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e-Tips Newsletter

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Keith Vincent

100 e-Tips

At last, e-Tips celebrates a double milestone. **This is the 100th issue of our monthly newsletter. It also starts the 10th year of this service that Wil Wilcox and I offer.**

Credit where credit's due. **Wil Wilcox had the idea for e-Tips.** At the time, EclipseNT was still a new product. Many reporters were simply used to DOS programs. They were making a transition to Windows programs in general and EclipseNT in particular. So Wil and I offered e-Power workshops in Houston, Los Angeles, San Diego, Chicago, San Antonio, Indianapolis, San Francisco, and even Honolulu.

e-Tips were born to promote the workshops and the video tutorials that eventually developed, but they've continued because we enjoy offering them.

100

To celebrate, I've been presenting webinars that illustrate my favorites e-Tips. These are offered via **EclipseWebinars.com**. Part 1 was in January and Part 2 in March. **Part 3 is scheduled for Wednesday, June 30th.** A fourth webinar is even possible because there are so many tips to illustrate.

If you're interested in the webinars, it's not too late to view Parts 1 and 2. The webinars' two-hour "live" sessions are recorded so that you can view them online and can fit them into your schedule. **For more information, visit EclipseWebinars.com.**

Note: As of e-Tip #101, we will try a new way of offering our newsletter. We will announce new tips in both the Court Reporters Forum (a/k/a CRForum) and in the open section of CR-Net (at Eclipsecat.com). You'll then be able to download the tips at KVincent.com. This means you will not have to sign up for e-Tips, plus all 100+ tips are always available at the e-Tips page of KVincent.com. Stay tuned!

Please keep in mind that because of the volume of e-mail we receive and the fact that that we are volunteering our time for this free newsletter, we can't routinely answer individual questions by phone or e-mail, nor can we consult on problems or purchasing decisions.

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Speex Codec and Settings



Way back in e-Tip #49, we described how the Speex codec enables you to record speech on your computer, with very good sound quality, while taking much less file space than you might expect. For instance, the default PCM setting takes about 36 megabytes to record one hour of audio, and that's not even at the highest quality, whereas a very high-quality setting of Speex takes only about 9 megabytes of file space per hour.

Many new computers come with the 64-bit version of Windows 7 pre-installed, and some have found that Speex no longer works on such machines. I tried **installing Speex on a new 64-bit Win 7 notebook, and at first I was not successful. I think it's because I was not using the Eclipse installation disk.**

When I did run the latest Eclipse install disk, I got a complete installation of my CAT software, with the updated manual, help system, and Visualizer movies, plus I also got Speex working beautifully, even on 64-bit Win 7. Yes, I did have to click on a button to say that I didn't mind installing something that hadn't been personally kissed by Bill Gates and the folks at Microsoft, but there are lots of excellent programs that fit that description, and Speex happens to be one of them. So if you've had

trouble getting Speex to work on your lovely new 'puter, I'll have to ask: Did you use the install disk?

Once the Speex codec has been installed, you'll want to go to the **"Realtime" tab of Eclipse user settings. Under the label "WAV Audio settings," use the "Compression" button.** Pull down the "Format" list and select Speex. Then pull down the list of "Attributes" and select the setting that you want to use.

There's quite a long list of Speex settings, but the ones that I recommend are toward the end of the list. Each setting has a number next to a Q (as in "Quality"). Do not use a low Q setting. I use Q9 or Q10.

Also, you want to **use a setting that says 8.0 kHz so that Eclipse will be able to speed up or slow down the audio playback.**

Personally, I have no need for a stereo recording of my voice files, so I use a mono setting.

Bottom line:

18.2 kBit/s, 8.0 kHz, mono, Q9 takes 2 kb per second, about 6 megabytes per hour.

24.6 kBit/s, 8.0 kHz, mono, Q10 takes 3 kb per second, about 9 megabytes per hour.

Use either of these settings and you should be pleased.

e-Power Video Tutorials: e-Tip Special

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For more info on e-Power Tutorials, visit: www.KVincent.com.

Keith Vincent: An Update on the Passport Steno Writer

Looking back over 100 e-Tips, I realized that it's been a while since I've written about the long-awaited Passport steno writer. Well, in the last few months it's been with me for literally more than 30,000 miles, and I think I've used it enough to share some personal impressions.

When the Passport was first announced, I was excited at the prospect of having a writer that was designed by the creators of Eclipse reporting and captioning software. What I could not have anticipated was how good the machine would feel. Touch is such an elusive thing, and one cannot overstate its importance to steno writers. All the time and effort and money invested to make the Passport feel right have obviously paid off.

The Passport is definitely the **most comfortable steno machine I have ever used**. I can write on it all day and not have half the back and shoulder pain that I have if I use my old machine for just a few hours. At the Texas Court Reporters Association convention this month, one of the most frequent comments I heard about the Passport was simply, "Wow, this thing feels good."

Adjustability is another area in which the Passport excels. It's all the more striking when one considers that at least one current writer makes no provision for adjusting the sensitivity of each key. On the Passport, **both mechanical and electronic adjustments can be adjusted even in the midst of writing.** There's no lid to open. To adjust key tension and depth of stroke, there are two thumbwheels at the bottom-front corners of the writer. Tweak while you write.

To adjust the sensitivity of each key, you press a button to enter adjustment mode. You can then use the scroll wheel on the right side of the display screen to make any key ever so slightly more sensitive or less sensitive. That comes in handy if you nick a finger on something (as I did while packing a razor for a recent trip). **You can see the difference on your writer screen (and on your computer screen in real time) as you continue to write.**

Colleagues who've bought the Passport tell me they're really happy that they're **not seeing the steno stacking that plagued their old machines**. Again, adjustability. The Passport doesn't just offer an anti-stacking feature; it lets you select the level that works best for your fingers. The default setting is 15. For me, 30 works best; at 32, I'd get steno strokes that would split into two. (As with the Sleep Number Bed, you just find your perfect number.)

The Passport has a very good audio system, and I've found that setting the **volume at 50% produces a strong recording**. You can also plug in headphones to help you hear whisperers, with realtime monitoring and amplifying of what a microphone is picking up

Finally, an update on aesthetics. The standard Passport writer comes in U.S. passport blue, and that's fine for folks who work in conservative settings like Federal courts. Recently (and with some strong lobbying by Wil Wilcox), **skins have been made for the Passport. That means you can personalize your writer**, yet you're not married to one look. If you get tired of a skin, you can remove it without harming the machine at all. **Skins are just \$25 each, with 15 styles available at present. You can see them at Eclipsecat.com.**

Here's an example of a skin applied to a Passport writer. You can also add a bit less of the skin, if you're afraid of having too much fun on the job. Then again, you could start minimal and eventually, like my friend Julie, go full zebra!



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