

DEVELOPMENT OF SHORTHAND PROFESSORS

FREQUENT ASKED QUESTIONS

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QUESTION: What is necessary for someone to teach shorthand?

ANSWER: Know the shorthand system you are going to teach very well. It is also important to like and have inclination to teach and - especially - to observe technical details when teaching this subject; technical details that are available in the articles of this page.

There are many shorthand students who are already teachers of other subjects. They can take advantage of all professorship know-how to use it in shorthand teaching. Brazil is in great need of shorthand teachers! There is a critical need of people who are dedicated to teaching such art.

QUESTION: Only those who work as professional stenographers, or have worked in some institution where there is a team of stenographers, are able to teach?

ANSWER: There is no need for a shorthand teacher to have been or be a professional stenographer. If anyone knows the system well, has a knack for teaching and uses a good methodology, they are able to become a great shorthand teacher!

QUESTION: In order to teach shorthand, is it essential to have shorthand speed?

ANSWER: No. What is really necessary is to be familiar with the system and know how to clearly and correctly transmit the theory as well as all its rules.

QUESTION: What would be the most important quality of a shorthand teacher?

ANSWER: That's a good question. And each experienced person in the subject may provide a different answer. Besides knowing the system very well and have good didactics, I believe that patience is the essential quality of a teacher, not only in shorthand, but in any field. A teacher should never become impatient when a student

makes a mistake, or when the student asks something related to what the teacher has already taught. A teacher should never say "I've already taught you that".

QUESTION: And if a student asks the same thing 20 times?

ANSWER: The teacher must answer 20 times without showing any sign of impatience. I have a solid case: a student was doing a German language course. She used to ask many questions during class. One day the teacher very annoyed, answered: "You're asking too many questions!" She never made any more questions. The professor caused the student to "shut down". And this type of "shut down" is harmful in any learning process. This should not happen whether the student is present in a normal shorthand class, or in a private class or at a distance. The teacher should always be available to the student to answer any questions, as many times as necessary.

QUESTION: What would be another great quality of a shorthand teacher?

ANSWER: To be the great stimulator of the learning process! The teacher invigorates, encourages, stimulates and creates enthusiasm in the student! I once read a quote in an English book about didactics, that the teacher is the "facilitator of the learning process". And the author said that the teacher "does not teach", and "who teaches is the student himself," the teacher is merely, as mentioned before, a "facilitator of the learning process". I found it to be a very interesting approach.

QUESTION: How would a first shorthand class be? What should the teacher teach?

ANSWER: Each teacher will portray his own strategy. But, just as a suggestion, I think that the teacher could start by talking a little about what shorthand really is, informing the origin of the word, the difference between common and shorthand spelling, make some geometry drawings, showing where shorthand signs came from. I think that five or ten minutes of this sort of presentation would be interesting. Next, he could start teaching the sign of the first lesson, showing the absolute use applied in some words. Next, a dictation could be given, in a very slow rhythm with few words for the student to write them in shorthand.

In the Maron System teaching, I usually give eight signs in the first lesson (eight signs are essentially needed for the student to start writing words in shorthand). In subsequent lessons, only two *signs* are taught per lesson.

Thus, in the first lesson, the student has a table with eight signs, and after showing how each sign is written in shorthand, I start by dictating a few words to the student to write in shorthand. As there hasn't been any time yet for the assimilation of the signs, the student can look at these signs in the table. The main idea here is for the student to feel he is already able to write words in a different writing system.

QUESTION: What else would be given in the first class?

ANSWER: Here is where the creativity of each teacher steps in. The teacher pays attention on the student's reaction as to each sign, that is, if he is already getting to assimilate some signs. You can write a few extra words in shorthand for the student to translate, you can write more words for the student to write them in shorthand. An exercise that students really like is to correlate. I write several words in a column and the same words in shorthand in another column. Since the words in the second column are scrambled, the student will have to correlate each word written in shorthand with some word in the first column. This challenge is quite appreciated by the students.

The ideal would be to transform the class into an enjoyable experience.

An important issue that must be observed since the first class, as well as in subsequent classes, is the student's posture when writing in shorthand. See if the student is seated correctly and if his elbow is on the table. It is also necessary to guide the student to always write light in shorthand, without forcing the pencil or pen. Remind the student that any tension on the hand or arm is detrimental to shorthand.

QUESTION: And if the student faces great difficulty in the first class, is it possible to continue the second lesson in the second class?

ANSWER: Yes, it is because in the second lesson the student will learn just two more signs. Nevertheless, when performing words of this second lesson, the eight signs from the first lesson will also be used. It's what we call "cumulative learning". The signs learned in the first lesson will be used in the second lesson; the eight signs from the first lesson and the two signs from the second lesson will be used in the third lesson, and so on. But one thing the teacher should strongly take into consideration: it is necessary to observe the adequate dosage in each lesson. Nothing should be forced. And nothing that overwhelms the student is good. The "right dosage", this is the secret of good learning!

QUESTION: And if the student finds great difficulty in assimilating a sign, what should be done?

ANSWER: This occasionally happens, particularly in regards to nearly identical signs, which change the direction, meaning another sound or, according to some systems, change in size or thickness. In this case, there are two things to be done: the teacher seeks a "mnemonic process", which helps the student to distinguish and assimilate signs or, gives more exercises containing signs that are causing difficulty in assimilation.

Allow me to give an example of "mnemonic process". In the Maron System, we have two signs that may cause difficulty in assimilation: the "g" and "d". The first is half a circle, and the second, the other half. If we take this second half of the circle and close it with a straight line, it will become a "D" in capital letter. Okay, here's the mnemonic process that will help students a lot in assimilation and distinction of the two almost-identical signs!

QUESTION: Some students have no difficulty at all to write in shorthand, but have great difficulty in reading and translating. In this case, what should be done?

ANSWER: It's really very common. So it's always good, since the very first class, to perform reading exercises, even of single words. I usually give the following exercise: I write two (three or more) signs together, in shorthand, and I ask for the student to try to figure out (interpret) how many words those two signs together can mean. For example, I write a "b" and a "t" in shorthand. As the Maron System has no medial vowel, I ask them to go replacing the vowels. Thus, the "b" and "t" can mean: beat, bat, boot, boat, bate. This little game of interpreting arouses much curiosity from the students and they feel fulfilled and happy to have found out more than one meaning.

The more this type of games, the better. Thus, class gets more interesting.

QUESTION: And when the student completes the study of the system, which would be the best strategy to start training shorthand speed?

ANSWER: Several methodologies may be used. And certainly each teacher will have his. I even changed the methodology several times and always, of course, looking for the best strategy, the more effective planning.

My first methodology consisted of the following: after having finished the study of the system, the student started making copies. Copies were corrected, and the student started to train again and again, every word that had been incorrectly written in

shorthand. The copies exercise lasted about a month. Right after, I began training 40 word per minute dictations.

Over time, I decreased the speed beginning at 30 words per minute. I thought this stratagem would work better: 30wpm, 35wpm. Therefore, the student would reach 40wpm with more basis.

Later, I decided to go back further and started with 20 word per minute dictations. The students enjoyed it a lot and I saw they were writing in shorthand more easily and with much less stress. I keep this stratagem to date. I just added what I call "audio-copies": very slow dictations, at a 15 words per minute speed. It is practically a copy exercise, due to being so slow. But it is a different "copy", since the student hears the word and writes it in shorthand.

QUESTION: And what do the students think about this stratagem of "audio-copies" and 20wpm?

ANSWER: They really enjoy it, and find it great! And it really works! It's interesting when we know that the acquisition of shorthand speed is achieved by "small victories". When everything is made easier for the student, when the "battle" is quite mild, the "small victory" is certain.

It is important to clarify here that the student always trains, repetitively, the words with difficult drawing, the brief forms and words that contain special initial and terminal signs, before making any "audio-copy" and before making any dictation. There is very special preparation for each dictation. Thus, the student increasingly strengthens the rules of the method, while gaining speed.

QUESTION: Which is right: raise increasingly the speed by adding five more words in each minute, or adding ten more words?

ANSWER: The ideal is to add *five more words*, not ten. Then, we have 20wpm, 25wpm, 30wpm dictations, and so on. And why shouldn't ten more words be added in each minute? This is where a very interesting scientific part comes in. Shorthand speed is processed within the brain. The student hears the words and writes them in shorthand first in the brain, and after, through motor coordination, the hand writes on paper in shorthand that which was first produced in the brain. This manual dexterity, with the intricate movements of the writing hand, is directly linked to the cerebellum. When a student trains several 20wpm dictations, the brain begins to create multiple connections

between the neurons and several synapses in relation to this speed. Only after training several 20wpm dictations the brain will be able to write more easily in shorthand at this 20wpm speed.

It takes much training to "program" the brain to write in shorthand at 20wpm speed. And the same applies to other speeds.

We can compare this exercise of consolidating each speed to a weight lifting exercise. You must start slowly, with a few pounds and lift during several days that same amount of pounds, and thus, continue preparing the muscles to lift more weight.

Increase the training speed by adding ten more words per minute is inadvisable, since it would overload the brain with an exercise it is not prepared for yet. In a five minute dictation, it would represent an increase of more than 50 words. It's too much!

QUESTION: Does it mean that it would be better a much slower, better dosed study...?

ANSWER: Exactly. It is better to work at a slower and continuous, steady pace. I really like that saying: "Turtles know the way better than rabbits".

QUESTION: How much training time is necessary to pass from one speed to another?

ANSWER: It varies greatly from student to student, and, of course, depends on hours of daily practice.

QUESTION: How do you know if it's time to move to a different speed?

ANSWER: I usually use the following plan. If a student is training at a 60wpm speed, for example, I ask him to write in shorthand and translate three 60wpm test-dictations on different days. If he passes these three test-dictations, with a margin of error of 10%, he is able to begin the 65 wpm training. Why do I like to test him with three dictations and not just one? Because if I only used one dictation, I could mislead myself. Maybe the dictation would be too easy, containing many brief forms. Yet with three different dictations and in different days, there is a greater assuredness that the student is already overcoming that speed and is able to move to higher speed level.

QUESTION: Is it true that the more we advance in speed, the longer it takes to go from one speed level to another?

ANSWER: It's quite true. Moving from 20wpm to 25wpm is easier than going from 120wpm to 130wpm, for example. It's a matter of mathematics:

In five minutes at 20wpm, you will have **100 words** to write in shorthand;

In five minutes at 30wpm, you will have **150 words** to write in shorthand;

In five minutes at 120ppm, you will have **600 words** to write in shorthand;

In five minutes at 130wpm, you will have **650 words** to write in shorthand;

Note that the volume of words that the brain will have to process at 130wpm is fantastic, representing more than two words per second!

We can compare the increase in the shorthand speed to that of a ladder, where the distance between the steps gets bigger as we step upwards. As we advance in the speed study, more training, greater effort and greater application becomes necessary.

QUESTION: And the repetitive study of words? Is it really necessary?

ANSWER: It's very, very important. It's vital! In each dictation that is trained, one must first highlight the difficult drawing words, the words that contain special initial and terminal signs as well as brief forms. And train each word several times for several days. These words often cause hesitation and end up delaying the speed due to their difficulty.

QUESTION: When should one stop the speed study?

ANSWER: Never. Learning shorthand is like learning a musical instrument: it is always necessary to train in order to get better and better and be in "shape". There is no point of arrival.