BREAKING WORDS INTO SHORTHAND STROKES

Another ***major*** area of hesitation when writing machine shorthand is the hesitation involved in trying to decide ***where*** to break words into shorthand strokes. The decision can be as simple as whether to break *filter* into strokes as FIL/ter or FILT/er. Without guidelines, even a common word such as ***carpenter*** could be broken into strokes as CAR/pen/ter, CAR/pent/er, CARP/en/ter, CARP/ent/er. With some ***big*** words, there could be as many as 10 or 15 different ways a word could logically be broken into shorthand strokes based on any particular theory, requiring multiple decisions. That's a lot of decision-making, hesitation, and ***lost speed.***

Many of you have been instructed by your teacher to "carry each stroke as far as possible through the sound of the word." That's good advice. Let's expand on that a little and say: (1) If, based on the sound of the word, you have a logical choice as to whether to end a stroke before or after a consonant, end it ***after*** the consonant (e.g., major = MAJ/or, not MA/jor); (2) If, based on the sound of the word, you have a logical choice as to whether to end a stroke between two consonants or after the consonant combination, end it ***after*** the consonant combination (e.g., carton = CART/on, not CAR/ton). But basically, it does come down to the same thing: Carry each stroke as far through the sound of the word as possible.

WHY? First and foremost, it gives you a consistent guideline to follow so you're not hesitating on every word of more than one stroke while you try to decide what's the best way to stroke it. And there's a lot to be said for "consistency" and what it contributes to speed. If you decide, for example, that you ***consistently*** break strokes ***after*** a specific consonant combination—say, the -rb—you'll develop an automatic response to hearing -rb and your fingers will automatically move to that stroking position. If you ***don't*** make a decision and follow it consistently, when you hear -rb your fingers can't even *start* to move until after you take ***time*** to make a conscious decision on how to write that consonant combination for the particular word or in the particular instance. That's lost speed!

Also, on many words, when you carry strokes through a consonant combination, it simplifies the sound, reduces the number of strokes, and reduces spelling dependency. Let's still use -rb as our example, and let's assume you've decided you'll consistently carry strokes through an -rb combination. On a simple word like ***carbon***, the difference between breaking it as CAR/bon or CARB/on may not seem like a big deal. (There ***is*** a difference in stroking *efficiency*, and we'll talk about that in a minute.) But now look at ***carbonate***. Because you've trained yourself to hear and stroke
-RB instead of -R/PW-, you'll react to that word as KARB/uh/nayt and immediately recognize that you can omit that "uh" sound syllable (remember the elision principle?) and just stroke KARB/TPHAEUT. If you *don't* carry the stroke through the -rb, you have

to decide whether to stroke KAR/bon/ate or KAR/bo/nate, either of which requires an additional stroke. Lost speed! Plus, if you write a spelling-dependent theory, you have to know how that "uh" vowel sound is spelled and conform your stroke to the vowel spelling. Sure, you know how to spell ***carbonate***. But English is funny. That "uh" vowel sound can be spelled with any vowel and several combinations of vowels. How many words are you going to run into where you don't know how the "uh" sound is ***spelled***, where you'll have to think about it or guess at it? Lost speed!

And what happens when you get to even more complicated words like *carboniferous*? If you follow the guidelines, *carboniferous* is a breeze to hear and stroke: KARB/TPHEUFRS. Without any guidelines, there are a dozen different ways it could be stroked, with a number of decisions to be made and some spelling to think about. Lost speed!

Another reason for carrying strokes as far through the sound as possible is that it may prevent conflicts which exist in a spelling-dependent theory—and conflicts are the nightmare of the realtime writer. Let's take a couple of our earlier examples and use them again here. We have to assume that every computer-compatible theory has eliminated the conflicts between vowel-consonant word beginnings and endings (er-/-er, or-/-or, em-/-em, in-/-in, al-/-al, etc., etc.) So if you follow the guidelines and break *filter* as FILT/er, you won't have a conflict. If you write a spelling-dependent theory and you stroke it as FIL/ter, those are the identical strokes you'd use to stroke the word *fill* followed by the word beginning *ter-*. When CAT software translates steno, it keeps checking the next stroke, and the next stroke, and the next stroke to see if including that next stroke would create a word. So if you stroke /FIL followed by any word starting with ***ter-***, it will translate as *filter*: e.g., "Fill terrible gaps" will translate as "Filterable gaps." KART/ONZ won't create a conflict, but KAR/TONS can create a conflict with "car tons." Other examples of possible conflicts when strokes are not carried as far as possible through the sound (always depending on the particular theory) are candid/can did, carbide/car bide, bargain/bar gain, damper/dam per, damsel/dam sell, feces/fee seize, futile/few tile, gastric/gas trick, global/glow ball, guidance/guy dance, gypsum/gyp sum, halo/hay low, hamper/ham per, helper/hell per, hermit/her mitt, hyper/high per, jargon/jar gone, kilo/key low, Kuwait/cue wait, latents/lay tents, license/lie sense, lilac/lie lack, masons/may sons, etc.

STROKING EFFICIENCY: Also, carrying strokes as far as possible through the sound frequently results in increasing stroking *efficiency*. For example, carrying a sound through the consonant and stroking the consonant with what would otherwise by idle fingers on your ***right*** hand may require less dexterity and actually be faster than carrying the consonant sound over to the next stroke and having to reposition the fingers of your ***left*** hand to stroke it. Example: It may be faster for you to stroke *caper* as KAEUP/-R, than to stroke KA/P-R, placing the responsibility for stroking both the K- and the P- on the ***left*** hand while your right-hand fingers sit idle. Carrying strokes through a consonant sound and stroking the consonant with the right hand frequently involves

fewer fingers, traveling a shorter distance, than carrying the consonant sound over to the next stroke and stroking it with the left-hand fingers. Try it. The difference may be very slight but still noticeable to you. Logically, the fewer fingers you must move, the shorter distance your fingers have to travel, the faster the strokes can be executed and the less the likelihood of stroking error.

And please remember, I said when you have a ***logical*** choice, based upon the pronunciation of the word. You don't have to force words into some distorted pronunciation just so you can carry the stroke further through the sound. Nor do you have to make an absolute rule that you always carry a stroke through ***every*** consonant combination. We each have particular fingering strengths and weaknesses. For example, it may be faster for you to break strokes *between* a medial –nt or –nd consonant sound. The important thing is that you make decisions on how it's best for ***you*** to handle specific sounds that can impact many words rather than having to make individual decisions on every word that contains those sounds. And in those areas where you can train yourself to hear through the sounds and carry each stroke as far through the sounds as possible, it can simplify the hearing, reduce the number of strokes required, reduce the decision-making, reduce the spelling dependency, and avoid a few conflicts. All of which can contribute to writing speed.