

LEARNING SHORTHAND IN FIVE DAYS... !?

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At the moment, all attention is focused on the news about a "revolutionary shorthand method" that anyone can learn "in five days"! Besides learning the method, the student would be able, after five days, to write in shorthand at the speed of "60 words per minute"!

The news caught everyone by surprise: skeptics doubt it, some laugh about it, others make jokes and there are those who truthfully believe the good news.

The news showed up in the Orkut "shorthand" community and spread quickly. The author of the method states and restates the efficiency of the method. According to his information, the student simply needs to study two books, Shorthand 9 and Shorthand 10 (with three CDs) to become a stenographer. By doing 24 dictations from the second book, for example, the student would already be writing in shorthand at a speed of 77 words per minute (wpm). In Module 12, the student would reach a speed of 140 wpm.

Many people ask me about the possibility of learning shorthand very quickly: learn in five days and write in shorthand, in such record time, that is, at a speed of 60 wpm (representing one word per second).

This "news" is not something new. Simply go down the list of shorthand book titles that have been published over time (hundreds of thousands), and find now and then, authors promising dazzling results: "Shorthand in one week!", "Shorthand in two hours."

This does not happen only with shorthand. With other subjects it is the same: "Learn piano in 15 days!", "Learn English in a weekend"!

But let's narrow it down only to shorthand, the focus of this rumpus, because questions are being raised and laypeople are feeling confused in regards to this issue.

And let's start by saying that, despite all the respect and admiration we have for all those who strive for the promotion of shorthand, and even more, for everyone who uses all their intelligence in creating a shorthand system, we can not endorse, under any circumstances, as the lawful truth and because it is common sense, the statement that someone can learn shorthand in five days and can write in shorthand at the speed of 60 wpm!

The statement that someone can learn shorthand in five days cannot be defended in five minutes! This does not exist or make sense in any way! First, it goes against the very nature of learning shorthand, which is, ultimately, a new "literacy." It also goes against an important part of the shorthand study: the gradual pick up of speed, a skill that is only obtained gradually. It also collides with another important point in shorthand study: the translation/interpretation of signs, another skill that requires a lot of practice and exercise.

And the killing point is when it ignores the main factor that governs the acquisition of any skill that demands precision and speed, as shorthand so happens to require: motor learning, a skill that can only be achieved after a long period of time through a repetitive, continuous, uninterrupted study.

The accuracy in sketching shorthand signs, having self-control, fluency, speed, self-assurance, aptitude, dexterity and quickness of movement and afterwards, performing the translation, recognition, interpretation of each sketch, of every word in context, and decoding each suppression (indication of sound). All this requires maturity, advancement and determination to overcome obstacles. It is necessary to grow strong roots! There are months of methodical, dedicated and applied study!

Sixty words per minute is a significant speed to be achieved in only five days. How can anyone "become literate" in graphic symbols where such person has never seen them before and start to eloquently write shorthand at a speed of 60 wpm in only five days?

No one becomes literate in five days in conventional writing, much less in shorthand! I asked a teacher who teaches how to read and write how long it takes for someone to learn. She was conclusive: all one's life! I then insisted: "I'm talking about

learning letters, to the point that someone can read and write with reasonable easiness and some fluency.” Her answer: 12 to 18 months!

To learn to read and write in conventional writing, a person starts from zero, that is, they do not have any knowledge of the alphabet, which is the set of graphic symbols.

Now, to learn shorthand signs, the student (although having previous experience in using graphic symbols – “the conventional writing”) also starts from zero, meaning that they will learn a whole new, different writing system, a phonetic-writing system, where shorthand symbols indicate a sound.

Learning shorthand is complex, because (unlike conventional writing) the student, besides learning how to read and write, must develop a skill inherent to shorthand, which is the development of shorthand signs according to each degree of speed that is gradually acquired and, only after months and months of training, there will be significant dominion, a fluent audio-graphic automatism.

In shorthand study, steps cannot and should not be burned. No one can jump any speed: the hand simply stops, because the brain cannot promptly develop shorthand signs. The brain can only perform this task, that is, to turn sounds into graphic signs at a certain speed, when there has been sufficient training in previous steps. No student reaches 60 wpm without first having trained many dictations of 30, 35, 40, 45, 50, and 55 wpm. It’s days and days of training at each dictation speed.

Learning shorthand takes time and a great variety of exercises in order to achieve an assimilation (memorization) not only of graphic symbols, but also of countless connections between these symbols, as well as memorizing the initial and terminal signs and not to mention conventional signs as well as all the rules (which are many) that govern each method.

Another important point that must be taken into consideration in learning shorthand refers to the recognition of shorthand signs at the time of translation. To decipher/interpret shorthand symbols afterwards is also a skill that takes time and patience to be completely mastered.

So all this significant amount of information, symbols, special signs, conventions, rules, (hear) sounds and the need to develop and decipher shorthand signs, cannot be assimilated (and neither can speed be achieved!) in just five days!

Even with a lot of motivation, applied study and extensive training in whatever method of shorthand, this quick five-day learning will never be possible – specially if taken into consideration that when studying shorthand there are limits to be obeyed in order not to cause mental fatigue due to excesses. After two or three hours of uninterrupted study, the mind gets tired and shorthand signs begin to be “mumbo jumbo”. Thus, further study in these circumstances would be counterproductive.

And not to mention the "mental hesitation", peculiar in shorthand studies, which makes the hand stop, due to the lack of deep assimilation of signs, or more specifically, hesitation as to certain words that are difficult to sketch. This deep assimilation of signs is only accomplished over time, with applied study for straight weeks and months.

Only special people with a “savantism” (impressive memory capacity), may be able to learn shorthand in five days and write in shorthand at a speed of 60 wpm! As is the case of Kim Peek, who has memorized 9,000 books! He reads a book and memorizes the entire contents, including the page number where there is a certain detail. But Kim Peek is a rare case that is being studied by scientists. Studies related to images from Kim’s brain has revealed considerable structural changes. We are dealing here with an unusual brain!

So, whatever the method is (geometric, cursive or mixed); as competent as a teacher may be; as good as the methodology may be and is being used in a book to make learning interesting; as much motivation that a student may have; as much as a student may intensively dive into the study of shorthand symbols and later on, go to speed training, shorthand learning will never be possible in such a short period of time!

In summary there is basic error when both a professor advertises and students enroll in an illusory shorthand learning course that supposedly offers “facility, less effort and immediacy.” False sensation! Sad illusion!