

Working with a Speech to Text Reporter

Role of the Speech to Text Reporter

It is the role of the STTR to facilitate communication between deaf/deafened/hard of hearing people and hearing people. The STTR produces a computerised verbatim record of what is said, using either a Palantype or Stenograph machine, to be shown instantly on a monitor or screen. The STTR provides a complete translation of the spoken words and environmental sounds, such as {laughter} and {applause}.

STTRs should not be confused with Electronic Notetakers using Speedtext, Stereotype, or other forms of electronic notetaking software. These provide a *précis* service for the deaf person.

A Speech to Text Reporter provides a *verbatim* service, and their training and software allow them to work with speech speeds that can reach in excess of 180 wpm.

Those STTRs who have additionally taken the “Live mode” examination assessed by the British Institute of Verbatim Reporters are capable of reporting in meetings where the language is exceptionally specialised or technical, or where speech speeds are likely to be in excess of 200 wpm. These people will be indicated in the directory by an asterisk. Although they will be prepared to accept all types of work, they should be contacted when an assignment is expected to be particularly complex. Examples might be highly technical medical or financial work or large multi-national conferences.

It is not the primary role of the STTR to produce a hard copy transcript of a STT assignment. Anybody who wishes to obtain such a transcript will, in the first instance, need to obtain the consent of the STTR. All hard copy transcripts of STT assignments will include the following disclaimer :

“This transcript was provided originally as communication support for a deafened reader. It should not be regarded as a fully checked and verified verbatim record; it has no legal standing.”

The Speech To Text Process

The training route for a Speech to Text Reporter has traditionally been within the court system. STTRs are initially trained in a Crown Court where a court shorthand writer (as they are called in court) is used to provide verbatim transcripts of court proceedings. The reporter may also have been employed at public enquiries, depositions or in a meeting or lecture situation to provide a verbatim report. The system has been in use for many years but it was the advent of new computer technology, which facilitated the immediate transcription as a full screen of text or as subtitles, enabling deaf people in attendance at meetings to follow the proceedings. In most circumstances a transcript accuracy of at least 95% correctly spelt English will be achieved. Most deaf readers become very adept at reading what the reporters call 'untranslates' (ie those words not matched in the dictionary) and displayed phonetically.

Position of the STT Reporter

- The reporter should be positioned near the main speakers so as to be able to hear every spoken word clearly.

- Correct seating is very important for the reporter's health and safety, and a chair without arms, and also, if possible, of adjustable height should be provided.
- Make sure that there is a standard 13A 240V ac power point near to the reporter's position in the meeting room.
- In large conference situations where a public address system is used, reporters can be helped immeasurably by the provision of headphones with a direct feed into the PA system.
- The reporter will need a small table for his/her own laptop computer.
- There will also need to be additional tables for any monitors that are used.
- STT Reporters do get tired, and when they are tired their accuracy decreases. Therefore, it is essential that there should be frequent short breaks of 5-10 minutes during the day, at least every 1- 1½ hours. If the nature of the assignment means that this cannot be done, two STT Reporters should be booked. For long assignments it is often necessary to book more than one Reporter
- The Chairperson should ensure that discussion is disciplined. STT Reporters can only report one person at a time. Users are disadvantaged if the way in which a meeting is conducted makes it impossible for the reporter to record all contributions.

Communicating Using Speech to Text Reporters

STT reporting is a method of translating text produced by a software programme via a computer into English text in a form readable by deaf people. Currently the software programmes commonly in use included Palantype, Stenograph, Eclipse and Legende. The text is reported by the STT Reporter on the Palantype or Stenograph input machine which is linked to a computer. The text is matched in the computer against a personalised dictionary compiled by the STT Reporter and displayed either on a small screen for one or 2 users or on to a larger screen suitable for a large number of readers. Words not matched in the dictionary will be displayed phonetically.

Before the Meeting

- Inform the reporter of the duration of the assignment and venue.
- Tell him/her how many deaf people will be using the system (see Additional Equipment).
- Let the reporter know if a first draft print-out (hard copy) will be required. This will be subject to the agreement of the users and reporter, and the availability of storage (ie a floppy disk).
- Make sure that the reporter has a contact name and telephone number (if possible, there should also be an evening telephone number available because reporters often have to do their administrative work in the evening).
- Ensure that the reporter receives copies of the agenda and any other relevant papers (at least a week before the date) so that he/she may do any necessary dictionary work. Failure to provide relevant information will result in a reduced translation accuracy which will disadvantage the readers.

How to book a STT Reporter

It is essential to book a STT Reporter who is suitably qualified for the assignment or the deaf person will not receive appropriate access. It is important to consult the deaf person to ask what kind of communication service they require before booking any Language Service Professional.

- STT Reporters may be booked through one of the specialist agencies.

- They may also be booked individually (through the CACDP Directory) or through personal recommendation.
- When making a booking for speech to text services, either through agencies or individually, the client is perfectly entitled to ask if the assigned Reporter is registered with CACDP.

Additional Equipment

Individual STT Reporters have their own equipment and can provide a service for one or 2 readers. Most agencies, in addition to the basic input machine and laptop computers, have monitors, which they can provide for additional readers. It is necessary, therefore, when booking an STT Reporter to stipulate the number of people who will be using the system. Most people now use data projectors and such equipment is more widely available than in the past. However, it is imperative that the STT Reporter or the conference organiser knows in advance whether additional equipment is likely to be necessary.

It is also possible to provide sub-titled displays in a conference situation (i.e. 3 lines of text underneath the visual image of the speaker) but this is very specialised and conference organisers will need to enquire of the various agencies if they are able to provide this service.

Use of the CACDP Kitemark

Some registered Speech to Text Reporters may use the CACDP kitemark in their publicity material. This kitemark is shown below.

