



The Other Side of the Coin: Real-Time Captioning Services

By: Jenee Petri-Swanson

After a dialogue with a staff captioner at the University of Minnesota, I (Jenee Petri-Swanson) offer this summary in which I will share my personal take-aways and perspectives as they relate to the field of captioning. I hope this information provides helpful insights as to how captioners operate and can bring the interpreting and captioning fields closer in their mutual understanding and partnership.

Note: I am using the term captioner to refer to those doing real-time-captioning, although preferred titles may vary among providers.

Agency Around Access

There are many approaches to communication access in-use by people with hearing loss. Some of the most commonly thought of methods would be use of a sign language interpreter, writing back and forth on paper or with some sort of technology, use of residual hearing combined with lip-reading, and more. Another approach, which is perhaps rarely considered in the field of ASL interpreting, is real-time captioning.

In terms of which approach is “best” for D/DB/HH folks to gain live access to acoustically-presented information, there is no one-size-fits-all answer. Not only are there individual differences, but also variability in an individual’s preference based on the environment, the day, the goal of the communication, and a whole multitude of variables. In short, it is not for us to decide what is the best mode of communication for anyone besides ourselves.

Also worth noting, the number of people reporting a noise-induced hearing loss at all ages has been increasing for decades. As much as I advocate for the instruction and use of sign language for ALL persons (regardless of hearing status), the reality is that many people are not given an opportunity or access to learn sign.

Consumers should be leaders in deciding what works for them. This sentiment is echoed in the ADA's [language](#): "...In determining what type of auxiliary aid and service is necessary, a public entity shall **give primary consideration to the requests of the individual** with disabilities" (emphasis added).

Some people may prefer real-time captioning over interpreting services. If that is their preference, it should be honored. However, some folks are not made aware of their options and may miss the chance to explore if and when real-time captioning may work for them.

Those of us involved in Deaf education - let us not shy away from our responsibility to empower our students to make *informed* choices. To that end, I would make the following suggestions: Consider providing opportunities for D/DB/HH students to experience real-time captioning. Facilitate discussion before and after the fact to give space for the student to determine what went well for them and what wasn't ideal (compared to other experiences with other ways of accessing auditory/verbal information.) Take it one step further by practicing conversations where the student offers feedback to a captioner to fine-tune their services to meet their needs (where appropriate and applicable.) These conversations are sure to build the self-confidence and vocabulary needed as empowered self-advocates!

For those students who do not utilize interpreting or captioning services in their current education plan, the team should still consider the students' next steps in life and see if captioning (or interpreting) may be a necessary and available in the future. A classroom of 30 kids may not require captioning for some students, but a lecture hall with 100+ participants may be a different story.

If a student plans to use captioning services for the first time in college, it would be ideal for that student to have some practice and experience working with captioners prior to their freshman year of college, when the learning curve is already steep. In an ideal world, the educational team would allow for some practice runs using captioning services while the student is still in the K-12 setting.

Captioning as a Profession

The field of interpreting was established and began evolving before the field of captioning. The typical trajectory for interpreters is to attend a college training program, achieve national certification, pay membership dues for national and local agencies, and maintain their national certification. Up until now, there has been nothing like that for captioners: no professional association for captioning, no national certification, and no maintenance program (despite captioners sometimes attending trainings and workshops that are relevant to their work.)

Salaries for a trained captioner can start out in the same general area as an entry-level interpreter. Captioners are typically [paid](#) between the salaries of professional note-takers and interpreter, but pay rates vary by region. The Training Completion certificate that one receives after completing C-Print training from NTID reads, "Completion of the requirements does not indicate a specific level of

proficiency. This certificate should not be used to imply a level of skill or as a statement of a professional certification.”

There is more than one captioning system available in the US. Some of these include C-Print, TypeWell, and CART. From a local (MN) perspective, most of the agencies who provide live captioning use CART, whereas the University of Minnesota staff captioners use C-Print. There is no single system that is best for all environments and individuals. Remote captioning services may employ any of these systems.

To learn more about the captioning services offered for guests, students, and professors at the University of Minnesota, check out this presentation:

<https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1CE6p8df0P08EwK67IrgB-ySZfNj5jAsNbFF03IDomq8/edit?usp=sharing>

In short, the captioner types in abbreviated words (which were added to the software ‘dictionary’ at the discretion of the captioner), which then populates the full-length words on a screen for the consumer to view.

Here is a brief history of C-Print, TypeWell, and CART:

- **C-Print**’s first abbreviations system was completed in 1993 (developed between 1989-1993) When providing C-Print services, the captioner is not typing out words verbatim, but rather types a meaning-for-meaning translation. They use a regular laptop/keyboard to type their abbreviations into. The message is received on another device for the consumer to attend (an iPad, laptop, or projection screen are most common.) This is the method used by University of Minnesota staff captioners. (More info about C-Print training below)
- **TypeWell** began around the same time as C-Print, but did not launch until 1999. This method of providing access also takes a meaning-for-meaning approach to captioning. The TypeWell program comes with a sizeable pre-installed dictionary.
- **CART** began in the 1950’s as a government experiment. Using the CART system, which is a specialized piece of equipment (what you may think of as a court reporter’s keyboard), the captioner provides verbatim transcripts of what is said. It was initially only used in court, and only became popular in education in the 1990’s. This is what is used by freelance/agency captioners in MN.

One common myth of captioning is that it always is and should be verbatim, or that verbatim is best. Again, that is best left for an individual to determine for themselves. A perspective to consider comes from TypeWell,

"Meaning-for-meaning transcripts are easier to read and understand quickly than verbatim transcripts. A verbatim transcript shows word-for-word what is spoken. This format requires the reader to search through dense text to find key concepts. A TypeWell transcriber conveys the essential meaning of what is said without redundant phrases and other non-essential information. This format condenses the language used while maintaining the full meaning intended by the speaker."

C-Print Training

C-Print is a grant-funded software program developed and maintained by the Rochester Institute of Technology. The training available for C-Print is online takes about 6 weeks to complete with 5 learning modules in sum. From there, C-Print captioners begin building their dictionaries (adding

abbreviations for terms they are likely to use while captioning.) To explore C-Print training further, visit <https://www.rit.edu/ntid/cprint/training>

In Sum

As service providers working to provide access, captioners and interpreters have similar roles and interests. Both desire to provide communication access, both maintain confidentiality and use discretion in accepting assignments, and both render the message faithfully. As technology continues to advance, becomes more accessible, and is used in schools, it is not hard to imagine the two fields working more alongside each other in the field of education. I think finding a common ground and working together to better understand our impact and services is the best way to move us all forward.

If you have questions, concerns, experiences, or resources you'd like to share - we (the EIC) would love to facilitate further dialogue on this issue! Please make use of the comments section on this site, and/or engage conversations in times/places/spaces as you see fit.



Jenee Petri-Swanson, NIC TSC, is an educational interpreter at heart and views the role of the educational interpreter as a great privilege and profound responsibility. Jenee co-chairs MRID's Educational Interpreters' Committee and co-authored "K-12: A Call to Arms for Sign Language Interpreter Training Programs" available on streetleverage.com. She is a St. Paul College ITP alumni and has been interpreting since 2003. Much of her career has been interpreting in the K-12 setting, but she has also enjoyed working VRS and freelancing on the side. More recently, Jenee has focused on interpreting in a post-secondary setting as she is a full time staff interpreter at the University of Minnesota. (jeneepetri-Swanson.weebly.com)

