the present-day electronic devices for transcribing. However — forgive our old-fashioned view — but better than an electronic device, for us, is a good notereader. You hand over your notes and that’s it. Unfortunately, such quality notereaders in their time were few and far between.

Anthony: Finally, one from each of you, what is your number one test-taking or speed-building tip?

Arnold: It is like asking the traffic cop how to get to Carnegie Hall: Practice, practice, practice.

Bill: Start to practice seriously for a test one year beforehand, not a couple of months beforehand. Of course, how to practice in order to maximize results is another story, which few, I daresay, except National Speed Contest qualifiers, understand.

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YOUR HEALTH

Ouch! My Aching Shoulders!
BY CANDIS BRADSHAW

When new students begin reporting school, they are told they need a machine, CAT system, and a lot of patience and perseverance. But one thing many reporters and students develop is intense shoulder pain that is rarely relieved. Sometimes this pain can be caused by the repetitiveness of our jobs, but sometimes this pain can be indicative of more serious issues.

A discussion on the NCRA Online Forum led to several suggestions for relieving shoulder pain.

SEE A DOCTOR

It is important to see your doctor if you have persistent shoulder pain. Jane McNally, Ph.D., a student from Osterville, Mass., found this out the hard way. After many months of seeing chiropractors, massage therapists, acupuncturists, and physical therapists with no relief, her physical therapist recommended she see her doctor. She made the following post on October 18, 2005:

Over a year ago, I began to have pain in my trapezius muscles, together with a stiff neck. The stiff neck went away after a few weeks. The sore trapezius muscles never abated. I tried everything. I even wrote on the Forum asking similar types of questions.

To this day I cannot remember who responded to me, but from among the responses someone asked, “Are you sure it’s not a disc problem?” To make a very long story short, I am now about 3-1/2 weeks out from surgery, after having a discectomy/fusion of the spine, grafting, and titanium plate put in to strengthen and support the vertebrae of my neck.

It did not become evident to me that what was being experienced as muscular pain was actually being caused by a disc that would eventually cause severe compression of my spinal cord. It was only when I began to have severe neuropathy in both hands that I realized that my “sore muscles” were actually symptomatic of a much more serious problem.

PRACTICE GOOD POSTURE

Many reporters and students gave wonderful suggestions on the NCRA forum of how to relieve job-related shoulder pain. Judy Coppock, RPR, CRR, CBC, of Fallbrook, Calif., recommended an article from courtreportinghelp.com that explains correct seating position at the machine. (See www.courtreportinghelp.com/Articles/TEDLEY/body_posture.htm.) This article systematically explains how to sit properly behind the machine and how to adjust the machine to the proper height.

Judy explained, “[This article] was a real eye-opener to me, because I don’t think anyone had really ever explained it to me. I can now caption many hours without physical discomfort. I passed it on to a friend who is a captioner having a lot of neck and shoulder pain. It relieved a lot of her pain, and she was amazed at the difference proper posture at the machine makes.

“It may take some practice,” she continued. “But once you ‘get it,’ you won’t want to sit any other way. As a student, you haven’t yet experienced the sometimes long hours at high speed of the real world working environment, but if you learn the correct posture, you will be well prepared for long hours without a break in depositions or captioning.”

GET COMFORTABLE WITH GADGETS

Leslie Foldy, RMR, CRR, CCR, from Phoenix, Ariz., had multiple recommendations. She felt her problem stemmed from being relatively short in a world of giant conference room chairs made for tall people. Leslie purchased two back supports, which she says have eliminated 99 percent of her problems. Her suggestions for pillows include:

1. Obus Forme. This company offers a few types of portable back rests, with prices ranging from $59 to $120. She uses the wide, high-back model.

2. Medic-Air Back Pillo. It’s a bright blue vinyl blow-up pillow with elastic straps to hold it onto chairs (or the Obus Forme). It’s about 15” x 18” x 3” and costs about $25. The concept is you only fill it partially with air. When you lean back, the pillow is very supportive and contours to you.

Foldy said, “With those two items, you’re ready for any chair. If I get to a depo and there is a ‘good chair’ there, I may only use the Back Pillo or the Obus Forme alone. If it’s a ‘bad chair,’ very deep and uncomfortable, I use the Back Pillo strapped onto the Obus Forme. The Obus Forme is great, but the combination of the two together is really super.”

If you do not like idea of blowing up a back support pillow before depositions, you can look into purchasing a self-inflating back rest.

A student from New York suggested using the Body Shawl from Orvis. This device is essentially a heating pad, but it is larger and more pliable than a conventional heating pad. The Body Shawl covers the neck and shoulder areas. One can purchase a hot version (which can be heated in the microwave and water can be sprinkled on it to make the shawl emanate wet heat) or a cold version (which can be placed in the freezer).

Nichole Kochy, RPR, of Edison, N.J., recommends that reporters “scope out the room and ask for a special chair.” She prefers an adjustable secretary’s chair, but as we all know, sometimes you have to “deal with what they give you.”

In addition to good back support, resting your arms while writing or resting your wrists during breaks in testi-
mony can help alleviate shoulder pain. Currently, there are two products on the market which allow one to do this. One is sold by Pengad and is called the Steno Rest Wrist Support. This device provides a comfortable and convenient resting place for hands and arms during pauses and other periods when you are not writing. The Steno Rest attaches to the tripod and is fully adjustable. It currently sells for $64.95.

Stenograph sells a product called Report-It. The main device rests on the lap, and foam pads support the forearms. According to Stenograph’s Web site, “As much as 75 percent reduction in muscle fatigue was experienced.” Some reporters have had difficulty adjusting to having something on their lap while writing, but I can tell you from personal experience, once I get used to the device, I can’t imagine writing without it. Report-It also comes with two foam pads to rest your feet in an ergonomic position.

Sheri Foote, RPR, CRR, of Boise, Idaho, also recommended the use of Miracle Balls. These balls can be placed on the floor and rolled on. She uses these balls daily, and she reports they help alleviate her pain tremendously. Denise A. Drill, RPR, of Mankato, Minn., suggested using a dog’s ball to work out knots in back muscles. “I’ve used them when I get a between-the-shoulder-blades knot or spasm. Position your chairback and then roll it around until it’s right in the spot that needs relief, and push against it to try to release the spasm.”

TREAT THE WHOLE PACKAGE

Megan Hefler, RDR, of North Hampton, N.H., recommended an option almost everyone would love: purchasing a hot tub with a Moto-Massage feature that runs up and down the spine and/or focuses on the shoulder areas.

Of course, getting adequate rest, keeping your body fueled with good-for-you foods, and exercising and stretching those sore muscles (gently) will all help you to relieve shoulder pain. Consider massage and other therapies as well.

Probably the best advice was offered by Megan a little later on in the same post:

[My chiropractor] read me the riot act two years ago about taking care of the whole body, not just the pieces of it, and he was right. We are package and eventually what you neglect will come back to haunt you.

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SCOPING

The Proof Is in the Proofing

BY FAYE BRYANT

Having learned to enjoy reading early on, I’ve devoured books for, let’s say, close to 40 years. My proclivity has always been mysteries, starting with The Happy Hollisters, Nancy Drew, The Hardy Boys, and Cherry Ames. I suppose, looking back, not only were those books teaching me to look beyond the obvious, they were teaching me the fine art of capturing speech on paper.

I give credit to English teachers who taught sentence diagramming, and I believe the groundbreaking way that my eighth grade English teacher taught us grammar has helped me in this field as well. We had books with quartets of correctly written sentences that we would read to a partner repeatedly. It trained our mouths to speak correctly, our ears to hear correctly, and our brains to put together sentences that made sense and were correct grammatically. Even now I can hear the sentence we jokingly created: “Mrs. Lackey learned me grammar good!”

A couple of years ago, a dear friend suggested that I could help her by proofing transcripts. That seemed to be right up my alley. All that red ink! A frustrated teacher’s dream! Then she taught me scoping, opening the door to the frustrated editor in me. She taught me the ins and outs of her Eclipse software. A couple months later, the crushing blow came. She had taken an official reporter’s position in another state. My life was ruined, in a veritable shambles. I really missed the work.

When I decided that I would jump into the world of scoping, I thought I would purchase an Eclipse edit key and continue with what I knew but found such a bargain in a CaseCAT4 edit version that I pounced on that. I placed an ad offering my services in the Tennessee court reporters association newsletter and quickly found a reporter who needed a proofreader. She happened to be using Eclipse software. It didn’t take a rocket scientist to figure out that I really needed to be scoping to make the money to break even on my new software, but work was work, so I became a proofreader.

I would proof her transcripts, then carefully type an errata sheet and e-mail that back to her. Soon after I picked up another reporter, then another, and I found that reading and marking a transcript was time-consuming, yet I would make money at my page rate. However, if I had to take the time to type out each correction on another form, that quickly disintegrated into minimum wage or less — not exactly what I was looking for. I read information on different forums, learning from other scopists and reporters, hearing about the same problem.

One day I hit upon a concept that I considered to be momentous, phenomenal, amazing, stupendous, and would only cost $19.95. But wait! Seriously, it solved my problem of finding mistakes and then having to retype those for the reporter to correct, which seemed incredibly redundant to me. Using my CaseCAT4 software, I now go through a transcript and make the corrections as though I’m scoping without audio, marking each with a scan stop. Even though the reporter will not be importing this transcript into her Eclipse, the scan stops become very important. When finished, I export the file to RTF/CRE, creating an RTF (rich text format) file of the transcript that can be opened with word processing software.

Here’s the fun part: Each correction or item that I have marked using a scan stop is recorded there in a different color, as well as being bracketed. No longer must I type out the original text and my suggestions, nor does the reporter have