

My name is Carrie Nauman. I am an official court reporter for the State of Iowa. I work in district court in the Dubuque County Courthouse. I have been a certified shorthand reporter for over 20 years. In the spring of 2014, I attended the ICRA seminar in Newton, which included a tour of the DMACC Newton campus. I was so inspired by the provost's enthusiasm over the opening of DMACC's court reporting program that I decided to make it my personal mission to be responsible for getting one student enrolled in the program.

On my drive home from the seminar, I brainstormed on how to accomplish this goal. I decided the easiest and fastest way for me to spread the word about court reporting would be to post daily facts on my personal Facebook page for the month of April 2014. For 30 days I shared highlights and a few lowlights about my opinions on a career as a certified shorthand reporter.

My personal Facebook campaign was a huge success in my eyes. I had no idea what to expect when I started posting my facts, but I soon realized I had a high number of people looking forward to reading my daily posts. I enjoyed all the feedback I received, both in public and in private. I may never know if my goal of getting a student enrolled in DMACC's court reporting program will be achieved, but I can proudly say I gave it my best shot.

Below is a near identical version of the daily facts I posted. I take no pride in ownership of any of the posts. Please feel free to share these facts as you see fit. I grant you permission to copy them and use as your own or to modify them to your liking.

**Fact No. 1:** The salary range for an official court reporter (think working in a courthouse) in the State of Iowa is \$48,464 - \$75,192, plus the State of Iowa benefit package. That means \$48,464 is guaranteed on day one right out of college. Since that is one of the top three questions I am always asked, I figured I'd throw that one out there right away. The salary a stenographer can make varies from state to state and also varies depending on the chosen path in the marketplace. (More on this topic later.) Here are average salaries for a court reporter in some of the top paying states: Oregon: \$87K; New York: \$83K; Maine: \$81K; Colorado: \$81K; and California: \$77K.

**Fact No. 2:** Technology cannot replace us! People mistakenly believe that court reporters will soon be replaced by voice-to-text technology (a/k/a a tape recorder). While it's true some simple court proceedings in magistrate court (think traffic tickets, possession of alcohol, public intoxication, small claims matters, etc.) are tape recorded, all other court proceedings (think domestic and sexual abuse, murder, medical malpractice, civil disputes, etc.) are reported by a live court reporter. A machine cannot differentiate between three male voices speaking during one court proceeding. Was that Mr. Smith, Mr. Jones or Mr. Miller that said that? YIKES! A machine cannot ask a witness with a unique accent to repeat what they said because it was unclear or ask a fast talker to slow down. Litigants in courtrooms often talk on top of each other and at the same time. Court reporters are trained to protect the record by stopping the proceedings and instructing litigants to speak one at a time so each litigant is heard individually. A

machine cannot do that task. A machine cannot see a head nod or a shake of the head. Haven't we all seen or sent embarrassing text messages littered with typos and incorrect voice-to-text translations? Those errors are unacceptable in certified transcripts that the Court of Appeals and Supreme Court rely on. The human element will always be necessary in legal proceedings. Court reporters have embraced technology. We are trained to write "realtime," which means instant translation of the spoken word. (More on this topic later this month.) In short, certified shorthand reporters **are** the cutting edge of technology.

**Fact No. 3:** With a degree as a certified shorthand reporter, you can become a broadcast captioner, a CART writer, a freelance reporter or an official court reporter. I have briefly broken down each profession for you below, but there's so much more I could share.

Broadcast captioners earn their living by writing realtime, which means instantly translating the spoken word into English. Their realtime text is then broadcasted across the nation and displayed on TVs or other visual devices in people's homes or businesses. Yes, when you are sitting in a sports bar and closed captioning is scrolling across the multitude of TVs in the bar, a human being called a broadcast (or closed) captioner is sitting somewhere in the nation (usually in the luxury of their own home office) instantly translating the sports announcer's words into English, which is displayed seconds later onto that TV screen. Broadcast captioners earn an EXCELLENT salary and often have very flexible hours tailored specifically around their schedules. Captioners are paid by the hour, and depending on their contract, they can make anywhere from \$50 to \$125 per hour. Experienced broadcast captioners can easily earn six-figure incomes. It is a very demanding and stressful job. Think about the vast range of topics on the "Today" show or "Good Morning America" every day. That's a lot of dialogue to accurately capture from some very fast talkers. Broadcast captioners do have the luxury of paraphrasing, however, so they are not required to be verbatim 100 percent of the time.

CART is an acronym for Communication Access Realtime Translation. CART writers provide realtime translation of the spoken word into text for deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals. CART writers can be seen in many environments including, but not limited to, college and high school classrooms, workplace settings, religious services, weddings, funerals, doctor visits, social events, etc. CART writers are at the disposal of their deaf or hard-of-hearing client's needs. If the CART writer's student has class from 9 to 11 a.m., the CART writer is in class with the student those same hours. CART writers are also paid by the hour at a rate of \$50 to \$75 per hour according to the research I've done.

Freelance reporters almost exclusively report depositions in legal offices. Depositions are a part of the discovery process in which litigants gather information in preparation for trial. Witnesses are placed under oath and answer questions pertaining to their knowledge of or involvement in a criminal or civil case. Those questions and answers are reduced to what is called a certified transcript that is provided to the litigants.

Freelancers often report arbitration and mediation proceedings and sometimes board meetings and city council meetings. Freelancers can also work as medical transcriptionists. Again, freelancer reporters earn a high salary with very flexible hours that can be tailored to their specific schedules. Need to be at your child's school from 10 to 2 on Thursday? No problem. Just don't take assignments during that time. Maybe you'll take an assignment from 2:30 to 5 that day instead. Freelancers are paid per page of transcript sold, and I'll share more on that topic later.

Official court reporters work in a courthouse with judges. I am an official court reporter. I work for the State of Iowa at the Dubuque County Courthouse. The duties of an official court reporter vary from state to state. I report all proceedings that require a record. When I am not in the courtroom, I work in my office performing administrative tasks for our judges, such as typing decisions and processing orders. I am also required to file paperwork associated with the proceedings I report. I've already shared with you my salary range. In addition to that salary, official reporters can make anywhere from \$5,000 to \$15,000 on top of their salary by producing transcripts. (Again, more on transcript sales later.) My job requires me to be at the courthouse from 8:30 to 4:30, Monday through Friday.

**Fact No. 4:** What equipment does a stenographer need? Reporters are responsible for purchasing their own steno machines once they join the workforce. While in college, steno machines are rented for a nominal fee from the college. A brand-new steno machine costs \$5,200. Court reporters use unique computer-aided software that translates the spoken word into English. The software to produce a certified transcript costs \$4,000. You also need a computer. Between the steno machine, software and the computer, a working reporter has around \$10,000 invested in their equipment.

**Fact No. 5:** There are only 22 keys on a steno machine. There are 26 letters in the alphabet, but only 17 of those letters are on the keyboard! Unlike a word processor's keyboard, letters and symbols do not appear on a steno machine's keyboard. By that I mean they are not stamped onto the keys so you can "cheat" and look down to see what letter on the keyboard to push.

**Fact No. 6:** Certified shorthand reporters must be able to write a minimum of 225 words per minute to graduate from college and pass state and national tests. During heated exchanges in court proceedings, litigants easily reach a talking speed of 300 words per minute. When people read documents into the record or prepared statements, they also exceed 225 words per minute. Also, court reporters "write" not "type" on their steno machines. When you type on a keyboard, you depress one key at a time. When we write on our machines, we depress multiple keys at one time to create words and phrases. Tomorrow I'll share with you how our machines work. Stay tuned!

**Fact No. 7:** So how does the steno machine work? The basic principle behind our talent is a phonics system. The keyboard is broken up into three segments. In the "home position," the fingers of the left hand rest along the gap between the two main rows of keys to the left of the asterisk (left pinky finger on the S and left index finger

resting between the H and R). These fingers are used to generate initial consonants. The fingers of the right hand lie in a corresponding position to the right of the asterisk (right index finger between the FR and right pinky finger between the TS). These fingers are used to generate final consonants. The thumbs rest between the AO and EU to produce the vowel sounds. For example, the word cat would be written in a single stroke depressing the initial K, the vowel A and the final T at the same time. The TK alone on the left side is the word "did," but TK is also the initial "D" sound. The word dog would be written in a single stroke depressing the initial TK, the vowel O and the final G at the same time. Initial KH creates words beginning with the "ch" sound. Words ending with the "rch" sound are written by depressing FPRB on the right side of the keyboard. The word "church" would be written in a single stroke depressing initial KH, the vowel U and the final FPRB at the same time. This theory would be used to write the words perch, birch and lurch. The letters PB on the right side of the keyboard represent the final "N" consonant. Words that end with "nd" sounds are therefore written by depressing PBD on the right side at the same time. Therefore, the word hand would be written by depressing initial H, the vowel A and the final PBD. The same theory would be used to write the words sand, pond, wand and canned. See the pattern?

Attached is an outline of some of my notes from an actual court case. It will help explain our theory a little more.

I'll stop there for today. Tomorrow I'll share more information on our writing theory. Please feel free to share any comments or questions you may have.

**Fact No. 8:** How can court reporters possibly write 225 words per minute? Court reporters use brief forms to help them attain a minimum writing speed of 225 words per minute. For example, the following common phrases can be written in one stroke or motion on a steno machine: Can you tell us, do you want, did you know, if you can, correct me if I'm wrong, beyond a reasonable doubt, at the same time, ladies and gentlemen of the jury, if I understand. We also create brief forms that are unique to the case we are working on. For example, let's take the company name Nauman Masonry. Nauman Masonry would be written in four strokes. If I am in trial and the company name Nauman Masonry is repeated over and over again, I will quickly come up with a brief form that allows me to write Nauman Masonry in one quick stroke. Brief forms, together with lots of practice, are the tricks of speed building in college.

**Fact No. 9:** Why isn't there any paper coming out of the back of the steno machines that are in your pictures? As I've mentioned, court reporters are the cutting edge of technology. Instead of ink ribbons imprinting letters onto steno paper, our notes are now digitally encrypted onto SD cards. With the advancement of paperless stenotype machines, steno paper has become almost obsolete. There are still reporters who use machines that require steno paper, but the vast majority of stenographers have welcomed and embraced technology and have gone "paperless." We like to work smarter, not harder. Also, steno machines were once only available in black. As you can see in the photo, they now come in fabulous colors. More about our high-tech machines tomorrow!



**Fact No. 10:** Technology has truly advanced our profession. Today's paperless machines have built-in, triple-protection backup systems. There are two SD cards that capture the steno notes and audio, as well as a memory board that backs up thousands of pages of steno notes. Three backup systems ensure reporters that they will never lose their work product.

Today's machines also feature WiFi and Bluetooth technology, which assists us as we instantly feed our live realtime to litigants' laptops or iPads. Lawyers can sit at counsel table during trials or depositions and see our instant realtime feed. They rely on this technology to help them better focus on their case as they question live witnesses on the stand. If a witness hedges on an answer, a lawyer can refer back to our realtime feed and say to the witness, "But just a moment ago you said X, Y and Z and now you're telling me something a bit different. What really happened?" Judges also rely on our realtime feeds during trials. If a lawyer objects to a question, the judge can quickly look at his or her laptop, re-read the question and rule accordingly.

Remember those tape recorders I spoke of earlier that some people mistakenly believe can replace us? Tape records can't read back on the spot nor can the parties to a proceeding rely on the accuracy of voice-to-text technology to produce a readable realtime transcript. Some states that have replaced live stenographers with tape recorders have embarrassed themselves by losing their tape recorded proceedings. Why? Sometimes the clerk forgets to push the record button. Oops! This error has caused taxpayers thousands of dollars by forcing litigants to retry their cases. Certified shorthand reporters NEVER forget to push the on button. We are always on and have proven ourselves to be the gold star standard to guard and protect the court record.

**Fact No. 11:** Backup audio. Another feature on today's paperless machines is audio backup. A built-in speaker digitally records the spoken word onto an SD card. The audio is in sync with the notes, so while editing transcripts, reporters can play back a portion of audio to verify the accuracy of their notes. Audio sync, used wisely, can be a great tool for working reporters. It is not meant to be a crutch and should only be used as a verification tool to spot check steno notes. Audio sync cannot be relied on to produce a transcript from scratch. Busy reporters do not have time to listen to every

word from start to finish while producing a transcript. Stenographers are trained to rely on their writing skills and to protect the record by asking fast talkers to slow down, speak one at a time, repeat a mumbled word, etc. Reporters leave depositions and court hearings with great confidence knowing their notes are verbatim, and that is what they rely on to produce a certified transcript.

**Fact No. 12:** Steno writers multitask while working and their minds work in unusual ways. Stenographers have honed their skill so well they can process grocery lists, to-do lists and busy family schedules in their minds while simultaneously writing flawlessly on their machines. (Many of the posts I've written are a result of something popping into my mind while working. "Oh, yeah, I have to mention X, Y and Z!") Stenographers' brains are able to hear spoken words and instantly process them without pause. We are fine-tuned and well-oiled machines and work in a rhythm. There are times we are asked to read back a segment of the proceedings by the judge or an attorney and panic immediately sets in and we think to ourselves . . . "Oh, man, I hope I got that! I wasn't paying attention." Thankfully, I've never read back my grocery list! I personally find myself making errors when I think too hard about how to write certain spoken words. Also, while we hear and write every spoken word in a proceeding, we aren't always listening to what is being said. Sometimes attorneys will ask for my opinion on what just happened in the courtroom and how I think their case went. I can sometimes honestly respond to them that I wasn't paying attention to what they were saying, so I don't have an opinion.

Lastly, stenographers are always thinking about ways to improve their writing skills. While watching TV or engaged in conversation, stenographers are notorious for thinking to themselves, "How would I write that word in steno?" We are always trying to create smarter, easier theory to make our jobs easier.

**Fact No. 13:** Transcript sales and more money. I talked a few posts back about how stenographers make money by producing transcripts. Freelance reporters earn their income exclusively by "selling" their certified transcripts. While freelance reporters own their own steno machines, some firms will provide a laptop and software. The industry norm these days, however, seems to be each freelance reporter is an independent contractor and is therefore responsible for his or her own equipment. Reporting firms or agencies will give reporters a cut of the overall transcript sales. For example, if a reporter produces a 200-page transcript, the transcript is sold for maybe \$3.50 per page.  $\$3.50 \times 200 \text{ pages} = \$700$  for the original transcript. That same transcript is often sold to more than one litigant. Maybe the copy is sold at .75 per page.  $.75 \times 200 \text{ pages} = \$150$ . So one job at 200 pages has now brought in \$850 total (original and one copy). The firm takes a 25 percent cut for getting the reporter the job. That means for one day of work, the reporter made \$637.50 on that transcript. Now, the downside is that may be the only job you get the entire week or maybe the job went from 9 to 4 but they didn't order the transcript from you so you made nothing that day besides a "sitting fee." Reporters do charge an hourly rate of \$25 to \$40 per hour when no transcript is ordered. Freelancing is a very feast-or-famine profession. Freelancers need to be

good budgeters. Earning a high salary as a freelancer is one perk of the job; the other perk is enjoying very flexible hours. You can work as little or as much as you want.

As an official court reporter, the State of Iowa does not provide any equipment for me. When I said earlier this month I make extra money on transcripts above and beyond my salary, it's because I have to provide all the tools to produce the transcript (steno machine, computer, software, printer, paper, toner, binders, etc. - \$10,000 plus). The State dictates how much I can charge per page for my transcripts, and I have to prepare them on my own time outside of my 8:30 to 4:30 schedule. Generally speaking, it's common to make \$5,000 per year in transcript sales, but it's not unheard of to make more than \$15,000 each year in transcript sales as an official court reporter. Remember, that is on top of our salary. Again, earning a great income as an official reporter is a perk, but this perk comes with a very structured schedule with little flexibility.

**Fact No. 14:** Certified transcripts. Reporters certify their transcripts before releasing them to litigants. What does it mean to certify a transcript and how do you certify a transcript? Certifying a transcript means we swear, under penalty of perjury, that the proceeding was, indeed, reported by us on the date and time stated in the transcript; that it is a true and accurate transcript of the proceeding; that we are not related to nor employed by any of the parties involved in the litigation; and that we have no interest (financial or otherwise) in the outcome of the litigation. We certify our transcripts by attaching a "CERTIFICATE" as the last page to every transcript. The certificate contains the language I mentioned above and we sign the certificate page.

**Fact No. 15:** Do court reporters ever make mistakes? (See what I did there?) Absolutely. Every day and every proceeding. We're human. In 20 years in this career, I have never written a single proceeding without an error or mistake. I've come pretty close and strive for perfection, but I don't beat myself up about it. To help avoid mistakes, court reporters are trained to interrupt proceedings to ask for clarification or to have a question or statement repeated if they missed it. Just a couple weeks ago I stopped an attorney and asked to have a number repeated. I admitted to the attorney I jumbled it and could they please repeat the number. We are trained to protect the record. It's our job. When we are writing 225-plus words per minute, sometimes our fingers erroneously drag another key into the steno outline which creates what we call an untranslate. Our unique software doesn't recognize the foreign steno outline, doesn't know what to do with it, so it simply leaves it alone for us to define as a correct word. When we are editing our transcripts, we see those untranslated words and change them to the proper word.

**Fact No. 16:** A degree as a certified shorthand reporter can be obtained in only two years! While the program is designed to take two years, the average student completes the program in two and a half to three years. It takes approximately six months to learn the steno theory to be able to write every word in the English language. The remaining time in school is dedicated to speed building. The sooner you attain 225 words per

minute, the sooner you will graduate. Students must be self-motivated, disciplined and dedicated to practicing on their own outside the classroom.

**Fact No. 17:** What kind of person would make a great court reporter? I believe today's generation has an advantage in this profession. Today's kids openly embrace and latch on to advancements in technology. Their nimble fingers fly over their handheld gadgets with ease as they text each other brief forms in a language only they seem to understand. LOL, SMH, IDK, LMK are all brief forms today's generation has come up with to quickly communicate with each other. Today's generation would quickly be able to absorb the concept behind our writing theory.

While I believe anyone can be a great court reporter, it is important to be punctual and organized. When a trial starts at 8:30 or a deposition starts at 10:00, reporters must be at the job early to be sure their equipment is set up and ready to go. It is very unprofessional to make others wait for you. Stenographers also have strong grammar and punctuation skills, which aids them in preparing their certified transcripts.

There aren't enough male court reporters in our industry! While statistics show the field is saturated with women, the reverse was once true. The truth is more men need to become court reporters. Does your son LOVE sports? Maybe his dream of becoming a professional athlete won't come true; however, he can still breathe, eat, sleep and live sports by becoming a broadcast captioner who specializes in sporting events! For big sporting events, such as the Super Bowl and World Series, broadcast captioners are often flown to the host city where they sit in plush suites in the arena to caption the event live and in person. How cool would that be to sit in your home and watch the Super Bowl captions flowing across your TV screen knowing your child is in the arena captioning the game for the deaf and hard-of-hearing community!

**Fact No.18:** 94.9 percent proficiency on a test is considered a failure. Can you imagine your son or daughter getting 94.9 percent on a math test and getting an F? Ouch! Shorthand reporters are held to very high standards. It is the gold star standard we proudly embrace as we are tasked with a huge responsibility in legal proceedings. Iowa requires shorthand reporters to pass a state test in order to work in Iowa. Reporters must be able to write question-and-answer testimony at 225 words per minute for five minutes with 95 percent accuracy. There is optional certification at the national level with the same requirement. Certification varies from state to state. Some states require certification, like Iowa, and other states require only a certificate of completion from an accredited college. When I was in college, tests had to be passed at an even higher level of proficiency of 97 percent. While that exceptional standard seemed hard to attain, it made passing the state and national tests at 95 percent a bit easier.

**Fact No. 19:** High demand and plenty of job opportunities! According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor and Statistics, jobs as a certified shorthand reporter, both inside and outside the courtroom, are expected to grow by 14 percent through 2020. In 2012 Forbes magazine ranked court reporting No. 6 among top jobs without a four-year degree.

In a quick glance through a national magazine that is published for court reporters, I discovered over 50 current job openings throughout the nation. Here is a link to check out some of the jobs that are advertised: <http://www.ncra.org/Education/joblist.cfm>

While there are currently no job openings in the State of Iowa for a position like mine as an official court reporter in a courthouse, in the next two years many official court reporters will be retiring and there will be dozens of positions to fill all across Iowa. A student who enrolls in college in the next year to three years will have their pick of jobs within the State of Iowa when he or she graduates.

In my opinion, broadcast captioning is the fastest growing facet of our industry. In 1996, Congress required video programming distributors to close caption their television programs to ensure that viewers who are deaf and hard of hearing have full access to programming. Because of that, there is a high demand for stenographers to become broadcast captioners. Again, broadcast captioners often earn six-figure incomes, and they almost always work from home with very flexible schedules.

**Fact No. 20:** Travel anywhere in the nation as a court reporter! When I was a freelance reporter, my boss and I were flown by a client to Washington DC to report depositions. I got to see some pretty cool landmarks at the expense of our client. I was also given the opportunity to be flown to China for some deposition work. Sadly, I had to decline the opportunity because I didn't have a passport and couldn't get one issued in time. Discovery work in complex civil litigation can last a couple of years. Attorneys like to use one court reporter for such complex cases. It's simply easier for the attorneys to use one reporter who will keep all the names, spellings and information about the case straight rather than reinvent the wheel every deposition with a new reporter. Strong relationships are forged between attorneys and court reporters.

**Fact No. 21:** Not every proceeding that happens in a courtroom needs to be reported. Parties can waive a record if they don't feel a record is necessary. When proceedings are reported, not all proceedings are transcribed. I only produce a certified transcript when one of the litigants requests a transcript of the record, and that's usually because they are appealing the case to the Court of Appeals. As I mentioned in an earlier post, when I am not in the courtroom, I work in my office performing administrative tasks for our judges, such as typing decisions and processing orders. Earlier this month we took a guilty plea from a Defendant who pled guilty to 10 counts of forgery. She had fun writing checks on someone else's account. She was charged with probably 25 counts of forgery, but because of the evidence the State had, the parties agreed 10 of the charges would easily stick. The order for that Defendant was complex because of all the different counts involved. We spent 50 minutes in the courtroom making a record on the guilty plea. I then spent an additional 40 minutes in my office processing her paperwork. Remember, that was one Defendant. There were probably 25 other Defendants in court that morning with her. Another administrative function I must perform is filing paperwork associated with the proceedings I report. Oftentimes months and sometimes years go by before litigants decide they need a record of a court

hearing. The paperwork I am required to file goes in the court file so litigants will always have a record of who reported what hearing and on what date, etc.

**Fact No. 22:** Do your hands hurt? That is a question I am frequently asked. No, my hands never hurt. If I am writing all day several days in a row at 250-plus words per minute, my wrists may get stiff. What bothers me the most are my shoulders and neck. We are so focused on getting every spoken word, we often tense up. It is important to use a good ergonomic chair when working. Reporters prefer chairs with no arms. It's also important to take breaks every hour and a half to two hours to stretch and move around. Judges and attorneys are very mindful of our need to take breaks. Reporters are also trained to ask for breaks to protect their health.

**Fact No. 23:** They said what? When you sit in my chair in a courtroom, you hear stories you'd never believe unless you heard them with your own ears. We can't make these stories up. As a certified shorthand reporter, you will have a front row seat to some of the most inspiring and troubling stories in America.

I have become both calloused and wiser because of my profession. I'm calloused because nothing surprises me anymore. It's no longer shocking to hear the way some people live. My normal is definitely not their normal. I've heard lots of "Do not try this at home" stories. I'm wiser because I've heard so many different things about people and the way things work. I've gotten mini tutorials from expert witnesses on topics that range from murder weapons to tagging cattle to land surveying to quality control issues in tool and die companies. The saying "I know a little about everything and a lot about nothing" definitely applies to stenographers.

I've become less judgmental and more empathetic. When I first became an official court reporter, I used to judge every defendant that was before me in court. I'd think about how uneducated they were and how pathetic their lives are. I'm now aware almost every serious criminal out there is simply a product of poor parenting. Many of these repeat offenders simply don't know a different life. It's what they grew up with. Barely getting by is what they are used to and nobody has taken the time to show them how to improve their situation. It's a vicious cycle that is hard to break. I've changed my thinking pattern from "I'm better than them" to "how do I become a part of the solution?" My job has made me realize my life is a good one and yet I have more to do.

One of my favorite proceedings to report is an adoption proceeding. More often than not, families are breaking up inside courtrooms. Adoptions create families. :D

(Off Topic Sidenote: Remember my post a few days ago about being able to travel in this profession? On a court reporter forum I follow, a gal posted she is being flown to the Cayman Islands for three days. Day one and day three are for work and day two is pure pleasure. The expenses incurred that the client doesn't pick up will be a tax write off for that reporter. How cool is that?)

**Fact No. 24:** This career sounds too good to be true. Tell me about the downside. I honestly don't have any dislikes, but I do have pet peeves. Here are some of my top pet peeves about this career.

**Ringling cell phones:** Cell phones should not ring during court proceedings. They shouldn't even be powered on. Some courthouses ban them at the door and you can't get them past security. LOVE that concept! And the sign that says "Cell phone usage is not permitted in the courtroom" really does mean YOU! Turn it off! Off means off and not just vibrate or silent mode.

**Hats:** Baseball hats, beanies and other such headgear should never be worn in a courtroom.

**Babies and toddlers:** Babies and toddlers should never be brought to court proceedings. They can't sit still for more than two minutes and they certainly can't keep quiet. Tapping, squeezing and pinching kids to try to get them to be quiet never works, either. Just leave the kids at home.

**Defendants who whisper when the judge addresses them:** I am POSITIVE many of the defendants who we see in the courtroom are not quiet little church mice outside the courthouse. Why do they barely open their mouths in the courtroom, act shy and quiet and mumble?

**Nature of the testimony:** Some days I get bummed out because of the nature of the testimony I hear. It's sad to hear some of the things that happen to kids who find themselves involved in juvenile court proceedings. And when divorcing couples can't see past their selfish, childish behavior, I want to stand up and shout: "GROW UP ALREADY!"

I'll also mention it does get frustrating when I work with attorneys who are notoriously fast talkers. I can politely remind them to slow down for me, but it's just their nature and the way they are. Those days you just bear down and work harder than usual. Thankfully those days are few and far between.

My biggest dislike is wearing Spanx every day. However, that's my personal problem and not the industry's problem. Seriously, that's about as bad as it gets for me. I'm truly blessed and have enjoyed what this career has done for me and my family.

**Fact No. 25:** What do stenographers wear to work (besides Spanx)? :D I do not wear a fancy suit, skirt or dress every day. If we are in a jury trial, I tend to wear pant suits. However, if we're not in front of a jury, I wear nice dress slacks and blouses, skirts and tops. I personally prefer to wear pants due to the machine sitting between my knees. If I wear a skirt, I prefer a longer, flowing skirt for my comfort. Some reporters wear short skirts or pencil skirts, but I can't fathom wiggling around like I do and still looking lady-like in a pencil or short skirt. By wiggling around I mean I don't simply sit still and look comatose when writing. I try not to distract the litigants when I do get fidgety, but I often cross my legs or sit "side saddle" to my machine. On days I know I will only be doing

paperwork in my office, I wear more “casual Friday” outfits. Jeans, tank tops, shorts, flip-flops and yoga pants are never appropriate for official proceedings with litigants. Male reporters always wear nice dress slacks, a button-down shirt and a tie. When in trial in front of juries, male reporters often wear suits or a sport jacket. Freelance reporters trend in the same fashion and wear professional attire like I mentioned. Now, if you choose to become a broadcast captioner, you can sit in your home office every day in your pajamas or yoga pants. That’s how captioners roll. Talk about a great perk!

**Fact No. 26:** What do judges wear under their robes? Become an official court reporter and you will finally find out! SPOILER: It’s almost always the same professional business attire I mentioned yesterday when sharing what court reporters wear. In fact, court reporters are often mistaken for judges and lawyers. It’s not until we plop down behind our machines that litigants realize we are “only” the stenographers. Humor aside, the point I want to make with this post is you will create life-long friendships with judges, lawyers, social workers, police officers, and many other awesome people when you become a certified shorthand reporter. There are many perks in this profession, and meeting and working with great people along the way is one of them. There are a lot of strong bonds formed and networking opportunities in this profession. (SIDENOTE: I had to add this nugget about what judges wear under their robes, because, believe it or not, it is frequently asked when I talk to students in school.)

**Fact No. 27:** Certification and continuing education units (CEUs).

Certification: Upon successful completion of college, reporters often go on to become certified at the State and National levels. As I mentioned in a previous post, to work in Iowa you must pass the State board, which involves passing a written knowledge test, technical question-and-answer testimony at 180 words per minute, nontechnical question-and-answer testimony at 225 words per minute, and nontechnical multi-voice (at least three speakers) testimony at 200 words per minute with one minute chosen for readback. Again, all skills portions using our steno machine must be passed with 95 percent accuracy.

The written knowledge test consists of 100 multiple choice questions pertaining to medical and legal terminology, court procedures, spelling, and Iowa Code Sections and court rules relating to shorthand reporters. Accuracy of 70 percent is required to pass the written test.

It costs \$200 to take the test. The test is offered twice a year. You can take the test as many times as you need until you successfully complete each portion. The test can be passed in “legs,” meaning if you fail one portion, you only have to pass that one portion the next time around.

I also mentioned earlier some states don’t require state certification, and a certificate of completion from an accredited college will be enough to obtain employment in those states.

Continuing education units (CEUs): In states that do require certification, certified shorthand reporters must comply with continuing education requirements. The State of Iowa requires reporters to obtain 30 hours of education in a three-year cycle. Reports must be filed annually, together with a fee, with the Iowa Board of Examiners of Shorthand Reporters. Any reporter who is nationally certified by the National Court Reporters Association (NCRA) must comply with the same requirement of 30 hours of education in a three-year cycle.

Like many professions that are regulated by the State of Iowa, reporters are subject to losing their license or having their license suspended if they do not comply with the State's rules. For instance, a felony conviction could result in the loss of one's license, barring them from working in Iowa. Failure to properly file annual reports could result in a reporter's license being suspended until they come into compliance.

**Fact No. 28:** Professional associations.

Iowa has a professional association called the Iowa Court Reporters Association (ICRA). As stated on their website: "ICRA's purpose is to promote and advance the interest of those persons engaged in the profession of shorthand reporting throughout the State of Iowa, to develop greater awareness in the appreciation for the profession through public education, and to generally promote the shorthand reporting industry." There is a nominal annual fee to belong to ICRA, which in return provides a membership experience that is truly priceless. ICRA offers several seminars annually to provide reporters an economical and convenient way to obtain required CEU points. ICRA is not a union but works almost like a union for its reporters. They go to bat for us if ever the need arises. The Iowa Court Reporters Association is recognized as one of the strongest state associations in the nation.

The National Court Reporters Association (NCRA) is our national association. NCRA's mission statement is as follows: "The National Court Reporters Association promotes excellence among those who capture and convert the spoken word to text and is committed to supporting every member in achieving the highest level of professional expertise." To become a member of NCRA, you must pass a national test above and beyond your state test. The testing is almost identical in that you must pass a written test with 115 multiple choice questions with 70 percent accuracy and pass three skills portions on your steno machine with 95 percent accuracy. To remain a good-standing member with NCRA, you must pay annual dues and file an annual report to prove you are obtaining 30 hours of continuing education in a three-year cycle.

Becoming a member of NCRA is kind of like obtaining your PhD in other professions. It is certification achieved above and beyond the bare minimum. NCRA certifications have set the standard for excellence since 1935. I touched on certifications yesterday, but there are many different levels of certification you can obtain at the national level with NCRA. Each level of certification involves independent testing. The original certifications are as follows: Registered Professional Reporter (RPR), Registered Merit

Reporter (RMR) and Registered Diplomate Reporter (RDR). In recent years, as our profession has evolved, NCRA has established certification requirements that include Certified Realtime Reporter (CRR), Certified Broadcast Captioner (CBC) and Certified CART Provider (CCP).

I realize all of those official titles and letters are confusing. The bottom line is you take a test for each certification. When you pass that test, you get to put those letters behind your name. The more letters you can put behind your name, the more symbolic your talent in and dedication to the profession. When I see the letters CSR, RPR, RMR, RDR and CRR behind Jane Doe's name, I know Jane Doe is a rock star court reporter. I know that to get the letters RMR behind her name, Jane Doe passed question-and-answer testimony at 260 words per minute with 95 percent accuracy. (Remember, the bare minimum is 225 words per minute!) What letters are behind my name, you ask? I'm Carrie Nauman, CSR, RPR, which means I am recognized as an Iowa Certified Shorthand Reporter (that's the CSR) and a National Registered Professional Reporter (that's the RPR).

There are some states that will pay an official court reporter more money in the way of a higher salary if they obtain their national certification. As far as freelancing goes, an agency looking to hire a reporter will probably want to interview Jane Doe, with all her credentials behind her name, before Carrie Nauman, with only her two designations.

NCRA also works in unison with state organizations should a need ever arise. In other words, NCRA is there to guide ICRA with such matters as certification, testing requirements, and any other issue that may arise within the state association. ICRA and NCRA provide its members with support and structure as well as educational opportunities to obtain CEU points.

Belonging to NCRA is usually always optional; however, I personally strongly encourage it. Belonging to any organization that represents your profession is a great idea no matter what your profession may be.

**Fact No. 29:** I want to be a certified shorthand reporter. Where do I go to obtain a degree? The DMACC (Des Moines Area Community College) campus located in Newton, Iowa is the only college in Iowa that offers a degree in court reporting. Enrollment occurs in the fall semester each year. Classes are scheduled year-round on a trimester basis and are held Monday through Friday. Students will complete coursework in machine shorthand skills and technique, speed building, medical and legal terminology, punctuation and grammar, and realtime court reporting procedures. Students who successfully complete the coursework will receive an associate of applied science (AAS) degree. For information about DMACC's program, contact academic advisor Angie Neville by phone [\(641\) 791-3622](tel:6417913622) or email at [ajneville@dmacc.edu](mailto:ajneville@dmacc.edu). I also encourage you to visit [www.dmacc.edu/programs/courtreporting](http://www.dmacc.edu/programs/courtreporting).

Is court reporting school hard? It is my opinion it's easier than the schooling required for other vocations that can earn you a six-figure salary or other professions that require

four or more years of college at a minimum. In two to three years you can become a certified shorthand reporter and be on your way to earning a lofty income while your peers are still in college. There are no all-nighters in court reporting school studying for a test and cramming facts and figures into your brain that you'll probably never need for your future profession.

The hard part about becoming a shorthand reporter is building your speed. Again, because of the technology today's generation has grown up with, it is my belief today's generation has an edge in quickly absorbing the concept behind mastering this profession. Today's generation understands the concept of practicing hard as they often spend two or more hours a day working with their school or travel club teams to improve their sporting skills. The same dedication applies to stenography: spend an hour or two a day practicing your theory and drilling, and the reward of graduating in two years will become a reality.

**Fact No. 30:** Why did I choose a career as a court reporter? And here it is, my final fact for you. I became a court reporter because my mom told me I should be a court reporter. I grew up on a farm with a hard-working set of parents and siblings who worked harder than today's kids do. I wasn't exposed to a whole lot off the farm like kids are nowadays. When I was a senior in high school, I had no idea what I wanted to be when I grew up. My dad had a relative who was a court reporter, so my mom suggested I give it a shot. Later that month I was checking out court reporting schools and never looked back. It took me three years to obtain my degree as a shorthand reporter and become certified. In hindsight, I can tell you I wasn't nearly as dedicated to the program as I should have been. I know I could have made it through in two years like many of my peers did had I practiced as often as I should have.

As parents, we have the ability to influence what our children become when they grow up. I am evidence of that. Every parent wants their child to be a happy and successful adult with a great career, yet the reality is some kids aren't interested in four years of college or the large D1/D2 college atmosphere. Sometimes, without realizing it, parents encourage their children to stay close to home because they aren't ready to see their kids move on. The fact is many kids want to stay close to home during and after college yet make money after college like they live in a big city. This career provides the opportunity to do both. Your daughter or son can attend college right here in Iowa for two years, then stay in Iowa if he or she chooses, close to home, and earn a lofty income as a stenographer.

Would I choose this career again if given the chance to start all over? Yes. Yes, I would. I have no regrets and honestly can't image a different career path for me. Would I do anything different? Yes. Yes, I would. First, I'd practice more so I'd graduate on time. Second, I'd spread my wings and work in multiple states before moving back to Iowa. I'd love to experience life in both the mountainous regions and the big cities on the east and west coasts. I'd get my passport so when the opportunity arose to work in China for a week, I'd be ready in a moment's notice. I'd network like

crazy and make all sorts of connections with agencies and firms. I'd never say no to big jobs that offer the chance to travel and/or seem intimidating.

Hindsight is a wonderful thing, but the truth is, I'm right where I'm supposed to be.

My goal when I started this month-long series of posts was to educate you about my career as a court reporter by sharing facts about my profession. It's a profession that is one of the best kept secrets out there. It's a profession that never gets talked about at career day in school as though it was shoved right out the door with learning cursive. I hope somebody reading my posts has been amazed and inspired by something that I've written about this profession. I hope somebody out there reading my posts has a child, grandchild, niece, nephew or student they can encourage to become a shorthand reporter like my mother did for me. Please share this wonderful and rewarding profession with others.

I've enjoyed all the feedback, comments, texts, emails and personal messages I've received from you this month. Please continue to contact me and ask questions. I'd happily sit down with you and/or your son, daughter, grandchild, niece or nephew and do a presentation in your home or their classroom for their school.

Stay calm and steno on. Thanks for following along!