

Stupid Interpreter Tricks

Audio transcription for fun and profit

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INTERPRETERS WHO FIND THAT WAR, PESTILENCE, AND HOSTILE visa requirements can lead to a work famine may want to take a look at transcription.

FedEx packs of video and audio-tapes are slowly being replaced by MP3 files on FTP sites, but regular and mini-cassette transcription machines are still part of the package. With some loss of sound quality, you can use a male-to-male mini plug cable to transfer the audio signal from a videotape to the regular cassette using either the headphones jack on the TV or RCA cables hooked to the back of a VCR.

Once the sound is on tape, a male-to-female mini plug extension cable allows you to run the audio from the dictation machine over to where the sound card is located on your PC. With this arrangement, when you step on the play pedal the tape audio plays to your earpiece, while the microphone lead from the same headset can plug into your sound card.

If you have dictation software installed on the PC, you can transcribe by repeating what is recorded on the tape in your own voice, or translate by interpreting that material into another language. One advantage to this arrangement is that you can make the speaker stop by simply lifting your foot. This is sometimes necessary to allow the speech recognition software to catch up with the stream of spoken information.

As MP3 audio files replace tape media, this area is becoming more competitive. Most of us are familiar with Internet radio sites streaming ethnic music into the computer sound system. For MP3 source files you typically click on a link in an e-mail message to begin downloading the content

from an FTP site with your browser. The interesting difference is that once the entire file has loaded itself to the system temporary files area, you can use the Save Page option to write the MP3 file to your hard drive.

As before, you can play the file all you want using a freeware program like Winamp or Apple QuickTime. As with videotapes, the sound can be transferred to a portable tape recorder straight from the sound card. A much less boring alternative is to convert the MP3 file to .wav format using a freeware program downloadable from many different sites. I use dBpowerAmp, simply because it works and I know how to run it. Basically you right-click on the MP3 file and a little window asks you if you want to convert it. A 40-minute MP3 file will expand from 40 MB to 400

MB of CD-quality sound, but you can write this to a CD-R disk that only costs 15 cents.

Now you can use any jambox CD/cassette player to transfer the information from your burned CD to a standard cassette. The best part is that you don't have to be there while any of this is happening. By folding socks during the CD burning and doing translations or bookkeeping while the audio tape is recording, you catch up on chores while eliminating boring repetition.

Sooner or later—especially if you are using speech recognition software—you will have to listen to the entire speech again to edit your transcription or translation. A very rough draft of a half-hour extemporaneous presentation can be produced in a little over an hour using dictation software if you do not stop to take breaks. Translation, of course, takes longer because few of us can resist the urge to consult or fatten our glossaries during the procedure. ★

