

The Deposition Reporter

DEPOSITION
REPORTERS ASSOCIATION
OF CALIFORNIA

Winter 2025

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

CINDY VEGA, CSR 6640, RDR, CCRR 95

Happy Winter, DRA Members!

As I approach the six-month mark of serving as DRA president, I can truly say it has been a wonderful experience. Throughout this period, our dedicated board members have worked hard on a wide array of tasks and activities to support our organization and its goals.

Many members have expressed interest in events in Northern California, and we responded by hosting our Fall Seminar in Walnut Creek in August. We presented engaging and informative topics designed to benefit all California CSRs. Among the seminars presented were "Best Practices" and our "Legislative Update." Attendees left with a wealth of new information and ready to put what they learned into action.

In October, we held our student picnic in Cerritos. The event was enjoyable and rewarding for everyone who attended, with students sharing their enthusiasm and appreciation. I would like to extend a big "Thank You" to all our volunteers whose energetic contributions made this event possible.

Preparations are already underway for our next convention, scheduled April 24-26, 2026, in Ventura. We encourage all members to make plans to attend. Our conventions offer valuable seminars, and we guarantee that every participant will leave having learned something new.

One of the advantages of serving on the board is the opportunity to remain informed about legislative changes affecting our industry. We actively track developments in



THE NATION'S LARGEST TRADE
ASSOCIATION DEDICATED TO THE
FREELANCE
DEPOSITION REPORTER

While legislative change can sometimes feel slow, there are moments when swift action is required to respond to new bills and proposals.

I believe that connecting and networking with fellow reporters in person is essential to staying relevant in our profession. Human interaction provides energy and new perspectives that remote meetings cannot fully replicate. Although remote depositions and meetings offer convenience and comfort, I personally value the benefits of in-person work, including seminars, conventions, and meetings. For those who work exclusively remotely, I encourage you to take one or two in-person jobs each month in your area. This will help cover the needs of our profession and support a more efficient calendar for all.

If you are interested in learning more about DRA or wish to become more involved, consider volunteering at an event or joining a committee. We welcome your ideas and participation. Thank you for your ongoing membership and support of DRA!



New Members

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Whitney Kumar

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Gabrielle Matusevich

Michelle Miller

Alexandra Negrosa

Joshua Olsen

Alyssa Pacheco

Jasmine Pendleton

Denise Pizante

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Andrea Riezebos

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Deposition Reporters Association

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CAL_DRA

Just Passed the CSR? Welcome to the Business!

A Checklist/Comprehensive Business Plan for New Reporters

By Jessica Savnik

IMMEDIATELY

- ❑ CONGRATULATIONS! Celebrate a bit. You've earned it!

THAT DAY

- ❑ Get an EIN - It takes five-ten minutes and is free. Use it instead of your SSN when applying for jobs.
- ❑ Maybe get a P.O. Box - Completely optional but not a bad idea for freelancing; probably unnecessary for those planning to be an employee. You'll need that address before you pay for your license.
- ❑ Pay for your CSR license - It will be due every year at the end of your birth month. If your birthday isn't that far away, you'll pay a reduced rate the first time.
- ❑ Buy Your Professional Software - Setting up of your CAT software may take a few days. It will also probably be your biggest expense, but there are payment plans. Now is a good time to buy exhibit marking software as well. Adobe has a plugin that you can purchase and there is also an excellent software called Final Exhibits 2 which is a wonderful tool for marking exhibits during video conference jobs.
- ❑ Set up a professional email account - Just to give a good first impression and keep work emails together.
- ❑ Incorporate and set up payroll - This will come in handy for a variety of reasons, filing for disability, Social Security, or maternity leave.

THAT WEEK

- ❑ Create a rate sheet - Have an experienced reporter or two look it over. Look at job listings if you plan to work in court. Ask firms you want to work with for their rate sheets and negotiate with them. Be reasonable!!!
- ❑ Apply for jobs or contact agencies - Take your time. Make sure they know you are new, and also make sure you have someone who knows what they are doing looking over your offers and giving you advice before you accept a job. Firms are VERY eager to send you work right away so don't give in to the pressure of accepting jobs immediately. Take one or two jobs a week and see how it goes from there.
- ❑ Organize your finances - It's often easiest to keep your personal and professional finances totally separate. Get a separate checking account and/or business-only credit card.
- ❑ Upgrade your bank account - See if you can get better interest rates where you keep your money. You may need to switch banks. Look into high-yield savings accounts.
- ❑ Look into professional insurance - E&O, professional liability, equipment...

AFTER YOUR FIRST JOB/THAT MONTH

- ❑ Get a business license if required. You may have to talk to your county and possibly your city
- ❑ Let your health insurance company know if your health insurance is supplemented in any way, this may be necessary. You may be required to do this within ten days of any significant change in income.
- ❑ Set aside 25% of all income for taxes unless you have an employer taking care of that for you.
- ❑ Save for retirement. Try to save 10% of every paycheck for retirement. If 10% is out of reach, save SOMETHING every month. It adds up. Automate it. Your bank will let you.
- ❑ Keep track of repeating expenses. Many of your expenses will repeat regularly -- license fees, association dues, insurance, software fees, conventions. Write out a list or a chart as you go your first year. You'll use it the rest of your career.
- ❑ Record and save all correspondence. Payables report from an agency? Save it. Invoice from buying office supplies? Save it. Account summary from a lender? Save it. And all your production documents, like exhibits and notices, too. Figure out how you want to name and organize your files for a system that makes sense to you.

IN THE FOLLOWING MONTHS

- ❑ Talk to a Certified Accountant. You won't need them much at first, but you will probably need them later, and they will have advice in the meantime. Have a plan for your finances.
- ❑ Backup equipment. Unfortunately, equipment does sometimes stop working. Start slowly accumulating backups so that when your main piece fails, you have an alternate ready.
- ❑ Gain an understanding of business, tax, and related terms. Sole proprietorship, S corp, LLC, 1099, 940, fictitious business name, IRA, Roth IRA, SEP, W-2, W-9, franchise tax, excise tax...
- ❑ Save for lean times. Work on having at least one months' expenses stashed away (maybe in that high-yield savings account). Most financial experts advise three to six month's living expenses or more for hard times, but start small and add a little bit at a time. If you have any debt, it's usually more important to pay that off once you have a small buffer for emergencies. You'll get there.

Voice Writing: A Game Changer for Court Reporting

By Marilissa Cram and Ana Fatima Costa



Shorthand was invented by Sumerian scribes, who captured speech by writing logo-syllabic cuneiform on clay tablets with a reed stylus. Since then, shorthand methods have evolved into writing with pen on paper, steno machine, and speaking into a steno mask.

On September 27, 2022, California Governor Gavin Newsom signed Assembly Bill No. 156 (AB-156)[1] into law, allowing voice writers to take the rigorous Certified Shorthand Reporter (CSR) exam and to work in this state.

What is “Voice” Writing?

In the early 1940s, Horace Webb, a shorthand pen writer,[2] invented a method of capturing the record where stenographers repeat verbatim every word into a stenomask in a way that their voices are inaudible to participants and do not disrupt court or deposition proceedings.

AB-156 defines voice writing “... as a verbatim record of a proceeding using a closed microphone voice dictation silencer, steno mask, or similar device using oral shorthand and voice notes made by a Certified Shorthand Reporter.”

How does Voice Writing Differ from Steno Machine Writing?

There are more similarities than differences between these two methods.

Similarities

- Complete rigorous education, training, and certification requirements.
- Use brief forms of complex words and phrases to shorten their writing (i.e., shorthand)
- Identify every speaker and format and punctuate transcripts on the fly
- Utilize Computer-Aided Transcription (CAT) systems to produce verbatim transcripts

- Provide realtime[3] text of proceedings instantaneously

- Adhere to the same high standards of professionalism, impartiality, confidentiality, ethics, accountability, and local, state, and federal rules, statutes, and laws.

Differences

Steno machine writers

Write what they hear by precise finger placement of thousands of memorized shorthand word / phrase combinations and steno briefs, using technologically advanced, specialized, chorded steno machines which are connected to their CAT software

Learn the stenographic alphabet[4] (theory) and how to write on a steno machine keyboard beginning at zero words per minute (wpm). May spend years building speed before taking the CSR certification exam at 200 wpm.

Voice writers

Dictate in English what they hear into specialized masks connected to two software programs. Their word / phrase combinations and voice briefs are simultaneously translated into text using advanced speech recognition such as Dragon and their CAT software

Begin learning voice theory in English at 120-140 wpm and build speed. May reach 200 wpm and take the CSR certification exam in as little as a year because they do not need to learn a foreign language.

Impact on Court Reporting

Since the adoption of voice writing in 2022, court reporting schools throughout California have experienced an upsurge of enrollment. Voice writing students (many of whom switched from steno machine writing) have been passing the state's difficult Certified Shorthand Reporter (CSR) exam[5] at a high rate. As a result, voice writers have been helping to meet the demand for court reporters by filling empty seats in courtrooms throughout the state[6].

Challenges and Considerations

Although voice writers[7] have worked for over 80 years in the military, abroad, and now in 46 states[8], most California judges, lawyers, their staff, and consumers are unfamiliar with this method of capturing the legal record. Integrating voice writing into traditional court systems, deposition conference rooms, and in remote proceedings will require some adjustments to educate the legal community and public.

The National Verbatim Reporters Association (NVRA)[9] offers entry-level and advanced certification exams to both steno machine and voice writers. To earn the Certified Verbatim Reporter (CVR) certificate, examinees must pass a written knowledge exam at 70% and three 5-minute dictations with one to two speakers at a 95% accuracy transcription rate.

California's CSR exam requires a higher standard. To earn their license, steno machine and voice writing candidates must pass two written exams (English and Professional Practices) graded on the Angoff criterion-referenced method and a 13-minute dictation exam with four speakers at a 97.5% degree of accuracy.

Conclusion

California legal professionals are assured that licensed voice writers entering the field are well equipped to provide equally high standards of performance and verbatim transcripts as traditional steno machine writers. Voice writers are poised to join their steno colleagues as cornerstones of judicial proceedings who capture and protect the record to meet the needs of consumers and help eradicate the shortage.

Marilissa Cram, CVR, is a West Valley College of Court Reporting and Captioning (WVC) student and plans to take the California CSR exam in July 2024.

Ana Fatima Costa, retired California CSR, is a WVC instructor and a founding member of BASF Paralegal Section's Executive Committee.

Student Picnic Highlights



It was a gorgeous day on Saturday, October 25, in Cerritos, CA, at Don Knabe Regional Community Park. We welcomed all students of the court reporting industry to our DRA Annual Student Picnic. Over 85 students joined us, differing in speeds and programs. Aside from our fantastic raffle items, a highlight of our event is the student speed dating, where working reporters rotate tables to answer questions and share tips, insight, and experiences. Our goal is to have everyone walk away from the picnic feeling empowered, supported, confident, and more knowledgeable. DRA truly cherishes the opportunity to connect our students to each other and working reporters.

It has always been so fun planning and hosting the picnic. From putting together the raffle wish list and gathering donations, to planning the food, games, and festive decor, we would like to give a huge THANK YOU to all of the supportive donors and volunteers. Without your generous contributions, the student picnic would not be the success that it has grown into. DRA looks forward to loving on our students again next fall! -By Jamie Asbury (see list of sponsors on page 14)





Legislative Update: AB 1189 Author Withdraws, But Supreme Court Hearing On ER In Courtrooms Looms

By Mary E. Pierce, CSR

So the good news is that Assembly Member Tom Lackey (Dist. 34) has withdrawn his name from AB 1189, the bill that proposed to license digital deposition officers, as well as “legal transcriptionists,” both licenses to be conferred by an entity such as AAERT rather than the rigorous state-administered testing that we all were required to pass. This is the second author to withdraw their name from the bill without a single hearing taking place.

AB 1189 is a two-year bill for the 2025-2026 legislative calendar, so there is still a narrow window for the proponents to find another author, but we are hopeful that that will not take place before the window closes for this legislative calendar in the latter part of January 2026. You can rest assured that we are closely monitoring that with the assistance of our superb lobbyist, Ed Howard.

However, there is a parallel threat on the horizon that is more pressing and more ominous – the request for a hearing by the FVAP (Family Violence Appellate Project) on their Petition For Writ Of Mandate And/Or Prohibition filed in December of 2024. Their writ argues that an exceedingly high number of hearings, particularly in family law courts, are going uncovered due to a “shortage” of licensed court reporters in California and that the law that precludes electronic recording of proceedings in most California courts is unconstitutional. Both DRA and CCRA believe the numbers cited by the Petitioner in support of their motion are exaggerated and include hearings that would never have had a reporter in the first place or one where no party tried to secure a court reporter, regardless of the cost. We also collectively agree that the charges represented in the petition likely include a full day of trial proceedings with additional services being ordered, possibly by more than one party.

In an exceedingly rare event, the California Supreme Court agreed to hear the Petitioner’s arguments without any lower court proceedings ever taking place. CCRA and SEIU have retained Scott Kronland of the Altshuler Berzon firm, an attorney with more than 30 years of experience in this arena, who filed an Amici Curiae Letter Opposing Writ Petition that same month. The Supreme Court has not yet indicated if they will let the opposition be heard, so we are closely monitoring that situation, as well. Sadly, the named Respondents (several California Superior Courts) declined to present any opposition and instead lateraled the matter of opposing the petition to the California legislature, who responded that that is not their role. So the sole opportunity for opposition to be presented seems to lie with court reporting associations and their allies.

I met with Michelle Caldwell, current president of CCRA, in late November, along with Cindy Vega and Stephanie Leslie, the current and immediate past presidents of DRA, to offer our thoughts and ideas to include in the opposition arguments should the request to be heard be granted. We assured Michelle that CalDRA stands with them and is ready to support them in any way that we can.

The campaign to change our industry is not going to give up easily, be it ER in the courts, AI notetaker applications or AI/ASR transcripts. There is a lot of money being funneled into alternative methods of capturing the record and putting the integrity of that record into the hands of lesser-trained and not meaningfully tested individuals, even machines. For this reason, it is more important than ever that we continue to stand together, support your professional associations, and stay informed and engaged. And always, always demonstrate with every appearance and every transcript the gold standard that we claim with pride.

Reporter Spotlight - Jennifer Porto



Jennifer Porto

CSR No. 14098

Los Angeles, Santa Barbara,
and Ventura counties

How long have you been reporting?

I started school in 2003. I began CART reporting in 2007, and I got my CSR in 2016.

Where did you grow up?

Walnut, California. Fun fact, I was born in a home a block away from the house that I would later grow up in.

Tell us about your family.

My mom is still in our family home that I grew up in, and she is my best friend. My sister and her family are a few miles away. Sadly, my dad passed away in 2020. My greatest joy is how proud my dad was of me and my career as a court reporter. When I was a low-speed student my dad invented a "Paper Buddy" for me. I learned steno on a manual machine, and he would watch me look at my steno paper, type the words, flip the paper, look, type, flip the paper, and look, type, flip the paper. My dad was quite the inventor, so he made me a little machine that fed the paper to me very slowly so I could read the words and type without having to take my hands off my computer. I wish I still had my little Paper Buddy, but it makes me smile whenever I think about it.

How did you first get involved with DRA?

One of my closest friends, Cheryl Haab-Scott, volun-told me. Okay. Kidding aside, I have always been involved in mentoring and leadership throughout my career, so volunteering on the board was a natural step. She saw the potential in me, and she helped me make the leap. I am not the smartest person in the room and sometimes I feel like I lack the experience to be a leader, but that is okay because I will always work hard to find the "smart" people to get the answers when needed.

What do you like to do when you're not reporting?

Running is my therapy. I was a couch potato turned runner during COVID. I was the kid that hated running the backstops at school or doing anything that made me sweaty. I am not the athletic type. I remember when I bought my first pair of long-distance running shoes. I was comfortable at four miles, but I never imagined I could surpass six miles. I learned a lot about myself while running. I learned that I can push myself even when I'm in pain. I can quiet the negative thoughts. I just keep telling myself, "One foot in front of the other, just keep going." I ran my first half marathon in 2020. I am not fast,

but I've learned that I can keep going even when I don't think I can take another step...literally.

What has been the highlight of your career?

My little steno machine has taken me to places I never thought possible. From the Oscars, to the SAG Awards, jail house depositions at Men's Central Jail, to high-profile jobs that make me drive home in silence because I can't believe I was a fly on the wall.

If you could do it all over again, would you choose court reporting as a career?

Absolutely, no doubt. Are there days that wipe me out? Yes. Do I hate driving to Century City, Beverly Hills, and Santa Monica and basically anywhere on the 405? Yes. This job kills brain cells as I jokingly say after a really hard day on the record. I joke, but the joy of being a freelance reporter is that I have been able to work as hard as I want, when I want, and as little as I want. I have been able to completely take care of myself, travel, do house renovations/preservations, pay for a full-time scoping team, gosh, so many things that I never thought would be possible on my own. Yes, I have a man who is my partner in life, but I don't NEED a man to get through life. I am independent and that makes me so darn proud.

What is one professional accomplishment you'd still like to achieve?

I would like to get more certifications. I can realtime any subject with one hand tied behind my back -- haha -- but as soon as I'm in a testing situation I feel like I'm having a heart attack. I have had test anxiety since I was in middle school. I took the CSR 18 times, proving my determination, but I sometimes struggle with confidence.

What's your cocktail order?

Glass of scotch neat is my go-to. I also love a spicy margarita and chips and salsa on a hot summer day.

Do you still practice on your machine?

I do. I encourage students to practice with me. My goal is to practice for 30 minutes without a break. I try to build endurance and stamina so shorter tests feel easier.

What advice would you give to a struggling court reporting student?

Keep going! Failure is okay. Once again, I passed the CSR on my 18th try. Every single time I opened the envelope and read the results – again, and again, and again, I would allow myself to have one “boohoo” day. I would cry it out, get a greasy burrito or whatever made my cravings happy at the moment, and I gave myself grace to sit on the couch and be okay with just being a grump. BUT the next morning I was up, I was practicing again, and I was researching a different practice strategy. The negative thoughts are going to be there, but you have to learn to ignore them and keep going.

If you couldn't be a court reporter anymore, what career would you choose?

I am a lover of all old buildings. When I go on vacation, I take more pictures of buildings and homes than I do of people. I have about 1,000 pictures of old doors from my travels in Europe. I recently had the joy of preserving – not renovating, but preserving my 1926 Spanish Colonial home in Belmont Heights, Long Beach. My dream job would be historical preservation and design – or dog walker, but I would walk dogs for free.

If you could only eat one food for the rest of your life, what would it be?

My mom's split pea and ham soup. It may seem basic, but this is my ultimate comfort food.

Why is DRA membership important to you?

Before I was a DRA member, I was not aware of everything that the board does for you. I didn't know that the board has an attorney and lobbyist that works fiercely to protect us. He is also our biggest cheerleader, so let me tell you I'm so thankful he is in our corner. I didn't know that when you go to a student picnic, convention, or pay your annual dues, your dollars are used to protect and fight for this profession – to fight for us. I don't have a plan B job. I don't want to do anything else, so I will continue to volunteer on the board, I will continue paying my dues, and helping where I am able. I'm not ready to retire and become a dog walker.

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Respond to
Sarah Arellano, CSR
Newsletter Editor:
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DRA Annual Convention
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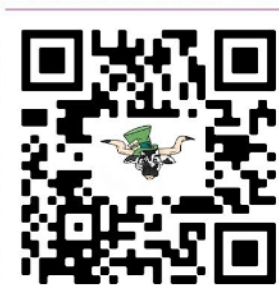
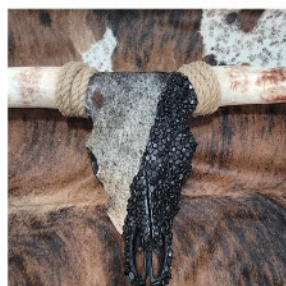


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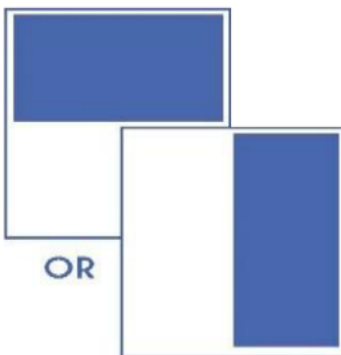
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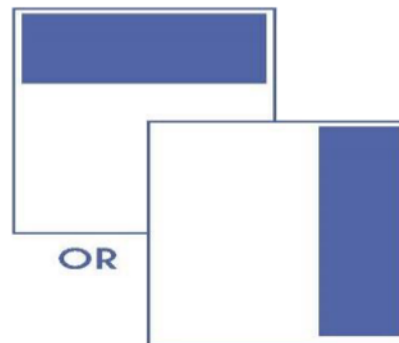
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