

CAREER PATHS

Which Road is Calling You?

Court Reporting is one of the most misunderstood professions today among those involved in a job search. Many misconceptions have evolved, and many turn away from reporting because they think it will either be boring or replaced by technology.

The truth is that a wonderful and exciting future awaits those who pursue a career in reporting. Court reporters have embraced cutting-edge technology and have shown repeatedly that nothing can replace them as the most accurate and effective method for voice-to-text translation. And boring? Never! Court reporters are front and center at controversial and highly publicized cases – criminal trials, millionaire divorces, federal government corruption trials and lawsuits – involving everyone from heavy metal musicians to public figures to embezzlers.

A court reporter not only records history, but also contributes to it through new technology that keeps all parties in litigation working at a swift pace and enables counsel to quickly analyze each day's events. Court reporters have input and may make suggestions to judges regarding courtroom technology and related procedures.

Once a student has mastered the skill of shorthand reporting, many gates open before them leading to different avenues of lucrative employment. Some might choose a career as a scopist, medical or legal transcriptionist, or a rapid-data-entry operator.

The majority of court reporters follow the career path of judicial reporting, CART reporter, closed captioner, or Internet/realtime reporter. These are the four career paths that we will explore further.

Whichever road a court reporter might choose, it promises to be a worthwhile journey where one can contribute to one's profession and earn the kind of money to make dreams come true.

Judicial Reporting...Freelance and Official Court Reporters

The Typical Official Court Reporter:

- has a degree from court reporting school.
- has state or national certification.
- has employee status with benefits, working in a state court.
- earns a salary and a per-page fee for transcripts.
- is assigned to, and is supervised by, a particular judge.

The Typical Freelance Court Reporter:

- has a degree from court reporting school.
- is an independent contractor.
- works in a firm with 11 court reporters, nine of whom are independent contractors.
- is paid per job and receives a per-page fee for transcripts.
- receives job assignments from the owner of a court reporting firm.

Most court reporters today apply their skill in a law-related setting such as a court or deposition room. About 27% of the judicial reporters in the U.S. actually work in court. Most of the rest are hired by attorneys to report depositions where the parties obtain information and pre-trial testimony of potential trial witnesses. Court reporting in the legal system allows individuals to be their own bosses. Many court

reporters work as independent contractors where they can work as much or as little as they want, while others own their own deposition agencies.

The accurate recording of legal proceedings is vital to the American system of justice. Court reporters are officers of the court, as are judges and attorneys. The American Judges Association stated in April 1998 that the role of the court reporter "must remain utterly beyond question in order to ensure the enduring confidence and faith from which our judicial system derives its legitimacy."

Income varies depending on the type of reporting jobs and the experience of the individual reporter. The income for a judicial reporter was posted to be \$78,335. (Stanislaus Co Superior Court - Feb 2014).

However, 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 by the amount of time a court reporter is willing to work.

CART Reporting...Communication Access Realtime Translation

What is CART?

CART is the instant display of English text onto a computer monitor or other display by the use of a stenotype machine, notebook computer, cables, and realtime software.

Who needs a CART reporter?

The primary customers of this technology are the hearing impaired and those for whom English is not a primary language. CART providers often assist their clients in classrooms, in church, and in the courts by providing instant translations of words and other sounds. These translations enable students, judges, attorneys, litigants, jurors and others to more actively participate in these settings.

In legal proceedings, the CART provider works independently of the official reporter to provide interpretive services; the official reporter remains exclusively responsible for creation of the verbatim record.

CART reporters also accompany deaf clients, as needed, to conventions, business meetings, doctor appointments, workshops, wherever communication access is needed.

How is it done?

Linked to a laptop computer, the judicial reporter's stenotype machine is used to provide an instant conversion of speech into text. A transcript and/or disk can be provided at the end of the session. Educational campuses hire CART providers through their Disabled Student Services Center for their hearing-impaired students. Churches or the individual parishioner will form the association with the CARTer, as needed. Reporting agencies that specialize in this service cannot meet the demand.

Uniquely Rewarding...

There are many unique aspects to this avenue of court reporting, but the most significant difference is the one-on-one involvement the CART provider has with the recipient of the service.

Providers report that the career is extremely gratifying and provides rewards greater than the average income of between \$35,000 and \$65,000. In July 2013, UC Berkeley was seeking CART providers with a starting salary of \$86K- \$101K with benefits.

Closed Captioning...a Primetime Career

Turn a kaleidoscope and you get many different colors and patterns. Turn toward closed captioning as a career, and the television becomes your kaleidoscope, filled with thousands of different programs that need to be translated from voice and sound into text.

A different challenge with every flick of the remote...how is it done? Is it for you?

What is closed-captioning?

Specially trained realtime reporters use their stenotype machines, computers and modems to provide text for television programming. The text can be read at the bottom of the television screen. Networks currently provide captioning for a wide variety of entertainment, sports and specialty programs, as well as local and national news coverage, breaking news and emergency broadcasts.

Who benefits?

- Deaf and Hearing-Impaired People.

People who are deaf rely on captions to follow the soundtrack on television. People who have some degree of hearing use captions to help them understand the soundtrack.

There are approximately 28 million Americans who are deaf or hard-of-hearing.

Broadcast captioners enabled deaf television viewers to follow breaking news coverage of the events of September 11th.

- People learning English. Many language schools use captioned television to help teach people to speak English. It is easier to follow a soundtrack reading the captions while listening to the pronunciation of words.
- People viewing in noisy areas. Captions can be used by anyone trying to watch a broadcast in a noisy area or where the volume cannot be adjusted, such as shopping centers, airports, gyms, bars and clubs.

Ready for Primetime?

The Federal Communications Commission ruled that 100% of all new television programming be captioned as of January 1, 2006. To accommodate this demand, captioning companies and broadcasters need qualified reporters to caption tens of thousands of hours of live programming every week.

Broadcast captioners who work for television stations or captioning companies earn an average income of \$35,000 to \$75,000+, with opportunities for overtime depending on whether the captioner is on staff or works as an outside contractor.

Internet/Realtime Reporting...Talk about a Revolution

From transcripts dictated and typed using carbon paper between the copies to today's advanced systems of digitized stenographic notes on the Internet...when exactly did we leave Kansas?

Because, baby, we are really in the Land of Oz now.

• What is Internet/realtime reporting, and is this the yellow-brick road?

Reporters have embraced the Internet, integrating its capabilities into their own passion for faster, more accurate production of voice-to-text. With the Internet, transcripts are delivered to interested parties via e-mail in a variety of forms. Once new and unusual; today it is expected.

Exhibits and transcripts are scanned to PDF files and saved and sold on CD-ROM. The storage of transcripts in searchable archives on the Internet is not a dream; it's a reality. This means enhanced revenue potential for the official or deposition reporter. Reporters can create an online, secure repository and offer their clients a host of technological solutions to file management.

Court reporting firms and their clients can then access files via a standard Internet connection from home, the airport or a hotel room. Clients log in to their secure account, select the proper case and drill down to the appropriate transcripts or exhibits, which can be viewed online or downloaded. Indeed, the fastest changing segment of the reporting profession has been in the area of transcript management and electronic transcript delivery over the Internet.

Now the business of sending realtime depositions and captions over the Internet to participants in remote areas is steadily growing. Time and distance become irrelevant with this advanced technology.

Yes; this is the yellow-brick road. And it leads to the future. We're talking revolution.

- **How is it done?**

The court reporters and captioners simply do their standard job using their standard CAT software. The technology does the work of delivering the realtime text onto the Internet.

- **Who else uses Reporting to the Internet?**

In addition to the legal realm, reporters are capturing sales meetings, press conferences, product introductions and technical training seminars and instantly transmitting voice to text to all parties involved via computers, accompanied by any relevant documents or graphics. Internet information reporters, who remotely caption to the Internet or provide Webcasting services, are usually paid at an hourly rate of \$100-\$200 per hour.

Professionalism – A Personal Perspective

By Sandy K. Finch, CSR #3883

"*profess*" – to practice or claim to be versed in a calling or occupation

"*profession*" – a calling requiring specialized knowledge and often long academic preparation; the whole body of persons engaged in a calling

"*professionalism*" – the conduct, aims, or qualities that characterize or mark a profession or a professional person; the following of a profession for gain or livelihood

Merriam-Webster Dictionary

Shorthand reporting is a noble endeavor with honorable roots. For centuries, scribes have been responsible for guarding the record of events as they unfolded.

In 63 B.C., Cicero's secretary, Marcus Tiro, recorded a speech on wax-covered tablets before the Roman Senate. The ampersand (&) still survives today to commemorate his first simple shorthand system.

In 1789, Charles Dickens used shorthand to report sessions of Parliament. Through the words of his character David Copperfield, Dickens reflected that shorthand "was about equal to the mastery of six languages."

Those who follow in the footsteps of the shorthand forefathers and pioneers of the craft have a responsibility to ensure that the reputation of shorthand reporting remains untarnished.

Professionalism has to do with both personal responsibility and group dynamics.

When considering the entire association of shorthand reporters as a whole, one must be mindful of how we appear to those on the outside looking in as we stand together. Therefore, it is important for the professional reporter to become a part of and be active in national, state and local organizations whose sole objectives are to preserve, promote and protect the integrity of the reporting industry.

A strong united group is important; however, when you break it down, the whole is simply made of many individuals whose behavior and actions can and will reflect on the entire group. If you doubt this

statement, consider how the general public views the legal profession and the reputation endured by lawyers.

So, ultimately, professionalism is all about personal responsibility and behavior. But “professionalism” is such a buzz word, a catch-all phrase. Let’s define it so we know specifically what to look for in a professional shorthand reporter.

CONDUCT

At a minimum, the conduct of a reporter should include the following behaviors:

- **COMPETENCE.** Know the trade. Master the skill. Stay on top of the record.
- **MANAGEMENT OF TIME,** business and personal, to establish a balance such that neither suffers.
- **CONTROL** of the reporting situation with quiet **STRENGTH** and **CONFIDENCE.**
- **TIMELINESS.** Arrive early. Never make the record wait for you.
- **BE PREPARED...**to read back...with proper equipment...to deal with difficult people...to share facts about reporting with the next generation...
- **DRESS APPROPRIATELY.** Can’t be stressed enough: First impressions **DO** last.

GOALS

The direction, objectives, and purpose of each professional reporter should include:

- **CERTIFICATION.** Meet the uniform standards at state and national levels – and then go beyond!
- **PERFECTION.** Producing a perfect transcription of the spoken word is the #1 priority to a great reporter.
- **ASPIRATION.** First and foremost, aim high. One can not be overqualified or overeducated for this job.

QUALITIES

By their very nature, it seems reporters share some common qualities:

- **SELF-MOTIVATED.** Always striving for a higher degree of **EXCELLENCE.**
- **PERSISTENT** in the face of difficulty. Attacks the challenges in life.
- **KNOWLEDGEABLE** in a number of areas and seeking continued knowledge.
- **AMBITIOUS** with an eager desire for success and financial security.

Additionally, all professional reporters should exhibit the following character traits:

- **INTEGRITY.** Protection and completeness of the record is the duty of the reporter. Reporters adhere to a code of values and incorruptibility.
- **HIGH SOCIAL STATUS.** Moral excellence. Respected in one’s community; thought well of by others. Live above reproach, thereby protecting the profession from inadvertent rebuke or disgrace.
- **PLEASANT DEMEANOR.** Self-control. Agreeable conduct. Play well with others.
- **PRIDE w/ HUMILITY.** A justifiable self-respect unbridled can quickly become an ostentatious display of conceit. Every reporter has every reason to hold a high opinion of their ability and talent; they have earned it and the financial rewards that come with that talent. Seasoning that opinion, however, with an attitude of gratitude for their success will serve to attract the respect and deference from others both for the individual reporter and the profession as a whole, which is certainly preferable to disdain and contempt.

Thanks to modern-day pioneers in the shorthand industry, reporters can proudly claim that the profession has stayed in step with current technology coming a long way since wax-covered tablets.

Court Reporting and Captioning is now Internet-compatible, real-time capable, paperless, and the profession is prepared to incorporate whatever future technology may evolve.

Court Reporting and Captioning is an excellent career promising a great future with extraordinary compensation and financial reward for quality people.

Are you made of the right stuff?

Might Court Reporting and/or Captioning be the career for you?