STAR article – "Speed, Realtime, and Beyond!"

Donna Urlaub and I were tasked with putting together a seminar for the STAR spring convention that would encompass a few of the keys to writing realtime effectively and easily. We put our heads together and came up with some things that have been of great help to us in our realtime adventures. Donna, being the speed champion that she is, shared with us some secrets that have helped her to compete in speed contests on a national level. Although never as good as being at a seminar in person, here are a couple of things she shared with the participants.

You can (and should) create your own briefs – without memorization. Here are a couple tricks of the trade Donna shared with the audience.

Use of abbreviations
If it works in medical records, it can also work for you in steno!
For example: SO-B=short of breath; RO-M=range of motion; M-G=milligram; M-M=millimeter, C-M=centimeter; W-NL=within normal limits. And the list goes on and on! If an abbreviation conflicts with another entry, just add an asterisk and use that stroke for the one that is used less.

Follow a theme
Once you start creating briefs for common words, pay close attention to the form of the brief. It might be something you can carry over to other words. For example:
DL-UR=disclosure; FL-UR=foreclosure; KL-UR=enclosure; KL*UR=closure. R-ELT=red light; GRAO-ELT=green light; H-ELT=headlight; STRAO-ELT=streetlight; HAO-EULT=highlight
One of Donna's favorites is: K-RT=contract; SK-RT=subcontract; J-RT=general contract. Once she has this theme going, she was able to expand it to also incorporate: K-ERT=contractor; SK-ERT=subcontractor; J-ERT=general contractor.

Tucks and Squeezes
Donna uses tucks and squeezes when she sees the opportunity to make a two-stroke word into one, just by "tucking" or "squeezing" a letter into the brief. (Speaking strictly for myself, I think Donna thinks on a higher plane than most reporters, but she really has me thinking more and more about my writing – and I am here to tell you, after 29 years of reporting, I am still finding ways to improve! There is hope!)

Examples of tucking are: RO-ER=error; RA-ERT=artery; TRA-ER=temporary; SMA-URL=smaller; LA-ERJ=larger; FRO-ERM=former; DRE-RKT=director; KLA-ERN=cleaner; MO-ERT=motor.

As far as the squeezing goes, here are some examples: PLA-FK=plastic; ST-IFK=statistic; OPT/M-IFK=optimistic; LO/JIFKS= logistics; SPA-FM=spasm; M-EK/N-IFM=mechanism

Squishing
I found Donna's thoughts on "squishing" just fascinating! Perhaps if we were taught how to "think" this way in school, we'd all graduate much sooner! Donna will take two or more words or commonly used phrases and "squish" it down to one stroke – and it all makes sense! For example, take the words "substantive evidence." You would write it out as SUB/STAN/TIF/EFD. You say to yourself, how can I shorten this? So your next step is SUBS/TIF/EFD. Take a look at that and figure out how to break it down even more - SBIF/EFD - with the final outline being a beautiful (and short) SB-EFD.

Take the words "you know what I mean." You might write it out like U/TPHOE/WHA/I*M. You shorten it up to UPBLG/WHAIM. And then finally: Y-UM. Now, don't go thinking, "Well, that conflicts with the word "yum." How many times do we really have that come up in our

transcripts? A lot less than "you know what I mean." So use Y*UM for the word "yum" and use YUM for "you know what I mean." From there, you can take this "theme" as described above and use it for "you know what I'm saying." It could be YUMS! Brilliant, isn't it?

Another one of Donna's secrets was to <u>drop the second stroke</u>. You don't need it. The stroke won't conflict with anything else. Give it a try! Here are a few examples that Donna uses on a daily basis. PR-ET=pretty; DA-T=data; ST-UD=study; J-END=agenda; F-IG=figure; DAO-ET=detail; RAO-ET=retail; FAO-EFP=feature.

<u>The Power of "of"</u>
If you left our seminar with one nugget of information that may change the way you wrote (and make you like your job more every day), it is the (secret) Power of "of." This little tidbit of information will save you when you least expect it! For example: LO-F= lot of; LO-FT= lot of the; GRO-UF=group of; SM-F=some of; SM-FT=some of the; PRO-UF=proud of; B-IF=bit of; BL-IF=little bit of; KAO-EUF=kind of; O-UF=out of; W-UFT=one of the; TAO-EUF=type of; MO-EF=most of; BO-EF=both of; STA-EUF=state of; TPRAEUF=afraid of; TPREF=friend of; SOFR=sort of . . . and the list goes on and on and on! It's all about the "theme" (as described above) and taking one little thing and running with it!

Donna stressed, "Think about your writing. Past practice isn't always better. Just because you've always done it a certain way doesn't mean it's the best way for you any longer."

<u>Other things to consider</u>
Turn your phrases into contractions by simply using the asterisk. U*L=you'll; U*D=you'd; U*F=you've; THE*D=they'd

One last pearl of wisdom that Donna shared was trying to tackle the everyday conversational words that will ALWAYS put you behind – and use of the various techniques above, whether tucking or squishing. Here are a few examples: SKAO-UM=excuse me; TU=thank you; TU-S=thank you, sir; TU-M=thank you, ma'am; -GD=go ahead; GO-RNG=good morning; GA-FRN=good afternoon; GO-ENG=good evening; SO-IRM=I'm sorry; GAO-NS=goodness.

Realtime and speed writing can be one and the same – different reason and different outcome. When you write shorter for realtime, shorter, cleaner writing will result in faster writing!