

CERTIFYING QUALITY REPORTERS TO THE PUBLIC

On behalf of the National Verbatim Reporters Association I would like to thank Intersteno President Jaroslav Zaviacic and the Board for extending this kind invitation to our association to speak to the Congress.

I would also like to thank Jaroslav Polacek, the jury members and the task force members for their tireless work in organizing the 2007 Congress. All of the members of the National Verbatim Reporters Association and the Board of Directors express our best wishes for health and prosperity to our colleagues, Mauro Panzera and Cees Van Beurden, the Central Committee members, distinguished guests and competitors at this Congress.

Our association has received international inquiries about our testing regimen. I am here as the Chair of the NVRA Testing Committee to give you a brief explanation of the design, construction and rules of administration and grading of the four levels of tests that NVRA offers to all professionals in the court reporting field, whatever their method.

There is no question that all court reporting associations adhere to the basic tenet that court reporters are the keepers of an accurate record. This basic principle guides creation of the tests administered by NVRA. In the United States as well as around the world, there is a demand for quality verbatim transcripts. Persons appearing before the bar of justice must be assured that the record of all proceedings are accurately and

completely reported by the only person in attendance charged with that responsibility, the court reporter. To have less would cause a diminution of trust in the system of justice.

NVRA tests are open to all methods of reporting, but the majority of our members are voice writers. Voice writing is accomplished by a reporter speaking directly into a voice silencer. As the reporter speaks into the silencer the reporter cannot be heard by persons around them, and their dictation is recorded by analog or digital means.

The Certified Verbatim Reporter and Certificate of Merit designation are validated tests and NVRA has a standing committee which meets several times each year with our nationally recognized psychometric consultants to ensure that each test administered meets established validation specifications of the 1999 Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing, a model developed by the American Educational Research Association, the American Psychological Association and the National Council on Measurement in Education.

Successful completion of our entry-level test carries the designation of Certified Verbatim Reporter or CVR. The test for the CVR designation, which addresses the basic knowledge, skills and abilities of the candidate is in two parts.

First is the written examination, which is conducted entirely online at proctored locations throughout the United States during four specific periods throughout the year.

The written test is timed and contains 100 multiple choice items, which measures the requisite job-related competencies for the effective practice of a court reporter in the areas of ethics, spelling, punctuation, vocabulary, legal and medical terminology. A passing grade must be achieved on the written test as a part of the certification requirements.

The second part of the CVR test is the dictation skills portion, also a timed test, and it is held four times each year at designated locations in the U.S. The skills test consists of 3 - 5 minute dictation and transcription examinations that test for speed, accuracy and silence.

The three areas of the dictation skills test for CVR are: literary at 200 words per minute, judge's instructions to the jury at 225 words per minute and Question and Answer at 250 words per minute. To receive the CVR certification, all portions of the skills test must be passed at 95% accuracy or higher.

Once a person attains a CVR, they may test for the Certificate of Merit, or CM.

Once again, the test has a written and skills portion. If the person has scored 90% or better on the written test when they received their CVR, they do not need to retake the written test, if they earn the CM within 3 years of the original CVR test. If they have not scored 90% or better, they must retake the written test, scoring 90% or better in order to be awarded the CM designation.

The dictation skills portion of the CM, just as the CVR, consists of 3 - 5 minute portions, however, on this test the dictation speeds are: literary at a speed of 225 words per minute, jury instructions at 250 words per minute and the Question and Answer portion at 300 words per minute. To achieve the CM certification, all portions of the skills tests must be passed at 97% accuracy or higher.

These two tests, the CVR and CM have existed in NVRA since the early 1970s and are the foundation of NVRA's testing program.

As all the world knows, technological developments have given reporters many new tools to capture the spoken word. This is particularly true for voice writers with the development of computers and the growth of speech recognition.

Just as reporters of the past employed pen and paper before machines of any kind, NVRA members have historically used analog tape recorders to record their spoken words. Computers with voice recognition capabilities now enable us to provide a realtime feed of the transcript to attorneys in the deposition suite and to judges and attorneys in a courtroom. Technology has also opened the field of subtitling to voice reporters.

NVRA has a committee that is currently developing the test standards for certification of our members in subtitling or captioning activities. This test will not require the use of a voice silencer but will allow the person to test in the kind of environment where he would work and speak into an open

microphone.

NVRA currently has members who are employed as subtitlers or captioners in financial and scientific meetings that are held via teleconferencing or the internet.

At this time NVRA administers a test that certifies voice reporters as Realtime Verbatim Reporters using the voice silencer. In order to be allowed to take the RVR test, the person must hold the CVR certification.

Our association defines a realtime verbatim reporter as a person certified pursuant to NVRA testing regulations, who makes a verbatim record of legal and other proceedings by means of the spoken word, symbols and abbreviations using the current technology and produces the record on a computer screen in a readable form.

Each RVR test is constructed with two dictation skill segments: a five-minute legal literary and a five-minute Question and Answer test at 180 words per minute with a minimum passing score of 96% for either dictation.

The model for administration of the RVR test requires that each individual set up their equipment as they would in the work environment. The test is administered in two discrete 5 minute segments. The person taking the test is allowed to interface with their computer during the test. When "stop" is called at the conclusion of the test, the person cannot touch his computer again until a test proctor observes the downloading of the voice

file stenograms to the media that will be presented to the test committee for grading.

This is a test of the abilities of a person as a court reporter and the application of their knowledge of the software they are using to capture and translate their spoken words.

Many of our long time members have chosen not to upgrade to speech recognition technology. Our test environment allows reporters to test using analog or digital equipment, including speech recognition or other reporting methods.

Whatever method of reporting the person may choose to use in taking our test, NVRA wants to ensure the integrity and validity of the individual test and the entire program. The use of a nationally recognized psychometric test development company assures members that whenever they accomplish their certification it is equivalent to those earned by others in the profession at some other point in time. It also assures employers and the public that the certified reporter they employ will perform at an entry or merit level, whatever method they use in reporting.

Test construction for both the written and skills is conducted by committee. Test construction begins with a committee of 3-4 persons submitting material for potential tests in the categories appearing in the written and dictation skills tests.

The material is reviewed for subject matter and appropriateness. For the written test, items are created in each

test category and are entered in an item bank. Four tests, which will be administered during the year are then created, and a criterion-referenced cut score is established for each test.

For the skills test, if submitted material is deemed a potential test a word count is run on the material to determine if it exceeds the required number of words for the final test. The material needs to have more words than the requisite number for the test since editing will change the number of words available.

Tests are constructed with what could be considered as double counting. The required number of words per minute must be counted. At that point, the number of words per minute are cut into four equal 15 second segments. Within each 15 second segment the number of syllables are counted so that the final density of each 15 seconds is 1.4 syllables. There are other fine points in arriving at a final product that is a validated test, but I think this provides a sense of the effort involved in the seven distinct steps in the process of developing each one of NVRA's tests.

Finally, I want to tell you about what many of our members refer to as the FUN test. Each year at our annual convention, which is held in various cities throughout the U.S., we administer the National Speed Championship.

To qualify to compete a member must hold the NVRA Certificate of Merit or its equivalent awarded by some other

reporters association.

The test is a 5 minute skills test at 350 words per minute Question and Answer. The winning scores have ranged in the mid to high 90% range.

In this contest, persons compete against themselves. They want to prove to themselves that they can speak that rapidly, enunciating clearly enough to be capable of transcribing and producing a printed transcript that passes at the historically high rate.

The honor of being the NVRA National Speed Champion for a year carries great prestige for those in our profession because all reporters, whether pen, machine or voice writers know that the ability to accurately report at 350 words per minute with high accuracy is not only great, it is phenomenal.

The final step in grading all submitted tests, CVR, CM, RVR and NSC is the step to ensure that the transcript is that of the person who submitted this test. A member of the test committee listens to the actual dictation of the person and compares it with the printed transcript. The dictation must match the transcript. It is not unusual to have a word or two that do not match, such as adding a word or not transcribing a word correctly, but the context of cheating is easily determined. If the words in the person's dictation and their transcript do not match, they are immediately disqualified. There are other potential repercussions, such as not being allowed to test for

some period of time or loss of NVRA membership for unethical and unprofessional behavior.

NVRA extends an invitation to each of you to join us at a national convention in the future and observe our National Speed Contest as we determine our next national champion at 350 words per minute.

Again, thank you for your gracious hospitality and the National Verbatim Reporters Association thanks you for inquiring about our testing program. I will be glad to speak to you after this event and give you additional explanations on our testing model.