

Texting @ 225 words per minute

I've been sending a lot of text messages lately, and I realize how closely it compares to how I write words on my court reporting machine. Combining phrases and shortening words by leaving out letters are two things texting and machine shorthand share – for example, LOL, UR, PLZ.

When people can speak between 200 and 300 words per minute in spurts, a court reporter's ability to keep up and maintain a verbatim record requires multiple skills: intense concentration, relaxing your body to let the words flow in your brain and out through your fingers, and the ability to accurately hit the right keys in a split second in the perfect combination to translate through our software into English on the computer screen.

We each build our own dictionary for our specialized computer software to translate the "strokes" on the machine keyboard into words. It's not like a QWERTY keyboard on a computer. I liken what we do to a combination of hearing things phonetically, playing piano (the ability to play individual keys and chords), and speaking a foreign language. The court reporting basic language is general to all of us, but each reporter speaks his or her own "dialect" in the way the words are heard and written. Each reporter's software dictionary is, therefore, unique to each individual. Each person will write a little differently.

As with text messaging and Twitter, shortening words and phrases allows you to convey more with fewer characters. Similarly, fewer strokes on the shorthand machine means being able to quickly write with the flow of speech.

The diagram below shows the machine shorthand keyboard. Each key can be pressed individually or in any combination, creating some complicated "finger twisters." You'll notice that there is not a key for each letter. Combinations of two or more letters can make up one letter – or a word or phrase. For example:

- EU = i (hit together with the right thumb)
- AO = the "oo" sound (hit together with the left thumb)
- TK = d
- TPH = n (on the initial/prefix side)
- PB = n (in the final/suffix side)

So.....TPH O PB T = the phrase "No, I don't" (NONT)

Words, syllables and phrases are written and read left to right, with the vowels stroked with the thumbs.

It's texting with all ten fingers!

