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NCRF New Reporter Grant Essay

Essay prompt: What is one major work challenge that you experienced and how did you overcome it? Please mention how the internet or technology helped you address this challenge. (400-600 words)

Technology and the internet are so pervasive in our lives these days, it is hard to ever think about a day when we did not have it. I am just barely old enough to remember having to use the Dewey Decimal Classification system for school research papers. It is an elegant organizational system to be sure, but the breadth of knowledge to be found is limited to the books that are in circulation. Since the invention of the internet, the concept of "knowledge at our fingertips" has dramatically changed.

On March 31, 2022, I was a new graduate from court reporting school and facing my very first deposition as a working reporter. The deposition took place over Zoom, and the subject was going to be a personal injury deposition, according to my mentor. I was ready and prepared with my CAT software, my writer, and my knowledge and training from school.

As the deposition went on, I learned that the deponent had been injured by a gun that had discharged somehow while he was standing near it. When the attorney asked the deponent what type of gun had discharged the bullet, the deponent said what sounded like "moze nagan" Romanian bolt action war rifle. In the moment, I marked my transcript so that I could come back on a break and ask for a spelling, but inside, I began panicking. I grew up on a farm and my dad owned a few guns, so I have a slightly deeper familiarity with guns than the average city dweller, but that gun was completely foreign to me.

Later, on a break, I asked the deponent if he would please spell the name of the rifle. His reply was, "I'm not 100 percent sure on the spelling of that. I'll give you my best guess."

Enter Google. I remembered one of my mentors telling me that Google has a search feature where you can type in "sounds like" followed by the phonetic spelling or one's best guess of the spelling of a word. In my Google search bar, I typed "sounds like moze nagan rifle" and in 0.51 seconds—voila!— I had my answer. In a split second, I learned the real spelling of the rifle (Mosin-Nagant), the caliber of bullets that the gun fires, as well as its history.

Reflecting back on this deposition with a number of my experienced court reporter colleagues later the next month, I asked how they would have found the name and spelling of the rifle in the pre-internet days of court reporting. Several of them said their local court reporting agency had reference books on all sorts of subjects—guns, airplanes, construction, etc.—and they would have had to search through one of those books. What are the odds of a Russian rifle invented in 1891 being included in a reference text of all the most prominent guns in history around the world? I am glad I do not have to find out.

In the era of Photoshop and deepfakes and the ever-growing push for a more accurate AI-based voice recognition system, it could be easy to believe that technology is a competitor. However, the internet is an incredibly powerful tool that puts a world of knowledge at our fingertips. I choose to use the internet to grow my knowledge and produce the most accurate transcripts I can. I use Google every day as a court reporter to look up spellings, information about lawyers and firms, and research brands and objects referenced in my depositions. That is something AI can never do.