

# **The Rewards of Taking a Risk: NCRA Realtime Contest**

By Karla Sommer

As I took my steno machine out of its case and began to set up my realtime connections, it hit me... I was sitting in a room preparing to compete in my first national realtime contest against 32 of the best realtime writers in the United States! My heart started beating faster. My palms began to sweat. The test consisted of two takes: a 200 wpm literary and a 225 wpm Q&A. I suddenly had difficulty remembering how to open a new realtime file. What do I name each file? Will I have time to start a new file after I write the first test, and will I remember to assign my job dictionary to the second file? It was acceptable to transcribe the literary in upper case, but the Q&A had to be transcribed in mixed case. If I don't remember to change my setting in between takes, my work will not be graded. Panic struck!

As the warm-up dictation began, I felt myself calming down. I thought to myself, this isn't so bad. I can do this. Then I heard, "This will be five minutes of literary at 200 words per minute. Ready. Begin." The test dictation began and I was in the groove. Things were going great until I saw on the screen "AB SEN TEE BALANCE LOTS"! It took a few more untranslates to regain my concentration. I hung in there and soon it was over. I quickly closed my file and opened a new file, glancing quickly at my reminder to change to mixed case and assign my job dictionary. My attention was drawn to the contestant sitting next to me as he began blowing on his hands in what seemed to be a futile attempt to keep his fingers from sticking to the keys. I felt the urge to do the same. I shook my hands in the air hoping to dispel the moisture and relieve the tension.

The second take was the Q&A. "Ready. Begin." The next five minutes went by quickly, but not without a number of untranslates and a few short drops. The overall winner took the gold with only nine combined total errors. While I did not win, I am proud to say I did qualify in both legs of the national realtime test, and I will be practicing for next year's test in the months to come.

I know what you're thinking. Why would I put myself through such agony? I can honestly say it was a thrill to meet and compete with some of the most respected and preeminent writers in the United States. I challenged myself and was rewarded with the self-satisfaction of knowing I had taken the risk and done my best... and I also received .5 PDC points.

I now challenge you all to be the best realtime writers that you can be. If you never try, you will never win. As Wayne Gretzky said, "You'll always miss 100 percent of the shots you don't take." So take a risk!!!