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COURT REPORTING



INDUSTRY WHITEPAPER

Understanding Digital Court Reporting

How certified court reporters create and protect the official record.



A Practical Guide for Litigators and Law Firm Decision-Makers

Every legal proceeding depends on one thing: an accurate record. Today, that record can be created through multiple professional reporting methods, including stenography, voice writing, and digital court reporting. This guide explains how digital court reporting works, the standards behind it, and what litigators should know when evaluating reporting options.

Topics Covered

- How court reporting is evolving to meet growing demand
- What digital court reporters actually do
- Common misconceptions about digital court reporting
- Accuracy, certification, and legal admissibility
- How to evaluate a digital court reporting provider

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Table of Contents

Introduction 4

Section 1: The Stenographer Shortage Is Real....and Accelerating 5

Section 2: What Is a Digital Court Reporter? 6

Section 3: Myth vs. Reality — Five Common Misconceptions 8

Section 4: Accuracy and Reliability 11

Section 5: Legal Admissibility and Certification 12

Section 6: Availability and Cost 13

Conclusion 13

About Remote Legal Court Reporting 14

Glossary of Key Terms 15

Citations & Sources 17

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Introduction

The legal industry is changing. A decade-long decline in the number of certified stenographers, combined with growing demand for court reporting services, has created new challenges for law firms and legal teams. As a result, digital court reporting has become an increasingly common option for depositions and other legal proceedings.

Even so, many litigators still have questions. How does digital court reporting work? Is it accurate? Are digital court reporters certified? Are transcripts admissible? And how does digital court reporting compare to traditional stenography?

This whitepaper is designed to answer those questions with industry data, legal references, and a practical look at how digital court reporting works. Our goal isn't to compare one reporting method against another, but to explain the role digital court reporters play in creating and protecting the official record.

The bottom line is straightforward: when conducted by a properly trained and AAERT-certified professional, digital court reporting produces accurate, certified, verbatim transcripts that are admissible in federal courts and the vast majority of U.S. jurisdictions. Like stenography and voice writing, it's a professional reporting method designed to achieve the same result: an accurate record attorneys can rely on.

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Section 1: The Stenographer Shortage Is Real…and Accelerating

For years, the legal industry has operated on the assumption that a stenographer would be available whenever and wherever one was needed. Today, that assumption is becoming less reliable. Across the country, law firms and court reporting agencies are experiencing longer scheduling timelines and a shrinking pool of available stenographic reporters.

By the Numbers

Indicator	Data Point
Stenographers employed (2022)	~21,300 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics)
Average age of a stenographic court reporter	56 years old (NCRA)
Stenographic court reporters over age 45	More than 80% (NCRA)
New stenographers per year	Fewer than 300
Stenographer retirements per year	More than 1,000
Net annual loss	~920 stenographic reporters per year
Decline in steno school programs since 2015	More than 40%
Drop in enrollment at steno schools	74%
End users reporting difficulty finding stenos	76% (2025 AAERT Trends Report)
Courts that have adopted digital court reporting due to the shortage	65–75% (Strategy&/PwC, 2020)

The impact is already being felt. According to the 2025 AAERT Court Reporting Trends Report, 76% of end users report difficulty finding available stenographic court reporters. Combined with an aging workforce, declining enrollment in stenographic training programs, and graduation rates below 10%, the industry continues to face long-term availability challenges. As a result, legal teams are increasingly relying on multiple professional court reporting methods to ensure proceedings stay on schedule and the official record is preserved.

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What This Means for Litigators

Scheduling challenges can have real consequences. Depositions may need to be rescheduled, discovery timelines can slip, and litigation costs can increase. Access to multiple qualified court reporting methods gives legal teams greater flexibility while ensuring every proceeding is supported by an accurate, certified record.

A Structural Challenge, Not a Temporary Shortage

The current shortage is not the result of a temporary spike in demand. It reflects long-term workforce trends that have been developing for years.

Becoming a certified stenographic court reporter requires mastering machine shorthand: a highly specialized skill that typically takes two to four years to develop. Nationally, fewer than 10% of students who begin stenographic programs complete them. Even with scholarships and expanded recruitment efforts, new entrants have not kept pace with retirements.

Digital court reporting has helped expand the available court reporter workforce by providing an additional professional training pathway. While the training models differ, both prepare qualified professionals to create and protect the official record. Together, these reporting methods help meet growing demand while giving law firms greater scheduling flexibility.

Section 2: What Is a Digital Court Reporter?

A digital court reporter is a trained professional who creates and protects the official record during a legal proceeding. Rather than using machine shorthand, they use a reporter-driven methodology supported by specialized court reporting software. Throughout the proceeding, they actively capture testimony through real-time digital annotation and confidence monitoring, which verifies synchronized audio quality. Like every court reporter, their role is to oversee the proceeding and produce an accurate, certified record attorneys can rely on.

What a Digital Court Reporter Does

Throughout a proceeding, a digital court reporter:

- Administers the oath
- Takes down live testimony in real time
- Identifies speakers throughout the proceeding
- Marks and tracks exhibits
- Documents on- and off-the-record discussions
- Facilitates transcript production in collaboration with certified transcription professionals
- Certifies the final transcript

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Digital Court Reporter vs. Stenographer: A Side-by-Side Comparison

Digital and stenographic court reporters share the same professional responsibility: creating and protecting the official record. The primary difference is how testimony is captured. Both methods rely on trained professionals, specialized technology, and established court reporting procedures to produce an accurate, certified transcript.

Category	Digital Court Reporting	Stenographic Court Reporting
Court reporter	AAERT-certified digital court reporter (Remote Legal standard)	Licensed or certified stenographic court reporter (when required by state law).
Primary method	Digital notation and synchronized recording	Machine shorthand and synchronized audio recording
Creates the official record	✓	✓
Verbatim transcript	✓	✓
Monitors record quality in real time	✓	✓
Administers oaths	✓	✓
Manages the proceeding in real time	✓	✓
Identifies speakers	✓	✓
Tracks and manages exhibits	✓	✓
Certified transcript	✓	✓
Human review of transcript	Reviewed and certified by the court reporter, sometimes assisted by legal transcription professionals (such as scopists and/or proofreaders)	Reviewed and certified by the court reporter, sometimes assisted by legal transcription professionals (such as scopists and/or proofreaders)

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Category	Digital Court Reporting	Stenographic Court Reporting
Technology used	Reporter-driven digital court reporting software, synchronized recording technology, and transcript production tools.	Stenographic writer, CAT software, and transcript production tools
Primary responsibility	Protecting the integrity of the official record	Protecting the integrity of the official record
Final outcome	Accurate, certified, verbatim transcript	Accurate, certified, verbatim transcript

The table above illustrates a key point that is often lost in debate: digital court reporters and stenographers perform the same core professional functions.The distinction lies in the reporting methodology used to create the record, not in the professionalism, rigor, or legal validity of the reporter or the certified transcript.

Section 3: Myth vs. Reality — Five Common Misconceptions

The debate between stenography advocates and digital reporting proponents has generated several claims that litigators deserve to examine critically. The following addresses the five most common myths encountered by legal professionals.

MYTH 1

“Digital reporters aren’t real reporters.”

THE REALITY

Digital court reporters are trained professionals who perform the same core functions as stenographic reporters: managing the official record, administering oaths, noting exhibits, handling on- and off-the-record logistics, and certifying the final transcript. The only material difference is the method of capture. Just as attorneys adapted to electronic filing, remote depositions, and e-discovery, digital reporting represents a technology evolution — not a departure from professional standards. Esquire Deposition Solutions, one of the largest court reporting agencies in the country, puts it plainly: the only significant difference between a digital reporter and a stenographer is the equipment used.

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MYTH 2
“Digital reporters are less accurate.”

THE REALITY

Accuracy concerns are legitimate, but they apply to all methods of court reporting, not just digital.

The NCRA's Registered Professional Reporter (RPR) certification and AAERT's Certified Electronic Transcriber (CET) certification both require candidates to demonstrate 95% accuracy as part of their certification process. While the credentials measure different professional competencies, both organizations maintain rigorous standards for transcript accuracy.

Professionallymanageddigitalcourtreportingcombineslivetestimonycapture,real-timeoversightbyanAAERT-certifiedcourt reporter,andahuman-reviewedtranscriptionprocesstoproduceanaccurate,certifiedtranscript.Manycriticismsofdigital reportingreferenceautomatedspeechrecognition(ASR)alone,butASRisonlyonetoolthatmaysupporttheprocess.Through collaborationbetweenthedigitalreporterandprofessionaltranscriptionpartners,thetranscriptundergoesreview,editing,and verification before certification.

MYTH 3
"Digital reporters just hit record."

THE REALITY

This is one of the most common misconceptions about digital court reporting.

A certified digital court reporter does far more than operate recording equipment. They oversee the proceeding, administer oaths, identify speakers, manage exhibits, document key events, and certify the final transcript. Throughout the proceeding, they actively create and maintain the official record using a reporter-driven methodology.

Digital court reporting is often confused with digital recording. While both may involve audio recording, digital court reporting is a reporter-driven methodology in which a certified digital court reporter actively creates the official record using specialized court reporting software. That methodology combines digital notation and synchronized recording to produce and certify a verbatim transcript. By contrast, digital recording services generally preserve audio without the reporter-driven methodology that characterizes professional digital court reporting.

Simply recording a deposition is not digital court reporting. Without a trained court reporter actively managing the proceeding, there is no professional responsible for creating the official record or certifying the final transcript.

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MYTH 4

"Digital reporters don't have rigorous certification standards."

THE REALITY

AAERT-certified digital court reporters are trained, tested, and held to established professional standards. The American Association of Electronic Reporters and Transcribers (AAERT), now operating as CAPTUR (The Council for the Advancement of Professionals, Technology, and Unbiased Reporting), remains the certification body for digital court reporting credentials.

AAERT certifications, including Certified Electronic Reporter (CER) and Certified Deposition Reporter (CDR), evaluate a reporter's knowledge of legal procedures, ethics, courtroom protocol, and the responsibilities involved in creating and protecting the official record.

Certification doesn't end after the exam. AAERT-certified professionals are required to complete continuing education and renew their credentials to maintain certification and stay current with industry standards and best practices.

Like other professional court reporting credentials, AAERT certification is designed to help ensure digital court reporters have the knowledge, training, and professional accountability needed to produce an accurate, certified record.

MYTH 5

“Transcripts from digital reporters aren’t court admissible.”

THE REALITY

For the vast majority of federal and state proceedings, that simply isn't the case.

Under Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 30(b)(3), depositions may be recorded by audio, audiovisual, or stenographic means, provided the method is properly identified in the deposition notice. In federal court, digital court reporting is a recognized and permissible method for capturing the record.

At the state level, the rules vary. Most jurisdictions permit digital court reporting either by notice, by stipulation of the parties, or without any specific procedural requirement. In jurisdictions that require stipulation, the process is typically straightforward: the noticing party advises opposing counsel that a digital court reporter will be used, and the parties agree to that reporting method before the proceeding.

As with any procedural requirement, litigators should confirm the applicable court rules in the jurisdiction where the proceeding will take place, as state rules are subject to change. Part II of this whitepaper provides a state-by-state reference guide to help attorneys evaluate reporting requirements.

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Section 4: Accuracy and Reliability

Accuracy is the most critical factor in any court reporting engagement. A transcript that misrepresents testimony can affect case outcomes, complicate appeals, and undermine years of litigation effort. Litigators are right to demand the highest possible standard, and the evidence shows that professionally managed digital court reporting can meet that standard.

How Accuracy Is Achieved in Digital Reporting

Professional digital court reporting uses a layered approach to accuracy that provides more redundancy than single-operator stenography:

- **Multi-channel recording**: Each speaker or microphone is captured on a separate audio channel, allowing editors to isolate and clarify specific voices during transcript production
- **Real-time monitoring**: The digital reporter listens continuously during the proceeding, identifying and addressing audio quality concerns as they arise.
- **Human transcription**: The final transcript is prepared either by the court reporter or by trained legal transcription professionals working from the official record—not by automated software alone.
- **Certification**: The final transcript is certified by the court reporter as an accurate and complete record of the proceeding.

The 95% Standard

AAERT certifications require candidates to demonstrate 95% accuracy. This aligns with the Registered Professional Reporter (RPR) certification, the credential held by many certified stenographic court reporters.

A Note on Automatic Speech Recognition (ASR)

Automatic Speech Recognition (ASR) can provide live testimony capture, but it is not the official transcript.

An AAERT-certified court reporter manages the proceeding from start to finish. The final transcript is reviewed by a qualified professional, then verified and certified by the court reporter before delivery.

Technology supports the process, but the court reporter remains responsible for the accuracy and integrity of the official record.

Technology Redundancy

One concern sometimes raised about digital court reporting is equipment failure. Professional digital court reporters prepare for this with redundant recording systems, backup power, and established contingency procedures designed to protect the official record.

Like every court reporting method, digital reporting relies on both trained professionals and specialized technology. Stenographic reporters depend on steno writers and CAT software, while digital court reporters use professional recording technology and court reporting software. In either case, established procedures and the court reporter's expertise help ensure the integrity of the record.

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Section 5: Legal Admissibility and Certification

The most concrete concern litigators raise about digital court reporting is whether the resulting transcript will be admissible in court. The answer, for most practitioners in most jurisdictions, is yes, with some procedural steps that vary by state.

Federal Courts

The Federal Rules of Civil Procedure provide the clearest authority. FRCP Rule 30(b)(3) expressly permits depositions to be recorded by "audio, audiovisual, or stenographic means." A party wishing to use non-stenographic recording need only state that intention in the deposition notice. No stipulation from opposing counsel is required. This means that in most federal district courts around the country, digital recording of depositions is lawful and the resulting transcript is admissible.

State Courts

State rules vary, but the landscape is strongly permissive of digital court reporting. Of the 50 states plus the District of Columbia, only Idaho and New Hampshire explicitly prohibit non-stenographic recording for depositions at this time. In all other states, digital reporting is permitted either by notice, by stipulation of the parties, or without any specific requirement. Litigators should always verify the current rule in any specific jurisdiction before proceeding, as state rules are subject to amendment.

What "Stipulation" States Mean in Practice

In states where digital reporting requires stipulation, such as California, Arizona, Alabama, and several others, the process is straightforward: the setting party notifies opposing counsel that a digital reporter will be used, and both parties agree on the reporting method. This is a procedural requirement, not a substantive legal barrier. Litigators operating in these jurisdictions should simply incorporate this step into their standard deposition preparation process.

The Certified Transcript

A critical point that is often misunderstood: the legal record in a digitally reported proceeding is not simply an audio file. It is a certified, written, verbatim transcript, exactly the same deliverable produced by a stenographic court reporter. The digital court reporter certifies that the transcript is a complete and accurate record. The transcript is then available in all the same formats, with the same evidentiary value, as any stenographic transcript.

Practical Guidance for Litigators

Before scheduling a deposition with a digital reporter:

1. Review the applicable state rule using the Part II reference guide in this whitepaper.
2. If stipulation is required, notify opposing counsel in advance.
3. Confirm that your digital reporter holds current AAERT certification (CER or CDR).
4. Ensure your court reporting agency has documented redundancy and quality-control protocols.

Taking these steps eliminates the procedural uncertainties that cause most litigator hesitation.

Section 6: Availability and Cost

Beyond accuracy and admissibility, litigators increasingly face a third pressure: simply finding a court reporter who is available when and where they need one. The shortage of stenographic reporters is translating directly into scheduling delays, geographic constraints, and rising costs.

Availability

According to the 2025 AAERT Court Reporting Trends Report, 76% of end users report difficulty finding available stenographic court reporters. In some counties, as many as 70% of hearings have proceeded without a live reporter present. Law firms in major metropolitan markets, which historically had the deepest pools of available reporters, are reporting wait times of several weeks for routine depositions.

Digital court reporters are available in significantly greater numbers and can be deployed more flexibly, including for remote or hybrid proceedings. As an additional professional reporting method, digital court reporting helps expand the available court reporter workforce and gives law firms greater scheduling flexibility.

Cost

Cost comparisons between digital and stenographic reporting vary by market, proceeding length, and transcript delivery timeline. In general, digital reporting can offer cost advantages in several areas:

- Equipment costs for digital reporters are lower than for stenographers, who must maintain expensive steno machines.
- Digital reporting scales more efficiently for multi-day or multi-witness proceedings.
- Transcript production timelines are comparable.

Litigators should request transparent pricing from any reporting agency—digital, stenographic, or voice writing—to make accurate comparisons for their specific matters.

Conclusion

The question litigators should be asking is not whether to use digital court reporting, but when it is the right fit for a particular proceeding. Digital court reporters are trained professionals who create and protect the official record, and their work is recognized in federal court and the vast majority of U.S. jurisdictions.

As the demand for court reporting continues to grow, law firms increasingly rely on multiple professional reporting methods, including stenography, voice writing, and digital court reporting, to ensure proceedings stay on schedule without compromising the integrity of the record.

For litigators evaluating their options, the most important consideration isn't the reporting method. It's the qualifications of the court reporter, the standards behind the process, and the quality of the record being produced.

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About Remote Legal Court Reporting

Remote Legal provides court reporting and litigation support services for law firms, corporations, insurance carriers, and government agencies.

Our proceedings are managed by AAERT-certified digital court reporters, experienced stenographic court reporters, and voice writers, giving legal teams the flexibility to choose the reporting method that best fits their matter.

In addition to court reporting, Remote Legal's platform supports live testimony capture, exhibit management, real-time transcript viewing, video integration, and secure transcript delivery, bringing the deposition experience together in one connected platform.

Whether a proceeding is digital or stenographic, our focus remains the same: helping attorneys create an accurate, certified record from start to finish.



40+ Years of Industry Experience

Built on decades of legal and court reporting expertise



AAERT-Certified Court Reporters

Experienced professionals behind every record



Nationwide Coverage

Supporting remote depositions across multiple states



One Connected Platform

Transcripts, video, and exhibits in sync

Get Started

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Glossary of Key Terms

Term	Definition
AAERT	American Association of Electronic Reporters and Transcribers. Although the association now operates as CAPTUR, AAERT remains the certification body for digital court reporting credentials, including the CER, CET, and CDR designations.
ASR (Automatic Speech Recognition)	Technology that converts spoken words into text. ASR may support live testimony capture, but it does not replace the court reporter or serve as the certified transcript. ASR is not artificial intelligence (AI), although the two are often confused.
CAPTUR	The Council for the Advancement of Professionals, Technology, and Unbiased Reporting. Formed in 2026 through the merger of the American Association of Electronic Reporters and Transcribers (AAERT) and the Society for the Technological Advancement of Reporting (STAR), CAPTUR represents professionals across digital court reporting, stenography, voice writing, legal transcription, and legal editing.
CDR (Certified Deposition Reporter)	An AAERT certification for digital court reporters who specialize in deposition proceedings.
CER (Certified Electronic Reporter)	An AAERT certification for professionals who oversee legal proceedings and create the official record using a reporter-driven digital court reporting methodology.
CET (Certified Electronic Transcriber)	An AAERT certification for professionals who prepare transcripts from digitally reported proceedings through a human-reviewed transcription process.

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Term	Definition
Digital Court Reporter	A trained professional who oversees legal proceedings using a reporter-driven methodology supported by specialized court reporting software. Digital court reporters administer oaths, identify speakers, manage exhibits, oversee live testimony capture, and certify the final transcript.
FRCP Rule 30	Federal Rule of Civil Procedure governing depositions. It permits testimony to be recorded by audio, audiovisual, or stenographic means when proper notice requirements are met.
Live Testimony Capture	The real-time capture and management of testimony during a legal proceeding by a qualified court reporter using professional court reporting technology and methodology.
NCRA	National Court Reporters Association. The leading professional association representing stenographic court reporters.
Stenographic Court Reporter	A court reporter who uses machine shorthand to create the official record during a legal proceeding. Stenographic court reporters administer oaths, identify speakers, manage exhibits, oversee the proceeding, and certify the final transcript. Licensure or certification requirements vary by state.
Stipulation	An agreement between opposing parties. In some jurisdictions, parties must agree to the use of non-stenographic recording methods before a deposition.
Verbatim Transcript	A certified, word-for-word written record of a legal proceeding that reflects the testimony given during the proceeding.

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Citations & Sources

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