

Stenographer Certifications and What They Really Mean

CSR, RPR, RMR, RDR, CRR

You have been handed business cards at depositions and more than likely just glossed right over the acronyms behind your stenographer's name. Believe it or not, those little letters are really important – not only to the stenos themselves – but to your case!

There are many different types of certifications, yet none are actually *needed* to work as a stenographer in this state.

Since Massachusetts has no licensing requirement for court reporters, all certifications your stenographer proudly displays on their business card (or Zoom screen, these days) are completely voluntary!!! We spend our free time practicing for tests, our hard-earned money paying state and national associations for testing opportunities, and even more hard-earned money on continuing education every year to maintain those little initials after our names – all to prove to our clients that we are the most capable people to take your deposition/trial/hearing/arbitration...anything, really.

We get certified because we love our profession and we respect our skill. Having those acronyms after our name is the only thing that proves to you, the attorney, that we are professional and competent to report your proceedings.

CSR

The first one is the CSR. This stands for Certified Shorthand Reporter. It is a test given twice a year by the Massachusetts Court Reporters Association and consists of three separate five-minute dictations:

Literary at 170 words per minute
Jury charge at 190 wpm
Testimony at 210 wpm

Candidates must pass the three sections with at least a 95% score.

RPR

The next step up from the baseline CSR certification is the RPR - the Registered Professional Reporter. It is a test offered by the National Court Reporters Association and consists of three separate five-minute dictations:

Literary at 180 words per minute
Jury charge at 200 wpm
Testimony at 225 wpm

Candidates must pass the three sections with at least a 95% score.

Taking a written knowledge test is the second part of obtaining the RPR. Candidates are tested on technology and innovation, industry practices, professionalism, and ethics.

RMR

The Registered Merit Reporter is a certification you can only sit for after you have obtained the RPR, and the speed requirements are a significant step up. It is offered by the National Court Reporters Association and consists of three separate five-minute dictations:

Literary at 200 words per minute

Jury charge at 240 wpm

Testimony at 260 wpm

Candidates must pass the three sections with at least a 95% score.

RDR

The Registered Diplomate Reporter designation can only be obtained after you have successfully completed the RMR. While there is no speed test as part of it, there is an extremely difficult written knowledge test.

There are 120 questions on various topics, including technology, industry practices, professionalism, ethics, and business practices. This designation is held by the most elite of stenographers.

CRR

The CRR stands for Certified Realtime Reporter. This is the toughest of the skills tests. Holding this certification means you have proven that you have very clean, near-perfect writing.

This test is offered by the National Court Reporters Association after you have passed the RPR. It consists of one five-minute dictation at 200 words per minute with a passing score of 96%.

Five minutes at 200 wpm? That seems “easy,” right? But there's a catch! (Isn't there always a catch?)

Besides requiring a higher passing percentage of 96%, candidates are not given any time to edit their transcripts. All of the other tests have a 95% threshold and candidates are given over an hour of editing time after the dictation to clean up their transcripts. For the CRR, though, you turn in exactly what you write. No editing is allowed!

Holding the CRR means that you can offer realtime services to your client. Realtime is the automatic translation that you can instantaneously review during any proceeding.

Only 15% of the entire field of stenographers hold this certification! If you want to utilize realtime, make sure you ask for a CRR to ensure you receive the best possible output.

Protect your record and always hire a certified stenographer – your case deserves it!