

A CAREER IN COURT REPORTING

• Court Reporting Today

Court reporters are in huge demand. By 2006, all non-exempt TV programming must be captioned. As a result of this federal requirement, there will be a shortage of court reporters nationwide. Court reporters capture thoughts expressed in speech and convert them into text that can be read, searched, and studied.

Today's court reporters are highly trained professionals who continue to educate themselves to meet national and state requirements, as well as to keep abreast of the business, legal, and technological environment.

The following job choices are available to court reporters:

Official Reporter – Court reporters are front and center at controversial and highly publicized cases: Criminal trials, millionaire divorces, federal government corruption trials, lawsuits against everyone from heavy metal groups to public figures to embezzlers. A court reporter not only records history, but also contributes to it through technology that keeps all parties in litigation working at a swift pace and enables counsel to quickly analyze each day's events. They may also make suggestions to judges regarding courtroom administration and procedures.

Freelance Reporter – Most reporters apply this skill in a law-related setting such as a court or a deposition, and they have harnessed technology to prepare accurate records of trials, depositions, and other legal and business proceedings.

Captioning Reporter – Court reporters provide an "instant text" of live television broadcasts, called captioning. The same skills enable a court reporter to provide captioning for cyber-conferences.

Classroom Reporter – Court reporters are used in classrooms to provide instant text, either in printed format or electronically, for the benefit of people with hearing impairments.

• Training and Education

A court reporting career requires two to four years of technical training, as well as state certification in many jurisdictions. Court reporting students also need to be able to meet deadlines, work well under pressure, and concentrate for long periods of time.

Students in court reporting education should expect to do college level work. The level of intellect needed to complete a court reporting program is equal to that needed to earn a college degree. In fact, court reporting students learn a variety of subjects that are part of many different post-secondary schools, including civil and criminal law, grammar, languages, legal terminology, anatomy, medical terminology, and computer technology.

One of the most essential things taught to court reporting students is machine shorthand. Once a student has mastered the theory, he or she will spend a majority of his or her time concentrating on speed and accuracy. To graduate, students typically need to "write" in machine shorthand at speeds of 225 words per minute. Many times they are required to pass certification examinations that test both written knowledge and speed.

• Employment Opportunities

Employment opportunities in the court reporting field are plentiful, and work in the legal field is keeping pace with increased levels of

litigation. Although some people have not recognized the need for court reporters, thinking that voice recognition systems are the wave of the future, current voice and speech systems have high error rates, and systems that can capture natural speech and multiple speakers are many, many years in the future

• Income

Income varies depending on the type of reporting jobs and the experience of the individual reporter. A February 1999 study indicated that the average annual income for reporters participating in the study was \$61,830. Note that this number does not reflect the significant variations within the profession that exist by region, level of training, level of certification achieved, areas of specialized expertise, and other factors. In court reporting, earning potential often is limited only by the amount of time a court reporter is willing to devote to his or her profession. Official court reporters earn a salary and a per-page fee for transcripts. Freelance court reporters are paid per job and receive a per-page fee for transcripts.

• Technology & Court Reporting

CAT (computer-aided transcription) systems electronically link a stenotype machine to a computer so that the stenographic symbols are recorded simultaneously on paper tape and digitally. A software program, which each court reporter personalizes for himself or herself, is used to translate the stenotype notes into English. The court reporter checks the text for "untranslates" (which appear as stenotype notes on the computer screen), makes corrections, proofreads, and conducts a variety of checking and verification procedures.

The CAT transcript can be stored on CD-ROM or other computer media, telecommunicated, integrated with videotape, entered into a database, or printed on paper.

The computerized transcript is a key asset in today's legal system. It affords the court and attorneys the ability to search the transcript automatically for key words and phrases, enhancing the ability to cross-check witnesses' testimony for inconsistencies. And the data collected by the reporter in the course of the proceeding can be fed into a court-wide computer system to aid in the management of the courthouse.

Most CAT systems can produce a translation from stenotype notes almost instantaneously. And many court reporters are involved in continued education and training to raise their skill to the level of providing "instant transcript," also known as realtime text, during proceedings. The text is displayed on computer monitors for individual attorneys and judges or on projection screens for viewing by larger groups. Realtime skills are also helpful in providing hearing-impaired people with the same ability to know what is going on in the courtroom.

• The Future

Never has the future been brighter for the skills of a court reporter. The opportunities are numerous which utilize a court reporter's unique ability to transform the spoken word instantaneously into a searchable database: The growing market for qualified broadcast captioners; the burgeoning market for realtime in the college classroom; the expanding demand for synchronous text to video on the Internet; the high-tech educational opportunities which will be of interest to those college-bound students wishing to pursue careers utilizing information technology.

