

Waldir Cury (Brazil)
THE ISSUE AS TO SHORTHAND SPEED

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Hello, everyone! My name is Waldir Cury, I am a retired stenographer proofreader of the Legislative Assembly of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, a shorthand teacher and a member of the Intersteno Educational Committee.

It is an enormous pleasure for me to talk to you through this video. The title of this talk focus on the issue as to shorthand speed. On this video I'll give you a very brief view of the subject. The full text is available on the Intersteno Website.

I want to say I like to talk about shorthand speed, a subject that I care about and that I am passionate about.

What is understood when we talk about "shorthand speed" is how many words per minute someone can write using shorthand. A good shorthand speed is around 120 words per minute. At this speed, this represents writing in shorthand, in theory, two words per second - which is truly a great feat!

Just by way of comparison, according to Juvêncio José Barbosa, in his book "Literacy and Reading", "we read at a normal

speed of approximately 250 words per minute (4 to 5 words per second)”.

➤ **The speed of longhand versus the speed of shorthand.**

Shorthand is an extremely abbreviated writing. Due to the simplification and significant savings through graphical representations, it is possible to achieve great levels of speed when writing. This unique use transforms shorthand into a valuable instrument.

After learning shorthand signs and rules of the new graphical system (shorthand), the student begins a daily and systematic training of progressive dictations to acquire speed. In this training period, listening and visual perception, mentally developing signs, motor coordination, writing on paper and transcribing shorthand outlines into longhand, come into play.

As the students advance in the shorthand speed training, they gain gradual conditioning that will enable them to write in shorthand at greater speeds. Training speed is a progressive, dynamic, live, full-time, continuous and individual process, demanding, as a basic condition to jump from one speed to another, personal effort and involvement as well as training and “maturing” at each speed level.

To begin the systematic shorthand speed training dictations, it is essential that the student has learned the entire system. This does not mean that you cannot train small dictations but, without the need of timing the speed, while learning the system. Small dictations with shorthand characters that have already been studied and written at a slower pace, if performed with criteria, may represent an excellent teaching resource and may even help preparing to train for progressive dictations that the student begins to do after learning the entire system. This is exactly the systemology that I have elected in my online shorthand course: dictations as of the first module that have showed very good results and students have approved.

Learning the system begins with moments of experience or familiarity with shorthand characters, interspersed with moments of systematization and solidification, through exercises and tests. Quality exercises are those that are very well dosed and in which the student observes, compares, infers, understands and repeats. These are exercises that stimulate the assimilation of shorthand characters and that properly build the foundations of learning the system. There are also playful and exciting exercises that generate pleasure and challenge as well as sharpen the student's interest while learning and still others that awaken, in the student, the desire to learn more and more.

In the Final Report of a study published in 1969 in the United States on "Systems of Teaching Shorthand: Research Analysis",

written by Joe M. Pullis, Polytechnic Institute of Ruston, Louisiana, we read the following conclusions:

From the findings of this study, there seemed to be strong indication that success in shorthand as measured by achievement in shorthand dictation was significantly related to one's ability to construct accurate shorthand outlines.

- 1. There was a significant positive relationship between the student's ability to write accurate shorthand outlines and his achievement in shorthand dictation.*
- 2. There was a significant positive relationship between the ability of the student to write accurate shorthand outlines and his ability to transcribe the outlines.*
- 3. There was a significant positive relationship between the ability of the student to transcribe isolated shorthand outlines and his achievement in shorthand dictation.*
- 4. Competency in transcription increased with competency in shorthand accuracy.*

Irvin H. Lesser believes that weak students in shorthand are those who have not mastered the theory of the shorthand system.

“Generally, the “weak students” in shorthand have never adequately learned the theory of the shorthand system so that they can automatize their responses. It is unfortunate that too many of the students' shorthand notes reveal that

their knowledge of the theory of shorthand is far short of what it should be.”

There is an imperative need to “mature” in each speed level! It is known that, while training dictations at a given speed, the brain starts creating new neurons relative to that particular speed. This is why it is necessary to train many dictations at each speed level. When training many 20 wpm dictations, the student gives the brain the necessary “time” for it to create neurons relative to the 20wpm speed. The same is true for each speed level the student advances to.

This is so true that the non-compliance of such period required for the brain to adapt to each speed level can represent a huge obstacle with regard to the student’s progress.

The students that "burn phases" and train speeds greater than their brain capacity, exceeding what their skill, their conditioning and their motor coordination enables them to, end up losing many words in the dictation, writing shorthand characters very poorly and generating enormous difficulty when they try to transcribe what they have written in shorthand.

In cases like this, where there is no real progress, the best strategy is to "go back a few steps in order to advance”.

Now let’s talk about:

➤ **The transition from one speed to another.**

To better understand this point related to the transition from one speed to another, we can illustrate with weights that are used for bodybuilding at gyms. Normally, people begin lifting 10 pounds. For several weeks, these 10 pounds will condition the arm muscles so that they can later be able to lift 20 pounds. In this second phase, weeks are spent lifting 20 pounds. Only after the muscle is fully conditioned, strengthened and truly prepared is when 10 more pounds are added and this pattern is followed every time there is an increase in weights. We can say that the same thing happens with progressive shorthand speed dictations. Days and weeks need to be spent at a given speed to condition, strengthen, and acquire motor coordination in order to obtain full capacity at that speed. Only then will five more words be added for every minute of dictation without representing an overload to the brain.

Speed training should be done with full commitment and with utmost discipline. Each dictation has to be well "digested". All words and brief forms that are difficult to write should be very well studied. The student cannot and should not be in a hurry to jump from one speed to another. It is essential to "mature" at each speed level!

The amount of dictations needed to train each speed level must be taken into consideration, but the most important is *the quality of*

the training of each dictation! To train a great number of dictations and not assimilate anything is time spent uselessly. On the other hand, "digesting" and deeply training each dictation, training not only words that are difficult to write but brief forms as well, represents an extraordinary gain with respect to shorthand speed.

As a rule, the greater the speed, the longer the training will take to overcome it. This is because the amount of sounds to be converted into graphic codes increases proportionally.

Let us make a comparison to better understand this point. In a 5-minute dictation of 20 words per minute, we give the brain a task of "transforming 100 words into shorthand outlines." In a 5-minute dictation of 120 words per minute, the brain has a great and complex task which is: "to transform with great speed, 600 words into shorthand outlines." The difference is brutal: 120 against 600!

It is easy to see that, every time words are added and every time there is an increase in the speed of the dictations, the brain has a greater amount of work to accomplish.

It is important to note that, the act of shorthand writing involves multitasks, not only in relation to "listening to the words, making the respective shorthand outlines in the brain and, through motor coordination, writing them on paper", but also performing everything with "ease, speed and accuracy."

The use of skills is a continuous improvement process that has no end.

It is necessary to always train speed in order to be a good stenographer. There is actually no point of arrival! To be able to use the shorthand skills well, it is absolutely imperative to follow a continuous improvement process that has no end.

The endless training of speed dictations, the daily drilling and the permanent enhancement of the art of shorthand all become essential conditions to achieve an excellent professional and personal performance.

The stenographer who daily trains speed is continuously improving and even surpassing every day, skills that have already been acquired. The motor coordination starts getting better, more accurate, more efficient and more refined!

Likewise, the stenographer who daily trains speed, improves concentration every day as well as the ability to hear sounds, transform them into signs and outline them fluently on paper. Every day, the stenographer becomes more proficient in overcoming the challenges shorthand writing offers.

Finally, we must emphasize that, along with speed training, there is also training related to reading what has been written in shorthand. As a result, the habit of reading what has been written in shorthand brings not only an improvement in comprehension but reading speed as well.

Thank you so very much for your kind attention.
