

Court Reporter Certification & Vetting Guide

How to verify credentials and avoid unqualified reporters

- ✓ RPR, RMR, RDR, CRR certifications explained
- ✓ Step-by-step credential verification process
- ✓ 10 red flags that indicate an unqualified reporter
- ✓ Sample vetting questionnaire you can send to providers

Understanding Court Reporter Certifications

The National Court Reporters Association (NCRA) administers the industry's most recognized certifications. Understanding the certification hierarchy helps you match the right reporter to your case.

Certification Hierarchy

Level	Certification	Speed Tested	What It Proves
Entry	RPR (Registered Professional Reporter)	180/200/225 WPM	Baseline competency — Literary, Jury Charge, Testimony at 95% accuracy
Advanced	RMR (Registered Merit Reporter)	200/240/260 WPM	Advanced speed and knowledge; requires RPR + 3 years NCRA membership
Expert	RDR (Registered Diplomate Reporter)	Written exam only	Highest NCRA tier; requires RMR + 5 years NCRA membership
Specialty	CRR (Certified Realtime Reporter)	200 WPM realtime	Proves realtime ability — 96% accuracy with NO editing

RPR is the baseline. If a reporter doesn't hold at least an RPR (or state CSR equivalent), they haven't demonstrated minimum competency through a standardized exam. For high-stakes litigation, look for RMR or higher.

Full Certification Comparison

Attribute	RPR	RMR	RDR	CRR
Full Name	Registered Professional Reporter	Registered Merit Reporter	Registered Diplomate Reporter	Certified Realtime Reporter
Issuing Body	NCRA	NCRA	NCRA	NCRA
Speed Tested	180/200/225 WPM	200/240/260 WPM	Written exam only	200 WPM realtime
Accuracy Required	95% each leg	95% each leg	N/A	96% (no editing)
Exam Cost	~\$220-\$350	Similar	Similar	~\$160
CEU Renewal	3.0 per 3 years	3.0 per 3 years (shared)	3.0 per 3 years (shared)	3.0 per 3 years (shared)
Court Recognition	Accepted in ~22 states	Higher prestige; complex lit	Highest NCRA credential	Required/preferred for realtime

State Licensing Requirements

States That Require Their Own Exam (do NOT accept national certifications alone):

Arkansas, California, Connecticut, Idaho, Illinois, Michigan, Mississippi, Missouri, Nevada, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Texas

States That Accept NCRA RPR (~22 states):

Most other licensing states accept RPR as a qualifying credential. Check with the specific state board.

Notable State Requirements

California CSR: 200 WPM four-voice dictation at 95% accuracy + 2,300 hours machine shorthand training + 660 hours academic coursework. Verify at search.dca.ca.gov

Texas CSR: State-specific exam; does not accept national certifications

Illinois CSR: State certification at 225 WPM

Iowa: RPR holders only need the written portion of the Iowa exam

Even in non-licensing states (like New York, Florida, Pennsylvania), individual courts and employers often require NCRA certification. "No state requirement" does NOT mean "no certification needed for quality work."

How to Verify Credentials

Step 1: Ask the reporter for their NCRA certification number and current membership status.

This is non-negotiable. If they can't provide it or seem evasive, move on.

Step 2: Verify through NCRA's PROLink directory (ncra.org). Search by name, locale, or certification level.

This is the authoritative source.

Step 3: Check state licensing. In licensing states, verify through the state's court reporting board.

Example: California search.dca.ca.gov

Step 4: Check renewal and CE status. All NCRA certifications require 3.0 CEUs every 3 years.

A lapsed certification means the reporter hasn't kept current.

Step 5: Ask to see the certification page of a recent transcript.

The reporter's credentials appear next to their signature.

Step 6: If the reporter claims credentials from an unfamiliar organization, investigate.

Only NCRA and NVRA certifications are widely recognized by courts.

PROLink Alert: NCRA PROLink only shows members who opt in to the public directory. Members who opt out won't appear. If a reporter claims NCRA certification but isn't on PROLink, contact NCRA directly to verify.

10 Red Flags of an Unqualified Reporter

1. No certifications or vague credentials.

Can't produce an NCRA number or state license number; deflects when asked about specific credentials.

2. Outdated technology.

Not using computer-aided transcription (CAT) software or AudioSync backup. Relying on tape recorders or outdated equipment.

3. Non-itemized billing.

Lump-sum invoices that obscure line-item charges — a common cover for overbilling.

4. Cannot provide realtime.

For complex litigation, inability to provide a realtime feed to counsel is a competency concern.

5. Financial relationships with opposing counsel.

Ethical violation if undisclosed. Watch for differential pricing.

6. Delayed or differential transcript delivery.

Delivering transcripts to you days before opposing counsel receives their copies.

7. Won't ask for clarification on the record.

A competent reporter interrupts to request spellings, ask speakers to repeat, and clarify on/off-record status.

8. No E&O; insurance.

Freelance reporters without professional liability coverage expose attorneys to risk.

9. No professional association membership.

No NCRA, NVRA, or state association membership means no ethical oversight or CE requirements.

10. Shows you corporate transcription samples instead of legal proceedings.

Court reporting and general transcription are completely different skill sets.

When Certification Matters

HIRE CERTIFIED (RPR minimum, RMR/CRR preferred) WHEN:

- Deposition may be played at trial
- High-stakes litigation (med mal, patent, securities, class action)
- Realtime feed required (deaf/HOH accommodation, attorney preference)
- Multi-party deposition with rapid speaker changes
- Cross-jurisdictional work requiring credential portability
- Appeals-sensitive proceedings
- Federal court (many federal courts require/prefer NCRA certification)

CERTIFICATION LESS CRITICAL WHEN:

- Routine EUOs (examinations under oath) for insurance matters
- Internal corporate proceedings not intended for court submission
- Uncertified reporter has 10+ years of active deposition experience with strong attorney references
- Even here: verify E&O; insurance and request sample transcripts

Sample Vetting Questionnaire

Copy and send these questions to any court reporter or agency you're considering. Their answers will tell you everything you need to know.

1. Credentials & Licensing

- What NCRA certifications do you currently hold (RPR, RMR, RDR, CRR)?
- What is your NCRA member number?
- Are you licensed/certified in [state where proceeding will occur]?
- When did you last complete your continuing education requirements?

2. Experience & Capabilities

- How many years have you been reporting depositions?
- Do you have experience with [specific subject matter]?
- Can you provide realtime feed to counsel during the deposition?
- What CAT software do you use?

3. Technology & Backup

- What is your primary steno equipment?
- Do you use AudioSync backup during proceedings?
- What is your procedure if equipment fails mid-proceeding?
- Can you accommodate remote/hybrid depositions?

4. Ethics & Independence

- Do you have any contracting relationships with any party involved in this matter?
- Will all parties receive their transcripts at the same time and at the same rates?

5. Insurance & Business

- Do you carry errors & omissions (professional liability) insurance?
- What is your transcript delivery timeline for standard, expedited, and daily copy?
- Do you provide itemized invoices with per-page rates clearly stated?
- What is your cancellation policy?

6. References

- Can you provide 2–3 attorney references?
- Can you share a sample of a recent deposition transcript?

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