



# The Legal Secretary's Perspective

Industry insight on the court reporter shortage and legal technology





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Secretaries are the backbones of America's busy law firms and handle essential tasks that keep lawsuits progressing, including scheduling depositions and selecting court reporters. The well-documented stenographer shortage can put direct strains on these professionals. Verbit connected with Cathy White, a legal secretary with 30+ years of experience, to learn how the court reporter shortage impacts her and hear more about how technology is changing the legal profession.

White, who is currently employed at a Dallas, Texas law firm, described working in a significantly different environment than prior to the pandemic. A new acceptance of technology in the legal profession is opening the door for time-saving and efficiency-boosting innovations that make work easier for people in White's position, court reporters, lawyers and others.

Verbit gathered this insider knowledge to help court reporting agencies understand what really matters to the people booking their services.





## Scheduling Depositions and Court Reporters

White works for a litigation firm that represents insurance carriers. Insurance companies may request depositions or examinations under oath (EUO), which are less formal interviews that the insurer has the right to request based on contracts with their clients. Legal secretaries arrange and set the dates for these depositions and EUOs. While the number White schedules varies each month, she may plan several in a single week. In her 10-lawyer firm, three other legal secretaries also carry out this scheduling task.

In addition to checking lawyer and witness schedules, White must ensure that a court reporter appears to record every deposition and EUO. **In many cases, secretaries like White are responsible for selecting court reporters.** If a client or attorney doesn't specify use of a particular court reporter, White says, "I would just pick the ones I like, the ones I knew did a good job."





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## What Makes a Good Court Reporter

## Legal Secretaries Look for Fast Turnaround Times

**Accuracy:** White says she looks for court reporters or agencies to use based on accuracy. She explained that doing “a good job means you don’t get a transcript back that’s got a lot of errors in it.” In some cases, White explains reporters may “have names misspelled, or they’ll have a bunch of typos or misspelled words. What is important to me is that the transcript be good when it comes back.”

**Reliability:** White said it’s crucial that reporters “always get there on time.” She might opt for a person or agency that she is familiar with over an unknown because it gives her peace of mind. Given the importance of familiarity, the ability to take on more jobs is critical for court reporting agencies. Turning down one job could prevent a legal administrator from reaching out to an agency again and impede the development of a working relationship that might lead to many more jobs down the line.

Getting a transcript ASAP isn’t just convenient in the legal industry; sometimes, it’s necessary. The pressure to get the complete transcript back is more intense when it comes to trial records. In such cases, **court reporters might tell White it will take “30-45 days.” The delays are unacceptable because the attorneys “only have 30 days to file a motion for a new trial. We need that in a week, two weeks max.”**

Court reporters who can deliver work quickly and within the time promised have a significant competitive advantage.

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## Feeling the Effects of Court Reporter Shortages

## Law Firms and their Employees are Open to New Technology

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It's no secret that the legal industry is facing a [shortage of court reporters](#). White says she has experienced the effects of the court reporter deficit in her own work, especially since the beginning of the pandemic. According to White, court reporting agencies are struggling. **"If we want something in person, they can hardly find anybody. There's a real shortage of reporters and especially ones that appear in person."**

"Attorney schedules are bad, but when you have to deal with a court reporter schedule, and you have to change things because you can't get a court reporter, it's like starting the process all over again," she said. Court reporter unavailability "definitely creates problems for people like me who have to go back and start all over looking at these ridiculous calendars."

According to White, she would be willing to use digital court reporters to ensure coverage for depositions, EUOs, and court hearings. When it comes to digital transcription, she said, **"I don't think it matters how it gets recorded as long as the transcript comes out good. I would think that [digital tools] would make it so much easier for them. It would make their end product go a lot faster."** Incorporating these tools can also open an agency's availability so that they never need to turn someone away because they lack the bandwidth to accommodate a request. Building a reputation for reliability will benefit court reporting agencies. With the legal industry becoming more open to technology in their own work, they are increasingly likely to appreciate the ways it supports court reporters.

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## Witnessing Big Changes

COVID-19 prompted law firms to adapt and incorporate more technology into daily routines. Using more technology has led to some surprising benefits. White stated, "We've definitely changed, and are doing depositions over Zoom and mediations, and I tell you, **most of my attorneys like it better. Because they can just stay in their office, they don't have to go somewhere, especially the out-of-town ones.** They really like it."

The growing acceptance of legal technology is paying off. White believes remote depositions will continue, explaining, "It really saves money. Clients don't have to pay for these attorneys to travel. I think it could be much more cost-effective that way."

As for anyone reluctant to try new technology, White advises that legal professionals keep an open mind. Changes might be intimidating at first, but she stated her office realized that they could accomplish nearly everything from home, "**It's just so much easier, and we were skeptical at first about the Zoom links, but they worked really well.**"





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## Conclusion:

The professionals responsible for scheduling court reporters are not concerned about what tools a court reporter uses. They have adapted to the incorporation of more technology in their own workflows, and they prioritize the final transcript, not the process. For White and other legal secretaries tasked with finding coverage for legal proceedings, a court reporting agency that offers easier scheduling, accurate transcripts and rapid turnaround times would be a valuable resource.

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Digital tools like Verbit's present court reporting agencies the opportunity to reduce personnel shortages and decrease the time it takes to complete critical records, all while meeting the industry's high accuracy standards. For more information on Verbit's digital transcription technology, [contact us](#).