

# Student Newsletter

**July 2014**

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## ***How to Rise Above Failing the CSR***

*By Sharece Atkins*



You've probably heard a lot about the CSR from classmates, especially those who have passed the CSR. Those who pass the CSR usually come back to school saying how great the test was and they had no doubt that they passed the test, and then there's me. I would have bet my life that I was going to pass the CSR. I walked out of the testing room smiling! Honestly, have you ever smiled after taking a test at school? I never did. In this article I'm going to describe my CSR testing experience and how I'm dealing with failing the CSR.

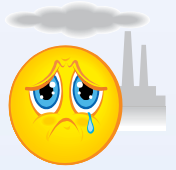
I had passed my first qualifier in late November 2013. In fact, I passed it the week before the CSR test in Sacramento. I had passed seven qualifiers before the CSR. I was optimistic that I was going to nail that CSR.

The week of the CSR was a horrible writing week for me. You know those weeks where you just can't write anything right? I was having one of those. I couldn't correctly write to any type of dictation. Hard copy was even hard for me to accurately write.



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On the 300-mile drive down to Los Angeles the Wednesday before the test, I called my best court reporting friend who is now a CSR. I was crying because I didn't feel like taking the CSR. I told her I didn't think I could pass it because I was having such a bad writing week. She told me that she felt the same way right before she took her CSR. This is coming from a steno superstar who went from Theory to passing a qualifier in one year! It's always good to have court reporting friends who understand you. We all know how family, friends, and significant others do not understand the process of going through court reporting or how we feel.



I got to the hotel on Wednesday night and had a great night's sleep. The next morning I decided to go to Manhattan Beach. Manhattan Beach is so beautiful! I definitely recommend going there the day before the CSR to relax. Do whatever relaxes you the day before the CSR.

I definitely recommend setting up your computer and printer the night before. You're already a little nervous and just having everything set up for the next day will help. It also helps to see what the transcription room looks like.

The night before the CSR, public and private court reporting schools each offer their own CSR practice sessions. I went to the RAPS practice for public schools. The takes were hard. I remember hearing some of the takes as qualifiers. In fact, the last take I practiced to was the last qualifier I took before driving down to Los Angeles. I practiced for about two hours and left when I felt like I wrote a take well. I think it's good to leave the practice the night before on a good note. These practice sessions do cost money, but it's so worth it! I believe the RAPS practice was \$10 and that included practice the morning of the CSR.

For me, if I don't get enough sleep I don't write well. The Westin LAX Hotel is right next to LAX, and I feel planes taking off about every 20 to 30 minutes. I tried going to sleep at 9 p.m. but ended up finally going to sleep at midnight. Then for some odd reason, I woke up at 3 a.m. and couldn't go back to sleep. At 5 a.m. I decided to get some practice in with finger drills and writing to the news. Writing to the news only lasted ten minutes because the news anchors were talking so darn fast.



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I was in group one. Group one was supposed to be in line at 8 a.m. I got to sit in on one practice take before having to line up. Funny thing is that I wasn't nervous at all before the test. DRA came through the line of students and passed out shortbread cookies and shamrock temporary tattoos for good luck. The worst part was the waiting. Things were running late, and group one didn't get to go into the dictation room until 8:30 a.m. You sign in at a table before



going into the dictation room and are given a number of the row you are to sit in.

Once you get in, you go to your row and go all the way to the left. The front row has the most space between the chairs, and as each row goes back, the space between chairs decreases. I sat in the second row. I had a woman to my left in front of me who was blocking the witness and rocked to and fro the entire test. Then I had a man to my right who blocked the defense attorney the entire time. I didn't speak up when the speakers asked if everyone could see. I should have. Definitely speak up if you can't see a speaker. The speakers make a couple of jokes and try to put you at ease before the test.

After dictation, you're led into the room next door, the transcription room. A person gives you some instructions. A manila envelope with a glossary and colored paper is sitting at your seat. I was so happy when my test was transcribed. I had the lowest untran rate ever! I could easily read my notes with the exception of a few rough spots. I had enough time to go through my transcript three times to proofread. I walked out of the transcription room smiling! I was sure I nailed it.

Next is the long six-week wait for results. I held the letter from the CRB. It was thick. I knew it wasn't going to be good. Next I saw the words, "We regret to inform you." I didn't pass. I missed 59. I requested my transcript so I could at least learn from my mistakes. I had mixed up "a" for "the" or "the" for "this." I had dropped a couple of small words at the beginning of sentences such as "now" or "so." I had 10 comma errors and one speaker error. I was devastated. I called my CSR best friend and she thought I was kidding when I told her I didn't pass. That was the worst part. Whenever I told my court reporting friends that I didn't pass they would say, "Stop kidding," or "What?"

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I cried and moped around for three days. I went to school the Monday after receiving the results. I cried at school and left early. Tuesday I was mad. I was so mad that the test did that to me. I was mad that I wouldn't be a CSR until September. I was mad I was going to have to take that long drive and pay a lot of money to go back to L.A. I was mad I had to spend another night in the nice hotel next to LAX.



There are still days that I mope around. I'm disappointed in myself that I didn't pass. I question if I'm meant to be a court reporter. It's a daily fight with myself to go to school. I have to admit, I am skipping school more. I can say it's because my boyfriend's mom recently passed away, I can say it's because I'm house surfing. I can probably give more excuses, but in the end I'm not going to school because I feel like I disappointed myself and others. It's not like I was a student who slacked in school. I would practice at home. I would practice at school. I worked my butt off to get through school and here I am, a student who failed the CSR.

After most of the CSRs, I don't see the students who took the CSR come back to school. They might come back the month before the CSR and only show up on qualifier days. Our teachers are right when they say missing a day makes us lose our speed.

So what can those of us who didn't pass March's exam do until the July test? We can hold our heads up high and go to school. We can show up every day and transcribe every test. We can practice for the RPR in August. We can take every mock CSR test that is offered. We can attend court reporting events to help boost our motivation and network. We can intern so that we are that much more ready for our first job.



I'm a firm believer that everything happens for a reason. For some reason I didn't pass the CSR. For some reason I'm writing this article. I hope it helps you or speaks to you. If you are taking the CSR in July, I'll see you there! We will conquer the CSR! We will be amazing court reporters!

***THANK YOU TO OUR DRA CORPORATE SPONSOR!***





## **Searching for the “Secret”**

**By Alisa Church**

Every court reporting student would like to know the “secret” to becoming a working court reporter. We all understand that we need to learn our software, become experts in grammar and punctuation, and do our best to master medical and legal terminology. Of course, what we really want to know is how to get from theory to 225 in record time. We ask our teachers, our fellow students, and veteran reporters. We scour the Internet, read articles, and join groups on Facebook. We do all of these things and more with the hope of finding that one magical secret that will somehow show us an easier or better way.

Naturally, these resources provide a variety of opinions and very sage advice. Some tell us to practice at higher speeds, while others insist that you should practice for accuracy and let the speed follow. Some say to use briefs as much as possible, while others say to write everything out. An article in a previous issue of the *Journal of Court Reporting* indicated that playing a musical instrument is helpful. I took a handful of guitar lessons a few years ago; does that count? One veteran reporter tells students that having a positive attitude is the key to reaching their goals. Most would agree that is true for many things in life. When Nancy Varallo spoke in Nashville last year, she said, “I believe you must set yourself on fire!” The NCRA President must know what it takes; right?



I met a fairly new reporter at the DRA convention earlier this year who got out of school in only 14 months. Finally, someone who must know the secret! When I asked her how she did it, she explained that she practiced every single day for several hours no matter what. That wasn't the answer I wanted to hear, and I realized that there is just no way of getting around all of those hours and days and months and years of time that must be spent with just you and your steno machine. The most consistent piece of advice seems to be to practice, practice, practice.

I am still a student, so I do not profess to know the elusive “secret” or to getting out of school more quickly. I do confess to trying anything and everything that anyone has ever suggested to me. I have even tried hypnosis. Has it worked? I don't know, but the hope that it might work compels me to do it anyway.

Someone once told me that the key to making it through court reporting school is that you have to really want it. I believe this to be true, but I would also add a little bit of love in there. I have not met one high-speed student or working court reporter who hasn't expressed a deep and genuine love for this profession. The process that we must go through to get those letters after our names demands it. We have to want it and love it so much that we are willing to set aside our personal lives, our families, our friends, our hobbies, vacations, and going anywhere without that machine in order to practice, practice, practice. I have practiced on long car rides, while watching a movie, and even on a cruise to Alaska. We endure the endless questions from friends and family about when we will graduate and why we can't give them any real answer. The process brings about tears and tantrums and threats to give it all up because “It's just too hard” and “It's taking too long.” Yet once the dust settles and the tears dry, we sit back down at the machine that we have grown to love and practice, practice, practice.

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I have been a student for a little while now and have come to believe that the secret of becoming a court reporter is this: There is no secret. We simply have to do the work that we already love and trust that it will all be worth it. Mostly, we just have to practice, practice, practice.

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## ***Your Mentor is Waiting!***

The Deposition Reporters Association of California is committed to ensuring that the shorthand reporting profession remains a viable and integral part of the legal system. To this end, we have designed a mentor program that melds the enthusiasm of new reporters and students with the maturity of the more seasoned reporter. Reporters (must be a student at or above 160-level speed or a new reporter within the first year of reporting and a member in good standing with DRA) and students will be matched up with experienced reporters in the state of California in order to provide them with relevant guidance, support and encouragement during the beginning stages of their new careers.

Do you need some extra help, personal attention, or have questions regarding reporting? If so, then sign up for our mentoring program and receive guidance or help from a professional working court reporter. Working reporters understand what difficulties you face as students and new reporters. We are willing to volunteer our time to get to know you, praise you for your achievements and lend encouragement for those tough times when you take the CSR, attend your first deposition, or are making the switch from being an official to freelance reporter.

**If you are a current student at the 160-speed level and above or any reporter that wishes to be mentored, and you are interested in participating, please go to**

**<http://www.caldra.org/get-mentored>**



## ***PENGAD DRA MEMBER DISCOUNT***

*10% off all Regularly Priced merchandise for DRA members!*

*The Deposition Reporters Association continues Pengad's  
Member 10 Buying Program for 2014.*

*SAVE 10% with your CALDRA-Pengad Discount*

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- Coupon may not be combined with other discounts, sales, or special offers
- Coupon may be used for multiple purchases
- Coupon effective April 1, 2014 - June 30, 2014

### ***The Deposition Reporters Association of California's Mission Statement***

**DRA strives to preserve and enhance the freelance stenographic reporting profession, ensure its integrity, and maintain its high standards and impartiality wherever stenographic services are required. DRA is committed to ensuring that the freelance stenographic reporting profession remains a viable and integral part of the legal system.**

## **SAVE THE DATE!**

Friday, July 25, 2014  
CSR Exam  
Los Angeles, CA

NCRA Annual  
Convention – San  
Francisco Hilton  
Hotel - Thursday, July  
31 – Sunday, Aug 3,  
2014

Board of Directors  
Meeting  
Saturday, October 11,  
2014  
Oakland, CA

2015 DRA Annual  
Convention  
February 20 – 22, 2015  
Monterey, CA



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