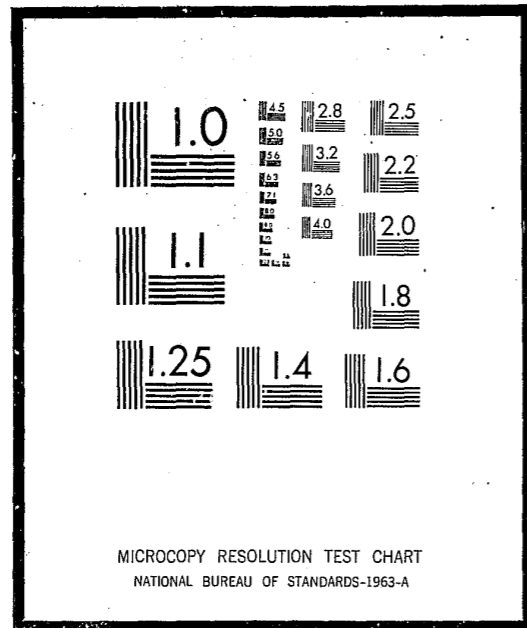


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THE GIMELLI SYSTEM OF
MULTI-TRACK VOICE WRITING:

AN EVALUATION OF A NEW COURT REPORTING TECHNIQUE
AN EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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ABSTRACT

Increased problems with traditional court reporting services including rising costs, delays in transcript production, and manpower shortages of competent court reporters are causing courts to seek new alternatives to obtain official record of proceedings.

This project evaluated and demonstrated the feasibility of multi-track voice writing as a court reporting system. Multi-track voice writing combines the use of electronic recording with a professionally trained voice writer. The voice writer dictates in court the official verbatim record of proceedings on tape and the voices of participants are simultaneously recorded on the same tape. Twenty applicants completed a three-month training program, and achieved excellent levels of proficiency on several state and federal court reporter examinations. In addition, these voice writers were evaluated by judges in seven states, and judicial reaction was strongly favorable. Comparison of voice writing to stenotyping indicated several potential advantages to voice writing including: (1) lower transcript costs; (2) faster production of transcripts; (3) faster training and higher proficiency levels of new reporters (4) better court control of transcript process; and (5) independent verification of the record. Included is a syllabus of the training curriculum and recommended revisions for future training programs. This report concludes that multi-track voice writing is a practical alternative offering several unique features to improve court reporting services by eliminating transcript delays while attaining high transcript standards.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Objectives

The study had the following objectives:

- to evaluate the competence and proficiency of trainees in the Gimelli voice writer training program
- to coordinate with several state courts an in-court field evaluation of these trainees
- to compare multi-track voice writing to court reporting techniques presently in use
- to determine the strengths and weaknesses of multi-track voice writing.

Multi-Track Voice Writing

A voice writer does not use manual shorthand or a stenotype machine; instead a multi-track tape recorder and standard microphones are used. The voice writer dictates the official verbatim record of proceedings in final form: all information necessary for the final transcript, including identification of participants, punctuation, non-verbal activities of participants, and other information required to produce the official transcript, is captured on tape in the voice writer's stylized diction.

The voice writer's whispered speech is recorded on one channel of a multi-track tape system. The reporter may use an ordinary microphone, or a microphone with a voice suppressor, into which he dictates softly in a specially-cultivated manner. The voices of the participants in a court proceeding are simultaneously recorded on another track (or tracks) of a multi-track system. The second track (in a two-track system) receives courtroom sounds by means of a microphone mixer. Microphones are

placed before different speakers (judge, counsel, witness, etc.); each microphone can be monitored and adjusted by the voice writer. Thus, the court has available for replay the voice writer's official court record and the voices of all participating speakers.

Should anyone question the official transcript, one need merely listen to Track Two of the tape to verify what was said.

The tape recorder is equipped with separate recording and playback heads; the latter are spaced away from the record head to permit slightly delayed replay. This enables the voice writer to monitor continuously the adequacy of the audio record, to ensure that the voice writer's dictation and the actual courtroom voices are on the magnetic tape; if a speaker is difficult to hear, the voice writer can adjust the volume on the speaker's microphone.

The audio record can be used as the official record of the proceeding without preparing a transcript. However, if a transcript is required, the court is not necessarily dependent upon the voice writer to prepare the transcript; transcript can be prepared from the voice writer's audio record by a capable typist with a minimum of training.

The multi-track voice writing system should not be confused with the stenomask system. While both require an operator skilled in dictation, voice writing is a refinement of the stenomask technique. The voice writer does not use any mask, (although a voice suppressor may be used), a multi-track tape system is used instead of a single track recorder, and completion of a four to five month training program is required to reach dictation proficiency and learn courtroom procedures and nomenclature.

Training Program

Twenty-two persons were selected to attend a three month voice writer training program. Trainees were selected from four metropolitan areas based on personal interviews and a qualification examination measuring verbal comprehension, grammar, spelling and punctuation skills. While there were no mandatory educational requirements, the average trainee had a baccalaureate degree but had no previous court reporting experience.

The trainees received classroom instruction in various court reporting skills including: dictation techniques, transcribing, legal and medical terminology, operation and maintenance of electronic recording equipment, court procedures and policies, and preparation of transcripts. In addition, trainees practiced after class on their deficiencies.

Curriculum changes were recommended for future voice writer training programs; in particular, greater emphasis on actual court observation and reporting experience in a court, intensive technical training on the operation and repair of the recording equipment, and additional classroom instruction on court procedures and nomenclature.

Course Evaluation

Several state and Federal court reporter examinations, including New York Supreme Court, New Jersey, and Federal tests, were administered to all trainees at the completion of the classroom instruction. In addition, several trainees took the certified court reporters examination given by the Massachusetts Superior Court.

The results achieved by trainees on all the examinations were excellent. On the New Jersey examination, all graduates attained final grades surpassing 97.5% with an average score of 99.1%. The New York examination results were comparable with an average final score of 98.7%, and the Federal court reporter qualification test results were also impressive with voice writers averaging 98.8%. These examinations measured court reporting skills at 220 words per minute for four voice testimony and 200 words per minute for single voice testimony. Of thirty-two applicants, including six voice writers, who took the Massachusetts certified court reporters examination, six voice writers were among the top seven applicants.

These results indicated that these voice writers met and surpassed present certified court reporting standards.

Field Evaluation

In the field evaluation phases of this project, fourteen voice writers were assigned to work as court reporters for judges in seven states. With one exception, there was unanimous agreement among the judges that the quality and preparation time of the transcripts produced by voice writers were equal to or better than stenotypists.

The judges also agreed that the demeanor of the voice writers was appropriate, and that the use of this new technique in the courtroom caused no disturbance nor required any changes in courtroom procedures. Attorneys were not disturbed by the technique, found the quality of transcript good, and liked the capability to independently verify the court reporters transcript.

Judges strongly approved of the multi-track recording; in particular, the ability to verify the voice writer's official record by listening to the actual voices of the participants on a separate track of the tape. The two recordings--the voice writer's record and the voices of the participants--provide a back up for each other. Although the judges were unanimous in their approval of the back up and verification features several stenotypists rated it as useless.

The greatest number of criticisms and suggestions for improvements were in the area of training. Although most judges agreed that the voice writers were well trained in the actual technique of voice writing, there were three areas where it was felt additional training should have been provided:

- technical problems related to the equipment
- knowledge of judicial environments and proceedings
- actual in-court practice.

The overall assessment of the voice writing technique by those who worked with it was strongly favorable. The quality of the transcripts provided were at least as good as stenotype transcripts. Most judges indicated that if they had an opportunity to employ a voice writer in the future, they would be inclined to do so. The results of this field evaluation are encouraging, and indicate that this new technique of recording judicial proceedings is a viable alternative to those methods currently being used.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on a six month evaluation of multi-track voice writing, it is concluded that:

- Multi-track voice writing is a practical court reporting technique.
- The graduates of this voice writing training program attained better court reporting examination scores than most graduates of stenotype schools.
- After a few months of experience in courts, voice writers are comparable in ability to experienced stenotype court reporters.
- Voice writers can be trained in less than six months compared with a minimum of 24 months for stenotypists.
- The transcripts produced by voice writers are equivalent to, or better than, transcripts prepared by experienced stenotype court reporters.
- Voice writing permits the court to control more easily the official record and production of transcripts.
- Voice writing provides the court with the alternative of two types of official record of proceedings: audio record or transcript.
- Voice writers should be equipped with reliable and portable tape recording systems.

Based on an evaluation of this particular voice writer training program, it is concluded that:

Performance

- Voice writers can be trained within six months to become competent court reporters.
- Trainees achieved high levels of proficiency on several state and federal reporter examinations.
- Trainees received strongly favorable comments from judges who observed voice writer reporting in the courtroom.
- The recording equipment selected met equipment standards, but additional evaluation and testing of other audio equipment should be done.

Curriculum

- Trainees should complete a minimum of twelve weeks of classroom instruction.
- Trainees should be required to practice under actual courtroom conditions for a minimum of four weeks.
- Trainees should be instructed by persons who have experience in recording courtroom proceedings and who have been certificated by Mr. Gimelli to teach the voice-writing technique.
- Qualified applicants for a voice writer training program should possess strong language skills.

Compared with stenotype or shorthand court reporting the multi-track voice writer technique provides:

- Greater availability of reporter's time in the courtroom
- Fewer steps in transcript preparation
- Availability of independent verification of the reporter's record
- Court control of the transcript process (costs, quality, and time)
- Potentially lower manpower and transcription costs
- Capability for recording non-English speaking participants
- Greater frequency of equipment problems caused by electronic malfunctions.

Presently, many statutes and court policies do not permit courts to take advantage of the voice writing technique. Competence in reporting should be determined by the final product, the official record, not the techniques used to record proceedings.

Statutes and court rules should be altered:

- To change qualification exams from certified shorthand reporter examinations to certified court reporter examinations
- To permit any competent reporter, regardless of reporting technique, to become an official court reporter
- To raise required proficiency levels of court reporters.

END