Believe it or not, from the birth of a Skills Test to its activation for our candidates, it involves quite a lengthy process and many people.

There are two committees whose charges include writing Skills Tests — The Skills Committee and the Test Advisory Committee (TAC). Each committee member is responsible for writing several tests a year. The Certification and Testing department works with the chairs to assign each committee member their various tests. Committee members use a software program called Syllables to ensure each test meets NCRA standards. After the tests are submitted, TAC members travel to NCRA headquarters twice a year to “test the tests.” Committee members bring their steno machines and write out each test that’s been submitted. They make changes as they see appropriate, mark punctuation, determine preview words, and sometimes have to “throw out” some tests. TAC works all day for two to three days approving tests to ensure candidates get top-quality tests.

After the approval process by TAC, NCRA staff formats and makes any noted changes accordingly. Then, the tests are ready to be recorded at the recording studio by our voice talents. The voice talents usually record about 30 tests in two days, including all types of Skills Tests, Jury Charge, Literary, Testimony, etc. The NCRA staff is there with the voice talents to make sure that the tests are read perfectly and on time marks.
After that, studio engineer and voice talent Rob Buhrman takes the recorded tests to his studio to re-check everything again, take out edits and the repeated parts that were recorded, and produce the perfect five minutes of test audio candidates hear on their tests. Once Buhrman has finished, he uploads all the newly recorded tests so NCRA staff can listen to them and check one last time just to make sure there are no additional errors.

Once the audio part is done, all the tests are formatted by NCRA staff for NCRA’s testing platform, allowing the platform to provide a preliminary score once candidates copy and paste their transcripts. All tests with punctuation marks and preview words are scanned for NCRA qualified graders. NCRA staff uploads all three files — computer-formatted documents, PDFs for graders, and audio files to the Realtime Coach testing platform once all items are complete. Every test that a candidate takes has gone through this entire life cycle.

“The creation of NCRA skills tests is a long and tedious process comprised of multiple resources: Two volunteer testing committees, certification and testing staff, voice talents, recording studio engineers, and NCRA partner vendors,” said NCRA Certification and Testing Director Amy Davidson.

Eva Liu is the NCRA Certification and Testing Program Manager.