

Elementary School Visits

(Machine in case or on nearby surface, not on the tripod.)

1. Introduce yourself

I am _____ and I am a court reporter.

2. Explain what a court reporter is.

A court reporter is someone who writes down what people say and they have to be able to write as fast as people talk.

3. Question: How fast do you think people talk when giving a speech?

We're going to express it in words per minute. How many words per minute does the average person speak if they are talking to a group? [Take as many answers as the students are willing to give, repeating what each one said.]

Answer: The average person giving a speech speaks at 173 words per minuteⁱ! And many people talk even faster than that! For instance, the person who delivers the news might be speaking up to 250 words per minute!

4. Question: Most of you are learning how to type on a computer keyboard. How fast do you think the average person can type on a computer keyboard? Again, we're going to express it in words per minute. How many words per minute do you think the average person types? [Take as many answers as the students are willing to give, repeating what each one said.]

Answer: The average person types at 44 words per minuteⁱⁱ.

That leaves a big gap between the speed at which people speak – 173 words per minute – and the speed that you can write something down on a computer keyboard.

Question: So the big question is, how am I able to write down everything that is said as fast as they are saying it? (Show them your steno machine – make sure to hold it so the keyboard is facing the group.) I use this machine, which is called a shorthand machine.

Notice that it doesn't have as many keys as a computer keyboard. And it has no letters on the keys. My fingers rest on top of most of the keys, so I couldn't see the letters if I wanted to, and it's fast for me to write if I don't look at the keys.

5. Question: So, how does this keyboard work?

Demonstrate where your hands go.

Explain where the consonants are and where the vowels are. Explain how a word is formed. Work through placement of fingers for a few words (SAT, SET, SEAT). If you have passed out handouts with a keyboard on it, they can follow along.

6. What kind of jobs can you do if you have the ability to write on a shorthand machine as fast as people can talk?

Discuss the various careers: official court reporting, freelance reporting, CART captioning, and closed captioning.

Many of the students can relate to closed captioning: Ask them if they've ever been in a restaurant that has a television showing a sports game with the sound turned off, but you can read the words at the bottom of the screen. THAT'S closed captioning!

Additional topics to explore, time permitting:

- Decoding a steno message (handout).
- How long does training take?
- What kind of things do you learn in court reporting school?
- What other kind of skills do you need? Punctuality, pay attention to details, good English skills, like to read and/or learn new words. You can relate some of that to skills they are building as students right now.
- If you are comfortable with it, students always like getting a turn to put their hands on your machine and try it. If you have on-board translation, praise them when they get a word to translate!

ⁱ <https://virtualspeech.com/blog/average-speaking-rate-words-per-minute>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.ratatype.com/learn/average-typing-speed/>