

CHAIR: Our President, Richard Ward, unfortunately cannot be with us today, so I am giving a talk in his stead.

Shorthand is still important.

Who needs it? Who uses it?

Anyone who wishes to have an accurate record of a meeting or hearing. It could be in the High Court in London, or an Arbitration in the UK or abroad.

The baseline for court reporting in the British courts these days is Digital Audio Recording. This works using a computer which is switched on in the morning and runs all day long until the late afternoon when the court clerk switches it off.

A very brief log is kept, provided the clerk is in court to keep it. If he or she has to leave the courtroom to attend to their other duties, then no log, or note, is kept of what is happening, or who is present and speaking.

On the first day of a trial the clerk inputs the names of the parties and their representatives, but not on any subsequent day.

Transcribers are engaged to transcribe specific portions of a hearing, but if the party ordering the transcript does not have the precise times, then the transcriber may not be sent the correct portion of audio. The Transcriber then spends their time (and therefore lose money) trying to find the passage to be transcribed.

Many people are now asking for an Accredited Verbatim Reporter (AVR) to attend court and take a note. The reporter is present in court and can see who is present and who is speaking. They are also able to speak up if they cannot hear. They will keep their own log of who is present in the witness box, or when a submission is made, just in case they are asked to find something, but usually they are transcribing immediately, plus the transcript is being read by the parties on their own computer or iPad. If a pen writer, then there may be a team of reporters taking a note and providing a "write out". They take a small portion each (20 minutes, or 15 minutes) in relays, leaving the courtroom to transcribe their first piece while the others are taking the next note.

If it is a machine writer, especially one who is realtime proficient, they may have a Scopist (sometimes referred to as an "Editor") scoping (or editing) their note as the note is taken. This Scopist may be present in the court or it may be streamed over the Internet to them in a remote place, next door or across the other side of the world! That is what can be done with modern technology. The more proficient the realtime reporter, the easier the task for the Scopist. Usually the note is complete and accurate, but may need some names checked, or some punctuation added or altered.

Before the Accredited Realtime Reporters begins they will have done "prep". This is short for preparation and may be done over several hours or days in advance so that they may be familiar with any unique names and subjects plus the words are correctly spelled in their dictionaries.

The fully edited transcript is usually proofread one final time and sent to the client the same evening, using the various methods available, email, or Dropbox, to name a few. It may also be in a pdf (portable document format), or even encrypted using the various programmes such as DocuSign, though there are others. Some people imprint a watermark on their transcript to prevent unlawful photocopying. It is usual these days to have what used to be termed a "Duplicate Master" rate, a higher transcription rate to take account of the fact that people are going to copy your transcript.

The most important thing to consider is ensuring that nobody is able to add any text to your transcript.

Another use of the Realtime Reporter is for Speech-to-Text for deafened or hard of hearing people. While British Sign Language (BSL) is the first language of a person who is born Deaf – and they are always designated with a capital "D", it also forms part of their grammar unlike those who are post-lingually deafened – designated with a lower case "d" - especially over the age of six years, who attended school and learned

to read while still hearing and therefore read quite quickly, so that they benefit from text on a screen to follow a hearing, meeting, or even a doctor's appointment.

How do you train to become a Realtime Reporter for meetings or STT? First find your Trainer. There are some wholly on-line courses, or some, such as mine, which are distance learning, after initial one-to-one assessment, with well on-line dictation, again one-to-one.

Getting through theory is the first step, then it is on to speed building. However unlike pen shorthand where you may "let your note go wild" while pushing for speed to then "rein it in" once that higher speed has been attained, so that your written shorthand returns to being small and neat, machine shorthand is quite different. With machine shorthand the muscles in your fingers are also being trained. It is, therefore extremely important, in order to retain accuracy while speed building, to actually drop down in speed at the end of a speed building session to your more comfortable level and take down dictation consciously maintaining accuracy of your stroking.

It has amused some people when I refer to "stroking" the machine. You are, in fact, pressing down keys, but you need to get into a steady rhythm and apply just enough pressure for the key/s to connect, but not so heavy that you are pounding on the machine as if playing Beethoven's Fifth Symphony. DA DA DA DAAAAAAA!

You need to keep your hands “quiet”. You didn’t realise they were noisy? They can be. Economy of movement is important so that you don’t tire yourself out. You are not Liberace playing a boogie woogie [*demo hands in the air*]. I have seen new theory students who are so pleased with themselves when they see a word appearing accurately on the screen that they raise their hands from the machine, applaud themselves or place their hands in their lap! Only to have to find the “home” keys again, look up at the screen and begin writing again. They are “noisy” hands. You want “quiet” hands, which hover just above the keyboard, ready to stroke the correct keys with the minimal amount of movement of the hands.

There is an extra pair of keys on the right-hand side of the keyboard and, if you are not careful, you will find yourself stroking the wrong keys because you have “noisily” moved your hands.

How best to speed build? I call it the “stenography two-step”. You are moving several tens of words up the speed ladder, but you then have to regularly drop back down. Gradually, over time, you find you are staying on the upper rung of the ladder as your speed building starting point. [*Here I just show you a copy of a speed ladder I had for my students in Lagos. They started, at the bottom, at 30 and moved up and up. That printed and placed on the wall they and everyone else could see where they were.*]

For example, you may come through theory at 60 or 80 wpm. You pass a 60 wpm speed test of 3 minutes' duration, then a 70 wpm, 80 wpm, but then the test passages are longer. They are now 4 minutes.

Initially you struggle to take that three minute test; halfway through you flag.

Therefore, just like an athlete, you need to practise on longer pieces. However, it is difficult to take longer pieces and build speed at the same time. This is where my stamina pieces come in. At the lower speeds, they are 4 minutes' long, then 5 minutes and then 6 minutes or more. As you achieve a pass at one speed, say 60 wpm for 3 minutes, you have to practise stamina passages at 40 or 50 wpm, for 4 minutes' duration, all the while speed building on 70 wpm, for short bursts [*sprints*] or longer, plus regular dictation at 60 wpm to consolidate the speed you have already attained using a variety of dictation styles. You need to be able to take dictation in all fields of work, not just a company report, or a court passage. Different passages may have a further level of difficulty as it may not be 700 Common Words. This is the consolidation stage for that speed.

Now we come to the "Stenography two-step".

Pass a test at 60 wpm, but speed build on 70 wpm or even 80 wpm, drop back to a 60 wpm passage of medium length, then drop down to 40 or 50 wpm for some stamina at 4 minutes. As the speed tests get higher, they also get longer, until you are taking

5 minute tests. For those you need to practise on stamina tests of 6 or 7 minutes' duration. There are also much, much longer passages for getting used to working for an hour or two at a time. It is, however, important if you are a realtime reporter to have a 10-minute break every hour. Fatigue is one killer for realtime accuracy. Most people, once it is explained to them, are quite hospitable about taking those short breaks as it means they can sit for longer. Without the break the realtime Stenographer is likely to not only tire physically, but also mentally, and the realtime accuracy will suffer, making it a false economy to insist on sitting on and on without a break only to have to finish earlier than planned because the realtime note is no longer being produced.

Start your practise day, or your on-the-job day, with finger drills. Get those fingers moving. Warm-up on some briefs or phrases. Not the ones you already know, but some new ones.

Students can help themselves by reading everything they write and checking to see which outlines they have struggled over. Our shorthand software shows the steno (or Palan) on the right-hand side. You can see, in red, every mis-stroke that you corrected.

Students are encouraged to go through them, and drill them. If you don't, you won't correct that bad muscle memory.

We used to say that we needed to drill a new outline 100 times before it was in our memory. Machine shorthand is no different. As with pen writing it is no good to just write the same outline 100 times straight off the bat. No, mix it up with other words.

Medical terms are also important. You will find it so much easier to write down a doctor's evidence if you have prior knowledge of the more common medical terms. Especially as some are very similar sounding. If you understand what they are talking about you are likely to get the right outline which will have the correct spelling.

Hyper and Hypo. These two prefixes are easily confused as they sound so similar but they have, in fact, more-or-less opposite meanings.

Hyper- means over, excessive, more than normal, as in such words as hyperbole (extravagant and obvious exaggeration) and hyperactive (abnormally or pathologically active). The prefix derives from the Greek word hyper, meaning simply over.

Hypo-, on the other hand, means under, defective or inadequate, as in such words as hypodermic (under the skin) or hypoallergenic (specially formulated to minimize the risk of an allergic reaction). This, too, derives from the Greek: hypo, meaning under.

There are several free dictation sites on the internet:

5000 common words part 1:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3rgmr4Kxg5o>

There are also links to audio files on the long-live-pitmans-shorthand website:

<http://www.long-live-pitmans-shorthand.org.uk/links.htm#dictation>

There is some free dictation on the IPS' website. There are parliamentary debate on television. There is also, of course, the IPS's Thursday evening dictation via Skype for just £5 or a one-hour session. Continuing Professional Education (CPD) points are awarded for those who need them.

Reading a newspaper each day to get the names of those in Government, or in the news, because you can be sure to hear those names. Don't just read it, write it too. Steno-copy, slowly and accurately, a short article in the newspaper. Put the outline in your dictionary so when the name comes up you are familiar with it.