

e-CourtReporter Presents:
e-Tips Newsletter

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"I'm all in favor of keeping dangerous weapons out of the hands of fools.
Let's start with typewriters."
Frank Lloyd Wright (1868-1959)

Wil Wilcox: Computer Guide
Keith Vincent: New Tutorial with Conflicts Kit

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Spring Computer Buying Guide

As professional court reporters, we strive to develop the best skills possible. Hand in hand with great skills we also need computers with top-flight components, workmanship and software. Don't sell yourself short with less than the very best in any of these areas. You really do get what you pay for. Much of the future of the court reporting profession relies on us not only producing an accurate and timely record of the proceedings, but we are also increasingly being called upon to become information-technology specialists as well. Let's rise to the challenge and go forward into the future with the confidence that our skills and technology will not become outdated.

So, in this spring buyer's guide to new notebook computers, I'll pay particular attention to what's new. As always, my advice is specifically for court reporters. As you know, court reporting tends to push the limits of our capabilities and endurance. It is much the same for our equipment. To navigate in our fast-paced world and keep up, we need higher-end computers than students or other less demanding home computer users.

This review features two computers with Windows XP Professional that both have the latest bells and whistles. Notebook computers, I'm sorry to say, have become a little confusing to buy with several processor chips to choose from. You should be able to get a high-performance notebook computer well suited to demanding realtime proceedings that also excel in audio-sync recording for anywhere from \$1,500 to \$2,500. Pump up your style with one of the following recommended cutting-edge computers that I've personally put through the paces using Total Eclipse doing realtime with audio-sync recording and editing myself. If you're in the market for a new computer or just interested in finding out about the latest and greatest, please be sure to check out my computer review after Keith Vincent's e-Tip which follows.

Conflicts Kit Available in "Translation Magic" Tutorial

I hope you won't mind if I take this occasion to announce a new e-Power Video Tutorial devoted to Prefixes & Suffixes, Conflicts, Phonetics, and the Metadictionary.

"**Translation Magic**" goes well beyond explaining how to take advantage of the **Prefixes & Suffixes Kit** that I put together a couple of years ago. It also includes a **Conflicts Kit** that I've developed just for this tutorial.

What's in the **Conflicts Kit**? There are over 900 pre-programmed dictionary entries in five categories: Basic conflicts, Comma conflicts, Echo Questions, Hyphenation conflicts, and Number-Related conflicts. The entries are listed in documentation similar to the other translation kits that I've created, and you can change the steno to whatever you want.

What makes the dictionary entries unique is that each one already knows a large number of rules for conflict resolution. Normally, of course, a new conflict has to learn from scratch. Although Eclipse conflicts learn quickly, they still have to learn. Some of the entries in my Conflicts Kit have been learning for more than 10 years, so they resolve quite well.

Even if you already have a great collection of regular conflicts, I hope you'll find a lot of entries in the Conflicts Kit that will help you get cleaner translation with less editing. However, this tutorial also includes explanations of the Phonetics Table and the Metadictionary, which are two areas that people usually find a bit mystifying.

If you'd like to see the approach that's taken in "Translation Magic," there are two sample videos that you'll be able to download from the "Updates" section of CR-NET. Just look for "1Conflix" and "1PreSufs."

Wil's Bonus Tip

Toshiba Tecra S1: Toshiba has really pulled out all of the stops with its top of the line Tecra S1. The S1 makes a strong first impression with a classy black-and-silver design. From court room to deposition suite, you'll go first class all the way. Beneath the plastic skin of the Tecra S1 beats the heart of a true-blue Intel Centrino notebook. Don't be fooled by processor speed numbers. To compare the Centrino, sometimes known as the Pentium M chip with the older Pentium 4M chips you double the processor speed. That means that a 1.4 GHZ Centrino is as fast or faster than a 2.8 GHZ Pentium 4M or Pentium 4. I'll bet you don't notice one bit of difference in processor speed between the 1.4 GHZ Centrino and the 2.8 GHZ Pentium 4 in typical court reporting applications. I believe that the Centrino or Pentium M is currently the way to go. (Sorry about that momentary lapse into geekspeak there!)

So what's so great about the Centrino processor chips? They feature longer battery life, they run cooler and much quieter and all have built-in wireless for networking, and hopefully at some time in the future may enable wireless realtime hookup to your judge and/or attorneys. Yes, you read that right, we may be able to dispense with all of those pesky hookup cables! No matter what you do, be sure that any new notebook computer you get is "wireless ready." There are different wireless formats. You may be asked which wireless format is best, and I recommend 802.11b or 802.11g.

Much more important than processor speed is memory, or RAM. These days most computers come with 256- or 512-MB RAM. Getting more RAM will yield more benefits than a higher processor speed. 512 MB RAM is optimal, but 1 GHZ won't hurt one bit.

But, wait, there's more. For the icing on the cake, this Toshiba Tecra S1 has a built-in microphone that features very high-quality sound recording for audio-sync without requiring an external microphone. Not only that, but it also has all of the extras you need for court reporting such as USB 2 ports and a genuine serial port for plugging into your writer. You won't be hassling with USB adapters before you can do realtime with this computer.

There's much more I could say about this notebook, but I'll leave you with this impression. I'd compare the Tecra S1 to a finely-tuned Porsche in both quality and workmanship. That's not to say that there won't be any bumps along the way. Computer longevity will save you money, and Toshiba's Tecra computers feature three-year warranties. The Tecra comes with Toshiba's 24/7, toll-free phone support and free e-mail support to round out this stellar package. Can you tell that I was almost drooling the couple of days I took the Tecra S1 for a test drive?

The S1 model I tested had a list price of \$2,167.00 and included a 1.4GHz Centrino Pentium M processor, 512 MB RAM, 15-inch display, 40 GB hard drive, and combination DVD/CDRW for playing DVDs and backing up to compact discs,

3-USB 2.0 ports. It has a built-in microphone and both serial and parallel ports, and wireless networking. A floppy-disk drive is extra since it doesn't come with one standard, so don't forget to order one which will add around \$50. You will also need to buy antivirus software since I don't believe it comes with any. I recommend Norton Antivirus 2003. Where to buy: You'll find it easier to customize a model, and sometimes get better prices, on the Web. So, visit Toshiba's Web site at <http://www.ShopToshiba.com> and click on "portables." You can buy the Tecra S1 on Toshiba's Web site or Call 1-800-316-0920 for more information. I'd give this computer 5 out of 5 stars or my highest rating.

Dell Inspiron 8500 (with a panoramic view): Not to be outdone, Dell has released the latest in its flagship line of notebook computers with a ground breaking 15.4-inch wide display. The Inspiron 8500 replaces the Inspiron 8200 which many court reporters are familiar with. Before I go on I'd like to address the fact that towards the end of the line with the 8200 many court reporters were experiencing trouble recording audio-sync with that previous model. I'm happy to say that that audio-sync problem seems to have been addressed and corrected with the 8500. I experienced no problems recording audio whatsoever with either of the two 8500s. In fact, it worked just great. The internal microphone on both units I tested did a very good job of audio recording and would serve you well. That's not to say that you may not need to supplement the internal microphone with an external microphone in some situations where a more robust external microphone would be called for. I was very pleased with the audio quality on the 8500 and would be very happy to work with it day-to-day on the job.

While some computers are now sporting huge 16- and even 17-inch screens which when closed look like huge pizza boxes, Dell opted for a wider display. Dell says that with a wide-screen display you can view two documents side-by-side or have a Web browser Window open with your e-mail window opened up right next to it. You get the idea. I experimented with this in the two days that I had the Inspiron 8500 for testing. I discovered that I loved the transcript document display on this wider screen. You no longer have to make any compromises in font size and/or displaying the notes Window alongside the transcript with plenty of room to see the line numbers, box, and not have to in essence scrunch things together. I found that I absolutely loved this wide screen for editing transcripts and viewing realtime. Microsoft says using a wide display increases your productivity because it's just easier to read. To me, the bigger font the better, and this screen fits the bill.

You also can view DVD movies on it without the black lines at the top and bottom of the screen, but who watches movies when they should be working anyway? After spending a couple of days working with a wide-screen display I'm convinced that this will catch on and that we will be seeing many more computers in the future sporting wide-screen displays. In fact, Microsoft is said to be optimizing the next version of Windows, to be released in 2005, for wide-screen displays. This computer is truly easy on the eyes!

While the Dell Inspiron 8500's most prominent new feature is the wide screen, the company also incorporates a new chassis design, a color scheme of silver and

metallic blue, and other new components. The 8500 does not, however, have a Centrino or Pentium M chip at this time. Dell has said that it most likely will have one available at a later date, so it may be by the time you are reading this report. Also watch for 80 GB hard drives being available which may seem like a lot, but if you record audio-sync daily on the job you may have use for such a large hard drive.

The configuration of the Dell Inspiron 8500 I tested and recommend had a Pentium 4M Processor at 2 GHz plus, (not a Centrino), 512 MD RAM, 40 GB hard drive, CD-RW/DVD combo drive and retails for approximately \$1,900. And like the Toshiba Tecra S1 reviewed before it comes with all of the standard ports that a court reporter demands such as 2-USB 2.0 ports, built-in microphone and both serial and parallel ports, and wireless networking. A floppy-disk drive is extra since it doesn't come with one standard, so don't forget to order one which will add around \$50. The Inspiron 8500 comes with a one-year warranty as well as web-based and telephone tech support. I recommend upgrading to a three-year warranty. Note: Dell oftentimes gives a pretty good discount for orders placed over their Web site as opposed to phoned in. Check this computer out at Dell's Web site at <http://www.Dell.com> or call Dell at 1-800-915-3355.

I'd like to add that the foregoing information has been the personal opinion of your humble correspondent based on a limited time testing period with these computers and anecdotal information from court reporters using these specific models on the job. People are raving about both of these computers. Regarding the Tecra S1, after recommending it to a friend I got a call from her saying: "I absolutely LOVE my new computer. It's Fantastic!" Nevertheless, any new computer if you have problems with it which is always possible can be an absolute nightmare. I must caution you that you can have problems with any computer you get from any manufacturer. But when you buy the very best you have put your money in the right place and have the best chance of having a good experience. I advise sticking with high-quality computers such as these that have been tested and used by other court reporters. If you don't use Eclipse, check with your particular CAT software vendor to insure compatibility with your CAT system. Ask your friends about the experiences they've had with any particular computer. Check on the return policy. Some computers come with a no-return policy. And, finally, please install your software on your new computer and try it out on the job before the return period, if there is one, has elapsed. All in all, you can't go wrong with either of these computers.

Who Are We?

Wil Wilcox is a freelance court reporter in Los Angeles, California, and has been a technology consultant for reporters since 1995. Since 1998, he and Robert Denos have been the Advantage Software representatives for Southern California.

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