

Q&A

Changing Your Dictionary

Have you changed your dictionary significantly since you graduated? How do you approach changing the way you write?

I have definitely changed my dictionary significantly since I graduated from court reporting school. I went to Bryan College of Court Reporting and graduated in 1987. Back then, Bryan had been teaching CAT-compatible theory for a little while, and I had been a computer programmer before CR school, so I knew that I had to have distinct outlines for the things I wanted to write and to have things translated properly even though, in the learning stages, I was a long way from writing for CAT for a living. Bryan didn't quite have computers up and running yet so we were still dictating, but the computer was always in the back of my mind. Back when I started, the CAT software wasn't even quite smart enough to handle, for example, prefixes and suffixes without defining the entire word. For example, one had to define PHAEUBG/-G as a separate entry of *making*. These days, one simply defines -G as the suffix -ing, and the software automatically transforms *make* into *making*.

I've been reporting now for approximately 19 years and have been realtining for only about three of those years, the first two being exclusively for myself. Even though I had been writing, keeping the computer always in mind as I was defining things, a student or newer reporter should always have an open mind in terms of writing style and should not worry

about changing words as the need arises. I'm also a beta tester for a major CAT software provider, so I've also changed things about my writing as the software has become smarter over the years.

As far as specifics go, I use a lot of macros for editing the transcript "on the fly," so those are the types of things I never even thought about doing until I was reporting for several years. I've got about four different alphabets that I use for stitching spelled proper names, glued letters for acronyms, etc.; and I've also entirely revamped my number-writing system to accommodate the smarter CAT software, so the word numbers — because I don't use the number bar and never have — get translated perfectly. Back in the day, numbers all had to be entered one at a time, which meant a lot of clutter.

And, as far as changing the way I write, when I make a significant theory or writing change, I try to make little notes and post them on my writer to remind me of the change. And it's also a good practice not to bite off more than you can chew when it comes to this aspect. Approach this change like adding briefs to your repertoire: don't try to change everything at once, but try to practice a few at a time until they become somewhat automatic.

*Harry Palter
San Diego, Calif.*

The operative word in this question is "significantly." No, I haven't changed my original dictionary significantly, because it was an excellent realtime, short theory to begin with. I have, however, made some changes inasmuch as I have created and added briefs, which have their own theory logic to them. I always check, of course, for any potential conflicts before adding an item. I also check the brief against any offered in

MEMBER PROFILE



Name: Kimberley Neeson, RPR, CRR, CCP, CBC

Occupation: Court reporter, CART provider, and firm owner

Hometown: Toronto, Ontario, Canada

Member since: 1994

What do you love about being a court reporter?

Court reporting has provided me with so many diverse opportunities. From reporting interesting cases and making the difference in the life of a hard-of-hearing person to providing employment to a number of women (and men), this profession just keeps on giving!

What has been the highlight of your career?

I've been privileged to report many high profile cases. A few in particular come to mind, such as reporting highly confidential interviews in two notorious murder cases here in Ontario, reporting the trial of a Holocaust denier, and accompanying our then-Prime Minister Jean Chretien to the United Nations to caption the presentation to Canada of the Franklin D. Roosevelt Disability Award for the country's work in the disability area. I have also enjoyed mentoring reporters and captioners.

What are you currently reading?

Mary Queen of Scotland and the Isles by Margaret George;
Anatomy of the Spirit by Caroline Myss.

What is your best memory?

Reporting commission evidence in Montreal, San Diego, and Jamaica!

Briefs Encountered and other short steno theories to see alternatives for the item.

It always puts a smile on my face when I discover that a brief I have created is sitting solidly in Mark Kislingbury's theory dictionary! But the best source I have found for learning a system for creating briefs is by seeing those submitted by seasoned professionals on the NCRA Online Forum. But all of this is possible without trauma because my original theory is short and lends itself to creating such "piggy-back" systems of briefing.

*Jane P. McNally, Ph.D.
Osterville, Mass.*

Absolutely. In 1991, when I learned theory, it was dubbed "computer compatible." However, the theory didn't take into account realtime reporting, which wasn't as prevalent as it is now. I've had to make significant changes in the past 12 years.

When I change my theory, I first look to see if the outline conflicts with any-

thing else in my dictionary. Then, I try different strokes for the same word to see which stroke I will remember and adapt to easily. I also look to see if I can write an ending — for example -ing, -ed — in the same stroke with that word. The reason I do this process is I am striving to write more words in one stroke in an attempt to build higher speeds.

*Anthony D. Frisolone, RMR, CRI
Staten Island, N.Y.*

Before I headed to reporting school back in 1974, my father, Red Cassel, taught me several strokes that he assured me would, though considered unusual at that time, be of great use to me as a working reporter. But as soon as I passed my 80s, an instructor pulled me aside and insisted that I change all those strokes and conform to the ones the school taught instead.

Then, when I hit my 140s, CAT started coming out of the beta-testing stage, and we students were handed a

list of theory changes and told to change our writing style to match the changes in order to be "computer-compatible." To my great aggravation, all of the strokes my father had originally taught me were in there! (Lesson: Father knows best!) In my 180s, the school passed out a booklet of still more theory changes that we needed to make so that the computer would be able to read our notes. And we were told that now we had to put periods after each statement and question marks after each question.

I have gone from such conflicts as using my "A" key for the words "a," "an," "and," as well as the letter "A," to being nearly conflict-free. My former instructors would cringe to see how many bits and pieces of other theories I have incorporated into my own.

When trying to change the way I write something, I first make sure that it doesn't conflict with anything important in my theory. Then I play with it mentally to see how easily it sticks in my brain. If it fits the way I think, then I

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doodle the change in longhand every chance I get. The ubiquitous yellow sticky notes on my desk and machine remind me to try to use the new stroke while writing. But some strokes mesh so well with my writing that I've learned them merely by glancing at a list of brief forms.

*Mary Anne Cassel Meyer, RDR, CRR
Vermillion, S.D.*

When I was in school, the teachers emphasized having as small a dictionary as possible. Today's computers can handle massive dictionaries, so this problem no longer exists. I may enter five different ways to write a word or term, along with possible misstrokes, as long as there's no conflict. Also, I brief much more. After several years of misstroking the same words, I came to the conclusion that my technique would not get better with age, so just brief those suckers.

I always try to write realtime whether I'm hooked up or not, so that I get as

clean a transcript as possible. I have gone back to the number bar and associated entries because it's easier to write times, dollar amounts, addresses, and so forth clean and not rely on the system's artificial intelligence to resolve them properly, which means less time in scoping and proofreading.

*Carolyn Mann, RPR
Richmond, Calif.*

I haven't changed my theory much. I started where I am working now as an intern in 1979. My theory from Ferris State was Stenograph Computer Compatible. We learned a lot of briefs in addition to the phonetic writing out, so I'm constantly looking for briefs. But I am out of the loop when it comes to word boundaries and to the lingo used in the realtime "real world of court reporting."

Anonymous

Yes, I have changed my theory. When I was in school, things were just

beginning to shift toward computer translations, not realtime writing, special prefixes and suffixes, and the like. Now, as a working reporter, I am working on briefs that make sense to my fingers for repetitive words and phrases that slow me down in realtime. Every day something new will pop in my head, and I will ask myself, "Why in the world didn't I write it like this years ago?"

*Tonya Esparza, RPR
Fort Wayne, Ind.*

YES! How? Realtime. Realtime. Realtime. I realtime everything! Nothing has helped me more than actually seeing how I write. That alone has helped me write so much more efficiently. I try not to change too much all at once, either. Thirteen years in and my dictionary is still a work in progress. I'm constantly tweaking my dictionary to save strokes and write better.

*Teresa Huff, RMR
Riverhead, New York*

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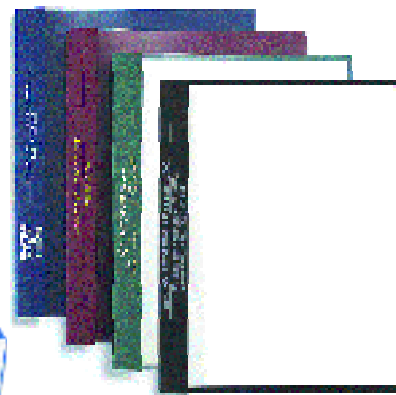


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