 2025

For law firms, time isn't just money; it's your business model. Tracking time accurately is essential for profitability, transparency, and growth, regardless of whether you're a partner at a growing midsize firm or a firm administrator juggling calendars and billing cycles. A billable hours chart can be the foundational tool your team needs to stay consistent and compliant without losing precious hours to memory and manual logging.

This article breaks down what billable hours charts are, why they matter, and how time-tracking tools can streamline your timekeeping, helping you capture every billable minute without the hassle.

Main Takeaways of this Article

- A billable hours chart helps standardize and simplify how attorneys track time.
- Tracking time in consistent billing increments (like 6 or 15 minutes) reduces errors and disputes.
- Clear, real-time entries improve productivity, accuracy, and client trust.
- Legal practice management software can enhance timekeeping with automation, mobile apps, and billing integration.

- Avoiding common time tracking mistakes can significantly boost revenue and firm efficiency.

What Is a Billable Hours Chart?

A billable hours chart is a standardized table that converts minutes worked into decimal-based increments typically used for hourly billing. For example, six minutes equals 0.1 hours, so a 36-minute task would be logged as 0.6 hours. These charts help legal professionals convert work into billable time accurately and consistently.

Beyond just conversion, billable hours charts improve tracking by enforcing structure across time entries. Most charts include:

- Time increment tracking (e.g., 0.1 = 6 minutes)
- Clear categorization of billable vs. non-billable tasks
- Standardized task descriptions that improve clarity on client invoices.

Here's a sample reference chart:

Time Increment	Minutes
0.1	1 - 6 Minutes
0.2	7 - 12 Minutes
0.3	13 - 18 Minutes
0.4	19 - 24 Minutes
0.5	25 - 30 Minutes
0.6	31 - 36 Minutes

Time Increment	Minutes
0.7	37 - 42 Minutes
0.8	43 - 48 Minutes
0.9	49 - 54 Minutes
1.0	55 - 60 Minutes

Why Law Firms Need an Attorney Billable Hours Chart

Proper time tracking isn't just about collecting hours. It's also about ensuring accuracy, compliance, and client satisfaction. Here's why these charts are indispensable.

Ensures Accurate Hourly Billing and Compliance

Using a standardized billing chart helps attorneys translate time into billable increments with precision, which is essential for complying with firm policies, client agreements, and bar association guidelines. For example, rounding inconsistencies or vague time descriptions can lead to ethical scrutiny or client dissatisfaction. A chart enforces consistency and reduces the risk of miscalculation.

Tracks Productivity and Performance

With consistent time entry formats, firm administrators and partners can easily analyze how attorneys spend their time—by case type, client, or task. This insight helps identify inefficiencies (e.g., too much time spent on administrative work) and informs strategic decisions about delegation, hiring, or process improvement.

Prevents Lost Revenue Due to Underreported Time

Quick calls, impromptu meetings, and email responses often go unrecorded. A visual and easy-to-use billing chart prompts attorneys to log these micro-tasks, which may seem minor but can result in significant revenue over the course of a year, potentially tens of thousands of dollars per attorney.

Improves Client Communication

Charts that include standard task descriptions (e.g., “Drafted demand letter – 0.4 hours”) create transparency on invoices, reducing confusion or disputes. Clients appreciate clarity, and a well-documented record strengthens trust.



Reduces Billing Disputes

Accurate and consistent timekeeping gives firms defensible records in the event of a billing dispute. If a client questions an invoice, the firm can refer to structured time entries supported by a uniform billing chart.

Enhances Productivity

With a predefined chart, attorneys spend less time figuring out how to log their time and more time focusing on legal work. This streamlining reduces the cognitive load of timekeeping, making it faster and more consistent.

Best Practices for Tracking Billable Hours Effectively

Tracking time well is more than filling in timesheets. These strategies can elevate your approach:

- **Establish a Clear Time-Tracking Policy:** Set firm-wide standards so every timekeeper logs time consistently. Develop guidelines that define what tasks are billable, expected timekeeping frequency, and the required level of detail. Provide examples to eliminate ambiguity and encourage buy-in.



- **Use a Billable Hours Chart to Categorize Tasks:** Break work into clear categories to avoid ambiguity when it's time to invoice. Make it easy for attorneys to code entries properly by using a standard chart with common task categories (e.g., research, drafting, meetings). This helps when reviewing time by task type for profitability analysis or client reporting.
- **Differentiate Between Billable and Non-Billable Tasks:** Avoid overbilling or underbilling by making this distinction explicit. Clearly identifying non-billable work—like internal meetings or training—helps the firm manage productivity and allocate resources more strategically. It also avoids accidental overbilling that could damage client relationships.

- **Use Descriptive and Clear Entries:** Avoid vague entries like “worked on case.” Instead, use specific phrasing: “Prepared discovery requests for Jones v. Martinez – 0.5 hours.” This level of clarity strengthens client communication and invoice acceptance.
- **Track Time in Real-Time to Avoid Gaps:** Real-time logging helps you capture .1s and .2s that often slip away. Logging time immediately after each task (or using automated timers) captures work more accurately than relying on end-of-day memory. Tools like Centerbase make this easier by prompting time entry based on activity.
- **Minimize Time Leakage:** Use automated tools and reminders to avoid forgetting to log quick calls or emails that take place outside traditional work windows.
- **Regularly Review and Adjust Billable Time Entries:** Conduct internal audits or have supervisors periodically review timesheets to spot patterns, such as chronic underreporting or inconsistent categorization, and offer feedback or training.

Common Mistakes in Tracking Billable Hours and How to Avoid Them



Even the most disciplined firms can fall into bad timekeeping habits. Here's what to watch out for:

Inaccurate or Delayed Time Logging

When attorneys wait to enter time at the end of the day (or worse, the week), they rely on memory rather than precise tracking. Encourage or automate real-time entries to ensure no work is missed.

Overlooking Small Tasks That Add Up

Five 3-minute client calls a day equals over five billable hours a month. Minor interactions like “1-minute phone calls” or “2-minute email replies” are often skipped but add up. Using a chart with 6-minute increments (or 10- or 15-minute increments for different billing models) helps capture them.

Not Differentiating Between Billable and Non-Billable Hours

This can cause compliance issues and financial misreporting. Blurring [billable hours](#) categories distorts profitability reporting and may lead to billing errors. Training and well-designed billing systems can reinforce the distinction.

Failing to Use Consistent Billing Increments

Mixing timekeeping formats (e.g., one attorney using 6-minute increments, another using 15-minute increments) leads to confusion and billing disputes. Standardize the format firm-wide and reinforce it with a shared chart.

Ignoring Reports and Analytics

Tracking time is just the first step. Analyzing it is what delivers value. Use reporting features in your software to uncover inefficiencies, improve resource planning, and inform pricing strategies.

How Legal Practice Management Software Helps Law Firms Track Billable Hours



Modern software transforms how law firms handle timekeeping. Here are some key features and how they help.

Automated Time Capture

Some software can automatically log time based on your digital activities, such as drafting documents, sending emails, or attending meetings, eliminating the need to manually recall every action of your workday.

Manual Timers

For tasks where precision is critical (e.g., court appearances, legal research), manual timers that can be started and stopped with a click within practice management software are key to ensuring exact billing.

Integration with Billing Software

Syncing time with billing ensures no data is lost or misaligned at invoice time. Time entries automatically feed into the firm's [legal billing software](#), which means no duplicative work, fewer errors, and a faster invoicing process. This integration also improves realization rates by reducing forgotten entries.

Mobile Accessibility

Attorneys aren't always at their desks. With mobile access, they can log time anytime, anywhere—from court, client meetings, or during travel—keeping entries timely and reducing lost hours.

Customizable Reports

Use advanced reporting tools within legal technology to review time by case, attorney, or task to boost accuracy and profitability. For example, Centerbase lets firms generate tailored reports to improve forecasting, identify bottlenecks, and optimize staffing, all based on real-time timekeeping data.

Optimize Your Law Firm's Billable Hours Tracking with Centerbase

From missed minutes to unbilled hours, the cost of inefficient time tracking adds up fast. A billable hours chart offers a simple yet powerful way to bring structure and clarity to how attorneys log their time. But to truly scale your firm's success, technology makes all the difference.

Centerbase's automated and manual timekeeping tools, along with smart integrations and mobile functionality, help you:

- Capture every minute
- Reduce billing errors
- Increase realization rates

Ready to take control of your time and billing?

- [Book a Centerbase demo](#)
- Learn more about [Centerbase's billing features](#)

FAQs

How Many Billable Hours Should Attorneys Track?

This varies by firm type, seniority, and compensation model. However, most firms expect attorneys to bill between 1,800 and 2,000 hours annually, which averages to about 35-40 billable hours per week. Tracking consistently helps meet these targets.

How to Maximize Billing as an Attorney?

To maximize billing, track time in real-time, capture all work-related activities, and use legal time tracking software that automates and reminds you to log time. This reduces time leakage and improves accuracy.

Why Do Lawyers Bill in 6-Minute Increments?

Lawyers often bill in 6-minute increments (0.1 hours) to accurately reflect the time spent on short tasks, such as quick emails or calls, while keeping billing consistent and understandable for clients.

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