

FROM THE GUYS AT COURTPROTECTINGHELP.COM

By Stephen Shastay

Steno is Fun!!

A Blog by Stephen Shastay, Steno Rebel

Monday, February 14, 2005:

Background Info on this blog and the author

My name is Stephen Shastay. I teach stenography.

Follow along with my blog, and you will learn the secrets. The hidden truths will be revealed. The fallacies will be exposed.

My expertise is teaching. I will show you what I do in my classes. I'll give you the drills, the exercises, and the advice.

I won't comment on steno machines, firms, schools, theories, organizations, CAT systems, etc. Go find the experts for those questions. This blog will give you the answers to learning the keyboard, speedbuilding, test taking, nerves, etc. If you need clarification, post a comment.

Please stay on topic when you comment. You may suggest that I cover a certain subject, but I won't be able to answer all questions on all subjects. Don't worry. There is very little that you must know. Everything about stenography is simple. The reasons for success and failure are simple. The answers to clarity, hesitation, carrying, etc., are simple. It is all simple. Let me show you.

First Day in 100; 60-80 class; Easy vs. Hard Drill

She was a student in my 60-80 wpm Theory class on Friday. Today, Monday morning, she was one of two people to raise their hands to read back a certain section at 100. Impressive. Clarity and control are the answer.

I handed out Page 2 of Essential Phrases from Steno Diva. The list has the phrases, but not the outlines. Their homework is to work out the strokes. I don't care if they use the phrase or if they write it out. But they must know how they are going to write those strokes when they appear on a test.

I used an hour of class to review each appendix in the back of the Theory book and in the dictionary. There is a heck of a lot of information in the back of them there books, by golly.

Today's 60-80 wpm class did a 14 minute easy Testimony drill and read back an extremely difficult article on North and South Korea with all of the names. They

performed admirably on both types of drill. The long drill was easy. The short drill was hard. Both of them were challenging, but within their abilities. Watch out for hard drills that are long. They can be debilitating.

Tuesday, February 15, 2005:

It's not you that's slow; it's the dictation that is too fast

Today, in class, I did an unusual readback that I find very instructive. I call it the "Gong Show" after the show of the same name.

Basically, each student reads until a mistake is found. Then I "gong" that student. The next student has to pick up with the very next word.

This seems silly (and it is), and it seems like a lot of fun (and it is), but it is one of the best confidence builders around.

On a regular readback, the teacher usually supplies any words that are dropped or mistranslated. In the "Gong Show" readback, the teacher supplies nothing. If one student doesn't have the full sentence, then the next student begins reading.

Today, during the "Gong Show" readback, we went practically around the entire room before someone could supply the missing section. I stopped the class and pointed out that if the entire class had trouble with that section, then the problem was not with the students. The problem was that the section was too tough.

My class is the tops. After five weeks, all but one of them has their 60s. Most have at least one 80. Many have completed 80s and are in the 100 class. They are very good.

And yet they all had trouble with one section. Doing the "Gong Show" let them know that they were not deficient in any way. It also reinforced the basic principle that they are in school to learn to get every word. They are in school to get as much of the dictation as they possibly can. That is much different.

Students cannot get every word and no one in the world can teach them to get every word. Professionals cannot get every word (at least while taking a test), and no one in the world can teach them to get every word. Captioners do not get every word. CART writers do not get every word.

The only ones who can get every word are the reporters in court or in depositions who raise their hands and say "Please slow down." That is the only way that any reporter can get every word.

Students do not have the luxury of asking the teacher to slow down. They can't get every word. They should not focus on getting every word. They should direct their attention to getting as much as they possibly can.

And if a student is getting as much as is humanly possible, who can ask for more?

Tuesday, February 15, 2005

I explained again to the 80/100 class that the secret is to learn to play the game as the rules are laid out by the powers that be.

That means that if the schools and the certification agencies say that you can pass a test with X amount of errors, then you should learn to take a test so that you maximize your chances of passing with X amount of errors or fewer.

And all that means is that you should use the tools you are given to your best advantage. All tests allow you to miss a certain number of words. If you do that, you pass. If you don't, you fail.

So instead of trying to write every word, the students should begin to focus on writing enough words to pass the test.

In no way, do I ever suggest that students should ignore hard words. But during the test, when the chips are down, the students should endeavor to write as many words as possible on that specific test on that specific day. After the test, the student should write down any difficult words and practice them. But during the test, every ounce of energy should be directed towards passing the test.

If you have read this blog entry carefully, you can tell that I am suggesting that students drop the hard words when necessary in order to write all of the easy words. That makes sense. Each hard word is worth one point, but each hard word requires more skill or more time. Each easy word is worth one point, but easy words, by their nature, are easy to stroke and do not require much time per word.

So if you want to consistently pass tests, make sure that you get all of the easy words and as many of the hard ones as is possible.

That's pretty simple, isn't it?

Wednesday, February 16, 2005

Good drop vs bad drop

By the way, the definitions of a good drop and a bad drop are startlingly different. Good drops are one or two words at a time. A bad drop is five or more words dropped at a time.

Take this example. Suppose that there is a 20-word section that is difficult. If you write the first fifteen words and then drop the last five, you have made a bad drop. But if you realize that you are falling behind and that you can't get all of the dictation, it is often a simple thing to pick out the worst two or three words and sacrifice them. By selecting which words should be dropped, the student learns to never drop easy words and phrases.

I know that this may be a new concept to a lot of you; so I am going to explain it one more time. Suppose that you have ten seconds to write a series of words, but you know that it will take you twelve seconds to write those words. What would be the best thing to do?

If you write from the first word to the end, your ten seconds will be up before you finish. In that case, you will drop any words at the end. That would be fine if the words at the end were always huge words like "preposterous" and bamboozled." Each one of them is worth the standard one point per word on a test. Those are great words to drop. They take a lot of effort to get you one point.

But what if all the hard words are in the front of that section and all of the easy ones are at the end? If you start at the beginning, then you will suffer through the hard words, and you will drop the easy ones at the end.

Wouldn't it be better to drop the real stinkers so that you make sure that you get all of the easy ones? Well, yes, it would. It's much better. It's easier to do. And it increases your point total on the tests. This translates into a "speed" gain without an increase in finger speed. What a concept!!

High speed vs low speed drill

People mistakenly get the impression that I preach slow controlled practice at all times. Not so. Every drill should challenge a student in one particular way. Today's Theory class illustrates that principle.

I gave them medium drill to get them warmed up. Then I told them that we were going to read 120, and that everybody had to participate.

The medium drill was appropriate as a warmup drill, but it would be too difficult for 60/80 students to drill at 120, much less read back.

So I picked one of my favorite "Little Words" drills. The students were able to read back almost all of it.

I followed that easy drill at 120 with a hard drill at 60. The students had to read that back. They did very well for two reasons. One, they were able to write and read most of it. Two, when they encountered an area that they could not master, they chose generally large and/or hard words to drop. If this was a test, they would have survived the hard part of the test with a minimum of errors because they correctly chose to drop the big words. This is an important point. My students choose which words they will drop. They do not write until they are so overloaded with extra words that they drop huge amounts of words in a row. They simply do not fall that far behind. When they begin to lag, they toss individual words out the window based on size and difficulty.

For the rest of the class, we alternated between an easy drill at high speed and a hard drill at low speed. The difficulty factor was basically the same. Now, you may say that the 120 drill must have been awful easy if 60/80 students could write and read it. You would be correct. Nonetheless, today, we spent close to half the class hour reading back 120 dictation. These students only heard their first short 100/120 dictation two weeks ago. Heck it was only one month ago that they started taking 60 tests and six weeks ago that they began drilling consistently at 60.

Even if the material was easy, they performed admirably.

You can easily duplicate their results. Find a hard drill, and an easy drill. Use the hard drill until you begin to break down and carry, hesitate or write sloppy. Don't wait until you break down. Stop when you begin to break down.

Then switch to the easy drill. If necessary, drill at low speed to regain your composure. Then switch to high speed with the easy drill. Again, don't wait until you break down. Drill until you begin to break down. Then stop the drill.

You can continue to switch back and forth between the drills as long as you are writing consistently strong clear strokes without dropping large amounts of words at one time.

Every drill should improve you. Keep your notes clear and your strokes strong. You are in charge. It is up to you to maintain control.

Thursday, February 17, 2005

A1 Hard copy drill

- 1) Find any hard copy drill, article, Theory exercise, etc., that you would like to practice.
- 2) Set a timer for one minute.
- 3) Drill at a controlled steady pace for that minute. All strokes must be clear. Push to keep your fingers moving, but do not allow yourself to write anything unclear.
- 4) Stop when the minute is up.
- 5) Repeat the drill. At this point, it will be very easy for you to fall into the trap of chasing the speed. Do not do that. Continue to write strong controlled strokes.
- 6) Compare how you did on the two drills. You should have written both of them with the same rhythmic controlled motions. But you should be able to write a few more words on the second drill.
- 7) Do Steps 1 through 6 with a different drill.
- 8) Do each drill twice. Then move on to another drill.

You should be able to write an extra word or two each time you do the drill. Watch out for hesitation. If you try to write too fast, you will stumble and that will kill your speed and your clarity. Your goal is to write strong clear strokes at all times.

Your speed does not have to be taught to you. You already have it. If you write this drill in the correct manner, you will not gain speed, but you will unleash your speed. There is a big difference between the two.

Thursday, February 17, 2005

Happy Theory Students vs Sad Speed Students

Theory classes are full of happy people. The work is challenging, but it isn't too hard to keep up with the teacher.

Speed classes are not quite as full of happy people. Upon graduation from Theory, the students are shocked by the unrelenting speed of the drills. They feel blindsided and unprepared. They feel that they have left the safe haven of Theory and entered a raging torrent. Hour after hour after hour, the average student endures drills that leave them shaken and downtrodden.

It does not have to be that way. You will feel a lot better once you realize why the speed feels overwhelming. When you do, it is easy to adjust.

You are in your particular speed class for one reason and one reason only: because you have not yet attained the skills to write that speed.

Let's suppose that you are in the 160 class. You are not writing at the 160 level when you are sitting in the 160 class. You are in the 160 class because you have not passed your tests at 160. Basically, you were promoted to 160 because you passed just a small amount of 140 tests. You didn't pass all of the 140 tests, or even most of them. All you did was pass a few of them. In truth, a 160 student is a competent writer at the 100-120 level.

Now what should you do with that big bowlful of harsh reality that I just served up to you? How about if you use it to your best advantage?

When you pass a test, you will find that there are easy parts and rough sections. You really don't need help on the easy parts. They are (like, duh) easy. It is the rough sections that cost you points.

If you feel that your average drill is too difficult, then most of your drill feels exactly like the rough sections of a test. Hmmmm. If you learn to handle the rough sections of a test better, then you will obviously pass more tests. Hmmmm. If your school is feeding you a daily diet of drill that feels like the rough sections, then they are giving you the perfect drill to learn how to write the rough sections. Write clean, keep up, drop the hard words, don't hesitate on briefs and phrases, don't fall behind. AND ACCEPT THE FACT THAT YOU CAN'T GET ALL OF THE DICTATION.

It becomes easy to drill on difficult material once you accept that you must learn how to "not get it all." There is a skill to that. If you freeze or lose composure because of a tough section, you will perform below your abilities. If you keep your wits about you, you will perform better and gain points with each stroke.

Saturday, February 19, 2005

Good Brief vs Bad Brief

A good brief or phrase is any brief or phrase that instantly pops to mind when you need it. If you have to think of it before you use it, then it is a bad brief or phrase.

If you want to learn them correctly, compile a list of briefs and phrases. Drill that list to death. But do not use them during dictation or tests until you have mastered them. Don't violate this rule.

Some people say that they will never learn the outline unless they stop and think about it. They say that this helps them to master the new outline. That may be true, but they are also learning to do something disastrous. They are learning to write with hesitation that they intentionally inserted into the drill. They are voluntarily putting up roadblocks on their path to success.

Sunday, February 20, 2005

The First Step to The Shastay Way

One day I got lost while driving through the country. I asked a farmer for directions to the nearest town. He gave a long convoluted explanation. I paid close attention, thanked him, and drove off.

I followed his directions to the T. An hour later, I was back at the same farmer's field. I said, "I did what you said. How come I came right back here?"

The farmer looked at me and said, "Well, son, I'll tell ya. I didn't want to waste my time giving you the real directions until I knew whether you could follow simple directions." Ha, ha.

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This blog is a diary of my methods in class. I will often be referring to the "secrets" that I am putting in my new book, The Shastay Way. They are very simple and very effective, but they are quite radical. Eventually, I will give you a drill to do. It will be the easiest drill you have ever done in your life. It will be very slow, and it will have little words, and it will teach you more than any drill has ever taught you. From that one drill, I will show you how to handle all drills regardless of density and speed.

My method works with all students. The results start appearing immediately. After the first half hour of drill, you should be shaking your head and saying things like, "Son of a gun. I can do this. Why didn't somebody think of this before?"

As I say, my method is simple, but it is also logical. I will give you a strong explanation as to why you should drill this way. But it is radical, and I anticipate resistance. If your mind is closed to new ideas, you will reject my method. This is not a rehash of anything you have ever heard before. This is entirely new and quite close to revolutionary.

And so, I will slowly lay the framework. Let me lead you step by step. I will give you directions. If you do them well, you will graduate and become certified with no trouble. If you do them poorly, you will graduate, but have trouble on the certification test. If you don't do them, you will not graduate.

Heck, yes, people have graduated and become certified without knowing these rules. They may not have been aware of them or recognized their importance, but

they didn't succeed without them. They had to do two things. Without them, they could not have passed. Those two things are the subjects of my two rules.

So you can graduate without knowing my rules. The trouble is you can also fail without knowing my rules. We see classes shrinking every day. It is so common that we don't even comment on it. One day, Mary is here. The next, she is gone. Then Paul drops out. Then Carla. On and on and on.

Most of the ones who drop out were trying hard up to the very end. They put in the effort. They did the work. No one can fault them. But it didn't work. Not only did they fail, but they left school without a clue as to why they failed. It doesn't have to be that way.

I know why you are having trouble in school. I don't care who you are or where you go to school. I don't need to know if you use briefs, phrases, or the basic strokes. It is irrelevant what Theory you use, what method of drill your teacher uses, or the requirements of your tests. I don't even care what your strengths or weaknesses are. None of that matters to me. But I know why you are having trouble, and I will show you what to do about it.

Today, I will give you the only two rules that you absolutely need. Although they are simple, I expect that the hooting and catcalling will begin shortly after this post. Go ahead. Laugh.

But keep on reading. My method is easy, it doesn't take much effort, and IT WORKS WITH EVERYBODY. Even if you disbelieve, give it a try. You will like the results.

Here are the only two things that you should concentrate on.

1 Clarity -- Don't leave home without it. If you are a sloppy writer, change that today. Do not "work" on clarity. You must have it at all times. Work on anything else, but never stroke unless you are stroking clearly and accurately. On tests, you lose points if your clarity is deficient; so if you write clear, you score maximum points.

2 Carrying -- Keep it to a minimum. You must stay between three and six words behind the speaker at all times under all circumstances at all costs. But make sure that you do not violate Rule 1. If you write clear, there is only one other way that your stroking habits can cost you points on a test. That is by dropping words. If you don't fall behind, you won't drop words, and you won't lose points.

That is all there is to it. If you keep to these rules, you will succeed. By the way, don't think that you can argue successfully against these rules by saying "Plenty of people wrote sloppy or carried and still succeeded." Sure, they did. But they had big trouble because they violated these rules. No one needs to suffer in school again. Follow the rules. You will succeed.

Future posts to this blog will explain why these two rules are so necessary and how you can easily ensure that you stick to the rules. But like I say, I expect

resistance. Despite opposition and laughter today, this is how stenography will be taught in the future. So if ya just gotta do it, go ahead and laugh, but keep on reading those blogs.

Let the cacophony begin.

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P.S. Just so we are clear on this subject, this blog will disappear the day that *The Shastay Way* is published. The reason is simple. It reduces the number of phone calls from my publisher on the subject of how much of an idiot I am. Something about the relationship between giving away the milk and the number of cows sold.

Monday, February 21, 2005

Step Two The Shastay Way

This being the Internet, it is hard to ask questions. So it behooves (what a crappy word) me to methodically lay out the plan. In the book, you will have all of the chapters that you can reference for anything that is unclear. But for now, bear with me. It may be a little slow.

Mary sat on the davenport
at the planetarium near the
ostentatious chrysanthemum display, reminiscing contentedly.

Consider the sentence above. I have split one sentence into three groups. Each group has five words. Your job is to decide which word in each group is the hardest word.

I think everyone will agree that the word "davenport" is the hardest in Group One. Similarly, I believe that everyone will pick the word "planetarium" as the hardest in Group Two.

It is the third group that may make you pause. "Display" is probably the easiest. "Contentedly" may be the next easiest.

But what is the hardest word to stroke? Which one will give you the greatest trouble on a test? Which one will cost you the greatest amount of time on a test? I need you to learn to make those choices.

Similarly, I could have given you this practice sentence composed of all easy words.

The cat sat on the
fat rat by the hat.

Which word in each group is the hardest to write? Yes, all of them are easy. The question is: Of those easy words, which is the toughest? My choices are "cat" in the first group and "fat" in the second group. What are your choices?

I want you to spend ten minutes a day listening to easy dictation and learning to pick out the hardest words in approximately each group of five words. It does not have to be exactly five. Don't fight the urge to group them differently. Do what comes natural. Make sure you use easy, easy dictation. That means that you should find something that has mostly little words. Don't worry about the speed. I don't want you to stroke it. I just want you to listen to it.

Spend some time doing this "nonsense" drill. I only ask for ten minutes a day. You will be making a night-and-day change to your style of writing very soon. This is part of the basic skills that you need.

The more time you spend at this, the greater will be your instant reward when I unleash the Magic Drill upon you. All I ask is that you expend at least a tiny bit of effort.

Think about this. You have spent thousands of hours on stenography so far. Most of them have been painful and frustrating. I promise you an answer. Your way will be clear. You will have a definite goal. You will know when you have written correctly or incorrectly. You will not be frustrated, and there will be no pain.

So I ask you to spend just a little bit of time. The reward will be great.

Monday, February 21, 2005

Test Nerves Excerpt from Basic Truths, Shastay Way

Test nerves are not as serious as everyone thinks they are. They are mostly the result of a lack of confidence, but they are not, in themselves, the reason for failure. You can perform despite your nerves. If you do not, then you are creating your own prison.

It is a staggering mistake to blame your lack of success on test nerves. Doing so relieves you of responsibility (which makes you feel a little better), but it leaves you in a terrible Catch 22.

If you have test nerves, and if you believe that you cannot pass a test because of them, then you are saying that you will not pass. I do not accept that statement. Neither should you.

I am no better than you. Neither are your teachers. We all had test nerves. Somehow we managed to do it.

You are in charge of your life only if you believe that you are. You deserve success. Believe in yourself.

Tuesday, February 22, 2005

The First Bitter Taste of Speed or Nobody Told Me It Was Gonna Be Like This

I have good students. They try hard. They are winners. Almost all are moving along without serious trouble. I advise them how to read their test notes, how to maintain poise, how to clear up their writing.

Already some of them have moved on to 100 and 120. In a few short weeks, the rest of them will graduate to the 80/100 class. Today, I gave them a preview of an average day in 80/100s. Today was a day of pain. It was ordinary material, but it was all dictated at 80 with buildup minutes at 80, 100, 120.

The trouble was not that any one drill was too fast. The trouble was that all of it was too fast. They weren't used to it, and, despite my best efforts in the past two months, they weren't ready for it.

But they learned. And when they hit the 80/100 class for real, they will be ready. Here is what they learned and how they learned it.

1. Five-minute dictation at 80. I warned them that they would not be able to write all of the drill. Their job was not to learn to master this drill. Their job was to finish the drill writing smooth and clear. If they could get all of it, fine. If they couldn't, fine. Their job was to finish with clean notes and without hesitation or carrying. In other words, solid stroking habits.

2. One minute buildup of the first minute at 80. I told them that if they had problems doing this drill the first time, then they would probably have problems on it this time. Their goal was to solidify their strokes. They should be a little better on this take since it is the second time they heard it.

3. One minute buildup of the first minute at 100. I asked them if they dropped on the 80. If they did, then I told them that they must go into this drill knowing that they will drop a lot more than before. Their job, again, was to solidify their strokes. They should be better this time, not worse. Regardless of the increase in speed, this was the third time they heard it. They should be better.

4. One minute buildup of the first minute at 120. I told them that everybody has to drop on this take. No one will be able to get it all. Their job on this high-speed dictation remained the same as it was on the slower takes: to solidify their writing. Every stroke written by now (the fourth time) should be very good.

5. One minute readback of the first minute at 80. Before this drill, I reminded them that this is the fifth time in a row that they were writing this particular

dictation. They should be writing very strong. This is the fifth time; their notes should be so strong that they read them back faster than I dictated.

This pattern of drilling, except for the advice, is the most common method of drilling. I have over 40 (and counting) distinct documented methods of drill, but many teachers employ this method almost exclusively. We drilled this method for the entire class.

At the end, I gave them the same piece of advice two times, but stated in different ways.

1. You have drilled on the material five times. You should have increased your skills.
2. If the fast dictation is causing you to break down, then you are doing the fast dictation incorrectly. Every bit of drill should make you stronger. None of it should cause you to regress.

If you have been a speed student for more than, oh, maybe two minutes, you know very well how my students felt today. They felt overwhelmed, insecure, blindsided, and betrayed. This was not what they thought stenography was all about. This was not anything they had experienced in the early days of Theory.

And today they stared into the gaping maw of the Dictation Monster (that's me) and didn't like what they saw. Despite my best efforts in teaching them the Shastay Way, they performed below their abilities.

Tonight, they will get mad. They know that I taught them how to handle that dictation. They won't get caught again.

Tomorrow, we repeat the drill with different material. Tomorrow, I reinforce the Shastay Way. From now on, they know what to expect from speed classes.

And the day after that? Well, I expect top results on the test.

Despite the crowing of some educators, stenography does not require top talent or students who are the cream of the crop. All that is required is average competency. My students have more than enough talent and skill. What happened today was that they forgot the proper technique.

I have one last point. I had written a previous blog about how well my students performed at 120. Today I wrote about how my students performed below their standards at 120. It was the same group. The difference in performance is due to the amount of speed drills used in each class.

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Sorry. No new drills or info about the Shastay Way today. Practice as I showed you in the blog named "Step Two, The Shastay Way." If you want, you can watch TV and practice the method. Try the radio. You can do it while you are having a conversation. As I told you, I am writing this blog in conjunction with the book. When I write more, then I will publish more. In a few days, we move on to Step Three. Be ready.

Stephen Shastay

Steno Rebel

Wednesday, February 23, 2005

Posted at 05:49 pm by Steve Shastay, Steno Rebel

How clear is clear as to clarity

If you are at a school that requires 98%, you can pass a test if:

- A) you can read 98 out of 100 words
and if you don't make any other mistakes at all.
- B) you can read 99 out of 100 words
and if you make only one other type of error per 100 words.
- C) you make no mistakes of clarity
and if you make only two other errors per 100 words.

If you are at a school that requires 95%, you can pass a test if:

- A) you can read 95 out of 100 words
and if you don't make any other mistakes at all.
- B) you can read 96 out of 100 words
and if you make only one other type of error per 100 words.
- C) you can read 97 out of 100 words
and if you make only two other errors per 100 words.
- D) you can read 98 out of 100 words
and if you make only three other errors per 100 words.
- E) you can read 99 out of 100 words
and if you make only four other errors per 100 words.
- F) you make no mistakes of clarity
and if you make only five other errors per 100 words.

No matter what your school's requirements, you must write good strong strokes to pass the test. There isn't a lot of wiggle room, even if you are in a 95% school.

Don't blame me if you write sloppy. It is not professional, and it is not up to the standards of your school.

Here's the kicker. If you are always pausing during readback, you don't have the clarity that is needed.

The Ten-Second Drill

I have never heard of anyone using this drill, but it is quite effective. So unless you have a copyright, this drill is part of my official bag of tricks.

Select an appropriate medium drill. Tell the students that they must finish within a few strokes of the end of the drill. Drill for ten seconds.

Tell the students to stop as soon as the drill is over. Read back the last four words to refresh the students' memories. Have them check their notes to see if they were writing those words when you finished.

Just this one time, for purposes of familiarizing students with the drill, repeat the exact dictation in the exact same way. Challenge the students to be writing somewhere on those four words when you finish dictating.

Go on to another section. Do not repeat the dictation again.

This drill teaches students to stay on top of the dictation. If the section that you chose has all easy words, then all they must do is keep their hands going. If the section that you chose is hard, then the students must learn to drop the individual big words.

Just like on a test, students must choose to either write all of a certain passage or drop a word here and there.

It is not a win if the students only satisfactorily write the drill when the words are within their abilities. That is not reality. Each test has a hard section. The student must be competent and under control when the dictation becomes too hard to be completed. That means that the student must learn to sacrifice the occasional word in order to stroke the rest of them.

Saturday, February 26, 2005

Convincing 225 students

I gave a special class for the 225 students to teach them the Shastay Way. Five of them attended. We never actually got around to using their machines. We spent an hour discussing the method. They were enthused.

The next day they reported that they were able to employ the method, but they had breakdowns in technique. I told them not to worry. They were new to the method. I promised them one extra hour of drill twice a week. Several of the others want to attend.

I have always had trouble teaching upper speed students new things. The Shastay Way appears to be an exception. Students at all levels embrace the method. That is very encouraging. All teachers can use it with minimal resistance.

P.S. This weekend will see several new blogs. I will be working constantly on the book, and I will publish the next step plus a few other things.

Saturday, February 26, 2005

Step Three, The Shastay Way

The book will come with its own MP3 drills. Before each drill begins, the speaker will announce the speed of the take and your goal. Some drills may have additional instructions. The drills are constructed specifically to teach how to carry correctly and drop correctly. The drills are being written, but they won't be recorded until shortly before publication. So I can't offer them to you, but we can achieve good results with some patient drilling on your part.

Remember that Goal Number One is Clarity. Number Two is Carrying.

Step Two, The Shastay Way, asked you to pick out a very easy drill with little words. All you did was listen to it and pick out the hardest words. I hope you picked easy stuff at a low speed.

Now it is time to write the drill. Start it up, and go from beginning to end. Write the entire drill. You should be able to write all of it clearly and accurately at a controlled slow speed. If you cannot do so, the drill is too hard or too fast. Choose a more appropriate drill.

This second time through the drill, I want you to drop the last word in every sentence. Work on this so that you can move smoothly from one stroke to another. Watch the hesitation.

Work on this until you get really bored with the dictation. Then find something equally slow and easy. Drill on that until you bored again.

Do not challenge yourself with a difficult drill. You are beginning. Give yourself time to learn the basics. By next week, you should be proficient at this drill and ready for the next step.

To review:

Use easy drill at a low speed.

You must be able to easily write all of the drill.

Despite the fact that it is easy, I want you to drop the last word in every sentence.

Easy, easy, easy. If you want to learn at the maximum rate, you will use easy drill.

Answers to Questions about Step Three

Answers to many questions

ANSWER NO. 1 No. The drill is supposed to be really slow. The problem is dropping, not stroking. You have to allow yourself time to learn the technique. Go slow. Write clean. Drop without hesitation.

ANSWER NO. 2 Yes, that is all right. You can use the technique now during regular drills or tests. Just make sure that you continue to refine the technique by repeated practice at low speed with easy words.

ANSWER NO. 3 If you get really bored, you can use regular drill. Just make sure you refine the technique by repeated practice at low speed with easy words.

ANSWER NO. 4 Easy words. That's all I'll say while you take that tone of voice.

ANSWER NO. 5 See that wasn't so hard. Okay, I'll tell you why easy words are better than any others as far as this drill. You are learning to judge the relative worth of the words that you stroke. You should be thinking about how much work it takes you to earn each point on a test.

When you drop, you should drop the most difficult word. Easy words help you learn that skill. In this case, easy words are actually the hard ones. It is hard to tell which one to choose.

Hard Sentence to choose the hard word: ***Where was it when you saw it?*** Easy words make it hard to choose. In the first sentence, I have to weigh my clarity and speed on words that are close to memorized. I write all of the words relatively well, but if I had to choose, the word "when" gives me more trouble.

Easy Sentence to choose the hard word: ***Mr. President, the stamped legislation before us requires our utmost attention.***

Hard words make it easy to choose. Instead of pure writing, we employ briefs, phrases, squeezes, with varying success. Some strokes are just tough. The hardest word for me is "stamped." I hate all words with the MP ending. "Utmost" is also tough. It's the same number of strokes as "requires," but I don't like the ST ending of "utmost." "Utmost" is actually a shorter word than "legislation" or "attention," but they are both easy one-stroke words.

So you learn on the easy words. Then it is a dream to apply it to the big words on regular dictation.

ANSWER NO. 6 Ubiquitous? Yes, that word is everywhere, isn't it.

ANSWER NO. 8 It took you a lot of practice and a lot of class time to get to where you are. Be patient. It will not take you long to get on the right track.

ANSWER NO. 9 No, I haven't seen Answer No. 7 either. We called his house. His mom said he was trying out for a job as an Exhibit No.

Monday, February 28, 2005

Speed Kills -- despite what you have heard

This is our Age of Enlightenment. The speed-first methods of writing are falling into disfavor. It will take time. Ten years ago, a teacher who believed in clarity and rhythm was a maverick. Today, the roles are being switched. The mainstream authors, save one misguided exception, all agree. Speed is not the answer.

Some of your teachers get as irritated as I do over the "new" theories of writing as fast as possible on material that is beyond your abilities. We heard it all before. It's not new. It didn't work for us. It won't work for you.

Speed isn't the answer. Even the guys who preach speed don't really believe it anymore. They have gotten tired of the rest of us asking them about clarity and control. Nowadays, they always end their lectures by saying "And of course, you must have clarity and control the whole time."

Heck, if I have clarity and control, I don't need speed. I need directions to the next class because I just passed my tests.

I go farther than most teachers. I don't teach speed at all. I teach how to handle hesitation, big words, little words, clarity, carrying, strategy, dropping, names, numbers, phrases, briefs, etc. In my class, I don't want you to be writing at top speed. I want you to write slower than that so that you can achieve top performance. Speed demons always crash and burn. I want someone who can make it to the end of the race.

If you are almost ready to pass a test and you think you need a little more speed, you probably:

have trouble with little words

have trouble with the s, d, g, endings.

readback in class pretty well

don't surge fast and slow very much, but when you do, you have trouble stopping

have trouble regaining accuracy after you "fracture" your writing on a hard drill

have little trouble on speed drills

have trouble with Testimony

That last one isn't fair. It's too easy. All people who have trouble with Testimony blame it on speed. It's a normal reaction, but it isn't correct. Testimony is chock full of all of those simple words that you practiced in Theory. You can write those words faster than any others. The answer isn't speed.

Conversely, those who hate Literary are quite frank and open that the problem is not speed. It's all of those big blankety-blank words.

Here is the whole deal in a nut shell. Your success does not depend on how fast you write. You write fast enough as it is. You don't need to practice that skill. You are having trouble on the tests because on certain parts of the test you write extremely slow. If you are close to passing a test, there are only a couple of those slow sections per test.

You can argue that you are not writing slow, but that the dictation is coming too fast. Same difference. The fact is that the teacher is spitting out the words and you're having trouble writing them. Don't worry about where we place the blame. Worry about how to change your writing so that you gain more points on those hard sections.

All you have to do is figure out how to perform a little better on two or three sections of a test. Sorry, no cool answers from me. You have to figure that out for yourself. What is it about a test that makes it so tough? That's the question that leads to your answer.

The hard parts on my tests involve words that begin with vowels, names, lists of any kind, the goofy right-hand endings, strings of little words. Those are my "hard" sections on a test. Each one is something that I don't do very well. Each one is something that I should practice every day. Each one involves not a lack of speed, but a lack of basic skills.

In other words, I will be "faster," when I have learned not to be so slow on those things.

What will make you "faster"? Find out, then direct your practice at it.

You can't write it fast until you can write it slow. Don't let anybody tell you otherwise.

Tuesday, March 01, 2005

Popcorn Drill

I don't know who coined the term, but short, quick Questions and Answers turn Testimony into that special drill known as Popcorn.

You are either on top of the dictation or you are dropping. There is no middle ground. Popcorn Testimony is unforgiving.

This makes it the perfect drill to teach Literary. On the average Literary drill, you can learn bad habits. These habits could be the reason why you are not passing Literary. Popcorn drill will not allow such habits.

Sometimes, the very best drill for Literary is Popcorn Testimony.

By the way, you can tell whether you need Popcorn Testimony by asking yourself this question: Do you hate Popcorn Testimony? If you do, then you really need to practice it.

Sunday, March 06, 2005

Step Four, The Shastay Way

Step Three asked you to do a slow easy drill and drop the last word in every sentence.

Step Four wants you to do the same drill, but now you should drop the hardest word in each sentence. Now you must choose. Which word slows you down the most or is the hardest to stroke? Find that word. Drop it. Move on to the next word.

Remember to keep your drill very slow. You are learning to drop. Learn to knock out all hesitation associated with the drop. Keep it smooth.

This drill is probably very irritating to some of you. Calm down. You don't have to write at breakneck speed to succeed. Rhythm, control, clarity -- those are the keys.

No fair skipping some of the steps. If you haven't put in the time, you won't progress as well.

If you have any trouble with this drill, you should repeat earlier steps.

Pulling the Dictation From Sloppy Notes

"Pulling" the dictation out of your notes refers to the skill necessary to read sloppy notes. It is a useful skill for emergency situations.

But if you are faced with this situation, the critical question is not whether you can read the notes. The question is: why did you write so sloppy?

Your road to improvement lies in writing clearer. That is the skill that you need.

And the "pulling" of the dictation? Save that for the emergency situations.

You should not have more than one "emergency" situation per minute. You should be able to read your notes very quickly and accurately. If you constantly stumble on readback, then you are not writing well enough.

Keep your standards high. You are training for one of the most respected jobs in the world. It is assumed that all stenographers are competent and professional. That is a reputation that we can be proud of.

Tuesday, March 08, 2005

Briefs and Phrases revisited

Lots of people have trouble with those timesaving strokes known as "Briefs and Phrases." They are great when they work, but horrible when they don't. As you go up in speed, you must make choices about them. If you hesitate for one second at 225, you have let four words go by. If you write out almost any Q&A phrase, you end up writing very simple words that are no trouble.

Ultimately, the hesitation is worse than writing out the phrase. Keep that straight. Writing out the phrase is always a correct choice. Hesitating on the phrase is always incorrect. If you use the brief or phrase, it must be without hesitation.

Briefs and phrases are great to know, even better to know how to use. But they will never be part of your base speed. They are for emergencies. They help you get out of trouble.

Briefs and phrases are little bonuses to ease your burden. But you can't depend on them. They do not consistently appear.

One section has a lot of briefs and phrases. So you do well. The next section has very few. So you do not so good.

It is nice that you performed so well on the first section, but you won't be passing many tests until you can do the second section.

Thursday, March 10, 2005

Drilling on Test Day

I often draw correlations between stenography and other professions and skills. They teach motor skills. We teach motor skills. They teach a certain way. We teach -- well, let's see.

Right now, it is spring training for baseball. Pitchers are working on pitching; batters on batting, fielders on fielding; runners on running. Every team does it.

What kind of practice do they do before a real game? Very little. Practice may occur at other times of the day, but before the game, they aren't practicing. They are warming up. Easy ground balls, easy throws, easy pitches.

There is a time for practice and a time for warm up. They figure that they are about to play a game with whatever skills they came to the park with. If they want to have the best chance to win, they will use those skills to their best advantage. And

finally, they figure that the best way to do that is to warm up, limber up, psyche up. Easy ground balls, easy throws, easy pitches.

When I went to school, every teacher believed that the best way to prepare students for a test was to feed them fast dictation before the test. No easy ground balls; no easy throws; no easy pitches.

Unlike sports, which gives their players easy warm up, all of my teachers drilled me beyond my abilities on test day. This was especially true in the last five minutes of drill. It was felt that the test would sound slow, if the drill immediately preceding it was fast.

That was true. It did sound slow. But I was a quivering mass of unclarity and hesitation by the time of the test. I could no longer perform at the top of my top abilities.

So it really didn't help me. I passed my 200s by ignoring the final dictation before the test. When everybody else was writing at 220 and 240, I was warming up by slowly writing such stock sentences as "Now is the time for" and "The quick brown fox jumped"

Today was test day. The students received slow material at a controlled rate. These students are at the end of Theory and are competing for 60 and 80 wpm tests. Their drill was as low as 40 wpm and as high as 80 wpm.

Tomorrow is not test day. Every drill will push the students for one reason or another. The slow drills will require writing unusual words or thick words. The fast drill will be extremely fast. The regular drill will require that the student know common briefs and phrases or know how to write out the words. The drill will reach as high as 120 on normal dictation. Easy dictation will be much higher.

Today was game day. I warmed them up.

Tomorrow is for practice.

Tuesday, March 15, 2005

Your Spring Break Homework

Some of you will be on Spring Break soon. This is the perfect time to recuperate. I believe that most court reporters are hard-working, driven individualists. There are very few that need advice about how to stay busy. If you are a steno student, you can probably talk for a half hour straight about all the things that you want to do if you ever get the time. We keep hectic schedules. Court reporters go the extra mile, but only when they cannot go two extra miles.

That's commendable. But step over here and let me talk to you world-beaters for a moment. You can overdo it if you don't watch out. We need you to be fresh and energetic at school. Proper rest is critical to your top performance.

Here are two analogies straight from the sports world.

Golfers do not go to every tournament. They take off now and then. It is true that they may miss a payday here and there, but they look at the big picture. If they are refreshed, they are more likely to play their finest golf.

Baseball players do not play every game. By July, they start to get tired. Crafty managers give their players a game off here and there before they become lethargic. They get days off during the season even when they are not hurt.

Some of these guys earn \$10 million a year. They get that money for their performance. They need to be at their best. A guy who gets 6 hits out of 20 earns about twice the amount of the guys who only get 5 hits out of 20. They can't afford to just go through the motions.

Quality beats quantity every time. It doesn't matter if they are kicking the ball, throwing it, running with it, hitting it, catching it, pitching it, rolling it or whatever they do with it. They want the top performance. And they get that by resting occasionally.

Now for you doubters who say that stenography is not comparable to sports, let me expand a little.

Musicians burn out on the road. All they do is travel and play music, and they break down.

Race car drivers do nothing but sit in a car and turn left about a gazillion times per race. They need to do that with a high degree of skill. And they need rest.

In chess, a championship match consists of two guys who sit in comfortable chairs and occasionally move little pieces of ivory. The matches leave the players drained of energy and spirit. If they would immediately play another match, they would not perform at the same level. They need a rest.

Truck drivers sit in a big vehicle, push pedals, and turn wheels. By national law, they can only push those pedals and turn those wheels for a certain amount of time. Even our own dear government recognizes the importance of quality over quantity.

That skinny guy who wins all of the hot dog contests is known worldwide as "that skinny guy who wins all of the hot dog contests" because he doesn't eat 50 hot dogs every day. He takes a day off now and then.

Now, let's talk about you. Did you work hard this semester? Did you apply yourself? Then you deserve a break. Take some time off with my blessing. I want you bright-eyed and bushy-tailed. We have a lot of work to do next semester.

Saturday, March 19, 2005

Question: Gimme a Great Drill

QUESTION: I just finished theory. I'm looking for some assistance in improving my speed and reiterating theory. (I need to get my speed up to about 120wpm).

If you could recommend a specific drill, it would be greatly appreciated. The sooner I get my speed up the sooner I get to go back to school (so very soon hopefully).

Thank you very very much in advance.

ANSWER: You need to reinforce your strokes and outlines before they fade from your memory. You should be doing a great variety of types of drills.

Go through your Theory book page by page. Put a paper clip on any page that needs practice. Spend one minute a day on each page. Practice them every single day.

Finger drills are very helpful for dexterity and reaction time.

Little words drills are great to improve your reaction time.

Slow drills on hard Literary will teach you how to write those big words.

Popcorn Q and A (short questions and answers) is great. It is good for Testimony practice, but it is terrific for Literary. Almost anybody who has trouble with Literary will also have trouble with popcorn Q and A. It sounds odd, but it isn't. The common factor is the amount of words that are carried by the student. Hard Literary will bury you if you carry. Popcorn Q and A will leave you in the dust if you carry. If a student can learn to do Popcorn Q and A at a reduced speed, that student will magically have better results when doing Literary. It's, like, way cool.

Word lists from the Theory Book so that you solidify your strokes.

Word lists of Briefs and Phrases if you wish to learn shortcuts.

Short speed drills are good. Watch out for your clarity. Stop when your writing degrades.

Drill on Page One of your newspaper every single day. This is very effective. If you can write Page One, you can write anything.

I didn't mention Jury Charge, names, numbers, clock time, multi-voice, technical writing, etc. They all have their place in the grand scheme of things.

Write clear. Keep up with the speaker. Succeed.

Posted at 08:25 pm by Steve Shastay, Steno Rebel

QUESTION: I Got the Low-down 80s Blues. Why am I getting so discouraged? I can't even pass my 80's!

ANSWER: Hey, don't get discouraged. Calm down. Write clearly.

Don't force your strokes. Allow yourself time to write. Don't try to write fast. Write with rhythm. Move smoothly from one outline to the next.

Your hands will write at their top speed without you "urging" them to go faster. That means that some strokes will be slower than others.

If you force your hands to write faster than they can, the only possible result is that your writing will break down.

So ignore the speed of your strokes. It is fine as it is.

Instead work on the space between each stroke. It is hesitation that saps your speed.

1) You must write clearly at all times and at all speeds.

2) If you write clearly, then work on keeping the hands moving at all times. Ignore the speed, but ensure that you keep the hands moving.

3) If you write clearly and if you can keep your hands moving smoothly at all times, then work on the number of words that you carry.

4) If you write clearly, and if you keep your hands moving smoothly at all times, and if you reduce the number of words that you carry, then work on your graduation speech.

Sunday, March 20, 2005

QUESTION: Is age a factor?

QUESTION: I am 50 years old and have been in school for a year and a half. I just passed my 75 wpm test and my fellow students which are younger passed much sooner than me. Is age a factor in learning? I'm putting in about 3-4 hours a day practice, do I need to do more to keep up with them?

ANSWER: Dedicated practice that is directed towards your shortcomings is needed. You are already putting in more time than is necessary. Instead, think about what happens during a drill or a test. There is a reason why you are not passing. It could be clarity, test nerves, carrying, big words, phrases, etc.

Clarity must be a constant. You must always have it. Test nerves must be faced and dealt with. Test nerves keep us from writing to our full potential.

Carrying is a subject that is not understood. Essentially, carrying should be kept to a minimum. Keep reading the blogs to find out all about the subject.

Almost everything else is minor, but nevertheless, they must be dealt with. If you want to know more briefs or phrases, start a list and review it constantly. If you have trouble with big words, find some thick material and drill slow. If you don't like certain strokes in your Theory, you will have to review those over and over.

It is not a problem of speed. Your tests are not asking you to write very fast. They are asking that you keep your hands moving. If you can't think of the brief, then write the word out. If you can't think of the exact stroke, use a good phonetic stroke.

Don't push yourself to write faster. Strive to keep your hands moving.

QUESTION: I have one student who refuses to learn even the smallest brief. She insists on stroking out if you, I couldn't, I don't, I didn't, I know, did you, etc. She is in her 120s.

ANSWER: I don't push briefs and phrases on students. Many times they are more trouble than they are worth. What happens is that students try to use those special strokes before they know them. That causes hesitation.

Generally, I tell students to balance the work against the reward. In other words, I want them to work on the words that show up the most. For example, if they learn Phrase A, they will be able to use it 20 times a day. If they learn Phrase B, they will use it only once or twice a week. So I tell them it would be better to learn Phrase A. They should concentrate on the common briefs and phrases.

As to your student, she should know some briefs. There is no reason for not learning the common words and phrases. She is one of the few students that needs to be pushed towards learning briefs and phrases.

I do not use the brief for "CONSEQUENT." I know the brief, but I get it confused with the stroke for "SUBSEQUENT." If I use that brief, I hesitate and stumble. If I ignore the brief and write out the word, I write strong and clear, albeit a tad bit slower than those who use the brief.

I have a good reason to get rid of that brief. I tried it, and it doesn't work for me.

Your student appears to be dismissing all briefs and phrases without trying them first. She is saving time right now because she doesn't have to learn them. But she will be forever putting in extra time writing simple briefs and phrases such as, "automobile" and "at that time."

The concept of writing a short form of a word should not be alien. The very essence of stenography is that we can represent words in a minimum of strokes. She will save herself a lot of work on future drills and tests if she will work on the popular words.

Wednesday, March 30, 2005

The Magic Drill

This is the drill that I use to teach students how to drop. Even though it is not really magic, it does the trick.

This drill was originally designed to teach phrases. Each sentence has three strokes if you use the simple phrases. Not only that, there is a definite rhythm to the sentences. Phrase, word, word. Phrase, word, word.

Since this drill is so easy, it is also the perfect drill to teach "speed." I prefer to tell the students that I am teaching them not to hesitate. They are more likely to end up with the "speed" that they want if they concentrate on the hesitation.

But back to learning how to drop.

This drill is excellent to teach students how to drop. The drill is so easy that they can concentrate entirely on the new technique.

All right, we are almost ready. But first, I want to go over the reasons that I want you to learn to drop.

People who fall behind the speaker tend to drop disastrously large amounts of words at one time. In our school, a 200 student needs to have 20 errors or less on a test. One drop can use up 1/3 or more of the total errors that a student can have on a test.

People who fall behind the speaker believe that they would pass their tests if they were just a little bit faster. When they fall behind, they are able to catch up in most cases. They feel that if they had a little more speed they would be able to catch up all of the time and that would remove their drops.

Sadly, that strategy usually does not work. First of all, if you can catch up most of the time when you fall behind, then you are consistently demonstrating the ability to write above the speed that you need. Simply put, you can't catch up unless you write faster than the speed of the test. So if you can catch up, then you have enough speed to pass. It ain't the speed.

What you need to do is to learn how to stay up. Here's the whole Magilla in one neat little package.

Think about how many words you can fall behind the dictation before your brain goes into overload and you drop. Everyone has a different number. For my example, I will pick 10 words.

That is many more words than I ever want anybody to carry. That is a ton of words. But just for the example, if you fall ten words behind, you will drop a lot of words.

If you normally carry six words, then you are only four words away from dropping. If you are carrying six words and a hard section comes up, you are in big trouble.

What would happen if you reduced the number of words that you carry? If you carry three words, then you won't necessarily drop on a hard section. You can fall seven more words behind before you reach your breaking point.

So if you can learn to stay up a little bit more, then you will pass more tests because you won't have big drops. You don't have to write faster. You just have to learn to stay up.

I don't recommend that you wait until you reach your breaking point before you drop. Just like the relief valve on a pressure cooker, I want you to drop now and then so that you do not overload. I am not teaching you to drop more words. I am teaching you to drop fewer words. When you learn how to drop before you reach total meltdown, then you will avoid the huge drops. You drop the occasional word instead of dropping a whole sentence.

It's cool. It works. And it makes steno fun.

Here is the Magic Drill. It isn't long since I only use it in Theory. I have a longer version that I will give you when it is ready. The Magic Drill is marked in ten-word increments. When I finally get the book done, I will have a series of Magic Drills on CD that I will include with the book. There may be additional drills written and recorded separately by somebody else at Court Reporting Help. For now, you can take this drill to your teacher and have her run through it a couple of times at different speeds. Record the drill. Then use it at home.

The Magic Drill

That would be fine. Who can be sure? So far, / so good. They have a car. What is the time? / That is the end. They should make it. No sir, / not us. We could do it. No, ma'am, you win. / Park it out there. She was a nurse. This would / go well. You are the best. They could take two. / Yes, sir, he won. She would work hard. I can / do it. They were on top.

This is the one. / I want to win. He is bad news. Will the / snow come? I have the note. She is the girl. / We can wash it. There are a lot. Who could / tell me? We had it last. He should walk up. / It was put there. Who can make room? They would / look there. Where is it at? There would be more. / I want to act. When is the song? Where is / your home? I have to paint. There is much more. /

They were the worst. Will the class start? They were / near home. He is too slow. I have a pet. / I should take it. So much for that. That is / the row. He said to go. I have a chance. / Is the horse gone? That was my cake. Too much / was said. Which are the same? Yes, ma'am, drive up. / She was the best. They had a stall. No, sir, / wait here. That is the fruit. We can make it. /

This week is the start of a new semester for us. I have a new class of students. They are on the final leg of Theory. They will be testing soon. I am using this drill to teach them. So far, they have done two things with the drill. The first thing is that they have practiced it just like any other drill. I did this so that they would be very familiar with the drill.

The second thing is more interesting. It is their first step toward learning to stay up with the speaker and to drop when necessary.

What I do is I announce that I want them to drop the last word of every sentence. Each sentence is four words long. That means that they are only writing three out of every four words.

I tell them that the drill is at 60 wpm. In other words, I will dictate at 60. They are not to write at 60 wpm. They are supposed to drop the last word in each sentence; therefore, they are really writing at 45 wpm.

It is hard for them to do at first. But after a few times through, they have little trouble. We have already moved the speed up to 80 wpm. I dictate at 80. They drop the last word in each sentence; so they are writing at 60. In a week, I should be able to dictate at 100 for short bursts.

The students are learning to drop without hesitation. That is a good thing. But it is not enough. They must learn to choose which words to drop. When they are comfortable with this drill, I will modify to help them learn to choose.

Since I have a new class, I will show you the type of drills that I use from the first week to the last week. Along the way, I will show you how to modify the Magic Drill to create more advanced drills. It's not hard.

I have one other goal for this quarter. After graduating from Theory, many students are shocked at the pace of a normal speed class. It can be overwhelming. This quarter, I will take selected class hours and drill the Theory students just like the speed classes. I have always done that at the end of the quarter, but now I will be doing it each and every week for an hour here and there. I'll write about that soon.

Thursday, March 31, 2005

QUESTION: I think too much

QUESTION: I have a question. I can't seem to pass my 80 testimony. ALL of my teachers have told me the same thing. I think too much. I am going to do your hesitation drill - but I also really want to find a rhythm. Is there a way to learn or establish rhythm?

ANSWER: If you had said the problem was with Literary material, I would advise hesitation drills. But you say that it is a Testimony problem, and I think you are exactly right about the rhythm. Testimony presents its own particular problems. The words tend to be small and easy, but unless you keep up a good pace, you will get lost. This is especially true of short Questions and Answers.

I can't say for sure if you are experiencing a problem with concentration (Gee, how long will this test go on?) or what I call "editing" (Did I do that last stroke correct? What is the correct outline for the next word?)

If it is concentration, I have a couple of tricks. Drill at home with any of the following things as a distraction: radio, television, dryer, kids, relatives, etc. The dryer is a really good one. Every dryer is built with a really annoying buzzer. I really hate that sound. If I can drill through that, I can drill through anything.

I have another excellent aid to build concentration. Reduce the volume of your drills. Any decrease in volume will force you to listen more attentively. This technique works with minimum effort. You will be surprised at the results. Before you know it, you will find yourself totally immersed in the drill.

But I think you are doing something closer to "editing." I would guess that you are either checking the strokes as you are writing or you are thinking too hard about

what kind of stroke to use on the next word. Of the two choices, I think it is the second one.

If you are checking the strokes as you are writing, you should

- 1 focus entirely on the next word
- 2 ignore the words as soon as you have stroked them
- 3 learn to stroke clear enough so that you do not feel the need to check your work as you write
- 4 realize that if you write a word incorrectly, use the asterisk to delete that stroke, and then write the word again, you have turned that word into a three-stroke word. Write it correctly the first time and save time.
- 5 read your notes after the drill. This is the time to evaluate your work.
- 6 remember your priorities. Job One on a test is always the next word. Keep your attention where it should be.
- 7 trust yourself. Check your work later. Right now, trust yourself to write up to your abilities and get the job done.

But if I was guessing, I'd be guessing that you fall into this next category.

If you are thinking too hard about the correct stroke to use, you should

- 1 resolve to keep your hands moving at all times.
- 2 ignore the speed. That just may be what got you into trouble. If you are spending time thinking about briefs and phrases, then you are wasting time. Briefs and phrases must save you time. The definition of a good brief or phrase is always the same: It must be easily remembered and easily stroked. You should not use them if you have to pause to think of them or if they lead to misstrokes.
- 3 force yourself to write the word or drop the word. If your hands aren't moving, you are not producing. Keep them moving.
- 4 ignore the speed. I know I already covered this, but it is important; so here's another angle. You are thinking about what stroke to use because you don't like any of your choices. You don't want to write out the word and you can't remember the brief. I am telling you to write out the word. You don't want to do that. Writing out the average word does not take too long. Do it.
- 5 write down the words, briefs, and phrases that stumped you on the drill or test. Look them up at home. Practice them.
- 6 learn your Theory after the test. It is possible that you are hesitating because you insist on writing absolutely perfect notes. Nobody can remember all of the strokes. Sometimes the best you can do is to write a good phonetically correct stroke.

7 remember that you are in a race. You will only pass the test if you can translate enough strokes. You can only translate them if you write them. Therefore, you must continue to write at all times. No other choice is acceptable.

8 recognize that the problem is that you are not making your choices in time. All you have to do is choose how to write the stroke a little bit faster. Easy way to tell: if your hands ain't moving, you aren't choosing fast enough.

9 leave your hands alone when they are moving. Some strokes are slower than others. If you try to force your hands to write faster than they can, they will overload. You will end up with herky-jerky writing and maybe a total shutdown of the hands for a second or two.

10 use the skills that you have at the present time. School is a learning situation. You aren't perfect yet. When you are in the test, you must make split-second decisions. Choose the best stroke or outline that comes to mind immediately. If you want a better way to stroke the word, practice it after the test.

11 chill out. Unleash your natural abilities by relaxing. Stress and nerves are debilitating. They can impede your success. It is a very common observation by students that the tests become much easier as soon as they have passed the ones that they need. They don't really become easier. When the students pass and are no longer stressed, they stop fighting themselves and consequently they begin producing better work.

12 remember that school is relatively unimportant in your life. Your family is important. Your health is important. Your retirement is important. School gives you what you need (a great education and job) so that you can take care of what is important. Each test is not a life-or-death situation.

13 have fun in school. Life is too short.

Friday, April 01, 2005

Week One

Today is the end of the first week of the semester. My job is to finish the final handful of chapters in the Theory book, and then prepare the students to test. My goal is to have everyone pass at least their 60 wpm test. Many of them will pass their 80s. A growing percentage will pass 100s and above.

Here is a brief review of the week.

The first two days were spent with very simple drill. These students were new to me. I had to find out who I was dealing with. The drill was slow and easy, but it was not a waste. Heck, every drill should be done with a specific purpose. I told them that they should learn to pop out the strokes as fast as they could on the easy drill. If they form the habit with easy drill, they will be able to apply it at high speed. This is the root of carrying. Students who insist on carrying will carry words even when it should be easy for them to catch up. So this type of drill taught them to stay up with the dictation.

I handed out a form that I am developing. The working title is the Shastay Way Ten-Week Course. The name will be changed. It doesn't describe the purpose of the forms. The purpose is to prepare the students for speed classes. Students get one page each day. Each day's page will have a section with 20 words on it from the Top 1000 Briefs. No definitions; just the words. Another section may have a drill, a tip on how to drill, advice on assorted topics. There is also a tip on how to stroke, a tip on grammar/English, and an inspirational quote.

The forms for this week recommended various finger drills and review of contractions, diphthongs, Top 100 words, etc. I want them to concentrate on the basics. Above all, they need to write strong clear strokes.

On the second day of class, we were still writing slowly and concentrating on the basics, but I gave them a very hard technical dictation. On other drills, I would build up the speed and then read back at a low speed to check their accuracy. On this hard technical drill, I told them that it would be extremely tough, but I would dictate very very slow. Oh, and they had to read back every drill.

It went great. They could read their notes on words that nobody in the room had ever heard of before. Two good reasons to read back everything on tough material. 1) You must ensure that accuracy remains high even on tough material. 2) The students need a break from the intensity of the drill. Tough material is, by definition, tough. (Like, duh) If the students don't get a chance to regain their composure, they won't perform at their top level.

The third day's technical drill was much harder. It dealt with tectonic plates, lithospheres, asthenospheres, oceanic trenches, and so on. They read back every drill. I always do readback on technical.

Their homework on the third day consisted of three things:

- 1 Write down the three Theory chapters that give them the most trouble.
- 2 Write down the three chapters that give them the least trouble.
- 3 Write down 15 words that they want to learn. They must also have the definitions.

I was going to collect the papers and review them on Friday, but I ran out of time. I will do it on Monday. Here is what I do with them.

First, I go through and call out the different chapters that students put down as causing trouble. I add my comments as to how to drill. At this level, the students are apt to forget chapters that gave them trouble. All they have is short-term memory for the most part. They need to be reminded constantly. The discussion opens up their eyes.

Then, I go through the chapters that give them the least trouble. I warn them to ensure that they have really conquered the chapters that they wrote down. And I point out that a lot of the chapters appear on both lists. Everybody has their own strengths and weaknesses. And everybody should know what their weaknesses are so that they can focus on them and correct them. Their problems are not the same. The solutions are not the same.

Finally, I go through their lists of 15 words. Everybody learns a ton of new strokes.

Friday was the fourth day.

On every day of the week, the students were drilled, drilled, drilled on the Magic Drill that I published in an earlier blog. The first couple of times through the drill, I gave them no special instructions. I wanted them to become familiar with it. After that, they were told to always drop the last word of each sentence. It felt funny to them at first, but by the end of the week, they were writing and dropping very fast.

On several days this week, the students had drills of 5 or more minutes. Nothing was longer than 8 minutes. They were cautioned to pay particular attention to the end of the drill. That is when they would be most likely to break down, lose concentration or become tired. They will get increasing amounts of this drill each week. By the third week, they should be doing 15 or 20 minutes with no problems.

On several drills, I told them that I would do one-minute drills at 60, 80 and 100. Before the 60, I told them to write clean strong strokes. Before the 80, I told them to write clean, and either stay up with the dictation or drop the extra so that they stay up with the dictation.

Before the 100, I taught them how to recognize if they were doing speed drills the wrong way. I said that if the speed causes them to write sloppy, then they are doing the drill wrong, and it will corrupt their writing. I said that there is an easy way to find out if they did the speed drill incorrectly. All you have to do is read back easy stuff immediately after the speed drill. So what I did was dictate at 100 and then at 60. I gave the students two seconds to mark the spot between the drills. So they virtually went straight from 100 down to 60. If the 100 caused them to write sloppy, it would show up on the 60.

On two days this week, the students typed up a practice one-minute test. The first day was a simple test at 60 wpm. The second day, I dictated at 60, 80, and 100. They had to type up two of them. The students had to grade their work, and then show it to me for analysis. The 80 and 100 tests started to reveal problems. Most of the advice concerned large drops.

On the final day of the week, the hard technical drill was common jury charge. Since they are Theory students, they do not know all of the neat shortcuts that make jury charge a piece of cake. I treated the drill just like other technical material. Every drill was read back. I did add a twist that is designed to force students to face their test nerves. I picked a student for readback. That student chose the speed of the drill. Talk about test nerves. As each student was picked, that student knew that the next drill was going to be read to the whole class. They did fine. This drill ties in with their homework.

Friday's homework was a page of jury charge drill. I chose a special one that is full of common briefs and phrases. The students do not have to use the briefs and phrases. That is their choice. Their homework was to figure out what strokes they were going to use. On Monday, we will be reviewing that in class. It will be helpful.

They know what it was like to struggle through "hard" jury charge. They can't wait to learn those briefs so that they turn the hard JC into easy JC>

The students are only several weeks from testing. They are writing strong. They are learning briefs, phrases, words, by the shovelful. They have learned to drop, but not how to choose the correct words to drop. They are becoming aware of their tendencies. It is a good start.

There are a million other little things that I covered. I reviewed the Theory book twice. The first time through was a review of lessons. When that was done, we reviewed the briefs, phrases, tips, advice, etc., from those lessons. We did a lot of Finger drills. We did a few StairStepper drills. Next week, we will learn the basics of how to drop correctly. It should be fun.

Tuesday, April 19, 2005

Mea culpa (or j'ac·cuse little ol' me)

Knowledge is power. Part of the problem of writing the words is simply being familiar with them. I don't really care if you use briefs or not. That is your choice. I think that it is critical that you know what outlines you intend to use. Take a look at what happened to me in school.

I never had a brief for the word "malicious." I always wrote it out. It was two strokes. When I was in school, that word caused a lot of trouble. I always wanted to change the outline. I didn't like that it was two strokes, and I didn't like the fingering pattern of the second stroke.

So it gave me trouble. Every time I would encounter it on a drill, I would hesitate and search for a way around this doggone word. I never found one. I always ended up writing it out as the same two strokes.

But every time, I would still hesitate and search for a better way. That cost me time. It was a two-stroke word, but if you factor in the hesitation, it easily cost me three strokes worth of time to stroke it.

One day, I stopped looking for a better way. I accepted that "malicious" was always going to be a two-stroke word for me. From that time forward, "malicious" became one of my better words.

I have other similar stories.

I hesitated on the words "consequent" and "subsequent" because of their similar outlines. My solution was to write out both words. I think that I can write them out almost as fast as using the brief, and I never have conflicts or slop.

The words "jury," "juror," "injury," and "injure" all have similar briefs in my Theory. Only the vowels are different. I hesitated on those words for about a year after graduation. One day, I sat down and compared their respective outlines. It took just five minutes to straighten out those strokes. From then on, all hesitation was gone.

I could go on and on. I would confuse the words "constitute" and "institute." I tried to write "retire" and "require" the same way. I knew that a certain brief meant

either "preponderance of all the evidence" or preponderance of all of the evidence," but I did not know which one was the brief.

It was my fault. I knew that I had trouble with those words, briefs, and phrases. I should have looked them up. Instead, I stumbled over them time and again.

It was my fault. I could have had a net gain in speed if I would have worked out the strokes for each word. I didn't have that gain. I hesitated on them for a long time.

Think about this: If I would have learned the words, I would have removed the hesitation.

And if I had removed the hesitation, I would have had time to write more words.

And if I would have had time to write more words, then in effect, I would have increased the number of words that I could write per minute.

That translates into a speed gain without having to move my hands any faster.

Too bad I didn't do that.

It was my fault.

Thursday, May 05, 2005

The Legend of SlowHand Lucy

She just appeared one day. She was returning to stenography after a long absence. She had once made it to her 100s, but we placed her in the 60s class when she returned.

I told her that she would experience times when she would not remember the correct outline or stroke. At those times, she must stroke phonetically correct strokes -- and avoid the hesitation.

I told her that she would experience an odd phenomenon. There would be times when she would remember that a certain word was a brief, but she would not remember the brief. When that happened, her brain would insist on using the brief, even though it could not remember the brief.

In that situation, her job was still the same. She must stroke phonetically correct strokes -- and avoid the hesitation. Truthfully, it is harder to avoid this kind of hesitation. The brain is in conflict. It wants to use the brief, but it can't remember it.

This lady started slow, picked up speed, and maintained steady progress through school without ever getting stuck at any level. She did not zoom through each speed, but she always moved through every class at a constant rate.

Every time she entered a new class, the students would begin to talk about her. It did not seem possible that she could be in their class. Her hands moved so slowly.

They found out on the first readback that she did belong there. She could always read her notes in every class from Day One forward.

But it was the slow hands. That was what they would talk about. How could she write so slow and still keep up with them.

Many, many students watched that lady enter their class, sit with them for a few months, and then move on down the hall to the next speed.

They didn't learn her secret.

She wrote clear readable strokes at all times.

She wrote as fast as she could each day, but only as fast as she could write clear readable strokes.

She allowed her hands to stroke naturally and normally without forcing the strokes.

No wasted time. No wasted effort.

The students still talk about her. She is gainfully employed as a reporter. She has about a year of experience. She has come back to my classes once or twice to talk to my students. Today, she was at the school to visit some of her friends in the 225 class. I saw her and dragged her into my class for a short introduction.

Was she a "natural?" I don't think so. I think she was an average student.

She had one advantage.

She believed that controlled writing would produce readable strokes.

She was correct.

Monday, May 09, 2005

Q: Where is my accuracy?

QUESTION: I am having problems with accuracy. The speed is there but the accuracy is not. Any suggestions?

ANSWER: There are several things that you can do. All of them require low-speed drill. All of them cure problems with clarity. All of them require that you either (A) write accurately, or (B) slow down until you can write accurately.

Finger Drills: Can't say enough about them. Anna Mae Tedley loves them, and she should know. The theory behind Finger Drills is that you cannot stroke the words unless you can stroke the individual letters. Great drill for clarity.

Hard Copy Drills: Hard Copy Drills are done by reading from a newspaper, a magazine, a book, etc. When you do these drills, you are not on a clock. You can go

at any speed you want. I want you to ignore the speed. Instead, work on moving smoothly from one stroke to the next.

Do not rush. Allow your hands to slow down, if they must. DO NOT ALLOW THEM TO STOP. You should, at all times, be able to stroke the next brief, phrase, word, syllable without stopping to think about the stroke. By the time you get to the word, you should have your stroke ready.

This drill, if done as I outlined it, is great for clarity and for hesitation.

Speed Teacher Drills: If you use the Speed Teacher, you want to use the drills that we call Step One, Step Two, and Step Three.

They are methods of drill. You can find them by going to CourtReportingHelp.com. Click on Speed Teacher. Click on "Please use these drills with the Speed Teacher."

Step One is for Clarity. Step Two is for Hesitation. Step Three helps to put it all together.

When you can write accurately, you will find that you can return to your regular speed, and the accuracy will be there.

At first, it will only be there for a short time. You will fall back into bad habits. Each day, you must reinforce your clarity.

As time goes on, accuracy will become second nature. When you reach such a point, you will only need to do maintenance on your clarity.

Right now, you are not doing maintenance. You are rebuilding. You must expect periods when your clarity disappears. You must expect that you will feel "out of sync" with some of the drills because you are beginning to focus on clarity.

Stick with it. We need good stenographers out there. It will come together for you in time.

Wednesday, May 18, 2005

Making sense of it all

I started this quarter with 40 students who were preparing for their first 60 wpm tests. I test the students at the 60 and 80 wpm level. After that, they are free to move on.

I have less than half that original number now. Of those who remain in the class, a few of them need their 60 wpm tests, most of them are working on their 80s, and some of them have passed their tests and have elected to stay in the class to solidify their writing.

The rest of the students have moved on to the 100 and 120 classes.

Of those students who have completed their 80 wpm tests:

- 1 All of them write with a high degree of clarity

2 Most of them do not drop 5 words in any section of the drill. (Dropping words refers to what happens when the student cannot write all of the drill and therefore must "drop.")

3 Those who do suffer from large drops are able to pass their tests on the basis of pure speed. In other words, they pass some tests with flying colors, but they may perform poorly the next day on similar material. Their scores swing between near perfection and disaster.

Of those students who have not completed their 80 wpm tests:

- 1 Some of them fluctuate between clarity and sloppiness from day to day.
- 2 Most of them are afflicted with large drops.

Of those students who maintain their clarity at all times and keep their drops to three words or less:

- 1 Some are in the 120 class
- 2 Most are in the 100 class
- 3 The rest have completed their 60s and 80s and have elected to stay in my class until the end of the quarter.
- 4 100% of them are making fine progress.

I cannot find any other group that has a 100% success rate. That is why I only teach clarity and how to drop correctly.

This isn't theory. The evidence is clear. If you write clean and keep your drops small, you will succeed.

This has been integral to the message of CourtReportingHelp.com since it first hit the Internet in 1999.

Just remember that you heard it here first -- for the gazillionth time.

Steve Shastay

Steno Rebel

"What makes one indignant about suffering isn't the thing itself, but the senselessness of it." Nietzsche

Friday, May 27, 2005

Three Strikes and You're Out

I have created a steno game -- Three Strikes and You're Out. It is very simple, and there is an awful lot of good readback.

First, deal everybody five cards. No, no, no, just kidding. Pick any drill. Drill for a minute. Start the readback.

Each student reads a sentence. The student finishes her turn if she can read the sentence without having three consecutive errors. If she makes three consecutive errors, then her turn is over. The next student must finish her sentence.

So each student reads one full sentence or finishes up the sentence if the previous person had three consecutive errors before finishing the sentence.

"Three consecutive errors" is defined as:

- 1 three dropped words (words that the student did not write)
- 2 three words that are too sloppy to be read
- 3 three words that are mistranslated in any way (this definitely includes endings)
- 4 any combination of the above

I suggest that you include one more rule. The student is automatically out if she has to search for the proper sentence. This rule will really speed up the readback. Students quickly learn how to beat this rule. And there is only one way to do that. They learn to stay up with the readback. And hey, all teachers struggle to keep their students focused on the readback. This is almost an automatic fix for those "lost sheep" who are never in the right place.

Don't keep score. Start a new game on each and every drill. The purpose is not to see who is the best student. The purpose is to get all of the students writing a little bit better. So make sure that students do not remain "out." They take their regular turn at readback every time.

You will find that none of your students are "out" all of the time. And you will find that none of your students can successfully read the sentence each time. Everybody will stumble at times and shine at other times. And since no one is keeping score, you will not have to worry about the class polarizing into winners and losers. This is very important. No one is a loser. We are just at different skill levels. And we are all moving forward, right? Who cares who is a little faster today as long as everybody improves? We will all reach the goal.

I find this to be very popular with the students. Every time a student finishes a sentence successfully, the student receives positive feedback. Everyone in the room knows that that student rose to the challenge. Our students can't pass a test every day. But they can succeed at this game every day. They can win at it every day. They can get that all important attaboy every day.

The real kicker is that every student can win at this game every time. All a student must do to win is to write every third word. That will ensure that the student does not drop three consecutive words. Even on tough dictation, a student who does not fall behind will be able to write at least one out of every three words.

I don't have time to explain the full benefit of this game. Perhaps another time. Suffice it to say that I have found that all students succeed if they can write clearly and avoid any drop over three words.

Conversely, I have also found that writing 260 will not ensure that you pass your 225s if your 260 cannot be read or if your 260 has holes in it from large quantities of dropped words. I may have said this before, but it stands repeating. Those speed champions may be pushing their own brand of speed on you, but even they do not believe in it. All you have to do is ask them if they would lose their job because they were too slow and had to ask the witness to slow down (no, they wouldn't) or if they would lose their job because they wrote too sloppy and couldn't produce a transcript (yes, they would).

Steve Shastay

Tuesday, May 31, 2005

Machine vs. Mask -

QUESTION: Do you think that voice writing using speech recognition software will replace machine writers?

ANSWER: Technology is wonderful, but unpredictable. New items come on the market every day. Life becomes simpler, better, easier.

But they can only invent things that are within the scope of the present technology. I don't think they can touch us. I don't see how they can come up with anything to replace us.

They will continue to have serious problems with voice recognition for the foreseeable future. Right now, they concentrate on training the operator because the computer refuses to go along with their game plan.

Mask writers will always be plagued with head colds, sore throats, dry lips, etc. And there are stories about what an extra chili dog at lunch can do to the afternoon's translation rate. Plus growling stomachs, toothaches, lip sores, swollen glands, choice of clothing (tight fitting or not), room temperature, humidity. All these things can and do affect them. On our bad days, we can slow down to achieve a better translation rate.

They can't. If they can't pronounce the words so that the computer can understand them, then the computer is not going to translate them.

I don't have anything against mask writers. There is plenty of room for them in my world. But I believe that their future is no brighter than before. If they are wrong about being able to compete with machine reporters, then they will always remain the second, third, or fourth choice. Machine reporters, naturally, would remain the top choice.

If they are right about being able to compete with machine reporters, then they will ensure the doom of all skilled reporters, including themselves. If their technology works, they won't need skilled mask writers at all. They will only need a few more microphones.

I don't believe that they are right. I don't think that they can climb the same mountain (realtime) that we climbed many years ago. Even if they can do it, there is a great upside to all of this.

If they figure out all of the problems, the present mask writers (and you and me) will face our collective doom and will be replaced by computers. Each computer will still need an operator to set out the little microphones and say "Testing, testing."

And the operator is well paid to do that. You know why? Because only a human can ensure that the proceedings occur according to law and that a proper transcript is being produced. They will always need us to do that.

So I don't mind if they could entirely replace us. We'd still have jobs. Maybe they would call us court operators. Nah, I don't think that will happen. I think the mask writers will remain a small minority. We will have pen writers forever, but I don't believe mask writers will last another ten years. Their technology was flawed in the 60s when they began, and it is flawed today. Eventually, the software companies will fold or move on to more lucrative areas. That will kill realtime for mask writers.

But here is something to think about. Our profession is blossoming. I say that we shouldn't worry about the mask writers. Any mask writer out there should be given a chance to compete without any hostility from us. We have more than enough work.

There will be a shortage of reporters for many years. Captioning and CART will expand at ever-increasing rates. This is where the big money is. This is where the future lies. It is our future. We are the only viable option.

We will always be around. The technology will change. It won't make a difference. Captioning, CART, law, reality TV -- they are clamoring for us and they are creating new jobs for us. We have the skills. They need us. They will always need us.

It is good to be a reporter.

Wednesday, June 01, 2005

How to save our free weekly drills

QUESTION: Hi. I would like to save your free weekly drills to my computer, but do not know how to. Can you advise me? Thanks.

ANSWER: Go up to our site. Find the page that contains the free drills.

To start a drill, you left click on it. But you don't want to start the drill.

You want to save the drill to your computer.

To save the drill, right click on it. A menu will pop up.

Choose "Save target as." That will bring up the normal window that Windows uses to allow you to save files. Pick the folder you want, or create a new one.

Once you save, you have the drills for good. Yay!!

Wednesday, June 15, 2005

Dictionary Building

QUESTION: I was fortunate to have you substitute for our class a few nights ago and wanted to thank you for offering a different perspective. What I have been doing is not working for me.

I am confused about when we should begin building our dictionaries. I have heard differing stories. What is your opinion?

ANSWER: In the old days, dictionaries were built from scratch, word by word by word. Nowadays, all CAT software comes with a pretty big dictionary. A lot of work is saved.

But not all of the work is saved. We could both start with the standard dictionary, but we both must tailor that dictionary to our individual writing patterns. We need different strokes in our dictionaries.

Any standard CAT dictionary needs modification before it is ready to support you. Even the guys who write the theories need to modify their own individual dictionaries. Here is what I imagine happened on one fine day during development of the theory that I teach.

A guy stands up and says to a group, "Okay, we have six votes for Choice A, four votes for Choice B, three votes for Choice C, and one vote apiece for Choices D through L." We are going to use the top three choices and the rest of you guys just shut up."

I believe that my theory book shows me three ways to write "New York" because the authors had a wild meeting like that. Nobody was willing to budge. Each had their own personal preference.

They appeased those who liked Choices A, B and C by putting their strokes in the theory. But I will bet my bottom dollar that the guys who liked Choices D through L did not change their strokes.

Working on your dictionary will pay off big. You will learn to write realtime. That is a huge benefit.

This is the computer age. CAT software can be an unparalleled teaching tool, and it should be utilized.

The computer is a steno student's best friend.

The more that you work on your dictionary and the more you write realtime, the more you will focus on getting your translation rate up to par. You will become exasperated when common words continue to be misstroked; subsequently, you will focus on them and clear them up. You will look for material that contains new words so that your tran rate stays high on all material. Imagine that!! Building your dictionary whets your appetite for technical and medical dictation.

All kinds of good things happen when you build your dictionary, and absolutely no bad ones happen.

Truthfully, I think that almost all of your practice could involve dictionary building. You can only build your dictionary if you write a lot, read your notes a lot, and focus on clarity a lot.

I like that idea a lot.

Tuesday, June 28, 2005

Practice Speed of Drills

QUESTION: Hello, I ordered a practice CD from your website today. I am currently a student in Court Reporting school and I'm having some trouble with getting past the speeds of 120(Literary) and 140(Jury and Q&A).

I believe it's my whole mindset because I know I can do it; but seem to get frustrated about it at times. You will notice that I ordered the drill in the speeds of 160 to 180.

Please let me know if that's a good speed to practice at this time. I visit your website often and find so much of the information to be so helpful. I was really excited to place my order today for the practice drills and I look forward to ordering more in the future.

Thank you

ANSWER: I won't get into the whole theory of how to write. The subject is too large.

In a nutshell, we say that if you cannot write the drill professionally at a low speed, then you have no business doing the drill at a high speed.

That statement is generally true, but students must also practice how to survive the rough passages on the test. That kind of practice requires drill that you cannot completely master. There is a great benefit in knowing how to turn a potential ten-word drop into a mere two or three-word drop. This kind of drill needs to be done in a specific way with a specific purpose. You must know exactly what you are doing. Control and clarity is necessary at all times, especially at high speed.

Don't believe those guys who tell you to crank up the speed and pound like a madman. Those guys can't tell you why it is good to write like that or how it will make you better or when you should expect results. We can tell you why and how and when about our "theory" of writing. You should write clean because you are training to be a professional who needs clarity. It will make you better by imprinting the correct outlines into your brain. Then when you attempt these same strokes at high speed, your brain will be able to supply the correct stroke to you. As far as when you should expect benefits from writing clear controlled strokes, you should see improvement within a half hour. Few people have to go a week without seeing positive tangible results.

Anyway, we will send you the disc that you ordered, but we are going to include the next lower speed at no cost to you. When you find that a drill is too challenging, the proper move is to practice that drill at a lower speed. When you conquer it at the lower speed, you will also be conquering it at the higher speed.

In short, if you can't write it slow, you can't write it fast.

Wednesday, July 13, 2005

Difficult Right-Hand Strokes

Here is a handout that I use in every class. Some students take to it right away.

A little practice can go a long way. All you have to do is work your way through the list a couple of times each day. Eventually, you should replace the words with other words that represent those endings and/or any other endings that give you trouble.

The secret is to do a little work each day. No pain. No long drawn-out drilling. Just a little work, but you have to do it each day. Before you know it, your list of problem strokes will shrink, and you will have a lot less hesitation in your writing..

Difficult Right-Hand Strokes

Church
Bench
Best
Myth
Fish
Watch
Session
Mansion
Faction
Sanction
Love
Crucial
Precious
Patient
Prism
Ability
Livable

Curve
Ramp
Next
Little
Vital
Band
Fact
Given

Monday, July 25, 2005

Schadenfreude and what to do about it

In traditional sports, there must be winners and losers. That is because the athletes are pitted against each other. If the Red Sox score 4 runs on Tuesday and 2 runs on Wednesday, the Yankees know that scoring 3 runs will win one game and lose the other.

Their success is directly tied the success (or failure) of the opposing team.

As an Eagles fan, it was always thrilling to beat the Cowboys.

Sometimes it was talent. Sometimes, it was luck. Sometimes, it was simply a judge who didn't believe in work release. If we won because we played well, that was fine. And if we won because the Cowboys played poorly, that was fine also. Eagles fans will take a win over the Cowboys any way that they can get it.

That's the way it has to be in sports. Sombdoy must win. Somebody must lose.

We don't need the same kind of competitive spirit in our schools. We should not associate our success with the failure of others. This is just dead wrong. No one has to lose at stenography in order for you to win. We can all win. We can all reach the golden land of steno heaven.

There is no need to resent those who progress faster than you. Don't wish bad luck upon them. Maybe they will get there first, but it won't slow you down. You will still get there in the same amount of time.

And try a little compassion for those who are not performing as well as you. Most students will experience at least an occasional period of non-progress. So you may very well end up in that same situation someday.

It's not fun when it happens, and it is a lot easier to endure when you have friends who honestly care for you.

Schadenfreude: 1) pleasure taken from the misfortune of others or 2) guilty joy.

Yuck.

Steve Shastay

Wednesday, August 10, 2005

An easy trick for those who drop endings

Dropping endings can have several causes, but they always lead back to attention to detail.

And if attention to detail is the problem, then the solution is merely to PAY ATTENTION TO THE DETAILS.

The best solution for those who drop their endings (s, ed, ing) is to read their notes, type their tests, grade and analyze. That can be hard work, but it will pay off big time.

For those who insist on instant gratification, there is a easy fix that has been known to work like magic. When you drill at home, reduce the volume of the drill.

Do it little by little, and you won't really notice the volume reduction.

As the sound becomes lower and lower, your brain will turn its full attention to the task of making out each word -- including endings.

It sounds ridiculously simple, but it does work. Best of all, it's pain-free. No hard drills.

No mental hoops to jump through. Just do your regular drill, but do it at a reduced volume.

Stephen Shastay

Steno Rebel

Thursday, August 18, 2005

Tuesday and Wednesday homework

Tuesday's homework was very instructive. I gave a list of 25 words. The students had to look up the definitions.

Wednesday's homework was based on Tuesday's homework. From that list of 25 words, the students were instructed to make up silly sentences.

The purpose of the exercise is not to learn new words. I pass out 100 briefs each week.

I give them every brief-and-phrase handout I scrounge up. We review them in each drill.

They don't know all of the basic ones yet.

Tuesday's homework was to look up 25 words. That forced them to dig out the ol' theory book or the not-so-ol' dictionary. They need to understand the importance of searching for answers to their problem strokes.

Wednesday's homework was to create silly sentences out of those 25 words. That gave them an easy way to conquer those words once they looked them up.

The purpose of the homework was to teach them that they do not have to put up with those "trouble" strokes. That is very important. Too many of us resign ourselves to fighting very common words. Each day, we hear those words over and over. Each day, we struggle with them.

Open the books; cure your problem strokes.

By the way, even though the exercise involved briefs, the students are not forced to use them. They are taught that the correct stroke or strokes are the ones that they can perform accurately at the highest speed.

For instance, I am faster if I do not brief "constitution" or "institution." I get confused during the dictation about which stroke to use, and that slows me down. So my correct choice is to write out those words, even though I know the briefs.

Steve Shastay

Steno Rebel

Monday, October 03, 2005

I Lost My Steno Groove

I received a letter from a student who finds herself in a very common predicament.

Theory and the first speed classes were not a problem. She was writing well and had few problems.

Now the kid gloves have been taken off. The material is much harder than it was in previous classes, and the teachers are constantly drilling on tough material or fast material.

She lost her rhythm and her clarity. At times, her hands shook and/or they froze up.

It wasn't fun in StenoLand.

Here is the basic answer that I gave her.

Your situation is that you are faced with dictation that is too difficult because of speed and/or density. This is very common.

The answer lies in how you handle the material. Above everything else, you must always write clearly. If you can do that, then you work on ensuring that your hands do not stop at any time. Forget how fast they are moving. Just make sure that they never stop.

If you can write clean and if you can always keep your hands moving, then you work on the number of words that you trail the speaker. A person with poor control will experience drops of five or more words on the average test. This is unacceptable. You should not trail the speaker so much that you must drop a five-word block of words.

A person who knows how to drop properly will drop only the small number of tough words that show up on a dictation. If the speed or the density of the material increases, the student should (1) continue to write clearly, (2) continue to keep the hands moving at all times -- even if they move slowly (3) continue to drop words in order to stay up with the speaker.

The only change that occurs between writing easy material and writing fast or thick material is that the number of times that the student drops will increase. The size of each drop must remain small, but because the dictation is harder, the amount of drops will increase.

So your success depends on writing clearly, keeping your hands moving, and keeping your drops small.

Don't worry about writing fast enough. Don't worry about how many times you have to drop in order to keep up with the dictation. Don't worry about how fast your hands move as long as they are moving. And last, but not least, don't be a spaz. Chill out. You are fighting yourself. Calm down and write the way you were writing before.

If you do these things, you will be writing like a professional. Your strokes will be clear. Your hands will be producing as much as they can. You won't be forcing the strokes. And your speed will naturally increase week by week by week.

Take care.

Steve Shastay

Steno Rebel

CourtReportingHelp.com and StenoDrills.com

Tuesday, October 11, 2005

Using Quotes in your Strokes

QUESTION: Okay, Mr. Steno Rebel, the 100s speed doesn't seem to be nearly as bad as all the rumors that XXXXXX and XXXXXX told me about. For the most part, I have notably improved on how to drop the "bad" stuff, but I can't seem to throw quotation marks in with the "good" stuff that I'm writing. Is accurately quoting something important at this stage of the game (particularly during Q & A material), or will not doing so hinder me in the future?

Jess

ANSWER: Punctuation can be difficult, even when you are talking about periods and commas. Quotations are about the toughest.

The rule is that you must use quotation marks around quotes. Like, duh.

But how can you do that and keep up with the dictation. For the most part, you can't. It can be impossible to distinguish a quote from a regular sentence until you have heard the entire sentence.

You can't afford to wait. You must continue to stroke. And that means that you will miss the opening quotation mark a lot of the time.

On the other hand, I have found the closing quotation mark to be a valuable tool. Since we do tend to miss the opening quote, it can be a lifesaver to insert the closing quote.

It makes a teacher uneasy to argue anything other than a full unswerving devotion to the rules. But remember, I am not saying that you shouldn't use quotes. I am just recognizing reality. It can be hard to tell when to use them. Insert them every chance you can, but keep those strokes coming. No hesitation.

It will become easier over time. You are lucky that you have a good grasp of the basics. I remember one class that I had. Everybody in it was tough. One day I asked, "What comes after a period?" One guy stood up and said, "That's when you file the appeal."

Steve Shastay

Steno Rebel

Thursday, November 17, 2005

Magic Drill is ready to use

On the home page of CourtReportingHelp.com is a link to three free MP3 drills. I call them the Magic Drills. They are relatively easy to perform, but they will frustrate you at first.

Strictly follow the rules that are given for the drills. They address all of the problems that you can have, and they solve them for you very easily.

However before you begin the drills, it might be nice to run through the full list of steno problems that affect students.

The Terrible Triumverate of Joseph Kinaim, Anna Mae Tedley, Barb DeWitt and myself came up with four possible problems and their subsets: 1, Clarity; 2, Hesitation; 3, Carrying Words; 4, Editing (thinking about whether your last stroke is clear, rather than concentrating on the next stroke)

On my own, I came up with the three rules of stenography that will guarantee improvement in every writer: 1, You must have clarity; 2, Your hands must be moving at all times; 3, You must never drop any more than three words in any one place.

Those rules are simple and easy. They produce quality students who turn into quality professionals.

1. Clarity. If you aren't writing clearly, then you must slow down until you are writing clearly. Clarity should never be defined as anything less than 99 percent readable strokes. Your strokes should be as perfect as possible, but a readable stroke is a stroke that can absolutely be correctly translated without guessing. No dropped endings, no partial strokes, no ambiguous outlines.

2. Your hands must always be moving. Allow your hands to write slowly when they hit the hard strokes. Forcing them to write faster will fracture your clarity. Don't worry if the hands move slowly, but never ever ever let them completely stop.

3. Never drop more than three words at a time. Ignore how many words you drop. Concentrate only on how you drop them. Correct drops of one or possibly two words at a time indicate that the student is not trailing the speaker and consequently, is able to concentrate on the next stroke rather than on retaining a large string of words in their memory.

A large drop indicates that the student dropped those words because a failure of memory. The student was carrying so many words that the train of thought was lost. The words that are dropped are not the problem. The problem is that the student did not recognize that he/she was falling behind.

When you fall behind the speaker by five or six words, you have a hard choice to make. You must either write faster or drop a few words.

For the most part, writing faster is not a viable option. If it is possible to write faster, then you should have done that before you fell behind in the first place.

The hard choice usually entails dropping a few words. If you are good at dropping, then you should look for the biggest or most difficult word and drop that. If you have trouble dropping, forget about looking for the best word to drop. Just make sure that you drop before you fall seriously behind.

Stenography really isn't any harder than that, folks. You don't need 80 million rules. You don't have to learn a million briefs. You don't have to constantly drill at high speed.

Now, let's get back to the Magic Drills.

The rules for the Magic Drills are very simple.

1. All strokes at all times must be readable.
2. You must write at least two words in every four-word sentence.

If you do those things, you will have great clarity in your regular drills and you will learn not to fall behind the speaker.

Go to CourtReportingHelp.com and look on their home page for the Magic Drills. There are three of them. Read the explanation for each drill, and follow the two rules. It won't take you long before you see the results.

Take care.

Stephen Shastay

Tuesday, May 16, 2006

Steno is Fun blog is back

This is the last entry in the original Steno is Fun blog.

This is also the first entry in the replacement blog of the same name.

The reason for the switch is that CourtReportingHelp.com is now hosted by Yahoo. They have a nice blog setup. It will make it much easier to manage the blog.

We can't automatically add you to the new signup list. This is for your protection. Only you can add your e-mail address to our subscription list.

To sign up for the new blog, go to CourtReportingHelp.com. Click the link to the blog. Look for the register button. Add your e-mail address.

Below is the first blog on the new Steno is Fun blog.

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Hello Steno Dudes and Dudettes

May 15th, 2006

This is the first post of the new "Steno is Fun" blog. I am Stephen Shastay. I teach stenography. My philosophy of writing involves three rules. They are easy rules. If you follow them, you will write at the maximum of your abilities. Your test scores will improve. You will improve.

If you use my rules, you will know exactly what to do in each and every situation. Why? Because there are only a few things that you really should be doing. In every bad situation, you will find that the root of the problem can be traced to one of three things. Every problem. Every single one.

Here are the three rules.

1. Clarity. At all times, you must be able to read 99 out of 100 words that you stroke. Forget perfect notes. The standard is readable notes.

2. The hands must move at all times. Hesitation must be removed by adopting one of several solutions. Forget hand speed. Concentrate on removing the inactive periods between strokes.

3. Thou shalt not drop more than three words in a row. Forget the number of times that you drop. Concentrate solely on keeping the number of words in each drop to a minimum. This is a lot simpler to do than you think. I will give you step by step instructions on how to learn the method. You must do two things: 1) You must do a little bit of simple practice 2) You must do that practice my way. The drill won't be hard, and the instructions will be clear. All you have to do is follow my directions.

I don't believe in complicated techniques. The problems are always simple. The answers are always simple.

We start tomorrow.

Easy Briefs That Everyone Ignores

May 17, 2006 at 9:26 pm · Filed under Radical Thoughts, Briefs and Phrases

Whenever I call the steno movers and shakers, I always listen to how they refer to me when they announce who is calling. They all know me, and over the years, they have christened me with a wondrous variety of thematically similar titles. Curiously,

most of the assigned monikers employ hyphenated or very long words. So when I call, it usually goes something like this: Hey, Bill, it's that blankety-blank Shastay again. Sometimes they say, Hey, Bill, it that blankety-blanking Shastay. Style preferences vary from region to region.

I earned the nicknames from a variety of innocent questions I have asked over the years. "How come you could make a paper tray 50 years ago that would not break, but you can't do so today?" "Why don't you create a simple tutor program for your CAT systems?" "Why does your theory assign an easy stroke to a rarely used word and a hard stroke to its popular counterpart?"

Here are some ideas that the theory gods simultaneously use by and ignore. That means that they know what I am about to say, and they use some of it, but they choose not to fully exploit them.

Almost everyone has a brief assigned to each of the single letters on the left hand. S = is; T = it or the; and so on. Briefs are assigned to each key. It works well. Why doesn't every theory do the same thing with keys of the right hand? Some of them drop the ball here.

If you have single keys that are not assigned a brief, ending, etc, why not use them. I can create a few on each hand. Smart theories have all single keys covered; so you may not find any help with the single keys.

How about two-letter combinations? You use a lot of them such as TH- and WR. Do you use all of them? I'll bet you don't. Now, how far along are you in school? If you are in theory or the lower speeds, you should investigate and find out what those letters mean. If they are assigned to something, then you have found another easy stroke. If they aren't assigned, then you can do as you wish with them.

If you are a pro or in the upper speeds, you should investigate also. But I wouldn't necessarily accept what you find. The reality of your situation is that you have been writing without employing those briefs. You have found an alternate way to write them. You either write them out or you employ an alternate brief. The rule is: Don't fix it if it ain't broke. If you are happy with your current stroke, then I do not recommend that you change.

So what should you do with the stroke if you aren't going to use it as the theories gods intended? You should find the hardest toughest word that you can think of — and tame it with an easy stroke.

Here are a ton of two-letter briefs. The outline or stroke is up to you and your theory. This is a long list.

LEFT HAND

ST, SP, SH, SK, SW, SR, TP, TH, TK, TW, TR, PH, PW, PR, HR, KP, KH, KW, KR, WH, WR

LEFT HAND WITH VOWELS

SA, SO, SE, SU, TA, TO, TE, TU, PA, PO, PE, PU, HA, HO, HE, HU, KA, KO, KE, KU, WA, WO, WE, WU, RA, RO, RE, RU

RIGHT HAND

FP, FL, FT, FR, FB, FG, FS, FD, FZ, FL, PL, PT, PB, PG, PS, PD, PZ, LT, LG, LG, LD, LZ, TS, TD, TZ, DZ, RP, RL, RT, RB, RG, RS, RD, RZ, BL, BT, BG, BS, BD, BZ, GT, GS, GD, GZ, SZ

RIGHT HAND WITH VOWELS

AF, AP, AL, AT, AR, AB, AG, AS, AD, AZ, OF, OP, OL, OT, OR, OB, OG, OS, OD, OZ, EF, EP, EL, ET, ER, EB, EG, ES, ED, EZ, UF, UP, UL, UT, UR, UB, UG, US, UD, UZ.

And here comes the big one.

RIGHT AND LEFT HAND COMBINED

S-F, S-P, S-L, S-T, S-R, S-B, S-G, S-S, S-D, S-Z, T-F, T-P, T-L, T-T, T-R, T-B, T-G, T-S, P-F, P-P, P-L, P-T, P-R, P-B, P-G, P-S, P-D, P-Z, H-F, H-P, H-L, H-T, H-R, H-B, H-G, H-S, H-D, H-Z, K-F, K-P, K-L, K-T, K-R, K-B, K-G, K-S, K-D, K-Z, W-F, W-P, W-L, W-T, W-R, W-B, W-G, W-S, W-D, W-Z, R-F, R-P, R-L, R-T, R-R, R-B, R-G, R-S, R-D, R-Z

All of those strokes should mean something to you. They are among the easiest of strokes. Only the single letter strokes are easier to do.

Most theories are still in the game. They use a lot of the strokes from the previous lists. How about the addition of the ubiquitous Asterisk? You could tangle tough families of briefs. Here's an example: P = proximate; P-L = proximately; P* = approximate; P*L = approximately. How many more briefs can you come up with if you add an asterisk to each letter combination in the previous lists?

Here is a further step into the world of brief-making. Some theories do have briefs that combine letters and numbers. I use E6 as the outline for the word "sixth" and 4R for the Roman Numeral IV. I like those strokes. They are so very simple. I wish that I had more. Wait!! I do. But first I have one of those nickname-earning questions.

If theories can use letter/number combos to make briefs for numbers, why can't they do the same thing and make briefs for words? If your theory doesn't mention this, here are some examples to get you started.

S-6, satisfy; S-7, satisfaction; S-8 Supreme Court; S-9 Superior Court

K-6 = conscious; K-7 = conscience; K-8 = conscientious; K-9 = conscientiously

1-B = begin; 2-B = began; 3-B = begun; 4-B = beginning

Those are merely examples. Which words give you trouble? Replace my definitions with yours.

And now, one final easy way to make briefs. An exceptionally easy and accurate way to create briefs is to double the stroke for the second outline and triple it for the third. For instance, some of you were probably laughing at me for my suggestion to use numbers and letters to create briefs. If you can't do that kind of stroke, maybe you can conquer the same words with these patterns.

SF = satisfy; SF/SF = satisfaction; SF/SF/SF = satisfactorily

KZ = conscious; KZ/KZ = conscience; KZ/KZ/KZ = conscientiously

B-G = begin; B-G/B-G = began; B-G/B-G/B-G = begun

So how many new briefs are you going to learn? Your choice is that you can create briefs to conquer your trouble words or you can continue to suffer from them.

WORD OF CAUTION: Briefs will not correct all of your problems. In fact, trying to use too many briefs too soon is much much worse than not using any briefs. Any theory that shoves briefs down your throat and insists that you use them is missing the point. I was taught to use SKP for the word "and." It did nothing but corrupt my writing. If I had been given a choice of SKP or AND, then I would have been a better writer. Some people swear by that stroke. I swear at it. It is a personal decision.

If you like an alternate way, you should use that alternate way as long as it does not create conflicts. The best choice is always the choice that you like.

There are many people who choose not to use briefs. It is a good system. If you write out everything, then you don't have to memorize or remember briefs. It reduces hesitation. If you choose to write everything out, it must be because you are faster and more accurate that way. You must not choose to write out words because you hate to memorize briefs. You only have to memorize them once. You will use them for the rest of your long and prosperous career.

So let's have no more complaining about how tough this word is or how hard that word is. Find a brief. Solve your problem. Easy, isn't it?

May 23, 2006 at 11:51 pm · Filed under Nerves

Keeping Things in Perspective

- Allow yourself to be human. You will make mistakes. Everybody does. Try to minimize the damage of each mistake.

- After you make a mistake, forget it. Don't obsess over what you did yesterday, last week, last year. Some people are still kicking themselves over things that they did when they were six years old. Drop that excess baggage.

- Nobody ever died because they didn't pass a test. Tests just are not that serious. You will pass them when you become proficient at that level. Until then, it is normal and natural and expected that you will not achieve a passing score. Actually, it would be kind of weird if you were to start passing tests before you could write the speed. So chill out.

- You can't always gauge your skill level by your test results. Tests vary widely in difficulty. Content yourself with doing your best. No one can ask more of you.

- Don't worry about how your friends are doing. The one and only standard that you should measure yourself against is your previous performance. Are you

better than yesterday? If so, then lighten up. As long as you improve day by day, you will reach your goal.

- Don't expect all problems to go away just because you practice. No matter how good you get, there will always be things that are below your personal standards. Those are the things that you will practice. Hey, even Tiger Woods practices.

- Forget about yesterday. The past refuses to change. The present, on the other hand, welcomes you with open arms. Today, do your best. Tonight, enjoy a good rest.

- Ask your teachers for help if you need it. We're the experts. We want you to succeed. Give us a chance.

- Simplify. You can't do everything. Stop trying. Figure out what you can do right now, and do that. Slow and steady will always win the race.

- Learn from every experience. You will have bad days. That is a given. If you can learn what causes them, you are halfway home to learning how to avoid them. You do want to avoid bad days, don't you?

- Take a break once in a while. Please don't work yourself to death. A small respite can revive your enthusiasm.

- Breathe deep; stretch those sore muscles; take a walk. Pay attention to your body. You will feel better. You will smile more. And we will like you just a smidgen more.

- Sing, sing, sing. It is a wonderful tonic for the blues. Also, dance, dance, dance.

- Find time for yourself. No work, no practice, no shopping. You deserve a little time for you and no one else. Have fun.

- Fight negativity. Yes, it is true. You have failed before, and you will fail again. That is life. Nothing is free, and some things are difficult. Keep pushing forward. You can do it. The greatest successes are always preceded by the greatest failures.

- Kick steno butt. Kick it over and over. And keep on kicking it until you graduate. Then kick professional steno butt.

EXTRA CREDIT: The word "smidgen" means "a bit" or "a small amount." It can be spelled three ways. What are the other two?

Answer is way down at the bottom.

Stephen Shastay, Steno Rebel

EXTRA CREDIT: The word "smidgen" means "a bit" or "a small amount." It can be spelled three ways. What are the other two?

ANSWER: According to Webster's Online Dictionary, you can spell it "smidgen," "smidgeon," or "smidgin." "Smidgen" is the preferred way.

What is meant by "clarity"

May 30, 2006 at 10:00 pm · Filed under Shastay Way

Rule 1: Clarity.

More than 5 errors due to sloppiness in any 100 word section is always unacceptable under all circumstances.

Sloppy notes cannot be your standard. I knew a 140 student who was the fastest writer in the school. I don't mean that she was the fastest 140 student. She was the fastest student at any level. But wow, what a sloppy writer. She struggled with each speed. All she had to do was slow down and write calmly at a comfortable pace. If you are a sloppy writer, you aren't giving yourself a chance to pass. It doesn't matter how fast you are if you can't read your work. You won't pass until you clean up the notes.

Slow, easy drill is the only drill you should do. Don't do speed. Don't try to learn briefs. Don't work on tough words. Slow, easy drill. Don't worry. The result of the drill will be a return of your clarity. That will also reduce your hesitation. And that will translate into a pleasant gain in speed.

Evaluate your work by how many errors you have due to sloppy writing. All reporters have misstrokes. No one has perfect notes all of the time. What do professionals do about the problem? If the stroke is too sloppy to be read accurately, then they work on their clarity. But if the stroke can absolutely be read correctly, despite the misstroke, then they don't worry about it. Why? Because they can read it.

You may be surprised to learn that your CAT software comes to you already loaded with misstrokes in the dictionary. Don't believe me? Consider just your Q and A symbols. In theory, these are easy strokes. But in real life, these symbols contain so many letters that misstrokes are inevitable. What to do? What to do?

Open your dictionary and search for all strokes that translate as the Q and A symbols. You may find an awful lot of them. You didn't put them in there. The dictionary guys put them in.

Now, let's learn a little bit about what constitutes a misstroke that can be tolerated. Examine any of the misstrokes for the Q and A symbols. You will find that all have two characteristics. 1) Each misstroke can be easily translated as the correct stroke. 2) Each misstroke cannot be easily translated as any other stroke.

These are important rules, and you should apply them to your writing. Let us take an easy example: the word "these." The correct stroke is THAOEZ, but sometimes you strike TKHOEZ, and sometimes you strike THOEZ.

The first example, TKHAOEZ, is probably acceptable. As long as it doesn't resemble another word, then you are safe.

The second example, THOEZ, is another story. You cannot accept the THOEZ misstroke because that outline is used for the word "those."

To take this a step further, you can't mess with any of the vowels in the word "these." Every variation of the vowels will create an unacceptable misstroke. You will never be certain whether you meant to write "these" or "those."

Drills I recommend for clarity:

- * Any finger drill. Whether they are on CD or out of your theory book, these are perfect for clarity.

- * Speed Teacher program. It has finger drills, easy drills, number drills. Find a drill that you should be able to write, and practice until you actually can write it. Plus, if you use the Speed Teacher instructions on CourtReportingHelp.com, you can reduce your hesitation at the same time by following Steps One, Two and Three.

- * Drills that contain a majority of simple or easy words. Tutor Ring CDs 1, 2 and 3 have a lot of easy drills for clarity. (StenoDrills.com)

- * A hidden gem for clarity is the Robinson Crusoe CD. It has all small words. The exact title is "Robinson Crusoe in Words of One Syllable. Interesting story. He tended to sink every boat he ever boarded. (StenoDrills.com)

- * The free Shastay Way drills on CourtReportingHelp.com. Use the easy levels until you can write them clearly. Only then, should you move on to harder drills.

- * STAY AWAY FROM HARD DRILL OR FAST DRILL. If you are a sloppy writer, you have no business working on anything but clarity.

BONUS KNOWLEDGE: "These" and "those" are two of the most annoying misstrokes that students have to deal with. Here are a few ways to clear them up. 1) Write one of them with an asterisk. 2) Write one of them without vowels. 3) Write one with a Z and one with an S. 4) Write one of them with short E and the other with short O.

Why I Love Anita Paul

June 5, 2006 at 7:53 pm · Filed under Hall of Fame

The stenography community is still behind the times. We aren't employing the same techniques that have been employed in related fields for decades and longer. Even today, we have supposed experts crowing that they recently invented such bad techniques as "learn a brief for every word" and "practice to extremely high-speed drill."

A large percentage of our present teachers were taught such abominations. They weren't correct then, and they aren't correct now. They are not rooted in logic.

I have always felt ashamed that I also taught them early in my career. I was young and didn't know better. So to those of you who are presently claiming credit for creating them — well, thanks. I will stop apologizing and start pointing.

Now, how does all of this tie in with my love for Anita Paul? Well, I'll tell ya. She runs the Realtime Mastery Workshops. Every month in the JCR she has a big ad. The ad, by itself, is better than a lot of the books on the market. I'm not kidding. She packs a ton of teaching into one tiny page.

Let's look at her ad from the June 2006 edition of the JCR.

1. She understands that poise and control are important. Her ad uses these phrases: "Overcome fear," "Master stress," "Write Your Best on Tests," "Test-taking techniques," "Conquer Nerves."

2. She believes that a solid writing foundation is critical. Her ad offers help with prefixes, suffixes, alphabets, numbers.

3. She understands that some techniques are meant to be employed only by those who have mastered the basics. I love (here I go again) that she included the word "Advanced" in her training modules on phonetics and phrasing.

From this, I gather that she believes that you should calm down and write the best you can at your present proficiency level.

Her workshops are famous. They aren't just for students. Professionals regularly attend. She probably has a high number of repeat attendees.

The highest praise that I can offer is that Anita Paul is universally liked by teachers. If they know her, they like her. You definitely cannot say that about some of the other "experts."

Hats off to Anita Paul.

NOTE: Anita Paul can be found at <http://www.anitapaul.com>

Read Back Like a Pro

June 20, 2006 at 10:50 pm · Filed under Radical Thoughts

Our school, **Court Reporting Institute of Houston**, has three levels of theory. After that, they begin their speed classes. My good friend, **Lee Medlin**, teaches the second level. I have the third. Today, he sent a group of his students to my class for a preview of what next quarter will entail.

On this day, we were doing speedbuilding drills. Very cool speedbuilding drills. I call them – I call them — well, actually I don't have a name for them. But you might call them "**Readback Like a Pro.**"

If you follow the rules, you are guaranteed (1) that you will perform up to the standards of a professional and (2) that you will have a good time.

Here is how the game is played. Before the drill starts, a student is assigned the task of reporter. The teacher starts at a low speed level. The speed is incrementally increased. The drill continues until the student calls out "Stop." That student must then read back all of the drill.

You can't accept mistakes in this game. If the work is too sloppy to be read, then the student should have stopped the dictation a little bit sooner.

When you first play this game, you may find that some of the students don't immediately grasp the concept. They are used to drilling until the teacher stops dictating. This drill is different. It puts them in charge. Just like the professional, they stop the dictation when they must. This is probably a new concept. Give them a little time.

My regular class knows this drill. They normally do not stop me until I am dictating well above their goal speed. They drill, eventually they stop me, and then they read it all back. Every single word.

Can you imagine that? With a smidgen of practice, your class can drill for a whole hour with very few errors in readback and with zero words dropped. You can do this day after day, week after week.

Do you remember the group of students that was visiting my class? They were new to this drill. After every one of my students read back, I asked for volunteers. They raised their hands, took their turns, and read back like a pro each and every time. All students at all levels can do this with very little training. They like it. It is fun. And they leave the room with a smile.

That's the game, and that is how it is played. And it really does get them reading back like a pro. In real life, when the dictation becomes overwhelming, the reporter's only option is to slow down the speaker. Sloppiness cannot be tolerated. Dropping is forbidden. All work must be readable.

A stenographer has one main duty: record the proceedings. When my students work on this drill, they do just that. They record it all, and then they read it back. It gives them a great deal of confidence.

VARIATIONS OF THIS DRILL THAT YOU CAN USE AT HOME

You won't find many drills that increase in speed during the drill, but that isn't super important. Choose a drill that doesn't give you much trouble. If you have

some of the drills from StenoDrills.com, you definitely have drills that you can choose the proper speed. They almost always give you a wide speed selection. This is important because you want to be able to read back every word. You can't use a fast drill. It has to be close to your normal abilities. For those of you who are really sloppy, choose a slower drill. You must clean up your notes.

STUFF FOR TEACHERS

The technique of increasing the speed during the dictation is very effective. The beginning is slow, and it gives the students the opportunity to get into the flow of the dictation with good clean notes. The end of the drill is as fast as the students can tolerate. It is almost always at a higher speed than their goal speed.

There is a trick to this drill. Even though the students do drill at high speed, they don't drill very long at that level. The vast majority of their drill is at a low or medium speed.

Timing the Drill

Start at about two-thirds of the normal speed. For 180 wpm students, that means I may start at 120 wpm. I increase the speed by one second every time I hit a mark. For example, a normal dictation at 120 wpm means that I hit a mark every ten seconds. But in this drill, I remove a second every time I hit a new mark. So I reach the first mark at 10 seconds, but the second mark at 19 because I remove a second. In this way, I gradually increase the speed. Using that example, my marks are at 10, 19, 27, 34, 40, 45, 49. Believe it or not, even though the first mark is at 120 wpm, the last mark is at 300 wpm. You start low, and it doesn't take long to reach high speed. Don't worry. The students will stop you before you hit 300.

EXTRA CREDIT

How many students could a steno student steno, if a steno student could steno students? Answer is way, way down below.

EXTRA CREDIT: How many students could a steno student steno, if a steno student could steno students?

ANSWER: Six. Well, heck, did you really expect a logical answer?

Tuesday, July 04, 2006

First message

Current mood: quixotic

Category: WindMillish School, College, Greek

Day One

For a guy who should know how to run a blog, I have my problems. I don't like this. I don't like that.

So I'm going to move my blog (again), and put it here.

You can come and read at any time, or you can subscribe.

General Steno Stuff Court Reporting Help (and steno help), Steno and court reporting drills and programs

We're gonna kick some steno butt. Get ready.

July 5, 2006 at 4:11 am · Filed under Uncategorized

Day One

Current mood: contemplative

I get a new class today. They have been taught well by Lee Medlin. They write well. He has never sent an unprepared student to me.

I'm the speed guy. I teach them how to pass the tests. I show them how to use their natural abilities. I help them to analyze their writing. I open their eyes. I never, ever, ever teach speed. And yet, since I do get them motivated and moving upward, I am the speed guy.

So here is Lesson One from the Speed Guy.

Today we will do a variety of easy drills that approach the speed that they have already conquered. They will be practicing, but not learning. I can't teach them until I know who they are.

While I dictate, I will be looking at their hands and observing their movements. I am searching for the students that raise their fingers high above the keyboard.

Some move the entire hand very high. Small problem. When they stop pounding the keys, they will not lift their hands high.

Others move individual fingers high. Big problem. These students have serious flaws in the writing patterns. They do it for one of two reasons. One, they want to move the unused fingers out of the way to keep from misstroking. Two, they want to move the unused fingers out of the way so that they can see the keyboard.

These are the trouble students. They are the only ones that have trouble in my class. You simply cannot build speed if you spend half your time raising your hands

or fingers out of position. This group works harder than any other group. They spend hours on the keyboard every day. The problem is not work ethic or ability. It is simply a bad writing technique.

Once I have identified these students and counseled them, I can begin my regular teaching.

The best drill for these students: Finger drills

The best advice for these students: Keep all fingers at all times very close to the keyboard. Whether they touch the keys or not is irrelevant, but they must always keep ALL FINGERS near the keyboard. If they do that, they will begin the journey to 225.

Steve Shastay

Steno Rebel

Get steno drills at StenoDrills.com

Get Court Reporting Help at CourtReportingHelp.com

July 5, 2006 - Wednesday

Day Two

Category: Music

Day One of the quarter was fine, although attendance was disappointing, especially for the first day. Here is what I see.

All students are motivated. I didn't have to fight to keep their attention.

Minor problems with basic hand position and/or addressing the machine. A minor problem is one that will not sabotage success, even if the student does not correct the problem. The minor problems are: incorrect machine height; fingers too flat (not curled); slight lifting of fingers and/or wrist rotation.

Major problems (of which I saw none) are extreme lifting of fingers or rotating of wrist; completely flat fingers, extreme hesitation on unfamiliar words, lack of attention; attendance (students were absent, but it too soon to make a judgment).

The worst problem is the lifting of the fingers. This is a dangerous area. It is hard to draw out the natural speed when the fingers are constantly out of position or too far from the keyboard. These students do not show a big problem, but this must be monitored.

Day One had lots of readback on easy to extremely hard material. Easy material was slow. Hard material was extremely slow. They can definitely write.

Day Two will have harder and/or faster material. My job is to train them to handle the dictation at all times. Day One showed me that they have skills. Day Two will tell me if they have poise under pressure.

I will be examining them more closely tomorrow. They didn't show serious problems today. I will be pushing them harder tomorrow to see if they have latent problems that only appear during stressful situations.

Will they break down?

Will they perform like pros?

Tune in tomorrow.

Same steno time.

Same steno station.

Steve Shastay

Steno Rebel

Check out my free drills, especially the Magic Drills at Court Reporting Help

July 6, 2006 - Thursday

Day Three: The Long and Short of Briefs

Day Two saw faster writing, longer dictation, instructions on writing briefs for names, absurdly thick dictation material, work on how to drop, speedbuilding, and the first 5-minute dictation for transcription homework.

That's a ton of material.

I also gave them handouts: word endings, and several lists of briefs and phrases.

Day Three will bring the Top 1000 words to the students.

They will use my program the Brief Man 1000. It is a flashcard type of program. That will help them memorize the terms. It's the easiest method that I know of to quickly learn new strokes. You can get the same effect by making up your own flashcards.

Day Three also brings a review of their first day's homework. From hard copy, they wrote a Magic Drill that was set up for jury charge terms. I asked for one very accurate copy. Before they turned it in, I had them guess how many errors they felt were in their notes, and then they wrote that number on the front of the notes. It is important to know how clearly you stroke, as compared to how clearly you think you stroke.

Several students were outstanding. One needs a little work done on her machine. One repeatedly made the same three mistakes. I like errors like that. All she has to do is learn three things and she will be writing like gangbusters. No students are below my standards for clarity. I am about the toughest teacher in that respect.

Don't make me punk ya junk.

Tomorrow: The big Magilla, as far as how many new words I expect them to know in 6 weeks..

Extra Credit: When you go to the zoo, what is it that those dirty, dirty monkeys throw at you? Answer is way down below.

Steve Shastay

Steno Rebel

blah blah blah Court Reporting Help

yadda yadda yadda Steno Drills

dum diddy dum dum dum dum Casa Brain

Extra Credit: When you go to the zoo, what is it that those dirty, dirty monkeys throw at you?

Answer: Rhesus Pieces

July 7, 2006 - Friday

How misspelling can make you rich

CNN just announced that there is a new word in the dictionary. The word is "google."

Why is that statement almost, but not quite, wrong?

"Google" was invented by the guys at Google. They needed a name. They decided on "googol", but they misspelled it when they did a search to see if the name was available.

"Googol" means a big honking word with a buttload of zeroes. Their misspelling, "google", meant nothing. So they took it as their name. Now, it means -- uh, it now means a word that -- a word that --

Heck, I don't know. Just google it.

EXTRA CREDIT: Name some words that are awful close to "google" in spelling. Answer, as always, is way down below.

EXTRA CREDIT: Name some words that are awful close to "google" in spelling.

Answer: "Googly" and "googly-eyed." Those words are also much older than "google." They refer to eyes that are big and/or bulging. Mary M. Webster (I didn't check the spelling) refers you to "goggle-eyed" when you search for "googly-eyed.

They make no mention of "googly-moogly" as in "Great googly-moogly, who put the cow on the roof?"

And them Google guys say that they are innovators. Ha!!

July 9, 2006 - Sunday

Day 4 -- Hard copy list of Brief Man 1000

Current mood: busy

The students already have Brief Man 1000 (<http://www.stenodrills.com/briefman1000.html>) and several handouts of briefs and phrases. Brief Man 1000 splits up the Top 1000 briefs into lists of 50 words apiece.

I told the students to use Brief Man 1000 over the weekend. I'm sure that they did. Brief Man 1000 works well, but there is also a need for a hard copy list of the Top 1000 briefs that are in Brief Man 1000. Having a hard copy list of the briefs makes it very easy to use Brief Man 1000. That is the subject of their homework for this coming week.

On Monday, each student will receive one sheet of briefs. Each student receives a different sheet. Their homework is to fill out their sheets with the best outlines that they can find. I want the StenEd outline and the StenEd brief (if there is one). I also want them to put any alternate or non-StenEd stroke. The only rule is that they cannot create conflicts with other strokes.

On Tuesday, they will bring back the first sheets. I will Xerox them and pass them out to the class. Then they will get another sheet for homework.

This will continue until we have gone through the entire Top 1000. Each student will have to fill out four or five sheets. In return, they will get a copy of the entire list, as they are filled out by their fellow students.

It will take three days worth of homework to complete the entire wordlist for Brief Man 1000.

I am including part of the Top 1000 briefs in each of the blog entries this week. Read each blog; get the entire list. Look at the end of this entry to find the first section of the Top 1000.

Tomorrow will also see longer drills and faster drills, but not long and fast drills. One or the other: long or fast. Otherwise, it would be easy to overwhelm the students before I have had enough time to teach them what to do during difficult dictation.

Magic Drills will be used daily. This is how I train students to handle tests and/or hard drills.

Last week, for homework, they had to transcribe two hard copy drills and a five-minute dictation. It is about time to give them a practice test, and have them transcribe it at school under test conditions. It's time to begin analyzing their work.

Steve Shastay

Steno Rebel

Court Reporting Help
Steno Drills

.....

Here is @ 1/3 of the Top 1000 Briefs from the Steno Diva Wordlists.

This portion of the list starts with a.m. and ends at freedom. See the list here:

http://www.cheapandsleazy.net/top_one_thousand_part_one.html

Comments:

Do you have any way to write all those words that start with "a-" in this list in one stroke rather than two? (first stroke AI, then second stroke)

Thanks! ;)

Posted by enghncrtrptr on July 10, 2006 - Monday at 12:11 PM

Response:

I have a couple of ways to handle words beginning with a vowel.

1. Drop the vowel: Adopt = DOPT; Adult = DULT.

2. Add the vowel to the second syllable. "Arrest" becomes REST by dropping the vowel, but that is a conflict. Adding the "A" makes sthe stroke RAEST. That isn't a conflict.

3. Create a brief that starts with the vowel. There aren't a lot of choices if the brief begins with a vowel; so be extra careful to avoid conflicts. You have to make choices. APT should not be "apartment" or "appointment." You can use A*PT for one of the words, and if you like it, you can use APT/APT for the other. There are other choices for those words, but they are longer.

4. Depending on your theory, you can change a final S to help create a brief. For instance, "Across can be briefed as KROS, KROZ, or KROSZ. Of course with this word you could lso use AKS, AKZ, ARS, ARZ, ARKS, ARKZ, KRAOS, KRAOZ, KRAOSZ.

5. Some words are real dogs. They don't have natural briefs. Instead you just have to pick something and declare that as your brief. StenEd uses KT for "Account.." I use IP for "Incompetent.." Those briefs don't really look like those words, but they work. By the way, your theory does the same thing, but they take it even further. Here are some arbitrary strokes that are taught in different theories: SPW = "int" as in "interview;" KPW for "imp" as in "improve;" LGTS for "tle" as in "little;" GS as "sion" as in "tension."

There are other ways to make briefs, such as APT = "apt;" APT/APT = "apartment;" and APT/APT/APT = "appointment." You could also "throw in the asterisk" if you like that kind of a brief.

Steve Shastay

Steno Rebel

Monday, July 10, 2006

Day Five -- Second part of Top 1000 Briefs

Recap Day Four

The students typed up their first practice test. Actually, it was three one-minute dictations. One at 60, one at 80, and one at 100 wpm. This was practice typing a transcript in the proper format.

We had several hard drills, one ten-minute drill, and a few speedbuilding exercises. Very little time was spent on the Magic Drills, and that was my fault.

The highlight of the day was drilling on a Magic Drill for Jury Charge terms. They knew most of the briefs. They did have homework one time on these briefs, but this was only Day Four. I was delighted. They are making my job very easy.

Tomorrow, I will Xerox their first lists, and pass them out. Each one filled out one sheet for their homework. They get the benefit of everyone's work.

Tomorrow will also see their first five-minute drill on regular drill material. Here is a secret of our profession. Drill material is almost always much harder than test material. That's a fact. My job is to train them to stay under control at all times.

Here is the next group of words.

NOTE; This group goes from deponent to market. See the list here:

http://www.cheapandsleazy.net/top_one_thousand_part_two.html

Wednesday, July 12, 2006

Nightmare on Steno Street

On Day Five, I was rough. The material was rough. Everything was rough. In fact, on the way home, I asked a dog, and even he said "rough" (phonetic).

I did it for a purpose. Regular speed classes usually use the same material up and down the line. What the 225s drill on, eventually finds its way to the beginning speed classes.

On Day Six, I was much easier. I have to show them what kind of material they will be facing in the speed classes. But I shouldn't beat them over the head with it before they are ready for it.

Day Six was much better. They regained their poise and rhythm.

Day Seven will give them another look at their future speed classes. At the 10:00 class, they will go to the 80/100 class. They will observe for about 20 minutes. No stroking. Just observing.

They will see a five-minute dictation to start the class. That will be followed by one-minute build-up drills. One minute at 80, then 100, then 120. Another minute at 80, then 100, then 120. On and on with plenty of readback.

I want them to fully embrace the wordlists and the Brief Man 1000 program. I don't care if they use the briefs, but they must master the words. One stroke is fine, but so is two or three -- as long as they choose the fastest and most efficient way that they can stroke.

If they don't, then 80/100 class will be one scary room. (Who's that guy with the long fingernails, and why is he talking to the guy in the hockey mask, and why are they pointing over here? Man, I'm gonna study them there briefs and git outta this class.)

From now on, each day will contain some drills from the speed classes. I want them to learn how to work effectively when the material is too hard or too fast.

Day Seven is also the final section of the Top 1000 Briefs. There has been some interest in this project. I will compile the whole list -- and the definitions they came up with -- into a file that I will post here. The definitions will be from StenEd, Brief Encounters, Mrs. Elaine Welch, Ms. Cori Sorensen, Mr. Medlin, or from my punkin head.

I am not a crappy teacher because I allow alternate outlines. StenEd states in their dictionary that they do not include all possible outlines. It also says that any outline, whether it is in the dictionary or not, is a valid StenEd definition as long as it does not create a conflict.

Also, I do not care if they use briefs or phrases. StenEd, again, agrees with me. It says that students should keep a notebook of briefs and phrases they intend to use. They also create a strong distinction between briefs that the students must use (is, be, the, etc.) and briefs that are optional. Optional briefs are all briefs that are not required, and there are only a handful of required briefs.

All I want is for them to choose whether they need a brief or whether they can write out the term. The lure of briefs can be very seductive. Almost all students are faster if they use briefs correctly, rather than writing out the stroke.

This is the basis -- and the flaw -- in half of Mr. Kisslingbury's theory. He shoves briefs down your throat. You are faster if you use briefs without hesitation. You are one quivering, bowl of steno jelly if you hesitate. And once again, StenEd agrees with me. They say that speed is lost, rather than gained, when using briefs that are not fully memorized.

The only correct choice to make is to use briefs and phrases when they come to you immediately, but ignore them if your hands stop while you think of the stroke.

Time to go. Look for the final section of the Top 1000 Briefs just below my signature.

Steve Shastay

Steno Rebel

Find Court Reporting Help at CourtReportingHelp.com.

Get Steno Drills at StenoDrills.com

Here is the final section of the Top 1000 Briefs.

NOTE; This group goes from question to yourselves. See the list here:

http://www.cheapandsleazy.net/top_1000_words_part_three.html

Thursday, July 13, 2006: 4:06 PM

The "Employ" Words

In our theory, StenEd, there is not a prefix stroke for words beginning with "imp" and "emp." Another theory has one, and it is KPW. With KPW, you can stroke the word "impel" as one stroke like this: KPWEL. I don't teach it because it is new to me, but the students learn it from other teachers.

Today, I received an e-mail from Jacqueline Jones, a student at Court Reporting Institute of Houston. She has been working with the Top 1000 Briefs, and she came up with a great set of briefs for words in the "employ" family.

Genius does not come to the lazy. Ms. Jones came up with these strokes after trying the StenEd strokes and doing some research on alternate strokes. She came up with these new strokes because the others did not work for her. Good for her. And good for us.

Here is her letter.

I had a difficult time, for some reason, with the "employ" words. I searched several sources and tried the Sten-Ed way of writing them. I just couldn't remember them for some reason and I am a brief remembering fool! haha....so I found these...worked with them....and they work like a charm for me now.

Employ KB-

employee KBE

employer KB-R

employment KB-MT

I just wanted to share that.

Jacqueline Jones

Cool stuff, huh?

If you have a great idea, send it to me. I'll give you the infamous 15 minutes of fame that Andy Warhol spoke about. In udder words, I'll post your idea. That ain't no bull. Hey, don't have a cow. I won't use puns any moo. Oops.

Now, that's the way to milk a joke.

Steve Shastay

Reno Stebel

[Find steno stuff here](#)

Jacqueline:

I forgot one...lol.....KB-D....employed

I sent these to Mr. Shastay as well:

I thought.... -IGT

you thought.... -UGT
we thought.....-WEGT
she thought....SHEGT
he thought...EGT
they thought....THEGT
And for some reason I write:
I guess.....IGS

Thursday, July 13, 2006; 4:21 AM

Basic Truths About Stenography:

Chapter Nine of the unwritten book, "The Shastay Way"

Clarity is the most important aspect to stenography. Without strong, clear strokes, the student is simply flailing in the wind.

The difference between Theories is inconsequential to your progress. It does not matter which Theory you write. No Theory is substantially better than any other. If your technique is fundamentally sound, you will progress.

The bulk of your practice should be slow and measured. All endurance writing or extended writing should occur at low speed.

Goal-speed practice should occur only after sufficient warm-up. It should end at the first sign of breakdown of the fundamentals.

High-speed practice must end at the first sign of loss of finger speed or clarity. Dont wait for a breakdown of the fundamentals. Dont attempt high-speed practice unless your fundamentals are rock solid.

Never write until you break down or fracture your writing. If the student cannot end a session (classroom setting, externship), and if low-speed, goal-speed, or high-speed drill is becoming too intense, the student should immediately switch to pure test mode.

Test mode is the savior that all students have been searching for.

If a low-speed drill is too long, then the student will tire and breakdown. At the first sign of this happening, switch to test mode.

If a goal-speed drill proves too challenging, the student will begin to hesitate, stumble and breakdown. Switch to test mode to ensure quality writing.

High-speed drills will induce inferior writing for the simple fact that almost all high-speed drills use the wrong type of material. The student should switch to test mode quickly or simply stay in test mode during the entire dictation.

Test nerves are not as serious as everyone thinks they are. They are mostly the result of a lack of confidence, but they are not, in themselves, the reason for failure.

You can perform despite your nerves. If you do not, then you are creating your own prison.

It is a staggering mistake to blame your lack of success on test nerves. Doing so relieves you of responsibility (which makes you feel a little better), but it leaves you in a terrible Catch 22.

If you have test nerves, and if you believe that you cannot pass a test because of them, and if you believe that you can't get rid of them, then you are saying that you will not pass. I do not accept that statement. Neither should you.

I am no better than you. Neither are your teachers. We all had test nerves. Somehow we managed to do it.

You are in charge of your life only if you believe that you are. You deserve success. Believe in yourself.

Thursday, July 13, 2006: 4:51 PM

Day Eight: First and Last Five Minute Practice Test

Next week, we begin testing. Some students will quickly move out and up to the next class.

There is still much to teach them. Chief among them is the importance of mastering all common words. Briefs, phrases, or normal strokes: it doesn't matter, as long as they master them. The most I can do is to keep hammering at them that they cannot allow a common word to be a continuing problem.

So I will bore them again about the importance of mastering their strokes. That only takes a few minutes per hour. The rest of the time will be spent learning how to take a test.

They will get a full five-minute test. It will be at the end of the hour, just like a normal test. They will do good on it, if they handle the warmup drills correctly.

Never let the drill control you. You should always be writing strong strokes. You should have very little hesitation. Either you write the stroke, or you drop it. You should not fall way behind the speaker. Anything more than a 3-word drop is too much.

Tomorrow will be their last practice. After that, we begin to play for real. That is when the fun begins.

Steve Shastay

Steno Rebel

Monday, July 17, 2006: 8:01 PM

Day Nine: Homework for the Thinking Man

The results of their first test are in. Six passed their first 60 wpm test. Those students will be able to test at 80 wpm now. One 60 wpm test is all we require, but they need two 80 wpm tests.

We worked on several hard drills today. Not too much was easy. They are getting better at staying under control on hard material. Hard material for them is simply standard drill material for the rest of the school.

I told them that we will probably test tomorrow, and that I won't be pushing them as hard tomorrow.

On this day, it is their homework that is the most interesting. I'm not a fan of homework just for the H-E-double toothpicks of it. Even in theory class, the students have different needs. This homework was designed to address those needs. It might just do the trick for you.

Here it is:

Write down three things that need work; ie, vowels, soundalikes, right hand endings, etc.

Write down three things that you do well. This isn't all that important. I really need them to focus on their shortcomings. The only benefit here is that if you know your strengths, you will know not to spend a lot of time working on those areas.

Write down 15 briefs that you need to practice. This one is a kick. Some students pick unusual briefs, but most pick popular ones. There will be a lot of duplicate briefs tomorrow.

I will collect their homework and discuss some of the entries on them. I will explain that they should always be looking for their weaknesses so that they can get to work on them.

And then, we will get to work on the briefs. First, I'll tell them to write down any word that gives them trouble. Then we will go over the lists slowly and have them call out the strokes. Then we will stroke the lists. Again, slowly. These are students who have just finished their theory book. They have only just started up the ladder of success. We can't go fast. We aren't practicing yet. We are learning.

One final thought: Briefs are not necessary. Briefs were invented to help with tough words. If you do not have trouble with a certain word, you do not need a brief.

Steve Shastay

Steno Rebel

Tuesday, July 18, 2006: 8:36 PM

Day 10: Stenographer, Heal Thyself

Day 9 went smoothly. We went over their word lists from their homework. They had some good briefs in their lists.

The other part of the homework was to name 3 things that they do well and three things that they don't do well. This needs a little work. They did identify some things, but they don't know enough about the subject yet.

Hence, the subject of Day 10's lesson. If you know what you are doing wrong, you are half way to doing it right.

Tomorrow, I will show them how to analyze their steno tape. It's simple. Underline every missing letter. Circle every added letter. Now look up and down the tape. Look for patterns of wrong letters.

There are simple patterns, such as stroking the P when you only wanted TH. And there are difficult patterns, such as, most shadows occur on the lower keys.

Simple patterns are easy to find. If you stroke E when you want O, then it will show up in your transcript. And once you are aware of the trouble, you are on your way to cleaning up those strokes.

Difficult patterns are harder to diagnose.

If your right hand is Mr. Crappy, then go to CourtReportingHelp.com and look for the article named, Right Hand Letters D and Z. Don't worry about the title. It is about why your right hand keeps letting you down.

If you can tell from your notes that your misstrokes are due to adding letters from the top row of letters or failing to stroke letters on the bottom row, then your machine is probably too close or too low.

If you can tell that your misstrokes are due to dropping letters from the top row or adding letters to the bottom row, then your machine is probably too far away or too high.

If your numbers really really suck, then you should also read the article named Right Hand Letters D and Z.

This is the second time that I mentioned that article. In short this is what you will learn from that article. All strokes of all types, bar none, are done the same: The fingers move downward. Some strokes allow you to do so with just the fingers. Others need you to use the wrist or elbow.

Regardless of the stroke, the fingers should never begin the downward motion until the stroke is fully formed.

If you don't follow that rule, you will be trying to use the fingers to stroke a word that requires you to use the wrist or elbow.

I wrote enough for tonight. I didn't cover everything that we will do tomorrow. The other big topic is "How to Analyze a Test for Fun and Profit, and hopefully, World Domination. Nah, just kidding about that. Analyzing a test isn't fun. It's like a

doctor's appointment. You do it because you must, but you hope they don't find anything.

Steve Shastay

Steno Rebel

Tuesday, July 18, 2006: 9:29 PM

How to Stay Poor Despite a Teacher's Salary

If you can read this, then you qualify for a discount at StenoDrills.com.

For every two MP3 drill CDs that you purchase, we will throw in an extra one of your choice. No restriction as to price. Order the cheap ones. Ask for an expensive one for the free one. No restriction as to number. Order as much as you want.

This is a promotion. We won't make any money, but hopefully a few more people will find out about us.

But you have to do this. When you purchase, there is a place for you to write a note. That is where you have to request the free CD. If you don't do it, we won't know to send you one.

If you can't figure out how to put a note in the order, you can send an e-mail to admin@buysteno.com. You don't have to remember it. You can find that address on BuySteno.com.

Steve Shastay

Steno Rebel

Wednesday, July 19, 2006

Day 11: Stroke Strengtheners by Anna Mae Tedley

I just lost a few hours work. I tried to publish and MySpace came up with an error. I couldn't get back to the original page, and the work is lost.

I will not go into a review of Day 11. I don't have time. I'll just say that we did very hard drill, and they did fine.

The concept that I am introducing tomorrow is Silly Sentences, or Stroke Strengtheners as Anna Mae Tedley calls them.

Here is one of them. It has directions.

.....

Much fresh bottled milk spawns damp lunch desk film.

Practice this sentence over and over. Work on it for the next seven days. Don't cheat. Don't work on speed.

Concentrate on correct outlines. Work on these strokes, and they will improve quickly.

The hidden trick to this drill is that you are reinforcing your muscle memory. These are strokes that cause hesitation. You need concentrated practice on these strokes in particular. Your fingers will react quicker and you will write cleaner with a little extra effort.

Anna Mae Tedley

.....

I remember the last time I saw Anna Mae.

I was like, Yo, and she was like, Hello, and I was like, wow, and she was like, Could you use sentences, and I was like 'kay, and she was like Are you the driver, and I was like Uh.

Ah, teachers' conventions.

Steve Shastay

Steno Rebel

BuySteno.com

Thursday, July 20, 2006: 7:29 PM

Day 12: Continued Hard Drill

Day 12 -- hard material, finger drills, Anna Mae Tedley's Stroke Strengtheners, Newspaper articles on terrorism, baseball, Jessica Simpson, and the want ads.

When you do hard material, you have to be extra careful to monitor performance with readback. This is a key point. When the notes start getting sloppy, it is time to pull back, and do a drill for clarity.

I believe the Stroke Stengtheners were the hardest. They may not remember it that way because each Stroke Strengtheners is short. But I think they were the toughest. I earnestly hope that my students drilled hard on them.

Tomorrow, I return more tests to them. This is the point where they think that they are moving backwards. Some of these tests have too many errors. That is okay. In fact, it is expected.

Everybody is doing well. Of course, some are going faster, but everyone is doing fine. There are more failed tests this time around, and like I say, that is normal.

Some students wrote two or three minutes with few errors. This proves that they have the speed and the skill. All they need is another week to smooth out their writing.

Others have large drops. They just need to work on dropping a little sooner so that they drop fewer words.

One has too many errors, but the errors were mainly one word at a time. That student should not change anything. If you can fail a test like that, passing a test is right around the corner.

Tomorrow, we take another test. And then it's the weekend.

Steve Shastay

Steno Rebel

Thursday, July 20, 2006: 8:00 PM

High Speed Students Have Their Problems Too

I received two letters from high-speed students. One is a why-am-I-stuck letter. The other asks specifically about stroking through strange words or strokes that break your rhythm.

Both students are doing fine. One has made steady progress. The other says she has been in 180 for four months. That is not a long time, even if it is longer than she wants.

Here goes.

I don't know enough about each student; so I have to give general advice.

1. Driven, Type A personalities tend to work themselves to death. Just before death, they start to complain about diminishing results. These guys always feel like they have a thousand things that they should do today. Pressure like that can take all of the fun out of stenography. Relax.

2. The Stroke Strengtheners from yesterday's blog could help. There will always be hard words and slow strokes. Those strokes must be worked on. The hard strokes tend to stay slow, but you must work on them. If general finger speed goes up, but the hard strokes remain at the same speed, there will be a problem. The hard strokes are now relatively harder than before. If a stroke takes 2 seconds at 60 wpm, I will fall behind by one second. I only have to find one two-word brief to make up that one second. That's not too bad. But if I am in 200s and that stroke still takes two seconds, I have just fallen behind by 12 words. Then I am really in deep doo-doo. The penalty becomes greater at the higher speed. A 180 student will fall three words behind for each second of hesitation.

3. You can get a hitch in yer giddyap from time to time. Some days, it will seem like your hands are moving through molasses. I would hook up the old cables and give them a jump start. Here is what I recommend. Pick 2 drills: one hard, and one easy. The easy one should be below your normal speed. Practice to the easy one until you feel as warmed up as possible. Then switch to the hard one. Before you begin, imagine your hands moving smoothly and quickly to the keys. Psych yourself up. Get ready to fight the good fight. And press that play button and kick some steno butt. Easy stuff to warm up. Hard stuff to prove your mettle. Get 'em, tiger.

4. I believe in hard copy. Good things happen with hard copy. You never fall behind. You never have to remember a ton of words. You never have to drop. You never have to race to catch up. Another good thing happens. Every time you come to a problem word, you will slow down. It will be obvious that you are slowing down specifically because of that word. After all, you aren't behind or carrying or racing to catch up. All you are doing is stroking each word as it comes along. If you hesitate, then you are hesitating because of the word you are stroking. You have just found a

problem word. Give extra attention to those words. Make it your goal to write smoothly at a controlled rate, but without hesitation. A little of this a day goes a long way.

5. Most students work on speed. The better ones work on speed and monitor their clarity, carrying, hesitating, etc. The best ones work on clarity, carrying, hesitating, etc. StenEd has a page in their theory book with these words in boldface: "Strive for accuracy; Speed will come later." It doesn't say work on speed later. It says "Speed will come later." And it will, if you work on everything but speed. When your accuracy goes up, you will be faster. When you carry less, you will be faster. When you stop hesitating, you will be faster. And it will all come without working on speed.

6. Grade your tests. Find out what type of stroke caused the most errors. Look for contractions, S, D and G endings, numbers, vowels, names, phrases, briefs, clarity, spelling, etc. Find the biggest group. That is where you will get the most benefit from your drill.

7. And again, grade your tests. Examine the areas on the test that have the largest amount of errors. What caused the errors? Was it the words themselves? Was it hard strokes that came up before the errors? Was it because you were carrying a ton of words and had to drop? Was it because you got nervous? Was it because you got distracted? What can you do to minimize the damage the next time?

I'm sure there is more I could say, but it's 12:30; and the alarm will be ringing at 5:30 to usher in another chapter in This Is Your Life, Stephen Shastay. And at this point in time, I wish I had kicked in the extra bucks to get the extended warranty.

Stephen Shastay

Steno Rebel

Tuesday, July 24, 2006

Sale: Moussaoui Opening Statements MP3

The Moussaoui Opening Statements MP3 CD has been released. It's introductory price is a mere \$7.99. Get it at BuySteno.com.

You get 12 5-minute drills at the speed of your choice. Six of those drills are by the prosecution. Six are by the defense.

You also get the entire 12 drills from the next higher speed.

And you get the text files for the drills, in case you need names or spellings.

\$7.99 for 2 full hours of drill. That is cheap.

Don't forget the special offer for all of you MySpace cadets. If you order two items from StenoDrills.com, you get a third CD of your choice for free. All you must do is include a note with your order stating that you heard about the offer on MySpace.com. Oh, and tell us which CD you want for the free one.

You won't find that special offer on BuySteno.com. It is just for the people of MySpace. It isn't advertised anywhere else. Just drop us a note with your order, and we will send out a free CD for every two that you order. There is no restriction as to price or number of free CDs. You can order the less expensive stuff, and get the high ticket items for free. Way cool.

Steve Shastay

Steno Rebel

Wednesday, July 25, 2006: 4:21 PM

Day 14 Increasing the Tempo

Day 14 Monday, July 24

There are a lot of things that you can do when students are struggling. But there is only one thing to do when students are progressing: Turn it up.

Today, we did regular drill, but we went faster than ever before. The instructions were similar to what you would tell a novice passenger on a motorcycle: Hang on!!

Most students try to match the speed of the drill. Most teachers urge them to do so. This leads to sloppy notes, big drops, and the occasional tear.

That's not the kind of student that I want.

When the drill becomes hard and fast, keep your poise. Stroke the same way as when the drill is slower. Get every word clean. Get every ending on every word that you write. Get all of the little words. Get as many of the big words as you possibly can.

Always work to maximize the score. If that hard drill was a test, would you have scored the highest possible score that you could get?

Here it is in a nutshell: Never try to get it all. Nobody can do that at all times. Always try to get as much as you possibly can. Everybody can do that.

It's all part of the steno plan, baby.

Steve Shastay

Steno Rebel

Get yer steno drills at BuySteno.com

P.S. I liked colons today. Men my age tend to think about them. Did you agree with how I used them? Look in the 1st, 2nd, and next-to-last paragraphs. Then look down below for a message about them.

Ha, ha. Made you think, Ha, ha. Made you think. Ha, ha. Made you think.

And you weren't even in school.

Tuesday, July 25, 2006: 4:40 PM

Day 15 Hard Material

Day 15 Tuesday, July 25

You can tune a piano, but you can't tuna fish. I know 'cause I tried. Got slimy stuff on my fingers, and the fish didn't sound any better when I was done.

Anyway, you shouldn't try to do things that obviously won't work.

Yesterday's drill was fast. "Yadda, yadda, yadda." Rat-a-tat tat. "Yadda, yadda, yadda." Rat-a-tat tat. I talked. They wrote.

Today's drill was super hard. We didn't go fast. That wouldn't be good. Remember the tuna?

We didn't even go regular. That still would have been too fast.

We went slow, slow, slow.

That's the only way to dictate tough material if you expect the students to learn how to write the words.

If you are teaching them the skill of how to drop, then hard, fast drill is perfect because they have to drop. That's what you are teaching. That's what you should do.

But I wanted them to write as much as they could. I had to keep the drill very slow. Even though I kept it slow, no one in the class got all of the material.

We did thicken Jury Charge. One of them was on contract law. We spent time on the Israeli invasion of Lebanon. We had plenty of names in the last class. There was

a speech by Reagan. Hey, actors have brains. Of course, you can't forget Jessica Simpson. She dovetails nicely with today's tuna theme.

Yesterday's drill was fast. We had a lot of readback. When the notes started to get sloppy, I lowered the speed and did short drills.

Today's drill was difficult. We had a lot of readback. When the notes started to get sloppy, I found easier material and did short drills.

Everybody is writing clear strokes -- no matter what type of material or speed. Life is good.

Steve Shastay

Steno Rebel

If you want to catch a hilarious clip of President Reagan and Jessica Simpson, (including the tuna incident), go here --

<http://www.courtreportinghelp.com/Goofy/Goofy.htm>

-- and look for "Two people I want to see in a deposition." It's in the middle of the page under the picture.

Thursday, July 27, 2006: 8:38 PM

Day 16 Students are ready to move up

Day 16 -- July 26

I started fielding questions about when it it time to move up. These questions were from students who could move up now, if they chose to do so. They have passed their required number of tests, and they are chafing at the yoke that is theory.

My reply was to ask them how they did on Monday (fast drill) and Tuesday (thick material). They said that they did fine, and I believe them.

By and large, the students write under control. Some of them write a bit sloppy, but they will change their ways as I continuously and continually point out how many errors are due to sloppy notes.

I knew that some of them were getting ready. That was the whole point of Monday and Tuesday. They have to be able to handle material, and they have to know how to drop when they must. So I metaphorically shoved absolutely horrible stuff down their throats on those two days.

That told me a lot. They can handle the hard stuff.

These students passed their 80s with me, but now they want to go to a class that will drill 80, 100, and 120 all day long. That can be a big jump from my class. Sure, I use hard material sometimes, but I don't drill the same as a speed class.

I prep the class before each take. Here is a sample of what I say over and over and over day after day after day. (Yadda, yadda, yadda)

"This next drill is going to be 100. If you had any trouble with the 80, then you better go into this drill knowing that you will have more trouble with the 100. Be ready to drop instantly. Make sure you drop the difficult words. Pick up all of the small or easy words.

"Get your maximum score. If this was the hard part of a test, you need to try to get the best score, and you do that by writing all of the easy words and as many of the hard ones as you possibly can. Clean, clear strokes. Don't waste effort on something that can't be read.

"Hesitation kills speed. Don't allow yourself to hesitate. Write it or drop it. Your brain works thousands of times faster than your hands. If your hands stop because your brain isn't supplying the stroke fast enough, then write it out or drop the word."

Those last few paragraphs are things that I say in between each dictation. I drill. Then I lecture. I drill. Then I lecture.

Speed classes usually cut out the lecture. They typically have 10 or 20 seconds between drills, and their drills are generally longer. The teachers do lecture, but by the time you hit speed class, they expect you to have a basic understanding of how to write under control. A lot of their advice pertains to briefs, phrases, and specific terms that appear in the transcript.

I think my students are ready for them.

Steve Shastay

Steno Rebel

Thursday, July 27, 2006: 9:12 PM

A Big Taste of Speed Class

Day 17, Thursday, July 28

Today, I gave them a close-up view of a speed class. Thanks to Mrs. Welch, the 80/100 teacher, my entire Theory class sat in on one or more of her classes.

At 10:00, I allowed those who had passed all of their tests to go to Mrs. Welch's class. I drilled and tested the others.

At 11:00, all of us went to her class. I have known Mrs. Welch for 15 years, but I have never been in her class while she drilled. It was great. She has a good tempo. She starts with a 5-minute take. Then she goes over it. She spends more time with the hard parts. She lowers the drill speed and gets them under control. Then she builds up the speed.

I was impressed.

Mrs. Welch believes in readback. She had a lot of it, and my guys were sticking their hands in the air all the time. It was great.

When we got back to my class, they had some comments. "Speed classes are constantly writing." "They don't give you a chance to catch your breath." "Boy, am I tired."

Out of 13 students, I expect 4 or 5 to take the plunge. It will take them a week or so to become acclimated to the amount of drill and the tempo of the class, but they are ready.

Steve Shastay

Steno Rebel

Wednesday, August 2, 2006

Phrasing at High Speed

I have been assigned to night classes. I have less time to do things. I will have to stop writing about each day in class. I won't have time on some days.

Instead, I will write about whatever comes to mind. You guys can give me ideas.

Here is a question from a student in her 225s.

QUESTION: I am currently a student and only have my 225 testimony test left to pass. I have completed Jury, Lit, Multivoice, and Medical. I just can't seem to get the speed. I think it may be because I walk my fingers across the keyboard a little bit. Meaning, at certain times I put my fingers on the left side of the keyboard and then think about where they belong on the right side -- mainly with phrases. It may be a split second, but I think if I fix this problem it may be enough to get the 225. Any suggestions?

ANSWER: You seem to have a good grasp of your abilities. If phrases are slower than other strokes, you will still probably gain a bit of speed because a phrase is worth two or more words. For instance, if you take a stroke's worth of time to write a two-word phrase, you gain one stroke's worth of time. If you take one-and-a-half stroke's worth of time, then you gain only a half stroke, but it is still a gain.

Since you have narrowed it down to mainly phrases, then you should spend some time reviewing phrases. You can't wait for them to show up in drill. You should review them from your dictionary or handouts. Find the ones that give you trouble. See if you can find a pattern.

Do you have trouble with phrases like the "I don't" phrases, but not with others like the "I didn't" phrases? This is probably just knowledge of the pattern. Once you do them enough, you will get them.

Do you have trouble with phrases that have hard finger patterns? Join the club. Doing a final FRP is a standard stroke in StenEd, but it will always be a hard one. If you have phrases that contain hard strokes, they will always be slow.

Do you have trouble with phrases that contain the asterisk, the final D, and maybe even the final Z? Fingers have to stretch for those keys. You have to move the fingers farther to get to them.

How about phrases that contain multi-key letters such as final N or final J, plus some other right-hand letters? Final N can be easy, but combine it with a few other letters and it can be difficult. Stroking FNL as part of a phrase can be murder.

How about alternating up and down letters? "Believable" contains a final FBL. That can be very hard.

Anyway, you look for phrases that give you trouble because you haven't memorized them well enough. And you look for ones that are hard for you to finger even though you know them.

Those are the only ones that need practice. In some cases, you might want to stop using the phrase because it interrupts your rhythm. Alternately, you might be able to make the phrase substantially easier by changing it to another pattern.

Our phrase for House of Representatives is HOURPTS. I recommend that students do anything but that stroke. It's fine if they stroke it out. And it's fine if they change it to HOURS, HOURTS, HOURPS, HOFR, HOUFRP or anything else that they can write clearly and quickly and without conflict.

My answer is sort of scattershot, but I hope that something helps. If not, write again.

Steve Shastay

Steno Rebel

Monday, August 7, 2006: 6:49 AM

Goal for Today

You can't climb the whole mountain today.

But you can take a big step forward.

Are you sloppy? Get the first two sentences of every drill without a misstroke.

Are you a carrier? Make your first drop a big word, and do it before you fall dangerously behind.

Are you a hesitator? Jump straight into the first big word without stopping to think about how to write the whole thing. Get it syllable by syllable.

Do you need more briefs and phrases? Get that list started.

It can be painful at first to get yourself moving in the right direction.

You know what they say: A journey of a thousand miles begins with a cavity search at the airport.

Ouch.

Steve Shastay

Steno Rebel

Monday, August 7, 2006: 2:29 PM

Brief and Phrase List -- Accident Phrases

These are the first briefs and/or phrases sent to me. If ya got 'em, I'll post 'em.

Stef the Eff, (Stef a Knee) sent them. She found them in a Yahoo CR forum.

TAOIX (TAOEUBGS) at the time of the accident (tykes is TAOIKZ)

DAIX day of the accident

DAEX date of the accident

HAEX happening of the accident

SDAP(D) accident happen (ed)

SDUR(D) accident occur (red)

SDAEP accident take place

SDAOP accident took place

Accident phrases: proof that you can find something good in the pain of others.

Steve Shastay

Steno Rebel

Tuesday, August 8, 2006

Correct Your Tests

Can't say it enough. You need to correct your tests. When you are finished correcting, you should be able to read every word of the entire transcript.

Then you go through your notes and analyze. It should be obvious what happened during the test.

Some people "push" for speed and write sloppy.

Some "push" through that big word and then drop a bunch of easy ones.

There are other causes for your mistakes, but those are the big two.

If you don't know how you make the errors, you don't know how to correct them.

Correct your tests. Correct your tests. Correct your tests.

Steve Shastay

Steno Rebel

Thursday, August 10, 2006

You Are Already a Winner

When I went to school, I hated when people asked me if I had passed a test. My fellow students didn't bother me. They were my rock.

It was outside friends and family. They were concerned, but they didn't understand how a steno school is run. I'd tell them time and again that I was tested almost daily, but that I would only start passing when I gained the speed.

And still, they would ask. And it made me feel bad.

Let me tell you something.

The fact that you get your butt down to the school each day,

The fact that you practice at home night after night,

The fact that you are still working long after everyone else is in bed,

The fact that you stood up one day (before you entered school) and shouted into the malestrom, "Enough. I want a better life for me and my family,

For all those reasons and many more,

You are already a winner in my book.

So you keep rocking, baby. You'll get there.

Steve Shastay

Steno Rebel

Monday, August 14, 2006

180 wpm for Theory

We are at the mid-point of the semester. The students who arrived writing 40 and 50 wpm can now write well at 140 and higher. They read back at 160, and they did hit 180.

How?

By using the Magic Drills.

If you are going to learn how to write fast, you have to do it on material that is easy to do and familiar to you. There is no sense in going fast on difficult material.

Anyway, it's true. They are trying for 80s, and they are drilling substantially higher.

Try the Magic Drills. You can find them on the top of the page at CourtReportingHelp.com. The ones that are posted are the only ones that available. You can download them for free.

Steve Shastay

Steno Rebel

Wednesday, August 16, 2006

Each New Speed Class is a Shock

QUESTION: Hey Mr. Shastay- I just entered my speeds 120s-140s today.. and i must say.. I was shocked as to how hard it was. I felt so incredibly behind which is normal I suppose. At first.

I was wondering if you had any tips for me...and wondering if you had an idea as to how long it might take (I know its different for everyone) for me to get use to this, and start catching up with everyone else. I absolutely HATE this feeling...and I do what you have taught us-to drop what I can't write b/c one of my goals is to just write as clearly as possible ... and speed will come later.

Any of your input would be appreciated:) thanks

ANSWER: Welcome to the wonderful world of court reporting. Each class pushes you harder than the last class. Ya just gotta hang on. It will become easier as you get acclimated to the new speeds.

To get to the nitty gritty, it works like this. You were in 80/100 class. They drill at 80, 100, and 120. You passed your two tests at 100. Now you are in 120/140. They drill at 120, 140 and 160.

So because you sat in the 80/100 for a while and managed to pass just two little tests at 100, your reward is that you now will be sitting in a class that drills at speeds much much higher.

The day before you passed your final 100, you could only say that you finished the requirements of the 80 wpm level.

The day after you passed your final 100, they started drilling you as high as 160 -- which is a full 100% higher than those 80 tests.

That is quite a jump, but it is a jump that is made by virtually all students in all schools.

Here is the good news. The difference between the 200 and 225 wpm classes is not as big of a jump. For instance, the difference between 80 and 100 is a 25% increase, but the difference between 200 and 225 is just half of that or 12.5%. It's one of those math things.

Keep that clarity.

Stephen Shastay

Steno Rebel

Friday, August 18, 2006

You Have The Speed Already

Six weeks ago, new students entered my class. We started at 40 words per minute. As they became stronger, we built up the speed.

One of my classes, the 8 a.m. class, had very few students. As the students passed their tests, they moved to another speed. That class became smaller.

Today, there is only one student who comes to that class, Ms. Kim Murrell. She's a fine writer. She has passed her 80s, but she has chosen to stay in my class.

Since she is the only one, I can direct the drill to help her the most. Today, she drilled and read back at 200 wpm. She got almost all of it, and what she got was all readable.

Excellent.

You have the speed. You need the clarity, the rhythm, the poise and grace.

But you have the speed.

If you can write well, like Ms. Murrell, you can also write fast -- like Ms. Murrell.

Steve Shastay

Steno Rebel

Friday, August 18, 2006

You Have the Speed Already, Part Deux

In the 11 a.m. class, Ms. Cassie Bittinger joined Ms. Murrell as my first theory students ever to read at 200 wpm. She got -- and hold on to your chair -- 100 percent.

Short dictation. Easy material. Nonetheless, the fact remains that these students wrote and read back at 200 wpm. Both students have not yet tested at 100 wpm.

So please do your Magic Drills, and please follow the instructions for each one. Get 'em at CourtReportingHelp.com. Look at the top of the page for the links.

Steve Shastay

Steno Rebel

Tuesday, August 22, 2006

Body Mechanics

I play pool. See the shot. Take the shot. Simple.

Just like steno. Hear the word. Stroke the word.

Simple.

In pool, I know that I have certain problems. I grip the stick too tightly, and sometimes, I don't center myself over the stick.

So I have a set of instructions on how to shoot. Here it is.

Chalk the stick.

Figure out the stroke before you bend down to the shot.

Get directly behind the ball.

Line up shot before bending down.

Bridge left hand before bending down.

Right hand touches hip before bending down.

Right elbow up.

Center left hand.

Sight down stick.

Thumb points at floor. (very important)

Adjust stick by moving upper right arm, not forearm. (way important)

Use practice strokes.

When stroking, forget cue ball placement; concentrate on object ball.

Firm, not hard, stroke.

If I can ever get those steps down, my mechanics will be very good.

How about steno?

Is your machine the proper height?

Are your fingers curved?

Is your butt in the middle of the chair?

Are your arms extended too much or pulled in too much?

Is your head straight?

Do you lean forward unnecessarily?

Are your hands way out of position after hitting a final D or similar letter?

Are your wrists relatively straight?

DO YOU ALWAYS WRITE FROM THE EXACT SAME POSITION EACH TIME?

All sports instructors recommend that you follow the same patterns on every shot, every play, every movement. That's why Tiger Woods is Tiger Woods, and that's why Joe Shmoe will remain Joe Shmoe. Tiger has three shots that he uses for 95% of his game -- a drive, a putt, and a short shot to get the ball on the green. Most of the variations that he uses are variations on how hard he performs those three shots. Everything else is the same, shot after shot after shot.

It's all about muscle memory, baby. You will do better if you reduce your body mechanics to only one basic set. The more variables that you have, the harder it will be for your body to pull off the strokes.

Steve Shastay

Steno Rebel

Wednesday, August 23, 2006

bin Ladenism or Bin Ladenism?

When we first heard of that bin Laden guy, I remember that there were variations of the spelling. Eventually, we, collectively, decided on its present spelling.

The same thing happened with Al Qaeda. I remember at least three variations.

Now, I am hearing of bin Ladenism. I have seen it capped on one of the top news sites. That looked strange, so I did some digging. The venerable Merriam-Webster people have a listing for bin Laden, but not bin Ladenism.

Hmmm, the experts are silent. What to do? What to do?

My searching has turned up a roughly equal mix of "bin Ladenism" and "Bin Ladenism" in the top results of a web search. However, after the top 20, it seems that the uncapped version is more popular.

I don't have the answer. If I had to put it in a transcript, I would do it "bin Ladenism" because that follows the normal spelling of the name, and because I can't find a definitive answer.

Why such confusion? Don't know. Words are funny people, and even people are funny people.

Consider Kim Jong il. Most people would capitalize all three words in the North Korean dictator's name. But Kim Jong il doesn't do that.

Heck, Kim Jong il says that his real name is really Kim Jong-il. Give him a hyphen if you want to satisfy him.

But in the newspapers, you are much more likely to see Kim Jong Il. It's incorrect on two counts, but that's life.

I believe it was Safire who addressed the problem. He said that it's wrong to capitalize the last word, but it looks funny if you don't. I don't believe he said a darn thing about the hyphen.

That's life, and that's why court reporters tend to smoke, drink, and pull out their hair.

Steve Shastay

Steno Rebel

Thursday, August 31, 2006

Gunga Din

You're a better man than I am, Gunga Din.

Rudyard Kipling went to India. He wrote about what he experienced. In the poem, Gunga Din was a water carrier or common laborer for the English Army.

He wasn't a soldier. He didn't have a gun. But he did accompany the soldiers to the battlefield. The poem boils down to a drink that he gave to a soldier who had

been shot on the battlefield. The soldier survived. Gunga Din did not. And all because he did more than was expected of him.

You're a better man than I am, Gunga Din.

12:55 120/140 class August 30

"You're a better man than I am, Gunga Din." Who was Gunga Din? He was a guy who gave more than the minimum. He died helping others.

"We're not asking you to die, and we're not asking you to do more. All we want for the next hour is that you settle down and do your normal job, which is to drill, drill, drill.

"Yes, it is the last hour of the day. And yes, you are tired and hungry. But you are here in this classroom. The only useful thing that you can do for the next hour is drill. If you keep your head in the game, you will leave here one step closer to graduation.

"If you don't, then at best, you will completely waste the hour. At worst, you will develop bad habits, such as giving up during a drill, writing sloppy; carrying, et cetera.

"Gunga Din went the extra mile. You paid dearly to be here. All I want from you is to do the drills that you paid this school to give to you.

Din! Din! Din!

You Lazarushian-leather Gunga Din

Tho' I've belted you an' flayed you,

By the livin' Gawd that made you,

You're a better man than I am, Gunga Din!

Stephen Shastay

Steno Rebel

Wednesday, September 06, 2006

Where Should Your Focus Be On A Test?

Where Should Your Focus Be On A Test?

Somebody put an article on my desk about what to do during a test. I didn't like it at all. There were a lot of wrong-headed ideas, such as "start writing immediately after a drop." I don't want you to do that. You should never stop. I want you to keep writing at all times, but especially when you have a drop. If your hands aren't moving -- for any reason -- then you are lost.

Another one was "practice until you have dropped in about three places" then rewind the tape and work on the problem areas. Again, I don't want you to do that. You should have drops in all of your drills unless you are fast enough to get it all. If you have three drops, and the total number of words dropped is 9 words or less, then you are writing like a pro. Small drops are not a problem.

Any big drop is a killer, and it means that you have stopped writing effectively. The best thing to do if you are having big drops is to stop writing immediately. Don't rewind and drill again until you are sure that you will 1, write clearly, 2, keep the hands moving, and 3 keep the drops small.

If you still have big drops, try a slower speed.

If you still have big drops, run to CourtReportingHelp.com and try the Magic Drills.

But this blog is about focus.

The author of the article says to use focal points, such as chairs, desks, clocks, etc. The author says if the effect of focusing on one focal point wears off, then you should move on to a second, a third, etc.

Then the author says listen intently to the speaker. Ahh, here's a good bit of advice, but if I am intently focusing on my focal points, won't I have less to give to the speaker.

What should a good reporter do in such a situation?

Well, let me ask you a question. Why do those meditation guys focus on a candle or focus on the same word that they repeat over and over? They do that because it empties the mind of all distractions.

So if it empties the mind of all distractions, why would it be bad for a reporter to do so?

Well, let me ask you a question. Why is it that those karate guys don't focus on a candle when they break bricks?

There is a good reason why they don't do that. If they focus on a candle, then they are not focusing on the job at hand. Focusing on a candle effectively removes all distractions, but it also removes all thought. They would break an awful lot of bones if they did that.

The meditation guys focus on the candle only until they have rid themselves of outside distractions. Once they are calm and focused, then they begin the real job which is stuff like "what is the sound of one hand clapping" and "what is that stuff in Twinkies."

Focusing on a candle -- or a desk or a chair or anything -- will turn your attention to that thing at the expense of all else.

Stare at a point if you want to do that. That is fine. I find that it helps clear my mind. But don't focus on it. The difference is not slight. It is critical.

Do you want your dentist to focus on a candle while he works on your root canal?
Do you want your taxi driver to focus on a candle while he weaves through traffic?
Do you want your hairdresser to focus on a candle while working on your hair?

Of course not. Their attention belongs elsewhere.

And the defendant does not want you focusing on anything but the testimony when he is on trial.

You will not write faster or better by focusing on anything but the dictation. Don't let anyone tell you different.

Steve Shastay

Steno Rebel

Sunday, September 17, 2006

What Do I Want From a Student

It's my job to move students from Theory to the Speed classes. Generally, I can get them all on their way. However, there are always a few that have trouble.

The problem is almost always clarity. Those who cannot pass a 60s test within a few weeks of drill are always sloppy writers. They may have other faults, but the sloppy notes are the big problem. With any other problem, the students can usually pass their 60s tests.

Those who have trouble passing 80s may have problems with dropping properly or with nerves. If so, they practice, and then they move up. But usually, the problem is clarity, and it can be quite some time before the tests are passed.

The reason it takes a long time is that sloppy writers do not feel that they are writing so sloppy that it is causing them to fail. They believe that they write sloppy because they do not have enough speed. So it takes a long time for them to pass because it takes a long time to convince them.

So what do I want from a student? I want a student who will believe me that clarity is more important than any other aspect of their writing.

If they enter my class with sloppy notes, that is all right. Just so long as they never write sloppy again.

Steve Shastay

Steno Rebel

Tuesday, September 26, 2006

Current mood: mood spelled backwards is doom

"Doctor, doctor, it hurts when I go like this!"

And the doctor says: "Don't go like that."

It's an old joke, but the advice is medically sound in some cases. Many doctors will tell you not to play basketball or tennis if the results are pain and agony. What else would you expect them to say?

"Teacher, teacher, I can't pass when I write like this."

Now, just what do you expect your teacher to say? The answer has to start with "don't write like that," and hopefully, there is a little advice about how to write properly.

But the bottom line is: you won't pass tests if you don't write clean strokes. So don't write that way.

You will also flounder if you have trouble with basic strokes that show up in words like, WASH, CAMP, FUNCTION, BAND, CAUTIOUS, SINK, CARVE. So learn those strokes.

Steve Shastay
Steno Rebel

P.S. One more joke.

Doctor, doctor, I get a pain in my eye whenever I drink coffee. What should I do?

Take the spoon out of the cup.

Tuesday, September 26, 2006

Ain't It Funny That the Words UNDERWEAR and THONG tain't briefs?

Okay, Steno Babies, you've had enough time off on your semester break. Let's see how good you hotshots are.

These words come from Lesson 34 of the StenEd Theory book. Can you write a conflict-free stroke for each word? Well, let's find out.

Warning: There are a couple of sneaky ones in here.

Bossy

Lesser

Hassle

Wheat

Wrap

Bonus

Zealous

Curious

Blight

Barb

Shred

The answers below are the StenEd outlines from the theory book. You can have variations as long as you don't have conflicts.

Boss BOSZ -- double S

Bossy BOS/SI -- double S that is split so to avoid the conflict with the word I

Lesser LESZ/ER -- double S and no need to split

Accessory AK/SESZ/RI -- double S and no need to split

Concession KON/SEGS -- you better know this one

Hassle HAS/L -- all you need is the L for the ending

Wheat WHAOET -- silent letter

Wrap WRAP -- silent letter

Bonus BOE/NUS -- US ending needs the consonant N

Zealous ZEL/OUS -- OUS ENDING

Curious KAOUR/YOUS -- OUS ending that begins with a Y sound

Blight BLAOIGT -- silent letter

Barb is BAR/B because Bash is BARB

Shred is SH/RED because Sled is SLED

I write all of these words with good StenEd strokes, but I don't necessarily use these strokes. The double S words in particular can be written several ways.

The only important one is the word CURIOUS which is too popular to do as two strokes.

The other changes can help, but they aren't nearly as important. Let's just say that if you have trouble with the briefs for words like CURIOUS, then you shouldn't spend any time working on words like HASSLE.

Steno Rebel Changes

Curious -- KAOURS

Hassle -- HAFL

Lesser -- LEFR

Bonus -- BOENS

Zealous can be written ZELS, but there is a steep downside to briefing rarely used words: You will also have to read it. That is much harder when the brief is seldom used.

Steve Shastay

Steno Rebel

EXTRA KNOWLEDGE FOR FREE: Remember the title to this blog? If you don't, it's, "Ain't It Funny That the Words UNDERWEAR and THONG tain't briefs?"

That ain't all.

Briefs are underwear and briefs, but the word BRIEFS isn't a brief. In fact, it's not even one-stroker in StedEd.

Tuesday, September 26, 2006

StenoDrills CDs on eBay

StenoDrills.com has two listings on eBay.

The first one is for a [Top 1000 Briefs CD](#) for \$4.00. There are 10 available. The other one is for [Top Phrases CD 1 and Top Phrases CD 2](#) for \$8.00 for both. There are 10 available also. Those are opening bids.

There are funny rules to this auction because this is a multiple-listing auction. Apparently, everybody pays the same amount. That is determined by the **lowest** winning bid. So if you bid a billion, and the lowest guy bids a million, you only pay a million.

You should read the rules yourself, but here is a small excerpt:

.....

For a listing with 10 available items and 2 bidders:

Bidder A bid for 8 items at \$5 each.

Bidder B bid for 3 items at \$6 each.

In this case, the lowest successful bid is \$5. So the outcome of this listing is:

Bidder B wins 3 items at \$5 each.

Bidder A wins 7 items at \$5 each.

.....

I post items on eBay every now and then. The prices are always super low, even compared to the sale going on right now at [StenoDrills.com](#). With the quantity that is offered, it is quite likely that you will pay the minimum of \$4 for the [Top 1000 Briefs](#) and \$8 for the [Top Phrases CDs](#).

See ya

Steve Shastay

Steno Rebel

Wednesday, September 27, 2006

And You Can Quote Me on That

Semester break is half over. Time to sober up, get the cheetos out of your hair, and go wandering around the house until you find your machine. Hint: Look in the trunk of your car first.

Here are some great quotes that I use in what I call the Shastay Way 10-week trainer.

Hear the word; stroke the word. **Joseph Kinaim**

Perhaps the most valuable result of all education is the ability to make yourself do the thing you have to do, when it ought to be done, whether you like it or not.

Thomas H. Huxley

Always bear in mind that your own resolution to succeed is more important than any one thing. **Abraham Lincoln**

Aim for success, not perfection **Dr. David M. Burns**

A successful individual typically sets his next goal somewhat but not too much above his last achievement. In this way he raises his level of aspiration. **Kurt Lewin**

You always pass failure on the way to success. **Mickey Rooney**

Formulate and stamp indelibly on your mind a mental picture of yourself a succeeding. Hold this picture tenaciously. Never permit it to fade. Your mind will seek to develop the picture. Do not build up obstacles in your imagination. **Norman Vincent Peale**

Success is not the result of spontaneous combustion. You must set yourself on fire. **Reggie Leach**

Eighty percent of success is showing up. **Woody Allen**

Believe one who has proved it. Believe an expert. **Virgil**

Destiny is no matter of chance. It is a matter of choice. It is not a thing to be waited for, it is a thing to be achieved. **William Jennings Bryan**

Only I can change my life. No one can do it for me. **Carol Burnett**

Stephen Shastay

Steno Rebel

Monday, October 02, 2006

Five, you know; Five, you don't; Ten, You Wanna

First day of day school with new 60 wpm students.

Easy drill at 40 and 60. Readback at 40. Good so far. Of course, we will be going faster week by week.

Homework for day school is the same homework that I gave night school sometime last month. It's very instructive. Here it is.

.....

Name five types of strokes that you do well.

Name five types of strokes that you need to work on.

Name ten briefs that you want to conquer this week.

.....

Pretty simple, huh?

Or is it?

How many of us know which types of strokes are problem strokes? Some.

How many of us know which types of strokes we perform better than average?
Very, very few.

How many of us are actively working on learning briefs in anything more than a piecemeal fashion? Uh, oh.

My class, by tomorrow, had better know which strokes they have no trouble doing because I don't want them to waste their practice time on things that they have mastered.

By tomorrow, they better know which are the top five strokes that cause pain and anguish because I want them to hit those strokes hard over and over again.

By tomorrow, they will begin building their first of many many wordlists.

Steve Shastay
Steno Rebel

"Everybody wants to be a good stenographer. Far fewer are willing to do the work necessary to be a good student." Anna Mae Tedley

Tuesday, October 03, 2006

Who Are You?

Are you pretty? Are you shy? Do you love long walks in the moonlight?

Well, I don't care about that.

What I wanna know is:

Do you have trouble with clarity on easy words like "my" and "any?"

Do you need to practice finger drills to learn rhythm?

Do you need to review lessons that you have forgotten?

Are you ready to work on briefs, or are you still working on basic outlines for words like "function" and "interest?"

Do the majority of your errors come from small words, big drops, or nerves?

Who are you? You must answer that question before you can make strides towards who you want to be. You can't change it until you know what need changing.

Steve Shastay
Steno Rebel

"Who are you. Who are you. Who are you. Who are you. Who are you. Who are you. Who are you. Who are you. Who are you. Who are you."

Lyrics from the song **Who Are You** from the album **Who Are You** by the group **The Who**.

Tuesday, October 03, 2006

Why is the Sky Blue? -- And Other Conundrums

Hard strokes fall into two categories: Physically difficult strokes and mentally difficult strokes.

Mentally difficult strokes take the form of those that your brain just cannot wrap around. I still have difficulty with words like "wash" and "watch." The outlines are WARB and WAFP. These outlines have similar endings that are both stroked with the same fingers: the index and middle fingers. When I have errors with those words, the problem is entirely a mental error.

Another mental error and probably the most common error with regard to briefs and phrases is an incomplete recall of an outline. How many times have you committed this blunder that one of my students told me about Monday? It was the beginning of the test. The phrase "at this time" came up. The student knew that that was a phrase, but the outline didn't come to mind.

The fingers stopped dead.

Instead of stroking "at this time" in three easy strokes, the fingers stopped, while the brain tried to remember the stroke. Time and points were lost.

Physically difficult strokes are those that require a higher degree of dexterity or training. My theory's outline for the phrase "House of Representatives" is HOURPTS. That is way too hard for this ol' boy.

I have a million alternatives for that phrase. All of them are easier than the suggested outline. How about H-R, H-RS, H-RTS, H-RT, HOURS, HOF, HOUF, HOFR, HOUFR, HEPT, HEPTS, HPT, HORPT, HOURPT, H-RT, H-RTS. I know I missed some, but that's a lot of alternatives. I can't choose HOF, HOUF AND HOUFR because they are in my dictionary.. I prefer HOFR and HOURS. I even have an alternate solution which is that I write it out sometimes.

If you have mentally tough strokes, you need word lists. You need to review those strokes until they improve. Make up your lists that you have not memorized or that you have improperly or insufficiently memorized. While machine practice is as good as any (if you are doing lists), it is not the only way to practice. You can take your lists to the doctor's office or to the bank. Wherever you are, you can fill empty minutes by reviewing those lists.

Some people use the Brief Man 1000 and General Phrase programs to memorize briefs and phrases. They are flash card-type computer programs designed solely to help you memorize outlines.

Physically tough strokes need physical practice, backed up with a strong mental image of the strokes. For example, my stroke for "juvenile" is supposed to be SKWRAO*UFPBL. That is a pretty long brief. Pun intended. If I want to do that stroke competently and quickly, I will have to practice that over and over.

Luckily, I am a lazy SOB.

I originally solved my problem with the word "juvenile" by removing the PB from the stroke. That left me with SKWRAO*UFL.

That is much easier but the asterisk still causes trouble. So that went with my second modification. The stroke now read SKWRAOUFL. That is getting easier, but there are still a lot of letters.

That stroke leaves me with four letters on the left hand and three letters for the thumbs. The right-hand fingers are happy with just the FL.

I can't change the SKWR on the left hand. That's the only way I can represent the initial J. But I can help out the thumbs by changing the vowels to a simple U. That leaves me with SKWRUFL for the word "juvenile." The left-hand fingers have to work like heck, but the thumbs and right-hand fingers are happy as clams. I can live with that.

It can be hard to differentiate between the mentally and physically hard strokes. I am going to give you an example of a mentally hard stroke that most people would misdiagnose as a physically hard stroke.

I initially thought that my stroke for "capable" was a physically hard stroke. That stroke is KAEUPBL. I couldn't do that PBL to save my life. It was a killer.

One day, I noticed that I used PBL in a lot of strokes that I liked. I write "mental" as MEPBL and "handle" as HAPBL. I love those strokes, and I have never had to practice them.

But I did have to practice KAEUPBL. I practiced the heck out of it, and the stroke was still sub par. Now why would that be?

Mental image. I thought of the PBL in "capable" as two separate strokes. First, there is the P for the end of KAEUP. That sound goes with the KAEUP syllable. The BL represent the ending of "capable." They belong to a different syllable. The problem was how my brain was processing the info. I thought of it as two strokes that I did simultaneously. The middle finger had to stroke the end of KAEUP and the beginning of BL.

Mental image.

So how did I turn KAEUPBL into an easy to stroke outline for "capable?"

Simple.

Everytime I hear the word "capable" (which has that hard hard PBL) I think of the non-word "canle." I made that up. That is the word "capable" with the "p" and "b" transformed into an "n."

Because I think of "canle" when I hear "capable," I love writing "capable" now. I can write PBL very quickly when I think of it as an NL. I can write it as fast as "handle," "mental" and other words with similar NL sounds.

The word "capable" was never a fingering problem. The problem was always right between my ears. And that's where I solved it.

Steve Shastay
Steno Rebel

P.S. Why is the sky blue?

Light is made up of all of the colors mixed together. When the sun shines, the light has to travel through our atmosphere before it reaches us. When it hits the atmosphere, the light (which is made up of all the colors) starts to hit stuff in the atmosphere like oxygen and hydrogen. The light hits it, and it reflects off of it. Now each color in the light has a different wavelength. The longer the wavelength is, the less it will bounce off of something. Red is long. It just powers right past stuff in the atmosphere. Blue, on the other hand, is a real shortie when it comes to wavelengths. It bounces the most. Wherever it bounces, the sky will look blue.

Monday, October 09, 2006

Literary -- The Home of the Supersized Words

Is Literary your bailiwick? For many people, it is not. They don't feel comfortable with it. Instead of feeling relaxed around familiar surroundings, Literary makes them feel like a stranger in a strange land.

Each Literary drill or test has new big words. You can't learn briefs for all of them. There can be a ton of stroking for just one word.

So whaddaya do? You jump right in with the stroking. Hear the word: stroke the word. Or in the case of big words, hear the word, and begin stroking from beginning to end.

The wrong way to write big words is to try to figure out the whole word before you start. That will teach you to pause, and any hesitation will rob your speed.

Take a word like "catastrophic." That is a big word. It takes several strokes, and you may not like all of the strokes. But there is no reason to pause before you begin stroking. Every student knows how to write "cat," and that is the first syllable. So every student should have zero hesitation on the beginning of "catastrophic."

What is your second stroke? Well, once you have written the first syllable "cat," you are pretty much locked into the rest of it. There are variations, but most of you will either write KAT/STROF/IK or KAT/TA/STROF/IK.

If you jump right in with the first syllable of the word, the rest of the syllables will usually come to you without a big hesitation. Notice that one of the choices in the last paragraph for "catastrophic" is longer than the other. Big deal. The extra stroke is easy.

Don't worry about writing the shortest possible way at all times. The word "catastrophic" is not that popular. If you can write it without hesitation, then you are doing fine.

You must remove the initial hesitation before you begin writing. That hesitation costs time. No work is being done while you hesitate. Those who begin immediately will be one, two or more syllables ahead of those who pause. Multiply that by the amount of big words on a test, and you just may have stumbled upon the sole reason that you are having difficulties in Lit class.

See ya later, steno babies.

Steve Shastay

Steno Rebel

Tuesday, October 17, 2006

Persistence -- How a good trait can have bad results

In Theory class, they teach you to write the right outlines. No slop, no guessing, no figuring out which words to drop. Just good clean strokes.

Then they shoo you out the door and send you to your first speed class. Now you have to write faster. The hands start to sweat. Sloppiness creeps in. Nerves grow to unmanageable proportions.

And bad habits are being learned. Big strings of words are dropped. Unreadable sections of sloppy notes show up.

At first, it is not so bad because there is a natural persistence for you to continue to stroke as you were taught in Theory class. It will take awhile for you to totally screw up your writing patterns. So give a thanks to persistence for saving you from yourself.

Eventually, however, that persistence is overcome by your new persistence for writing inaccurately or out of control.

When (not if) you decide to clean up your writing, you may find it very hard to do so at first. That is because your normal writing pattern is now very sloppy.

Don't worry. You can beat it.

Until you get your brain screwed on straight again, you will continue to have a natural persistence to write inaccurately.

But if you persist in changing back to the good clean strokes that you learned in Theory, then your brain will eventually give up on that bad persistence of sloppiness. You will re-develop the good persistence of clarity. It is easier than you think. After all, you have already learned clarity. All you have to do is re-apply it.

For most people, a return to clarity will take no more than one week. Results can usually be seen within a day or two, but as soon as the drill overloads you, it is quite natural to revert back to the sloppy strokes.

It's all about persistence, ladies and gents. Your brain will tell your fingers to write clear if you insist on clarity. Your brain will accept the sloppy strokes if you don't.

Persist. Keep at it.

To paraphrase a wise man, You must fight for your right to write steno.

The Steno Rebel

Stephen Shastay

Thursday, October 26, 2006

Mrs. Moody at the NCRA 2006 Teachers' Convention

Mrs. Moody of the **College of Court Reporting in Hobart, Indiana**, gave a great talk on how identify errors in a test paper. She also gave tips on how to motivate students and how to choose drills, but her main topic was analyzing tests.

Not enough people do that. You can learn so much. I can tell a student exactly what happened during a test, why it happened, and sometimes even what the student was thinking at the time.

I intend to write an article to back up Mrs. Moody's talk. It will be on CourtReportingHelp.com in the Teachers Area. It hasn't been written yet, so don't go shuffling off to Buffalo yet.

Mrs. Moody may have opened up a lot of eyes with her analysis, but I could tell that she really dumbed it down. Each example test had only one type of error: contractions, big drops, numbers, etc. That's not real life, but it did make for a good talk for Steno Analysis 101.

We all know that a test will have many different types of errors. The main error on any test is the root of the problem. Without that error, the test would be substantially improved. The difference between passing and failing is often one type of error.

I also look specifically for errors that the student has repeated on test after test after test. Those are usually spelling errors, punctuation errors, or inappropriate steno outlines.

The subject is broad. It can't be covered in one article. Mrs. Moody used a 25-page handout just for the basics. I once attempted to cover the topic, but gave up when I realized the complexity. This time, I will finish it.

Steve Shastay

Steno Rebel

Sunday, October 29, 2006

Why Geniuses Fail

I just got back from the NCRA Teachers' Convention in Dallas. They think that you guys are more emotional and stressed than the general population.

I think you guys are just about right compared to the regular population. Sure, school can be frustrating, but I think we handle it as well as can be expected.

So what the heck does that have to do with Why Geniuses Fail?

I think most of you are in the top ten percentile in brain power.

So what the heck does that have to do with Why Geniuses Fail? Answer the question, dammit.

The leaders of our profession think that court reporting is tougher than most other professions. They think that you guys stress out for no good reason other than that court reporting is tough.

They are wrong. Court reporting is no tougher than any other comparable profession.

What is the big difference between the court reporting and other traditional educational systems?

For the most part, if you want to teach history or science or math, you have to be trained AS A TEACHER in those fields. However, the basic qualification for a teacher in the stenography field is training AS A STENOGRAPHER.

See the difference? You are being trained by people who do not have a background in teaching stenography, other than what they have learned while on the job.

My sister went to a teachers' college. Then she got a job teaching English. Then she spent about 6 years going to Dartmouth in the summer to learn more. Not more about English. More about how to teach.

I spent three years struggling in a steno school. I worked for a while after graduation. Then I wanted to move to Texas. Texas said that I wasn't qualified to be a stenographer in Texas because I didn't have their certification.

But Texas cheerfully accepted me as a teacher of stenography without any certification or training.

Of course, I have gotten better at teaching, but I can only assume that I would be much much much better if someone had thought it important to give me formal training.

For you steno babies who are having trouble in your school, I offer one piece of advice. Maybe you should open your eyes and examine the way that you are being taught.

If you are being taught in a way that is directly opposed to the way you were taught to type or the way you were taught to play music or the way you were taught damn near anything, then you have found your problem.

The solution is to relate what you have learned in comparable fields to what you need to do in stenography.

CourtReportingHelp.com is full of articles that dovetail with the teachings of other physical skills. We teach quality. No trashy notes, no out-of-control writing.

Your success is too important.

At a minimum, 95 out of 100 strokes should be perfectly readable.

At a minimum, you should review your theory book daily.

At a minimum, you should spend at least half of your time writing material that is less than your goal speed.

At a minimum, you should type up three tests a week.

At the teachers' convention, they made a big deal about how we should learn to talk to you. We shouldn't say "you should," because that takes away your choices. We should discuss your situation and present you with possible solutions.

Screw that touchy-feely crap. I want graduates.

YOU SHOULD have clean notes. YOU SHOULD practice controlled strokes. YOU SHOULD review your theory. YOU SHOULD type frequently.

YOU SHOULD.

Your success depends on it.

Dammit.

Steve Shastay

Steno Rebel

Monday, October 30, 2006

Why Geniuses Fail, Part Doo

At the NCRA Teachers' Convention, several speakers used the term "psychomotor skills." Very good term. Very, very good term.

Basically, psychomotor skills are physical actions that directly proceed from mental activity. I am paraphrasing the online Webster's dictionary for that definition.

I teach that if your hands are not moving, then you are doing something wrong. Your brain works extremely fast when compared to your hands. The brain should be able to provide a command to the hands at all times.

It does not matter how long they have been stopped. If your hands are sitting dead in the water, then your brain is at fault.

On the other hand, it does not matter how fast your hands are moving. If they are moving at all, then they are almost assuredly moving as fast as they can competently move. Some strokes are harder than others; so your hands will move slower at times. Like, duh.

These concepts are extremely fundamental. But they are not always applied in our profession. The major theories use them, but some of the others do not.

If you are being taught to stop and think about a stroke during dictation, then you are being taught wrong.

If you are being taught to "power through" tough dictation or to "get a stroke for everything," then you are being taught wrong.

If you are being taught to trail the speaker so that you have more time to think of your briefs and phrases, then you are being taught wrong.

There are other wrong-headed ideas out there in Steno Land, but those are some of the worst.

When you are doing a dictation or test and you are faced with a tough section, there are only a few things that you should do.

If you can think of the brief or phrase immediately, use it.

If you can't think of a shortcut immediately, then you should write out the passage.

If you can't think of a shortcut and you don't have time to write out the passage, then you should look for the hardest strokes and drop them.

At all times and under all circumstances, you should continue to write good clean strokes and you should not carry or trail the speaker more than a few words.

Do it right, and you won't have trouble. That's a fact, Jack.

Steve Shastay

Steno Rebel

Monday, October 30, 2006

Why Geniuses Fail -- The Final Word

Ultimately, the responsibility for your success is on your shoulders. You are the one who will rise to the challenge, or you are the one who will sink. It is up to you, and it is time that you opened up your eyes about how you are being taught.

The two main theories -- StenEd and Phoenix -- teach the same thing about how to stroke. They want good clean strokes, and they virtually ignore speedbuilding. They may advocate a certain amount of high-speed drill, but they definitely ignore speedbuilding just for the sake of speed.

I teach StenEd; so I will use them as a reference.

The StenEd theory book is full of advice such as, "Learn how to write it slow before you try to write it fast," "You should keep a notebook of the briefs and phrases you plan to use," and "Use only briefs and phrases that you can easily remember."

That is good advice. It is in your theory book. Don't let anyone tell you different. StenEd and Phoenix are proven theories that graduate good students.

If you are going to listen to the "get a stroke for everything" crowd, then you are not a good student. If you are going to listen to the sole person out there who advises

students to write way above their speed for way too long, then you are not a good student.

Maybe you have good intentions, maybe you thought that you were following experts, maybe you are trying as hard as you can, but the fact remains that you should not be overloading yourself by trying to write extremely fast all of the time, nor should you be trying to learn every shortcut in the world. So maybe it is time that you started listening to the true experts, not just those people who call themselves experts.

If you just settle down and try to follow the rules as set out by your theory, then you will be okay.

For those of you who are following that awful awful new theory that advocates learning every shortcut and drilling at high speed, then I have great sympathy for you. My advice is to learn the outlines of your theory, but don't follow the advice on how to practice or how to learn briefs. Instead, I advise you to visit the Phoenix theory site. They have a ton of advice about the proper way to write, even for those who don't use their theory. It's a great site, and you can believe what they say.

Most of my students are much smarter than I am. I am sure that you and your fellow students are just as smart.

Start using those brains. Stenography is not that hard if you follow basic rules. We need you. We need a huge amount of new reporters right now.

Steve Shastay

Steno Rebel

Wednesday, November 01, 2006

Don't Ever Say That I Am Not A Good Student

Man, oh, man, oh, man. Who is that idiot who wrote that blog called Why Geniuses Fail -- The Final Word?

That guy is dead wrong to call all of us students names, isn't he? Where does he get off thinking that he can say that we are not "good students?"

Idiot, idiot, idiot.

Or maybe ...

What if the guy was trying to wake you up? What if he was trying to say that good, hard, honest effort is not enough if you are not seeing the results?

What if he was saying that geniuses (you guys) should be able to figure out what is happening when you get stuck in a speed, even if your fellow students cannot, your teachers cannot, and especially if your theory book cannot?

I applaud all of the steno students in the world. I don't know a harder working group of people. All of you have made the decision to make your present life much

much harder so that you could provide a better life in the future for yourself and your family.

But keep those eyes open.

If you are stuck in a speed, try lower speed drill, try working on wordlists, try finger drills, try re-reading your theory book, try asking different teachers for help, try working on clarity, try working on hesitation.

Do something now. Do not accept your predicament. It does not have to be. There is an answer, and it does have a name.

For every student who comes to me with a problem, I give them a specific solution. I tell them exactly what to do. None of this try harder stuff. None of this push through the tough sections stuff.

I give specific answers because there really are specific answers. The road to graduation is not a mystery. If you can perform the fundamentals, you will get there.

You are the geniuses. You are much better than I ever was. You are receiving a better education than any of your teachers. You are smarter, better trained, and ready to rock the steno world.

I want results, and I will not tolerate less. If you are in my school, you have heard me say something like this: "You should be able to see substantial progress every two weeks. If you do not think that you have improved over the last 14 days, then come to me and we will find out why. Do not wait."

You want to graduate. I want to help.

And a good student will not accept mediocre results.

Steve Shastay

Steno Rebel

"Get 'er done." Larry the Cable Guy

Wednesday, November 01, 2006

Joe Namath and Why He would make a Great Court Reporter

I heard this story once. I don't know if it is true, but it does make a great point.

One day during an Alabama football game, a penalty was called against Joe's team. The foul was committed by a guy named Wright. One official was running around trying to identify who Wright was.

"Are you Wright?" "No."

"Are you Wright?" "No."

Finally, he came to Namath. "Are you Wright?" Broadway Joe drew himself up to his full 6' 3' height and said in his best Southern drawl: Sir, a Namath is always right.

Dang, now that guy has confidence.

How about you?

Are you getting dogged down because each day you try as hard as you can and you still aren't the perfect student?

Or do you walk with an air of pride because each day you try as hard as you can and you are a little bit closer to graduation?

Do you feel like crap because you didn't pass the test again?

Or do you feel great because you did a little bit more than you did yesterday?

Which person are you?

Show me the confidence, baby. You deserve it. You are a winner already, and you should be treating yourself as one.

Steve Shastay

Steno Rebel

Thursday, November 02, 2006

Kernals of Truth of the Awful, Awful Theory, Part One

Okay, so I won't name it, but there is at least one theory and two unrelated websites that are still trying to shove bad advice down your throat for their benefit.

Their biggest failure is the belief that if you drill at high speed, you will achieve proficiency at a lower speed.

There is even somebody who insists on claiming credit for that misguided idea. Nope. I was taught that way. Most of my fellow teachers were taught that way. Almost every nine-year-old ballplayer has thought of that theory. It is not new. It does not work.

What does work is high-speed drill that you do for SHORT PERIODS OF TIME and that you DO NOT TRY TO WRITE ALL OF THE DRILL.

Every student is faced with tests that contain a hard section. That section must be written as well as possible. But a hard section is hard because it cannot normally be done accurately and completely.

So a choice has to be made. Do you want accuracy on the words that you do stroke? Or do you try to write it all and accept the misstrokes?

Many people try to write it all. That is the Number One reason why these people do not make steady progress. Nobody can get all of the dictation at all times. That is a truism in stenography, and it is also true in all walks of life.

Instead, get as much of a hard dictation as you can, but always maintain a consistently high standard of accuracy.

You will have dropped words. You had them yesterday, last week, last month, last year. Why would you go into a test with the idea that you will not have drops?

So to use high-speed drill effectively, do short amounts because you must keep your quality high and go into it with the idea that you must drop words.

For those of you who disagree, I suggest that you walk down the hall and enter the 225 room. Tell them that you can do high-speed drill without dropping. Tell them that all you have to do is "push" through the hard part or "get a stroke for everything." Ha, ha, ha, ha.

By the way, the 225 room is full of people who have no trouble with high-speed drill. More than 75% of all 225 students are having trouble reading the little words. They can write the big ones, and they can read the big ones, even with misstrokes.

But they can't get the little ones. They have sacrificed their clarity for speed.

When they do eventually work on clarity, they discover that they also benefit from an increase in speed without even trying to work on speed.

It's a fact, Jack.

Steve Shastay

Steno Rebel

Thursday, November 02, 2006

Kernels of Truth of the Awful, Awful Theory, Part Two

Let me preface this with a comment about Kernels of Truth about the Awful, Awful Theory, Part One. Today, during break, a student told me that she was advised by a teacher to "get a stroke for everything" and "eventually the clarity will come back." This teacher was not taught the Awful, Awful Theory. She had been taught that long before the Awful, Awful Theory was in existence. That bit of bad advice has been circulating for probably hundreds of years. It is wrong -- but it is still out there.

On to Part Two...

The second big fallacy of the Awful, Awful Theory is that you should learn every brief and phrase in the world. That is just nonsense, but there is an attractive piece of truth to it.

If you do know every brief and every phrase, and if you can instantly recall them ON DEMAND (meaning without hesitation), and if you can write them all perfectly, and if you can read all of them perfectly, then you will naturally write more words without having to increase your number of strokes.

StenEd has the right advice for you. I'm sure Phoenix agrees also. I have talked to the Phoenix people, and I have been on their site a lot. I am positive that they do not disagree with the quote from StenEd that I am about to use.

"Use only briefs and phrases that you can easily remember. Speed is lost, rather than gained, if you lose the steady rhythm." This quote appears on Page 123 of my theory book. If you use a newer book than mine, the page number may be different.

I hate being a corporate shill, but in this case, I have to wholeheartedly agree with StenEd and their theory of how to write. If you try to use too many briefs and phrases, you will stumble and hesitate. You will lose speed. You can count on it.

Never once in their entire book does StenEd recommend that you "get a stroke for everything" or sacrifice clarity for speed or that you do long drills or that you learn to "pull" a translation out of sloppy notes.

The same people (the Awful, Awful Theory guys) who recommend that you "get a stroke for everything" are the same guys who want you to learn every brief and phrase. That doesn't work. If you can learn every brief and phrase, you must be absolutely accurate with your strokes or you will be misreading your strokes. Their theory of writing is comical.

If you disagree with anything that I have written, especially in the last week or so, I challenge you find support for your argument outside of the Awful, Awful Theory. StenEd won't help you. Phoenix won't help you. In fact, every single program to learn keyboarding won't help you. They all insist on controlled accurate strokes at all times.

If you look for support for your bad ideas outside of stenography and keyboarding, you won't find it sports, music, driving, mountain climbing, or even tiddlywinks. Everyone everywhere teaches that you must be able to competently do the strokes, outlines, patterns, movements, vocal sounds, etc., at a low controlled rhythmic pace before you can move up to the next level.

The way you learned to run was that you first learned to crawl, then you learned to walk, and then finally you learned to run. Don't teach your kid to run first. It won't work, and you will spend too much time with the social services people explaining why your kid has bumps and bruises from falling down.

Let me end this with a word about myself. I have hypothyroidism. I have been able to write a lot on this blog lately because my thyroid has been working okay. I feel that it is starting to give me trouble again. I get very very tired as a result. When my production goes down on the blog, please cut me some slack. I am doing the best I can, but somedays it is hard just to get out of bed. I will cut back on the blog when necessary. Sometimes I will cut back to just one or two entries a month. Bummer, dude.

All right, steno babies. Let's go have a great steno day and kick some steno butt.

Steve Shastay

Steno Rebel

Wednesday, January 03, 2007

Welcome to Steno School

Current mood: Don't know, but my currant mood is for raisins

Your goal is to become certified as a court reporter.

Your job is to do whatever it takes to achieve your goal.

You must be able to meet or surpass the standards of (1) your school, (2) your state certification examination, and possibly (3) a national certification examination.

The national guys want 95% on their tests. The state guys usually want 95%. The schools either meet or exceed the 95% standard.

Do you really know what 95% accuracy on a test entails? It means that **if you can't read 19 out of every 20 words, then you won't pass.**

It also means that **if you can only read 19 out of 20, then you will only pass the test if you do not make any other mistakes** in transcription, such as, leaving out a word, adding a word, spelling, punctuation, capitalization, misreading an outline.

And finally, **if you can only read 19 out of 20 words, then you will not be able to drop any of the words** on the test. You will have to write every single word.

Most of us can't do that. We will drop a few words here and there, and we will have mistakes in punctuation and transcription.

And we can pass plenty of tests with those mistakes.

But we can't pass those tests if we can only read 19 out of 20 words. That is too sloppy.

For those of us who do make mistakes, we have to set our standards much higher than simply reading our notes at 95%. The true standard is really around 98 or 99%.

If you were not able to read 19 out of 20 words on every readback today, then you had a bad day.

If you normally cannot read 19 out of 20 words on every readback, then you have had a lot of bad days.

If you can generally read 19 out of 20, then you are still a sloppy writer. You need improvement. 19 out of 20 does not leave you any room for error. **(Warning: Stupid sports analogy)** You are still out in left field, but at least you are in the ballpark.

If you can read 49 out of 50, then you have achieved a 98% standard for reading your notes. You can sleep easy. Success is yours if you stay on the straight and narrow.

Stephen Shastay
Steno Rebel

P.S. The Tutor Ring drills were specifically designed to work on those problem areas that cause sloppy notes. The first Tutor Ring CD, the appropriately named [Tutor Ring 1 CD](#), contains the 37 drills that were released several years ago in the now-defunct Tutor Ring weekly steno newsletter. **Find all of the Tutor Ring drills at [StenoDrills.com](#).**

Wednesday, August 01, 2007

My tip

A teacher at school had an article that contained tips from pros. There were five tips from five pros. Most tips were good, but some really stunk. Here is mine.

225 students are 225 students, instead of graduates, because they can't write clear enough to read their work and because they hesitate. It isn't a speed problem. They enter the 225 class with enough speed.

They have trouble with the simple words; for example, this/that, these/those, yes/yes, sir, any/my. They have problems with these words because they are writing too fast.

Their hesitation is also caused because they are trying to write too fast. It's a vicious cycle. They stumble on a word, write fast to catch up, stumble again because they are writing too fast, write even faster, stumble even sooner.

Chill out. Write your level. Do this, and your writing will smooth out. When your writing smooths out, you will have a pain-free speed gain.

Tuesday, August 07, 2007

I Feel So Conflicted I Could Just Dye -- uh, Die

The following is a list of basic soundalikes. I need you to know how to write every word that is bolded. The rest of them are nice. But the bolded ones are essential. Yes, yes, yes, you will encounter all of these words, but the bolded ones are the most popular. No one can absorb everything in one setting. If you want to know every soundalike in the world, that's great with me.

But you should still start with the most popular ones.

Note: It's not a mistake that some pears/pares/pairs have only one or two words highlighted. Concentrate on just the popular words. For example, "pair" is a popular word, but "pare" and "pear" are much less popular.

ate/eight

ascent/assent

complement/compliment

capital/capitol

council/counsel/consul

bare/bear

hear/here

brake/break

hole/whole

knew/new

know/no

feet/feat

hair/hare

knight/**night**

flee/**flea**

lesson/lessen

its/it's

plain/plane

peace/piece

pear/**pair**/pare

principle/principal

meat/meet/mete

not/knot

raise/raze

right/write/rite

road/rode

sea/**see**

sole/soul

some/sum

reed/**read**

steak/stake

sight/site/cite

threw/through

they're/there/their

two/to/too

your/you're/yore

weather/whether

wear/ware/where

Have a great steno day!!

Monday, August 20, 2007

What Can You Do With Magic Drills? (aka Everything But the Oink)

Depending on which critter processing plant you are in, the answer is "Everything but the oink, moo, cluck, whinny, etc" in response to "Do you use everything or is there waste?"

The Magic Drills can be used for a variety of reasons. Whatever you need can be supplied by one of them. Last week, for instance, I taught 60/80 wpm students to effectively drill at above 240 wpm with the Magic Drills. Effectively. They didn't get it all, but they wrote their speed, and they could read it all back.

So let's start a list.

Today's use of the Magic Drills is for learning phrases. That was the original purpose, and it works fine. Almost every sentence has at least one phrase, and some of them have more than one.

Here is Magic Drill 1. Can you do all of the phrases?

That would be fine. Who can be sure? So far, so good. They have a car. What is the time. That is the end. They should make it. No, sir, not us. We could do it. No, ma'am, you win. Park it out there. She was a nurse. This would go well. You are the best. They could take two. Yes, sir, he won. She would work hard. I can do it. They were on top.

This is the one. I want to win. He is bad news. Will the snow come? I have the note. She is the girl. We can wash it. There are a lot. Who could tell me. We had it last. He should walk up. It was put there. Who can make room? They would look there. Where is it at? There would be more. I want to act. When is the song? Where is your home? I have to paint. There is much more.

They were the worst. Will the class start? They were near home. He is too slow. I have a pet. I should take it. So much for that. That is the row. He said to go. I have a chance. Is the horse gone? That was my cake. Too much was said. Which are the same? Yes, ma'am, drive up. She was the best. They had a stall. No, sir, wait here. That is the fruit. We can make it.

We were in love. It would last long. Which is my coat? I could see it. That is a fake. They are the men. You can count them. At least, he left. What was the cause? They can have it. We have the set. Are the sheep wild? I was on call. We should do it. She would not steal. They will be sad. You could dream it. This could run fast.

There are easy phrases like "They are" and "You can." Everybody is aware of them. But millions of students don't touch "Which" phrases, "Where" phrases, "whether" phrases, and plenty more. Easy strokes for an easy speed gain.

Will you put in a few minutes of work in order to learn something that will help you for decades?

Wednesday, August 29, 2007

Magic Drill 1 (Phrases)

Boy, oh boy. I wrote 90% of this entry, and then my spiffy new Windows Vista (the cool new one that is so much better) crashed. There goes the work.

Ah, well. It's sort of comforting to realize that Mr. Gates kept some of the familiar features of past Windows operating systems.

Today's blog entry shows you the phrases in Magic Drill 1. I do that by bolding any word that is part of a phrase. Some sentences only have one phrase. Other sentences have two or three.

Your job is to figure out which phrases you can use. Every theory is different. I have bolded a phrase if I am aware that at least one theory uses it as a phrase. In other words, some of them are probably not part of whatever theory you are using.

.....

Here is Magic Drill 1 with the phrases in **bold**.

That would be fine. **Who can be** sure? **So far, so good.** **They have a** car. **What is the** time. **That is the** end. **They should** make it. **No, sir,** not us. **We could do** it. **No, ma'am,** you win. **Park it** out there. **She was a** nurse. **This would go** well. **You are the** best. **They could** take two. **Yes, sir,** he won. **She would** work hard. **I can do** it. **They were** on top.

This is the one. **I want** to win. **He is** bad news. **Will the** snow come? **I have the** note. **She is the** girl. **We can** wash it. **There are a** lot. **Who could** tell me. **We had** it last. **He should** walk up. **It was** put there. **Who can** make room? **They would** look there. **Where is it** at? **There would be** more. **I want** to act. **When is the** song? **Where is** your home? **I have** to paint. **There is much** more.

They were the worst. **Will the** class start? **They were** near home. **He is too** slow. **I have a** pet. **I should** take it. **So much** for that. **That is the** row. **He said to go.** **I have** a chance. **Is the** horse gone? **That was** my cake. **Too much was said.** **Which are the** same? **Yes, ma'am,** drive up. **She was the** best. **They had** a stall. **No, sir,** wait here. **That is the** fruit. **We can** make it.

We were in love. **It would** last long. **Which is** my coat? **I could** see it. **That is a** fake. **They are the** men. **You can** count them. **At least,** he left. **What was the** cause? **They can** have it. **We have the** set. **Are the** sheep wild? **I was** on call. **We should** do it. **She would not** steal. **They will be** sad. **You could** dream it. **This could** run fast.

.....

There may be even more phrases than I have marked. I don't know everything. I just think that I do.

Take care, steno babies.

Steve Shastay - Steno Rebel

Tuesday, September 04, 2007

Magic Drill 1 (Rhythm, smoothness)

Okay, I know you are sick of Magic Drill 1, but we are not done with it yet.

By now, you should know which phrases you want to use. The question is: Are you using them effectively?

In order to be used effectively, a phrase must be (1) absolutely clear and (2) much faster than writing out the phrase. Why? Because the only purpose of a phrase is to reduce the number of strokes. And it doesn't help to reduce the number of strokes if you can't read your notes.

Contrary to popular opinion, it doesn't always work to your benefit to reduce the number of strokes. Problems crop up. Sometimes the use of a phrase will cause problems in an otherwise problem-free area. Problems, problems, problems. Hmmm.

If you write slop, you will lose multiple points on every phrase. I've known students who misread their stroke for "Ladies and Gentlemen of the Jury." There are six words in that phrase; so one sloppy stroke will cost you six points. Ouch, ouch, ouch, ouch, ouch, ouch.

The larger problem, at least for students, is that the phrases are not memorized and/or practiced sufficiently. If you attempt to use a phrase and hesitate before you write, you often make your situation worse than ever.

For instance, suppose that you are six words behind the speaker, and suppose that a three-word phrase pops up. If you write smoothly through the phrase, you will move up from six words behind the speaker to four words behind the speaker.

But if you hesitate, you may end up six, seven, eight or more words behind. I am sure you will agree that seven and eight words behind is a loss, but six is also a loss. You started six words behind, and you are still six words behind. However, you have traded easy-to-read strokes for a phrase, and you have introduced hesitation into your writing.

Rules for the use of phrases are easy. They must be clear and fast. Nothing else is acceptable.

By the way, this blog entry gives you the explanation for why StenEd and Phoenix are not worried about that new-fangled theory that boasts about how they are not stroke-intensive. Maybe they aren't, but they sure are hesitation-intensive and headache-intensive. You shouldn't shove tons of phrases down a student's throat. You can't fit them all in at once, and the student can't effectively use all of the ones that do fit.

That dog just won't hunt. (That's Texas speak for "I don't want to learn golf from Tiger Woods. I want to learn golf from the guy who taught Tiger Woods.")

So I want you to go back and do Magic Drill 1 again. When you use your phrases, do you hesitate before or after them. Do you write them crystal clear? Have you completely memorized each stroke?

Hesitation is defined as any pause before a stroke. If your brain has not sent down the proper signal by the time you need it, you should go on and write out the phrase.

Hesitation is not defined as writing the stroke slowly. If your hands are moving at all, then you are not hesitating. On the other hand, if they are moving slowly on a phrase, then you have not practiced it sufficiently.

Clarity (on a brief or phrase) means that there are absolutely no mistakes of any kind. No extra letters, no dropped letters, no shadows, no nuttin, honey.

I'm not looking for speed. I'm looking for rhythm and clarity. Give me that, and I will show you how to write any speed you want.

See ya next time, steno babies.

Evets Yatsahs - Onets Leber

[Steno Practice CDs](#)

Sloppy notes will kill your score. Hesitation will kill your rhythm.

Thursday, September 06, 2007

Mgic Drill 2 - Hard Endings

Editor's Note: If you have not fully conquered Magic Drill 1, get yer butt outta here.

Steno is so easy. Hear the word. Stroke the word. Ah, life is good.

But some words suck wasterwater.

Hmm. What to do, what to do.

Hey, how about practicing them?

Magic Drill 2 - Hard Endings is set up to run through most of the common endings that give us trouble. Some of them are one hard stroke. Some of them are two easy strokes. Hopefully, none of them are two hard strokes. But if they are, you can't ignore them. You have to practice them.

Forget about speed. Work on rhythm. First of all, let's see if you can write them without having any hesitation before you stroke the word. Then, let's see if you can write them without slowing wa-a-a-ay down to turtle speed.

You don't have to be a speed champion on the hard words in stenography. Save your speed for the words that are easy for you. For hard words, you must merely be competent. Can you write it at 75% of your normal speed? Can you read it? Well, then you have mastered it.

This drill introduces the concept of putting the hard word at the end of each sentence. So your drill looks like this: Easy word, easy word, easy word, hard word; easy word, easy word, easy word, hard word.

You must begin this drill at a speed that allows you to write every single word. If you do not, then you are making a mistake. There is only one proper way to handle a drill that is too fast for you: drop the hard words. But if you do this drill too fast and you drop the hard words, you are not learning the very lesson that I want to teach you: how to correctly write the hard stuff.

Slow down enough so that you can get it all. Don't worry about it. I will give you plenty of practice at enormously high speed. I have no trouble teaching 80 wpm students how to drill at 300 wpm.

So chill out and do it my way because my way works. I ain't bragging. It's just fact. I can get you writing clearly and competently at any speed if you just settle down now and write clearly and smoothly at low speed. The goobers who have been telling you to write above your speed and get it every word are nuts. And they cannot tell you how to do it. All they can say is try harder.

I don't want you to try hard. If your hands are shaking or you are worn out after doing my drills, then you haven't done them correctly.

Chill out. Write clean. Get every word. Slow down the drill if you can't do those two things.

Oh, and have fun.

Here's Magic Drill 2 - Hard Endings

(The slashes are timing marks for your teacher)

I have a wish. You need a comb. Sit on / the bench. I cut an elm. Do you use ink? / We must have change. Where is the wasp? Now you / can jump. I want to carve. We need a task. / It hit a bump. I love that film. She drew / a blank. Where is the branch? I need some help. /

This is a bulb. She can speak French. It made / me cringe. Find the big arch. Look for the curve. / Pick up the chalk. They will take both. Yes, I / will search. There is the camp. That is so dumb. / He is a punk. I want a drink. They went / to church. Cut off the fringe. The dog / will lunge.

They want to balk. I have a hunch. / He ate the surf. I ate the turf. You can / stay calm. I know he drank. There is my bank. / That show is junk. This is a smash. The box / will bulge.

You have some nerve. Sit at your desk. / This is an inch. He read the oath. I saw / the porch. I have a cramp. This, you must solve. / The air has dust. I know he drank.

My hand / is numb. When is the lunch? I will not flunk. / Who will be next. I want some action. Will you / go serve? Tom is a Thumb. Give me a test. / The fire will singe. Do you like ranch? There was / a gasp. He had a vision. I hurt my tooth. / Where is my watch. You are at risk. She had / a lamb. I can eat half. The floor is damp. / What is your function? You are the last.

I won / the match. You must have health. Which is your disc? / This is our section. Please do not binge. I need / some help. It was not lost. This is a dump. / That is the curve. She has the text. Make it / a fraction. The date is past. Who took my cash. / The air is crisp. You need to wash. She is / the first.

Do not lose nerve. I need a bath. / I lit the lamp. You must use caution. Look at / my rash. Shut up your mouth. She is so rich. / You are a lump. It's in your grasp. I see / your breath. This is the session. I saw the path. / He hit the pitch. I like that dish. He cut / the tension. She dug the earth. I love to fish. /

The boy is plump. Use the top shelf. Look at / the ocean. I drew a blank. Go down the ramp. / This is the booth. I am a catch. That is / a fact. You must have faith. Please do not push. / Now you must skimp. I love the crust. This is / very fresh. That has a patch. I lit the torch. / She read my palm. It is a wolf. Drive to / the east. You must now act. She had the mask. /

I use a crutch. She hit a slump. I must / not rest. Sit on the cushion. Do you like golf? / Where is your stash. This is a birch. You must / not gulp. I gave a wink. She is a pest. / I need a stamp. The floor will sink. You are / in fashion. I sold my hutch. You should not sulk. / I need your help. She took a walk.

That is / a myth. Hey, did you belch? He has to talk. / This is not milk. That is a prank. Where are / the French? Sit on the stump.

Get to it, steno babies. I have much more to show you, but every journey begins with the first step.

Learn that step.

Steve Shastay - Steno Rebel

[stenography practice drills](http://buysteno.com) ([http:// buysteno.com](http://buysteno.com))

Tuesday, September 11, 2007

Magic Drill 2 - Hard Endings and Learning to Drop

Concepts, concepts, concepts. Hmmm.

Okay, let's see if this makes sense.

Step One -- Hard Word vs. Easy Word

Magic Drill 1 and Magic Drill 2 are identical -- except that Magic Drill 2 has a hard word at the end of each sentence.

Magic Drill 1 is easier. Magic Drill 2 is harder.

And Magic Drill 2 is harder because of the hard word at the end of each sentence.

The hard word costs you more time and effort than the other words. The hard words take longer to write. They slow you down. They often have hard fingering patterns. And all of those bad things can cause you to hesitate.

.....

Step Two -- Strategy

When you are drilling, you often find yourself faced with the unpleasant situation of not being able to write every word. What is the correct thing to do?

No. 1, you must continue to write strong clear strokes. Under no circumstances should you allow your writing to deteriorate. The minimum standard is no more than one unreadable word per one hundred words stroked.

No. 2, your hands must always be moving. When you are behind, your hands have no business stopping. The brain is the culprit. If your hands have stopped, it is because the brain has not told them what to do. By the way, forget about how fast the hands are moving. If they are moving, then they are okay. Concentrate solely on keeping your hands from stopping.

No. 3, if you don't have time to write all of the words, then you must pick which ones you will write. The way to do that is to selectively drop the hardest words.

I have a ton of things to say about how to drop and why. The above explanation is enough for now. It is time to drill.

Your job is to redo Magic Drill 2. This time I want you to drop the hard word at the end of each sentence.

Do not write the hard word.

Do not write the hard word.

Please, oh, please, do not write the hard word.

Just drop the sucker.

Now because you are dropping the hard word from each sentence, you should be able to increase the speed. But maybe not at first. Many people find it hard to drop. Keep your drill at a speed that you can easily do.

The only rules to this drill are: 1) every stroke must be readable, and 2) the last word of each sentence must be dropped.

Steve Shastay - Steno Rebel

P.S. If you don't know this, you can find recordings of the Magic Drills on CourtReportingHelp.com. You can use them for free.

Monday, September 17, 2007

Magic Drill Song

I am supposed to write about Magic Drill 2 - Jury Charge terms. But I'm lazy, and I found an easy way to backslide. While looking for the hard copy for MD 2 - JC, I found the Magic Drill song.

You didn't know there was a song, did ya? Yes, there is a Magic Drill song. No, I can't give you a good reason **why** there is a Magic Drill song.

Magic Drill Song

(with apologies to Pete Townsend and the Who)

Every day I get to class (Do the Magic Drill)

I get in the groove and I write clear (Do the Magic Drill)

I'm so nervous I just stroke and smile (Do the Magic Drill)

Next test will be in a little while (Do the Magic Drill)

Thank you, teacher, for getting me here (Do the Magic Drill)

You'll love my work, so have no fear (Do the Magic Drill)

I don't want to cause no fuss (Do the Magic Drill)

But can I buy your Magic stuff (Do the Magic Drill)

Noooooooooooo!

I don't care how much I pay (Do the Magic Drill)

I wanna stroke the Shastay Way (Do the Magic Drill)

I want it, I want it, I want it, I want it ... (You can have it for free([just click here](#)))

Lit, JC, and Q&A (Do my Magic Drill)

Just to take the sloppy notes away (Do my Magic Drill)

Lit, JC and Q&A (Do my Magic Drill)

cause I want to graduate (Do my Magic Drill)

Magic Drill, Magic Drill, Magic Drill...

Now I've got my Magic Drill (Do my Magic Drill)

Yes, I've got my Magic Drill (Do my Magic Drill)

I drive to school every day (Do my Magic Drill)

Just to write the Shastay Way (Do my Magic Drill)

I want it, I want it, I want it, I want it ...

Every day you'll see my dust (Do my Magic Drill)

Cause I write the way you know I must (Do my Magic Drill)

.....

Boy, what a song. Pete Townsend would be turning over in his grave right now if he was dead.

Thursday, July 8, 2010

I'm Not Just Back, I'm Steno Back

I haven't been on Myspace for years. Comments and mail are years old. I deleted the mail. It is time for me to write again. I will be producing articles left and right about stenography and a few other topics. Some can be republished here. Some can't, but I can provide a link to them.

For those of you who have a site or blog about stenography, English, medicine, scoping, psychology, law, memory, self help, small business, fine motor control, or anything concerning stenography or stenography-related fields, send me a link. I will be updating the CourtReportingHelp.com site, and I will place your link permanently on my site.

Before I add your link, I will personally visit your site or blog. Big or small, personal or business, I will add your link if your site can be of interest to the students and teachers in the stenography profession.

If you wish to send a brief description along with your link, that would be helpful to the visitors to CourtReportingHelp.com, and it will give you some free advertisement.

Your part of the deal is to place either or both of the following links on your site or blog. I have two main sites: CourtReportingHelp.com and BuySteno.com. CourtReportingHelp.com is a steno site with free drills, articles, tips, etc. BuySteno.com is a steno store of speedbuilding CDs, programs, books.

I believe that it is time for me to write once more. I was quite prolific back in the day. The articles will be coming shortly. Along with them, I will be working on my sites. Also, I will probably create a steno group on Facebook.

I am on Facebook, Twitter, and of course, Myspace.

Currently, I have a newsletter called: [Advanced Steno Techniques](http://AdvancedStenoTechniques.com). It's free. You can sign up on the homepage of CourtReportingHelp.com.

That's enough for now. See you soon.

Sunday, July 11, 2010

Try the Advanced Steno Techniques Newsletter

For a free newsletter on steno speedbuilding, go here:

<http://CourtReportingHelp.com>.

On the homepage, sign up for the Advanced Steno Techniques newsletter.

Monday, July 12, 2010

Get Court Reporters is, Like, Way Cool, Daddio

Get Court Reporters is a Facebook page that supports the [Get Court Reporters website](#). Besides job-related posts, they also have a good deal of posts about briefs, CAT systems and all the regular stuff court reporters love to chat about.

Wednesday, July 14, 2010

Briefs for VOL Words

volt VOELT

voluntary VOLT

volunteer VOL

volume VOM

Friday, July 16, 2010

Slow and Steady Makes Great Steno

Today on Facebook, two students were discussing how to practice. They chose a solid practice regimen, but it was clear that they had considered an alternate method. They chose correctly, but many students look for better methods than those proposed by their boring, slow-and-steady theory. And some of those methods are very risky, outdated notions that were discarded decades ago.

No one, outside of stenography, agrees that sloppy physical movements should be tolerated when learning a skill.

No one, outside of stenography, agrees that novices should be taught a large number of complicated or technical physical patterns if simpler patterns are available.

ALL REPUTABLE AUTHORITIES AGREE THAT THE SLOW AND STEADY METHOD IS THE CORRECT METHOD.

All of them.

Every single one.

I will be publishing articles that will fully explain the correct methods of practice and memorization. I will lead you to articles on Wikipedia that agree with my articles. You won't find any disagreement, whether you look on Wikipedia or anywhere else.

StedEd is right. Phoenix is right. Drill under control. Write well. Use only the briefs that you can effectively use right now. Don't overload yourself.

Look for my articles on the Facebook group named Court Reporting Help and in the free newsletter named Advanced Steno Techniques (sign up on CourtReportingHelp.com).

Let me prove it to you.

Court Reporting Help site

Friday, July 30, 3010

Read Your Notes, Steno Babies

WHAOEUL KWROU R RAED G TH PHES SAPBLG RBGS KWROU R STR*EPBGT G
KWROUR SKEUL S. RAED KWROUR TPHOET S FPLT RAED AUL OF THEPL FPLT