

Court reporting: Now and in the Future: by Danette Rodriguez

Miles Bartholomew created the first stenograph machine in 1879. He was trying to make it easier for court reporters to take down the record. He probably never envisioned the many varied ways in which it would be used not much more than a hundred years later.

Today, this little machine is not used just in the legal setting. That is the most widely known use though. If you watch Court TV, you have probably seen the court reporter, front and center, taking down the record. When the news programs show a snippet of some high-profile trial, you will often see the court reporter writing on her machine.

Also in the legal field but not as widely known outside of the court reporting field, is the taking of depositions. A deposition is the taking of a witness's statement outside of a court. The witness does take an oath, just as if he or she were in a court; but there is no judge. There is a court reporter, a witness, and the lawyers. A deposition can last 15 minutes or be stretched over the course of a couple of days or even longer.

A court reporter does not have to actually work in a legal setting these days. As of January 1, 2006, all new English language programs must be captioned. Captioning is where the words that are spoken on a television program are displayed on the top or bottom of the television screen for people who are deaf or hard-of-hearing. This type of captioner often works from the comfort of their own home. They don't even have to get dressed before going to work.

In addition to captioning television programs, a captioner can also caption meetings, sporting events, church services, or conferences. These are captioned with the captioner on site. The speaker's words are projected onto a screen for everyone to read. This is just a small example of the many events that can be captioned.

Another service for deaf or hard-of-hearing people is called CART, which is short for Communication Access Realtime Translation. The CART provider uses their steno machine, realtime software, and a laptop computer. CART providers have a student that they help out in school by going with the student to his or her classes. The student can read what the teacher is saying off the laptop screen and take notes and is better able to keep up and even play a more active role in lessons.

Right now there is a shortage of court reporters to fill these jobs with even more created every year. Technology is advancing very rapidly; and as it does, there will be created even more need for court reporters. The Internet is relatively new but is advancing fast. Since high-speed Internet has become widely used, there is becoming a need for web captioning for audio and video. Not all video is required to be captioned at this point but there is a need is there and growing.

In another ten years, court reporters might be captioning video telephone calls. The sky is the limit.