

"Interview Preparation" for New (and Experienced) Reporters

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Interviewing for your first job can be really nerve-wracking, especially if you do not know much about how court reporting businesses are run. On the NCRA Forum and the Depoman forum, participants were asked what questions they wish they would have asked at their first job interview. This article is a compilation of responses received from both forums.

This list is meant to be an "interview preparation" tool. It is **not** recommended that, in your interview, you go through each and every question on this list. Before you get to the interview, do as much research about the firm as you can. You may want to ask the office manager or firm owner for the firm's Web site, rate sheets, employment agreements, memos, handouts of office style guides, or office procedure manuals to see if some of the questions below are answered. Only ask questions at the interview that are not covered in other material which is made available to you by the firm beforehand or readily found elsewhere. Use the interview to clarify any points that are not answered

Al Betz of Washington, DC, says that the primary goal of the interview is for the prospect to get the job if he or she wants it; a secondary goal of the interview is to learn as much as he or she can without appearing to be intrusive.

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The Top 20 Questions Which Need to be Answered (either through the interview or preinterview research):

- Will I be an employee or independent contractor of your firm?
 - If the answer is “employee,” ask the following:
 - What benefits are provided, if any? (e.g., health insurance, life insurance, errors & omissions insurance, professional liability insurance, med flex spending account, etc.)
 - What supplies will I be expected to provide, and what supplies are provided by the firm?
 - If the answer is “independent contractor,” ask the following:
 - What supplies will I be expected to provide, and what supplies are provided by the firm?
 - Will I be expected to produce my own transcripts, or will the firm produce the transcripts for me? If I produce the transcripts, will I be compensated for doing so? ^^
 - Will I be permitted to accept work from other firms? **
- Are your reporters paid based on a percentage of total billed to attorneys or paid a flat page rate? If a percentage, what is the percentage? **
- Does your firm guarantee payment on the O+1? %%_Are reporters paid for copy sales? %! Do you guarantee payment on copies within a certain period of time (e.g., 30/60/90 days)? ^* If not, what kind of collection policy do you have in place? Does the firm have aggressive collections for slow or non-payment of copy sales? ^*
 - Note: The “O+1” is the basic component of pay. This stands for “Original,” (which is purchased by the client and is usually filed with the court) and one copy of the transcript (which the hiring attorney will use during his/her case preparation.) Additional copy sales are billed out at a different rate. In some parts of the country, there is no O+1. Clients only want the original. Be certain to clarify if the base rate is for the O+1 or just the original.
- What is the pay schedule? Are your reporters paid for work submitted on a schedule or only paid for work as invoices are paid by clients? **
- What are mileage reimbursement policies? (e.g., no mileage charged within a 25-mile radius or no mileage EVER is charged) ##
- Will I be required to purchase the same software the firm uses? && Or does the firm require all reporters to be on one CAT software?
- How many reporters are in your firm? What geographical region does your firm cover? ^^ What knowledge and skill sets do you anticipate needing from reporters in the foreseeable future? Are you seeing more mold cases, med-mal, etc.? I would aim to develop questions whose underlying theme is: How can I make myself useful to the firm? *&
- What types of work are typically available (depositions, expert witnesses, court work, arbitrations)? Approximately how many pages per week and/or month would I be expected to handle? ** Will I be expected to do only one type of work (i.e., worker’s comp or PI cases) or all types of work? &&
- What is your standard turnaround time? **

- May I send in my work electronically, or am I expected to print hard copies and deliver them to the office? ## If I am expected to print hard copies, will the firm reimburse me for travel and/or postage expenses? ^^
- What exactly am I expected to turn in with each job (read and sign letters, errata sheets, invoices, mailing labels, signed order forms)? ##
- How supportive are the support staff? What can I expect from them? %!
- How is production handled? What are the reporter's responsibilities? **
- What are your dress code expectations? &&
- Are your reporters required to work in your office, or are they permitted to work from home? **
- Do you have any work that's not transcribed? If so, what percentage? %%
- How far in advance are your reporters notified of work assignments? Are they expected to be on-call if not assigned a job on a given day? **
- How is work distributed, especially during slow times? by seniority or always evenly distributed or by some other system? **
- How well networked is the firm within the reporting community? %!
- How does the firm market itself? Does the firm differentiate itself from its competitors? If so, how? %!

Following is a list of things which you should listen for in the interview and which may need to be clarified after the initial interview and after you start working for the firm. *Pick no more than two or three of the following items to ask in the initial interview.*

General Questions:

- What is the mission of your firm? %!
- What is professionalism, as your firm defines it? %!
- What is the brand your firm has established (and can I meet it)? %!
- What do you expect of me? %!
- What do your clients say about your firm? %!
- Why do I want to begin my career here with your firm? %!
- Will you mentor me? %!
- Can I expect a performance review on a scheduled basis (annual, semiannual, quarterly)? ##

General Employment-Related Questions:

- What is your policy regarding reporters scheduling time off? **
- What is your policy when jobs cancel at the last minute, either before or after the reporter has appeared? **
- How often are jobs which require lots of travel rotated? &&
- How long will you give me before sending me to court/arbitration/expert depositions? %%
- How do I communicate with lawyers and the parties? What do I say to them? What subjects should I stay away from? %!
- Do you have an on-call person if someone calls in sick? &&

- Are jobs distributed solely on a seniority basis? (i.e., are the “good” jobs always given to the people who have been at the firm the longest) ^^
- What should I do if I become ill during a job and cannot fulfill my duties? What if I become ill the morning of the job? What should I do? ^^
- Are your reporters required to submit audio files to the firm? If so, does the firm provide the audio files to the clients? ** If the firm provides audio to the clients, will the reporter receive extra compensation for providing the audio? ^^
- Are there any noncompete clauses I must sign? If so, what restrictions are in the noncompete, and how long will it last? &&

Fee Issues:

- If travel is involved, are expenses advanced, or am I expected to use my personal credit card/money? ##
- Is there a writing fee if the transcript is not ordered and I wrote for hours? @@ Is this a flat fee or a per-hour fee? ^^
- Is there a fee if the proceeding cancels the day before or if the proceeding cancels late the day before? ^^
- Is there a cancellation fee if I’m heading to the proceeding and it cancels? @@
- Is there a waiting fee if the attorneys are late? @@ Is there a waiting fee if the witness is late? ^^
- Do you charge an hourly fee on top of the pages for interpreted depositions? ^%
- Do you charge more per page for video depositions? ^%

Payment/Rate Policies:

- Can I improve my commission split by attaining higher certifications? ##
- What steps will the firm take if a client does not pay a bill? ^^
- Are there different rates for medical and technical depositions? &&
- Does the firm charge an appearance fee? ^^
- If the firm charges extra for a service (i.e., word index), will the reporter also receive a portion of that fee, or will the firm retain the entire fee? ^^
- Are your reporters allowed access to invoices sent to clients? **, @@, &&
- Are there set rates that I can quote or different rates for different firms? &&
- Should I refer all rate questions to the firm directly, or can I answer questions posed at the proceeding? ^^
- Do you have direct deposit available for paychecks? ##
- Will the firm pay the reporter for ASCIIs/E-Transcripts sent to clients? ^^

Transcript Production:

- Will my work have to be proofread before I can turn in the job for production? If so, what will determine when the proofreading stage ends? Will I receive less pay while being proofread? What will my salary be once the firm stops proofreading my work? ^^

- Do you have format samples for different venues (i.e., worker's comp deposition, regular deposition, court work, etc.) &&
- How much does the firm charge the reporter for production of transcripts? && For instance, one reporter's firm charges her \$0.10/page to produce the job. Another reporter's firm charges \$0.15/page to make copies of exhibits for the transcripts.
- Can the reporter use their own style of punctuation, or does the firm REQUIRE you to do it "their way" (even if it's incorrect)? ^%
- How are expedited jobs handled? ** What is considered an "expedited job"? ^^ (This varies throughout the country.)
- Are your reporters required to provide realtime access and/or rough drafts to clients? ^^ If so, what is the compensation to the reporter for those services? **
- What is the firm's preference for handling nods and shakes of the head and uh-huhs and huh-uhs? ^%

Business Practices:

- Will I be required to obtain a signed order form from any attorney ordering a transcript, or will I be required to obtain a signed order form from opposing counsel or nonclients only? ^^
- Is there an incentive to be requested by attorneys? Do I get more money if I am requested? ^*
- Do I get more money if I bring in new clients? How much? Even on copies?? ^*
- How do you select your clients (or do you accept anyone who calls)? %!
- Does your firm engage in incentives to attract new business? If so, what? ^^
- Does your firm engage in contracting or rate or other incentives to law firms and paralegals for repeat business? **
- Are the employees/reporters of this firm/agency members of their state associations or members of NCRA? @@ If so, what percentage? ^^ Do they volunteer for the associations in any way? How do they otherwise support those associations? #!
- Is the firm a member of the local or state court reporting association or NCRA? ^^ What other associations to which does the firm belong? ^^
- Is it a requirement of the firm that reporters be members of their state or local associations and/or NCRA? ^^
- Does the firm adjust rates and fees annually to account for cost-of-living/inflation increases? &&

Questions for the Employer after a Few Jobs and Questions for Yourself after You Obtain your First Job

Now, I might suggest that this is a reciprocal process, in that the new reporter can help him/herself immensely by engaging the employer in a feedback

process. By that, I mean:

- 1) Periodically ask for critiques of not only your transcripts but your communication with the office staff. (Am I giving proper copying/billing instructions? What could I do to make things better?)
- 2) Acknowledge the office staff for helping you with a rush job/difficult situation (something as simple as a Starbucks gift card or a thank-you note).
- 3) Humility is a virtue. Don't be so married to a concept taught in school that you are not open to constructive criticism. ##

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- What's actually necessary in terms of upgrades/improvements in my hardware and software? Is it all just vendors trying to sell me stuff, or is there a good reason and genuine benefit to staying updated? =+
 - What help resources are out there for me? Where is it "safe" to ask a question and get knowledgeable help? =+
 - What kind of continuing education will benefit me most? How often should I invest in continuing education? How much should I expect to spend? Is this something I should budget for on a quarterly or semi-annual or annual basis? =+ (For example, attending an NCRA convention usually costs between \$1100-\$1800 total. ^^)
 - What can I do to inspire my performance to the point that clients notice? %!