

SOUNDBYTES

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Essential Skills to Be a Successful Digital Reporter

By Nicole Kidder-Perry, Contributor, Advisor to The Court Reporting Academy

Digital court reporters have an exciting, fast-paced job that involves far more than pushing a few buttons. You must pay close attention to details, often have to think fast, and be ready to troubleshoot any problems that arise. Focus on developing these skills to ensure every job is successful:



Flex Your Assertive Personality

Many new reporters struggle with interrupting the proceeding to ask speakers to slow down, speak up, or repeat what was just said. Since it is your primary responsibility to accurately capture the record, you must develop the confidence to politely but assertively interject when sudden background noises, overlapping chatter, or aggressive arguments occur.

Patricia Falls, managing director of The Court Reporting Academy, advises setting the tone from the very beginning by taking control of the room. "I tell our students that we want to see your personality during your housekeeping," she says. "Sit up straight, smile, be engaging. This sets the pace for how the job will go. If you are meek and shy, then they will walk all over you. When you are assertive, you will command the room."

Falls notes that having the AAERT certification gives reporters that boost of confidence as registered professionals. "Those letters after your name establish your credibility as a qualified professional reporter, give you an edge over others in

the industry, and provide clarity on how to comport yourself during proceedings," she says.

Develop Your Computer Knowledge

Having a fast typing speed and learning your reporting software is just one piece of the technology puzzle. You also want to have high-quality equipment for microphones and backup recordings and be comfortable with confidence-monitoring tools. A good reporter has solid basic computer skills and knows how to navigate online videoconferencing platforms, such as Zoom.

Your professionalism is heightened when you can offer a breakout room if an attorney needs a private moment with their client or the lawyers want to speak off record at length. Knowledge of troubleshooting audio and video issues, particularly for the witness, is essential to keeping the proceeding running smoothly. You also need to know how to pull exhibits from the chat window and get comfortable with screen sharing and annotation tools in case the attorney has unforeseen problems or isn't tech-savvy.

Be Prepared for the Unexpected

There will always be new obstacles and challenges to face, but being prepared before the proceeding begins will ensure that you can handle any curve ball thrown your way. Along with testing your equipment before every job, thoroughly review the notice to confirm the



correct venue and attorney contact information. Do your research on pronunciations and practice saying the case, witness, and attorney's names.

"Through proper training, mentorship, and practical experience, these are all skills that any new reporter can be taught and confidently pick up," Falls encourages.

The Court Reporting Academy combines the best practices in the industry with the new skills required to master the emerging digital technologies for all stenographic, voice, and digital court reporting-related professions. As a proud AAERT platinum sponsor, students are expertly prepared to pass their AAERT certification.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Striking Changes to the AAERT Certification Program Will Help Solve the National Shortage of Court Reporters



By Janet Harris, AAERT President

In all my years with AAERT, I can't recall so much activity happening on so many important fronts at one time. Allow me to touch on some of the highlights – many of which are detailed in articles elsewhere in this month's newsletter.

First, of course, our Professional Development Committee is putting the finishing touches on the program for our in-person Annual Conference June 16-18 at the Westin in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Highlights include an educational program flush

with industry experts from AAERT and from some of our key industry partners, a Courthouse Tour, and our Annual Membership Meeting on Friday. The much-anticipated Awards Luncheon on Saturday and the Welcome Reception on Thursday evening provide wonderful networking opportunities. There's plenty of time to register by going to the AAERT website.

Certification continues to drive interest in AAERT. We're nearing completion of the months-long professional upgrade and expansion of our certification program – adding a new certification (Certified Deposition Reporter) and revamping and fortifying our existing Certified Electronic Reporter (CER) and Certified Electronic Transcriber (CET) offerings. In addition, the Board is assessing our current testing vendor and looking at ways we can improve delivery. Several Board Committees have been part of this vital process, and I'm confident the results will spur a considerable growth in our membership.

Bolstering our certification efforts is especially critical in face of the dramatic shortage of court reporters across the country. States and individual courts realize that digital alternatives are the key to solving the shortage. Many are now openly supporting digital reporters and recognize AAERT as the source for professionally trained reporters and transcribers. We must be prepared to answer the call!

The Board signed a contract with an acclaimed marketing company, GrowMore, to develop and execute a marketing effort designed to increase AAERT membership, grow our certification program and bring in more sponsorship support. The fourmonth project should bear fruit for AAERT by late summer. I'll have an update at the Annual Membership Meeting in Milwaukee.

Lastly, we have signed a contract with a company called Gallagher Affinity to provide our members with a wide range of new products and services at steeply discounted prices. Products include such things as office supplies through Office Depot/Office Max, computers through Lenovo, and insurance through such companies as The Hartford, Farmers, Progressive and Liberty Mutual. Plenty of information on this exciting new member value will be coming your way later this month.

Please make plans today to join us in Milwaukee. AAERT is on the move, and we have so much to share with you at the Annual Conference.



AAERT's First In-Person Annual Conference in Three Years is Brimming with Vital Educational

Sessions Just for You!

In a few short weeks, AAERT will convene the first in-person annual conference we've held in three years, and it's simply not to be missed! It all takes place June 16-18 at the fabulous Westin Hotel in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. There's still plenty of time to reserve your place – just go to our website at www.aaert.org to register.

Months of careful planning have gone into the program, which will feature several engaging educational sessions, a live courthouse tour, our Annual Membership Meeting, and the always exciting Awards Luncheon.

Built around the theme, "The Future is Now," the 2022 program is highlighted by a keynote address from William Snowden, Director of the Vera Institute of Justice in New Orleans, Louisiana. Snowden's session, "Promoting Excellence – Insights from Implicit Bias and Racial Anxiety," is an examination of the biases we all have. How do those biases affect our decisions? What can we do about it?

Earlier in his career, Snowden spent five years as a public defender in New Orleans. This experience led him to launch *The Juror Project*, an initiative aimed at increasing the diversity of jury panels while changing and challenging people's perspectives of jury duty. He conducts workshops across the country to help people understand implicit bias, racial anxiety, and stereotypes that influence outcomes within the criminal justice system.

Another highlight will be an Introduction to the Statewide Digital Court Reporting Program in Wisconsin. Everyone is concerned about the shortage of court reporters across the country. Wisconsin courts have implemented some innovative solutions you'll want to hear about – they're solutions that may help solve the shortages in your home state.

Jon Bellows, District Court Administrator for Wisconsin's 4th Judicial District, and Patrick G. Brummond, District Court Administrator for the 7th Judicial District, will lead this dynamic session.

All sessions will be recorded and made available to attendees one month following the live event. Don't put off registration any longer. We're anxious to see you in Milwaukee!

You can also register using the link below:

Register

The Nature of Words

By Laurel Stoddard, CET

In wintertime, even in Texas, we long for the gentle zephyrs of springtime, those soft, warm breezes. However, in Austin, with a month left on the calendar till the vernal equinox and summer, it seems we've moved far too quickly from the gentle breath of Zephyrus, the west wind as named by the G



gentle breath of Zephyrus, the west wind as named by the Greeks, to the hot, desiccating breath of Notus, the south wind. Central Texas is still enjoying the burgeoning greenery of springtime, unlike large portions of the western part of our country being laid waste by drought and hot winds, and wildfires.



One of my favorite sightings after a good rain is clusters of Zephyranthes lilies in yards and green spaces all around the area. There are a number of varieties of these small perennial lilies which mostly bloom white. In our region, some of them spring up three days after significant rainfall, and some after four. They bloom profusely, then wither and fade to

inconspicuousness until the next heavy rain. They grow best in areas that aren't mown regularly, so they're often plentiful on roadsides and in grassy traffic triangles.

Boreas, the Greek name for the north wind, also has trickled into our vocabulary, as in the aurora borealis, the northern lights, which are not visible in our subtropical neck of the woods. The boreal forests are Earth's northernmost, covering the northern parts of eight countries: Canada, China, Finland, Japan, Norway, Russia, Sweden, and the United States. According to Audubon.org, the North American boreal forests are



North America's bird nurseries, providing nesting grounds and migratory stopovers for nearly half of the common bird species found in North America. Boreal forests, comprised mostly of coniferous trees, with some broadleaf species, are also primary resources for the ecosystem, providing clean water and carbon storage.

Climate change is upon us, so much so that using a 15-year average of temperatures apparently does not give accurate enough information to predict current electric usage in Texas in the hottest May in meteorological records. We've already had warnings of potential power outages. Let's do what we can to make our living spaces more energy efficient and plant more trees around our towns and cities. Urban forests, boreal or not, are blessings for us as well as wildlife.

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CONGRATULATIONS!



What Has AAERT Done For You Lately?

By Benjamin Jaffe, AAERT Communications Committee Chair

For almost 28 years the American Association of Electronic Reporters and Transcribers has been the leader in digital court reporting and legal transcription. The organization has slowly but surely grown in recognition and membership. While most of that history has been focused on the judicial and administrative court market, over the last 10 years



more and more new members are joining from court reporting agencies focused on depositions and out-of-court proceedings.

This surge in interest has boosted our membership to nearly 1,100 members across the country. This is a great accomplishment, but we all know professionals practicing digital reporting and/or legal transcription that are not part of AAERT, or who have left the organization over the years. It is this writer's personal opinion that some of that has been due to AAERT not better answering the question, "What has AAERT Done for Me Lately." In 2022, AAERT has committed to a focus on the growth of the organization and providing more benefits to our members.

Membership Benefits:

Through a new partnership with Gallagher Affinity Group, our association will soon offer its members discounts on office supplies and computers as well as access to discounted personal/professional insurance products. Insurance products offered by Gallagher will include Professional Liability Insurance, Business Owner Insurance, Errors and Omissions Insurance (E&O), Car Insurance, Home Insurance, Pet Insurance, and more. Additionally, several vendors have stepped up to offer discounts on training courses, CEU courses, court reporting software, marketing, and text expansion software. Full details on this new program will be announced at the AAERT annual conference in June and posted on the AAERT website. If you are an industry vendor who wants to participate in the program, please email aaert@aaert.org.

Marketing and Outreach:

In order to reach more potential members and to grow the awareness of our



industry, AAERT has contracted with an outside marketing company named GrowMore to provide marketing, social media, and creative services. GrowMore is working very closely with the Communications Committee as well as AAERT management to accomplish three goals: Expand Membership, Increase Certifications, and Grow our Sponsorship Program. Within the next month, you will start seeing more emails, social media postings, and social media ads being driven by this campaign.

New/Updated Certifications:

As I mentioned earlier in this article, over the last 10 years AAERT has seen more and more demand for digital reporting and legal transcription from the deposition market. This shift has led the association to create new certifications and update their existing certifications. The new certification, Certified Deposition Reporter (CDR), is geared towards those who are taking work outside the courthouse. Additionally, the test is structured more broadly than the existing CER and CET exams, not only focusing on federal law but also on common state laws and practices that new reporters to the industry would be exposed to. AAERT is offering a special exam session preceding the annual conference for FREE to those who sign up. Additionally, certified members can help sculpt the CER and CET exams by participating in a question writing session preceding the conference.

Advocacy:

AAERT continues to monitor legislation to help increase the legal system's access to the highly reliable and accurate methods of taking down the record and producing the transcript of digital court reporting and legal transcription. Although this year was rather quiet, the Advocacy Committee did get involved in legislation in Colorado, Alabama, and Illinois, while also continuing to watch bills across the country.

Board Expansion:

This year AAERT is growing the size of the Board of Directors from eight to eleven. This new size will ensure greater diversity and representation of our membership. Candidates in this year's election represent the vast range of roles and organizations within our industry. All AAERT members are encouraged to vote so that their opinion counts. One of the functions of the larger board will be more participation in committees and task forces. Each committee/task force will be able to have its own board liaison focused on its mission. For those members who are not part of the board, you can also get involved in committees by emailing aaert@aaert.org.

The Conference is Back:

One of the greatest benefits of AAERT is its ability to bring us all together. No matter if you are looking for camaraderie, networking, a new job, technical advice, or just to catch up with old friends, this year's conference is going to be for you. The 2022 annual conference is the first in-person conference since 2019 and is sure to be the event of the year. If you are unable to or are uncomfortable attending this year's conference, there is also a virtual conference that will allow you to take many of the available CEU credit classes from the comfort of your home. No matter which way you attend, the conference is a great way to share knowledge, meet vendors, and grow as a professional.

Giving Back to AAERT:

The benefits that AAERT provides to its members will continue to grow as the organization grows, but the organization can only grow with your help. All of these

initiatives are led by volunteers. Whether it is the Board of Directors, committee members, or those writing questions for the certification exams - it is all done by member volunteers committing their time to make the organization and our industry better. If you would like to get more involved, have an idea for the association, or just want to know more about these initiatives, you can email aaert@aaert.org. We need your support and help in order to keep building the list of "What has AAERT Done for You Lately."

Join an AAERT Committee

AAERT is looking for members to join its Advocacy, Membership, Certification, Communications, Professional Development, and Leadership Development Committees. Anyone who is interested in sharing their passion and talents is encouraged to join! Fill out the application and email it back to aaert@aaaert.org

Committee Application

Falling to Rise: A Parable of Leadership

By James Salandro, AAERT Communications Committee

With spring in full fling, it's a time of renewal and of rising from the ashes of last year into a new life of opportunity. But, it's important to remember that oftentimes we can only rise after falling. One of my mentors in digital reporting taught me this lesson through a tangible episode in leadership by example.



This particular parable of leadership can best be framed by the STAR vignette method. Situation, Task, Action, Result.

Situation: Describe the scenario

After about a month after my first solo reporting job, it was time to train on a complicated meeting with a high-profile and fastidious client. This was the big leagues and my mentor was going to show me the ropes. After arriving on-site, I watched as my mentor positioned himself at the head of the meeting table, took out his laptop, set it down, placed his mixer beside it, and started running microphones down the length of the table. His determination and proficiency meant that he was set up in under 15 minutes. This was critical because he wanted to teach me how to, "own the breakfast spread."

I was told to not be sheepish and to establish a command presence over the best food items and to shovel them onto my plate with measured liberality: Blue Cheese Quiche With Whole Grain Crust, Baked Egg Danish with Kimchi and Bacon, Espresso Waffles with Mocha Drizzle, apple-cinnamon Bostock, and the Waffle Sandwiches with Cecina, Avocado, and Arugula. We confidently filled our own thermoses with the expensive coffee as well. So much coffee in fact, that the caterer needed to do a refresh before any of the agency staff had an opportunity to pour themselves a cup. "This man is a baller," I thought of my mentor.

After we filled our plates, I took my place behind my mentor and prepared to actively

observe the meeting. The chairperson asked if we were ready. My mentor nodded. The chairperson gaveled the meeting to a start. After a commanding swig of boutique coffee, my mentor leaned back in his chair and promptly hit the floor, sweeping mics, mixer, and laptop along with him. Miraculously, his breakfast made a clean escape and remained steaming on the table. I waited, poised to take notes on the ensuing leadership that would occur.

Task: What are we now trying to achieve?

Our task now was to make sure that some semblance of a meeting could occur and that we would again be taken seriously.

Action: What specific actions did we take to achieve our task?

There was a gasp or two from the committee. The chairperson declared a five-minute recess. My mentor stood up, repositioned his chair, gathered the fallen equipment, and calmly directed me in repositioning the mics on a now very cluttered conference table. "You really should do something about that draft in here, someone may hurt themselves," my mentor quipped. Groucho Marx couldn't have pulled it off better. What sangfroid.

With coffees replenished and breakfast still waiting, the meeting resumed. However, not long after the last morsel of the last biscuit was consumed, the Great Collapse happened to my mentor again. But this time he was prepared. He quickly flung his earbuds from his ears and with his hands crossed upon his chest (like they tell you how to do when you're going down an inflatable airplane evacuation slide), my mentor went tumbling toward the ground. The committee stared in stunned, slack-jawed astonishment. Surely they were thinking, "Who ARE these schlemiels?"

The war with gravity having been lost, my mentor, with unbridled self-assurance, quietly directed me to assist him in again repositioning all of our equipment. His controlled demeanor kept me from completely collapsing into a gelatinous pile of giggles and instead focused me on the important task at hand. The record of the meeting had to be made, no matter what.

Result: Did we achieve our objectives? Have we learned something?

The remainder of the meeting proceeded smoothly and the chairperson even expressed admiration that my mentor managed to save his breakfast through all of the adversity. At our debrief back at the office, I told my mentor that I was impressed by his composure and his commitment to professionally serving the client through what was the most embarrassing situation that I had ever personally witnessed. Even my mentor's suit remained un-schmutzed.

This was true leadership by example in the face of a stupefyingly awkward set of circumstances. My mentor rose to the occasion after falling and gave me a model of poised perseverance that I will never forget.

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