



THE NERVES OF A NEW COURT REPORTER – COURT REPORTERS

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On our Kramm Court Reporting Facebook page, my friend Terry posted a request that I blog about being a new court reporter and getting nervous at depositions.

Remembering back (circa 1981) I was super nervous when I first started out as a court reporter. Every morning I woke up scared and excited. I loved being assigned to a deposition, having a law firm or doctor's office to go to, swearing in a witness, and pounding on my steno keys. But then I was at the same time scared. I worried that I would get lost, not find a place to park downtown, miss a word, or drop a phrase.

Here are **9 tips** to help squelch the nerves:

1. The first rule I adopted was "the two-hour rule." I always set my alarm clock to wake me up at least two hours before my deposition/hearing was scheduled to begin. In the early days I remember running late because of bad traffic, not finding a good place to park, a broken heel... I believe everyone can relate, if you are running late, your day is probably not going to be super great, and you will be on edge before you get to your job. So my first bit of advice to Terry is get to your job 30 – 45 minutes early.
2. Because you are 30 – 45 minutes early, you will have time to systematically set up, get organized, grab a cup of coffee, and relax. Plus you might get your hands on a pleading or interrogatories, something, and you will be able to start building your job dictionary.
3. If you are assigned to report a doctor or expert, Google the person the night before your deposition. Read what their expertise is and at the very least get into your dictionary what colleges they went to and what degrees they received. You know the attorneys are going to ask about their background. Put the names of their past employers in your dictionary; make up a brief or two of past companies



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the witness worked for. When you see everything translating beautifully, you are going to sit up in your chair with a little smile on your face feeling proud of your writing (confidence builder).

4. Make up briefs for generic objections: vague and ambiguous; calls for speculation; not calculated to lead to the discovery of admissible evidence; calls for a legal conclusion.
5. The reason you want to have as few strokes as possible for objections is because they are rarely going to be read back. It is the question before the objection that is going to be read back. So make up your mind you are going to totally get the question – hang on. You can trail on the objection(s) because you have your briefs. The objections will give you time to catch up.
6. Reading back long answers. The other time you are going to be asked to read back is for long answers or answers that are a little convoluted. These are tough – even after 28 years of reporting these are sometimes tough to read back. If an answer is getting away from you, you are trailing, keep hanging on, but if it gets away from you, say politely, “Excuse me. I need to hear that part of the answer again. I left off at (then read back where you last were before you lost it).” It should be very rare that you have to stop someone in the middle of an answer (or stop someone in the middle of a question). But if you do lose it, always be polite, firm, and professional. No squeaky voice or look of fear.
7. If a witness is constantly interrupting and starting to answer before the whole question is out, give the witness and attorney a “look.” Raise your eyebrows, look confused, look angry. If it happens more than three times, wait for a pause between Q&A and say, “Excuse me. May we go off the record for a second?” Wait for agreement. Then say to the witness, “I really need you to stop interrupting the attorney. It is making a very bad record.” Typically, at that point, the attorneys will admonish the witness and tell him/her to knock it off.
8. If the attorney is interrupting the witness, try to live through it. You can give everyone “the look.” At the first break, you might say, “Wow! No more coffee for you. This is tough because you are talking when the witness is still answering. I don’t know if you realize that. Phew.” You don’t want to anger your client (they are typically not conscious of what they are doing if they are interrupting the witness), so you have to use a little humor or finesse to get your point across and let them know they are creating a messy record.
9. Fighting! If attorneys are in the mood to fight, they are going to fight. Separate yourself from the event and truly become Switzerland. Everyone in the room is



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going to rely on you to be the level-headed voice of reason. If one person yells at you to read back, and the other yells that the court reporter is not going to read back, let them yell at each other for a while. Then slowly you can say, "Counsel, I will read back when no one is speaking because I have to stay on the record whenever anyone is speaking." When I make a statement on the record, I always write it on my machine and then later put it in the transcript. If I am saying something on the record, it is very much on purpose and I stroke the machine with emphasis when I speak, bang, bang, bang, and speak in a computer-type voice to get their attention.

Bottom line: I can't imagine anyone not being nervous their first year or two in the court reporting field. There are always new challenges, more difficult jobs, different personalities thrown at you every day. Be prepared. Keep moving forward. Don't let fear get in the way of being great or accepting new and unusual assignments. The days that are the most difficult are the days you are going to learn the most. "If it doesn't kill you, it will make you stronger," is one of my favorite sayings. One day you will wake up only feeling the excitement of being a court reporter – no fear.

Good Luck, Young Court Reporters! Be Strong!



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