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A Study of Employment Opportunities and Job Requirements for Entry-level Stenographic Occupations in Suffolk, Virginia Businesses

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A STUDY OF EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES AND JOB REQUIREMENTS

FOR ENTRY-LEVEL STENOGRAPHIC OCCUPATIONS

IN SUFFOLK, VIRGINIA, BUSINESSES

by

Margaret Wishon Willett

A research project

submitted in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Science in Education

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Statement of Problem

What skills, knowledges, and attitudes do employers require of
their entry-level stenographic workers? Are the schools adequately pre-
paring students to meet the demands of the business world, or are they
using their time unwisely in teaching skills for which there is no need?
Schools can effectively train tomorrow's workers if classroom standards
and expectations are comparable to those standards set by local business
firms.

Because of technological changes and other forces, business edu-
cation must continually evaluate its objectives and programs to keep them
relevant to the students and to the community it serves. Office work has
undergone a revolution of eliminating or simplifying some jobs while
creating others. Today's jobs require skilled workers. These skills
are not haphazardly acquired; they must be carefully taught.

The Vocational Education Amendments of 1968 and the Virginia
General Assembly's Educational Standards of Quality have charged local
school districts with the responsibility of providing their students
with vocational skills. The general public is demanding that education
be held accountable for the quality of its training.

Providing stenographic students with thoses fundamental skills
required by businesses today necessitates that teachers keep in tune with

current practices in the modern business office. Identification of the skills, knowledges, and attitudes required of business employees is the first step in providing relevant instruction and realistic objectives.

Research Questions

To determine whether high school trainees are meeting the employment demands of Virginia employers, a survey of selected business firms of Suffolk, Virginia, was made. The survey sought information about business practices, employment standards, and business equipment used in local offices. The results of the study will be utilized by the Suffolk City Schools for evaluating their stenographic programs.

Answers were sought to the following questions:

1. Are there stenographic positions available in the Suffolk, Virginia, business community for the inexperienced worker who has had stenographic training?

2. Do employers have a preference as to the educational training of their beginning stenographic employees?

3. What skills, knowledges, and personal qualities do employers expect from beginning stenographic workers?

4. If there are stenographic positions open to inexperienced stenographers, are these employees adequately trained to fill the positions? If not, what areas need improvement?

Definition of Terms

In order to clarify the researcher's use of particular terms and to provide a better understanding on the part of the reader, the following definitions are given:

1. <u>Stenographers</u>. Those workers primarily responsible for taking dictation and transcribing letters, memorandums, or reports. Beginning stenographers often do other office tasks such as typing, filing, answering telephones, and operating office machines.

2. <u>Basic Skills</u>. Acquired ability in performing such office tasks as taking dictation and transcribing, typewriting, handling communications, and operating various office machines.

3. <u>Basic Knowledges</u>. Understanding of the business organization and the worker's role within it.

4. <u>Personal Qualities</u>. Those traits of an individual which would reflect one's appearance, personality, and attitudes.

5. <u>Entry-level Job Standard</u>. Specification of educational and other experiences and skills required of new office employees.

6. <u>Acquaintance</u>. When used with reference to operating an office machine, denotes the ability to use the machine for simple operation only.

7. <u>Mastery</u>. When used with reference to operating an office machine, denotes the ability to perform a skill rapidly and accurately.

8. <u>Dictating Machines</u>. Machines such as tape or disc recorders which record the spoken word.

9. <u>Word Processing</u>. The combination of procedures, personnel, and equipment to accomplish the transformation of ideas to printed form. Equipment may be mag cards or mag tapes.

Limitations of the Study

This study and survey was limited to selected businesses in the Suffolk, Virginia, area. Although the location of Suffolk makes

employment possible in several cities within commuting distance, it was felt that firms surveyed in Suffolk would provide the best information for improving the business program in the Suffolk City Schools. It was further believed that a larger study to encompass all the cities within commuting distance of Suffolk would be too extensive for the experience, time, and financial limitation of the researcher.

The questionnaire, which was used, primarily attempted to seek information related to entry-level stenographic jobs. However, as many stenographic jobs include tasks in closely related areas, some attention was given to those areas.

Chapter 2

RELATED LITERATURE

In order to become more familiar with the efforts of others as related to the stenographic worker, this researcher considered pertinent periodicals, theses, and books.

Information is presented on the following general topics: (1) The need for stenographic workers in the future; (2) The skills or personal characteristics demanded by employers; (3) The areas in which improvement is needed in beginning stenographic workers; and (4) The need for educational evaluation.

A review of the literature reveals a definition of a general or entry-level stenographer as one who "takes routine dictation and does other office tasks such as typing, filing, answering telephone and operating office machines."[1] It is further stated that the federal government requires stenographers to take dictation at a minimum rate of 80 words per minute and type at approximately 40 words per minute.

The literature indicates differing opinion as to the future need and importance of stenographic skills. Employers' minimum skill requirements for stenographers vary in different locations. In order to present a more complete overview of the subject, some diverse opinions will be given.

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[1]U. S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Occupational Outlook Handbook, 1974-75 Edition, Bulletin 1785 (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1974), p. 102.

Scott Ober, in reporting in <u>The Delta Pi Epsilon Journal</u>, predicts that due to an increased use of machine dictation, there will probably be a decline in demand for stenographers. He believes that the greatest use of shorthand in the future will be at meetings and conferences for non verbatim recording. He further states that more class time should be spent on non-skill learning experiences.[2]

The <u>Occupational Outlook Handbook</u> foresees an increased employment of secretaries through the mid 1980's because of the continual expansion of businesses. However, the prediction is that the "opportunities for stenographers will be limited as more firms install dictating machines."[3]

Madeline S. Strong, in a recent article, speaks of the current shortage of stenographers in Los Angeles. The article states that "if a person has a skill, is suitably dressed for the job, and 'means business,' she should have no difficulty in getting a good stenographic position."[4]

In October, 1971, Rose Ann Bryce conducted a survey of twenty-six employment agencies in St. Louis, Missouri, and in five Illinois cities. The purpose of the study was "to help business teachers assess the effectiveness of secretarial programs in preparing their students for jobs."[5]

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[2]Scott B. Ober, "What Business Educators Should Know About Word Processing," <u>The Delta Pi Epsilon Journal</u>, XIV (August, 1972), 29-32.

[3]<u>Occupational Outlook Handbook</u>, p. 104.

[4]Madeline S. Strony, "How Will Your Stenographic Graduates Measure Up On the Job?" <u>Business Education World</u> (January, February, 1975), p. 5.

[5]Rose Ann Bryce, "Shorthand Plus--For Good Secretarial Positions," <u>Journal of Business Education</u>, XLVIII (January, 1973), 178.

The survey showed that shorthand is "alive and doing well" in business offices today. When asked if shorthand (opposed to other methods of communication) was a requirement for good stenographic positions, the employment agencies that were surveyed replied, "Yes, usually," (70%) and "Yes, always," (30%).

The Bryce study revealed that 73 percent of the agencies said that employers called for shorthand speeds of 100--120 words per minute. Only 27 percent of the employers would accept speeds below 100 words per minute.

When listing the complaints about applicants, 27 percent of the agencies said that the applicants lacked the ability to spell and punctuate correctly.

This survey further showed that 84 percent of the employers wanted their stenographers or secretaries to have some post-secondary education.

Ruth Anderson believes that with the current shortage of stenographers and secretaries, it is not likely that shorthand will lose its place in the business curriculum. She see stenographic training in the high schools as an important source of supply of workers. Due to changing trends in the schools today, she stresses the need to intensify the shorthand program.[6]

In a recent article by Herbert A. Tonne, he states that in the foreseeable future competent stenographic secretaries should have no problem in finding jobs and earning an adequate living. He says that business teachers must share some of the blame for the conception that

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[6]Ruth I. Anderson, "Shorthand," Changing Methods of Teaching Business Subjects, eds. Leroy Brendel and Herbert Yengel (Washington, D.C.: National Business Education Association, 1972), p. 113.

the stenographic secretary is dead. Teachers have continued to "teach" for 120 words a minute, often without achieving the goal. They merely "expose" the students to filing, human relations, and other important concepts. An evaluation of learning goals is in order.

In concluding his observation and opinion, Tonne said:

> Despite the half-baked research that encourages prediction of the early demise of stenography, despite the false goals of most stenographic training, and despite the misdirected learning materials available, shorthand will be as important in the office of the year 2000 as it is now.[7]

David L. Clemmer conducted a survey in the spring of 1972 in which he sought "to quantify the status of office skills relative to a beginning office worker."[8] The 161 returned questionnaires showed the following results:

	Essential	Desirable	Not Needed
type from handwritten copy	64.6%	29.2%	6.2%
take dictation using shorthand	27.8%	35.4%	36.6%
use transcribing machine	13.7%	22.4%	64.0%

In this survey, the majority of the businesses reported that a beginning office worker should be able to take dictation at rates from 71 through 100 words a minute. If a beginning stenographer can take dictation at a rate of 100 words a minute, this will allow her to meet the shorthand speed requirement of 97.3% of the responding organizations.

The purpose of a study done by Patty Glover Campbell was "to investigate the relationship of the use of office job selection tests

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[7]Herbert A. Tonne, "The Death of the Secretary--A Prophecy," Journal of Business Education, XLIX (March, 1974), 230.

[8]David L. Clemmer, "Office Skills Survey," Balance Sheet, LIV (May, 1973), 353-355.

emphasizing skills (e.g. shorthand and typing speeds) and the apparent importance attached to these skills in subsequent job performance evaluations."[9]

Campbell's survey, conducted in Tennessee, reported that the majority of firms giving shorthand dictation tests required speed of 80 words a minute for three or five minutes.

Fifty percent of the firms reporting found that the use of the telephone and getting along with others were the major problems with employees.

In her conclusions, Campbell stressed not only efforts to raise the typing and shorthand skills of high school business students were needed, but there was also a need for teachers to visit businesses and obtain information of the effectiveness of their graduates.

Mary Jane Spartz of Racine, Wisconsin, conducted a survey of secretarial duties and activities. Among other conclusions of her study, she lists the following:

(1) the institution that provided the greatest amount of specialized education for employment in secretarial positions is the high school;

(2) manual shorthand is used by 85 percent of the responding secretaries, of which all but two use Gregg shorthand;

(3) the most common deficiency of secretarial education programs noted by NSA secretaries is spelling.[10]

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[9] Patty Glover Campbell, "Job Selection Methods and Evaluation of Job Performance. . .," Journal of Business Education, XLVI (April, 1971), 272-274.

[10] Mary Jane Spartz, "A Survery of Activities Performed by Selected Secretaries in Racine, Wisconsin. . .," Journal of Business Education, XLVIII (November, 1972), 83.

Mavis Boone, a teacher in Baltimore County, Maryland, completed a business graduate survey in August, 1973. The purpose of her study was to find out whether their high school business program adequately prepared the students for their first job. Both graduates and some of their employers were surveyed.

Seventy-five percent of the graduates indicated they needed no additional training in order to secure a job. Typewriting, shorthand, and introduction to business were selected as the three most important courses offered.

The employers' questionnaires showed the following results:

Business people stated the three most important qualities that are looked for in such potential jobs as receptionist, secretary, typist, stenographer . . . were dependability, accuracy, and ability to follow directions.

Business people felt that the major weaknesses of graduates were spelling, work habits, business vocabulary, composing correspondence, inability to follow directions, lack of self-confidence, and proper dress for the office.[11]

Lawrence W. Erickson conducted a study "to identify and analyze those job components which could be considered basic to most beginning and intermediate level office work."[12]

Erickson listed ten basic components of beginning to intermediate level office work as being identified in his survey. The component most frequently mentioned was communicating with others (interpersonal relations) (90% of the jobs.) This included receiving and giving information and/or evaluating information, both written and oral.

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[11]Mavis Boone, "Business Graduate Survey Provides a Basis for Curriculum Analysis and Improvement," The Balance Sheet, LVII (February, 1976), 197.

[12]Lawrence W. Erickson, "Basic Components of Office Work—An Analysis of 300 Office Jobs," Monograph 123 (Cincinnati: South-Western Publishing Co., 1971), p. 1.

The eighth component mentioned was taking dictation (10% of the jobs). Thirty of the 300 workers reported this component of office work to be important. An average dictation speed of 90--100 words a minute was reported to be adequate. Stressed were the importance of accuracy .and initiative.

In his conclusions Erickson had this to say:

It would seem that certain basic courses as now offered in the business education curriculum such as typewriting, book-keeping, general business, and shorthand should continue to be offered. . . . greater emphasis needs to be given in all business education courses to development of Communicating with Others (Interpersonal Relations) skills. This can be done if opportunities are provided for students to work cooperatively in the classroom situation, if they are given more responsibility for the evaluation of their own and other students' work, and if they are placed in situations where they have to engage in problem-solving activities.[13]

Although there are different opinions as to the value of acquiring shorthand skills and the degree of skill needed, there seems to be a consensus of opinion on the fact that the nature and requirements of jobs are constantly changing. The changing job requirements cause educators to need to identify the changes, to evaluate their programs, and to make any changes necessary to meet the needs of their students and their community.

In speaking of the changing business needs and the responsibility of educators, Norman Ganser has this to say:

An effective office training program is continually changing to meet the needs of both the students and the community. Training students to compete in today's tight job market is quite different from training students five years ago. As a result of our high unemployment rate, the business educator must review the office training curriculum and reassess priorities.[14]

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[13]Erickson, p. 23.

[14]Norman J. Ganser, "The Tight Job Market Curriculum: Skills and Strategy," The Balance Sheet, LVII (March, 1976), 252.

Edward Brower also believes in the need for evaluative efforts. He states:

> In order that all business education students may possess vocationally acceptable office competencies and, thus, have equal access to office employment there must be constant evaluative efforts on the part of business educators to analyze existing business education programs and to determine if these programs are responsive to the needs of office employers.[15]

While it is important that all educators keep abreast of current trends, it is often easier to do this on a wide geographical or national basis rather than on the local level. There are numerous magazine articles and studies relevant to many different regions of the country. However, there is a need for information about local needs. Popham and others state that "each business teacher must be aware of employment trends . . . both nationally and for the specific localities in which graduates may seek employment."[16] These authors see local business needs as the basis for planning new educational programs and revising old ones.

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[15]Edward B. Brower, "Office Employment Expectations of Business Students," The Delta Pi Epsilon Journal, XIV (November, 1971), 1.

[16]Estelle L. Popham, Adele F. Schrag, and Wanda Blockhus, A Teaching-Learning System for Business Education (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1975), p. 45.

Chapter 3

PROCEDURES

A survey was made of sixty-two Suffolk, Virginia, businesses. These businesses were selected, with the help of high school business teachers, from a list supplied by the Suffolk Chamber of Commerce and from the yellow pages of the telephone directory. Every effort was made to select firms which would represent the various types of businesses in the area. Both large and small businesses were included.

A two-page questionnaire was used to gather the data. (See Appendix B.) Questions were included which seemed relevant and necessary in order to determine hiring practices for beginning stenographers.

Before mailing, the questionnaire was given to one of the firms included in the survey. A representative of the firm reviewed the questionnaire and commented on any questions that were difficult to answer. Minor changes were made so that relevant information could be obtained with ease.

The revised questionnaire was mailed with a cover letter on May 24, 1976. As a follow-up procedure, telephone calls were made on June 11 to firms who had not responded to the questionnaire. July 6, 1976 was set as the cut-off date to accept returned questionnaires. Of the sixty-two questionnaires mailed, forty were returned (64.5%). Out of the forty questionnaires returned, four were not usable. These four firms stated that they did not use stenographic personnel and were, therefore, unable to complete the questionnaire.

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The thirty-six usable questionnaires were classified according to firms who hired only experienced stenographers and to firms who would hire stenographers without experience. Separate and combined analyses were made of these two categories. As the firm who helped with the pilot questionnaire filled out a revised questionnaire, these results were included in the analyses.

Chapter 4

RESULTS

Number of Office Employees

The number of office workers in the firms surveyed varied from one to one hundred employees. The firm reporting 423 office employees included employees in other firms in the area. Over one-half of the firms surveyed (55.6%) employed four or fewer office employees. (See Table I.)

TABLE I

SIZE OF FIRMS--OFFICE EMPLOYEES*

Number of Office Workers	No Experience Required	Experience Required	Total
1	3	1	4
2	4	1	5
3	6	1	7
4	2	2	4
6	3	1	4
7	0	2	2
11	1	0	1
12	1	0	1
14	2	1	3
15	0	1	1
40	1	0	1
85	1	0	1
100	1	0	1
423**	1	0	1
Totals	26	10	36

*Stenographers and general clerical

**Figure includes employees in other offices in the area

Of the firms responding to the survey, only ten firms (27.8%) said they required their stenographic employees to have previous experience. Twenty-six firms (72.2%) indicated they would hire stenographers without previous experience. However some of the firms that said they would hire without experience commented that they would prefer new employees to have some experience.

Educational Training Preference

The results to the question which asked employers to indicate their preference in hiring beginning stenographers with different educational backgrounds show that the high school graduate is given first choice by 7 (19.4%) of the businesses, second choice by 10 (27.8%), and third choice by 7 (19.4%) businesses.

The questionnaire did not differentiate between the graduates of a business school and the graduates of a business program of a community college or technical school, but included all these graduate under the choice of "business school graduate."

The preferences given by employers to this group classified under business school graduates are: first choice 19 (52.8%) businesses and second choice 5 (13.9%) businesses. This indicates that over one-half of the businesses surveyed would prefer to hire a business-school graduate.

The college graduate is favored as first choice by only 2 (5.6%) businesses, second choice by 6 (16.7%) businesses, and third choice by 5 (13.9%) businesses. One respondent commented that college graduates usually want better jobs than those available as beginning stenographic workers.

Twenty-two percent of the businesses had no preference as to the type of educational training of their entry-level stenographers. Table II shows the breakdown of these figures.

TABLE II

EDUCATIONAL TRAINING PREFERENCE

(36 Responses)

Preference	Choice					
	1st		2nd		3rd	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Recent High School Graduate	7	19.4	10	27.8	7	19.4
Business School Graduate	19	52.8	5	13.9	0	0
College Graduate	2	5.6	6	16.7	5	13.9
No Preference	8	22.2				

Table III, on the following page, shows the training preference of employers in firms which require no prior work experience while Table IV indicates the preference of employers in firms requiring work experience. The trend is basically the same as the preference trend shown in Table II of all reporting firms. First choice is given to the business school graduate by both groups of employers. However out of the firms requiring work experience, 7 (70%) businesses selected the business school graduate as their first choice. Of the firms requiring no experience, slightly less than one-half of the businesses (46.2%) selected the business school graduate as first choice. The reason for

the slightly lower first-choice preference of business school graduates was that 22.2 percent of the firms requiring no experience indicated no preference as to the educational training of beginning stenographers.

TABLE III

EDUCATIONAL TRAINING PREFERENCE

(26 Firms Requiring No Experience)

Preference	Choice					
	1st		2nd		3rd	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Recent High School Graduate	6	23.1	7	26.9	4	15.4
Business School Graduate	12	46.2	4	15.4	0	0
College Graduate	1	3.8	4	15.4	4	15.4
No Preference	7	26.9				

TABLE IV

EDUCATIONAL TRAINING PREFERENCE

(10 Firms Requiring Experience)

Preference	Choice					
	1st		2nd		3rd	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Recent High School Graduate	1	10.0	3	30.0	3	30.0
Business School Graduate	7	70.0	1	10.0	0	0
College Graduate	1	10.0	2	20.0	1	10.0
No Preference	1	10.0				

Testing

In the area of testing, 19 (52.8%) firms said that they did not give employment tests. The type of tests given by the 17 (47.2%) firms who reported testing is shown in Table V. The typewriting speed test and the shorthand dictation test were the most frequently used tests with 70.6 percent of the firms using them.

When indicating the skill required on the typewriting speed test, the firm requirements ranged from 45 - 75 words a minute with 50 wam as the most frequently given requirement. The range of the shorthand dictation speed requirement was from 80 - 140 words a minute with 80 wam as the requirement most frequently indicated. Few comments were made as to the skill required on the typewriting production and shorthand transcription tests. However, it was stressed that accuracy was important.

TABLE V

EMPLOYMENT TESTS

Test Given	No Experience Required (26 Respondents)		Experience Required (10 Respondents)	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Typewriting, Speed	9	34.6	3	30.0
Typewriting, Production	6	23.1	3	30.0
Shorthand, Dictation	10	38.5	2	20.0
Shorthand, Transcription	4	15.4	1	10.0
Other*	3	11.5	1	10.0

*Other tests listed:
    Math, Spelling, Clerical

Dictation Methods

On the question of dictation methods, employers ranked in order or preference the dictation methods they preferred to use in their companies. The most preferred dictation method reported was a stenographer who could take dictation using a shorthand symbol method. Twenty firms (55.6%) selected this method as their first choice. Some firms commented that all stenographers in their employ must be able to take dictation using a symbol method. Other firms ranked equally as their first choice a stenographer who could take dictation using a symbol method and a stenographer who could transcribe from a dictating machine indicating that at times both methods were used in their companies. Table VI shows these responses.

TABLE VI

PREFERRED DICTATION METHODS

(36 Respondents)

Dictation Method	Choice					
	1st		2nd		3rd	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
A stenographer who can take dictation using a shorthand symbol method.	20	55.6	5	13.9	3	8.3
A stenographer who can transcribe from a dictating machine.	6	16.7	4	11.1	4	11.1
A stenographer who can arrange handwritten material.	9	25.0	9	25.0	3	8.3

It is interesting to note in Table VI that the stenographer who can arrange hand-written material was the second most popular method and was the first choice of 9 (25%) firms.

Table VII shows the figures on the preferred dictation methods of the firms who require no previous experience. The same trend as is reported in Table VI continues.

TABLE VII

PREFERRED DICTATION METHODS

(26 Firms Requiring No Experience)

Dictation Method	Choice					
	1st		2nd		3rd	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
A stenographer who can take dictation using a shorthand symbol method.	15	57.7	3	11.5	1	3.8
A stenographer who can transcribe from a dictating machine.	3	11.5	2	8.5	4	15.0
A stenographer who can arrange hand-written material.	7	26.9	6	23.0	1	3.8

The dictation preferences of the firms requiring experience is shown on the following page in Table VIII. Although the first-choice preference for a stenographer who takes dictation using a symbol method is chosen by 50 percent of the firms, the second most frequently chosen method is not one who arranges hand-written material, but one who transcribes from a dictating machine.

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TABLE VIII

PREFERRED DICTATION METHODS

(10 Firms Requiring Experience)

Dictation Method	Choice					
	1st		2nd		3rd	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
A stenographer who can take dictation using a shorthand symbol method.	5	50.0	2	20.0	2	20.0
A stenographer who can transcribe from a dicta-ting machine.	3	30.0	2	20.0	0	0
A stenographer who can ar-range hand-written material.	2	20.0	3	30.0	2	20.0

Office Machines

Although some of the machines listed in this section may be used more by other types of office employees than by stenographers, it was felt that with the many small offices in existence, some employees would have to perform clerical as well as stenographic tasks. Employers were asked to check the level of machine skill needed by beginning employees. Their choices were mastery, acquaintance, or training not needed. Table IX, on the following page, shows the results of all responding firms. The figures indicate that more firms felt that beginning workers should have a mastery of the ten-key adding machine (19.4%) than any other machine. In the acquaintance level, the first-place choice was the calculator with 66.7 percent of the firms selecting it. The spirit duplicator was

indicated by 63.9 percent of the firms as the machine on which training

was not needed.

TABLE IX

OFFICE MACHINE SKILL REQUIREMENTS

(36 Respondents)

Machines	Mastery		Acquaintance		Training Not Needed	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Ten-key adding machine	7	19.4	23	63.9	4	11.1
Full-key adding machine	3	8.3	18	50.0	12	33.3
Calculator	6	16.7	24	66.7	6	16.7
Spirit Duplicator	0	0	4	11.1	23	63.9
Mimeograph Duplicator	1	2.8	6	16.7	19	52.8
Offset Duplicator	0	0	4	11.7	21	58.3
Word Processing Equip. (Mag. cards or tapes)	2	5.6	0	0	21	58.3
Other*	1	2.8	5	13.9	0	0

*Other machines listed:
    Mastery--typewriter; Acquaintance--copier, computer terminal

Of the firms requiring no experience, two machines were overwhelm-
ingly selected as machines on which training is not needed--the spirit
duplicator (61.5%) and word processing equipment (61.5%). Only 19.2
percent of these firms felt that a beginning worker should have a mastery
of the ten-key adding machine. On the acquaintance level, the main
selections were the calculator (73.1%), the ten-key adding machine
(61.5%), and the full-key adding machine (53.8%). See Table X on the
following page.

TABLE X

OFFICE MACHINE SKILL REQUIREMENTS

(26 Firms Requiring No Experience)

Machines	Mastery		Acquaintance		Training Not Needed	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Ten-key adding machine	5	19.1	16	61.5	3	11.5
Full-key adding machine	2	7.7	14	53.8	7	26.9
Calculator	4	15.4	19	73.1	3	11.5
Spirit Duplicator	0	0	3	11.5	16	61.5
Mimeograph Duplicator	0	0	5	19.2	13	50.0
Offset Duplicator	0	0	3	11.5	14	53.8
Word Processing Equip. (Mag. cards of tapes)	1	3.8	0	0	16	61.5
Others*	1	3.8	3	11.5	0	0

*Other machines listed:
    Mastery--typewriter; Acquaintance--copier, computer terminal

Table XI, on the following page, gives the machine skills desired by the firms who require experience. The trend for the mastery and acquaintance level expectations are similiar to what has already been reported in the two previous tables. In the training not needed section, 70 percent of these firms do not require training on the spirit duplicator and the offset duplicator. These machines are closely followed by the mimeograph duplicator with 60 percent of the firms indicating that training is not needed, and by word processing equipment with 50 percent of the firms so indicating.

TABLE XI

OFFICE MACHINE SKILL REQUIREMENTS

(10 Firms Requiring Experience)

Machines	Mastery		Acquaintance		Training Not Needed	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Ten-key adding machine	2	20.0	7	70.0	1	10.0
Full-key adding machine	1	10.0	4	40.0	5	50.0
Calculator	2	20.0	5	50.0	3	30.0
Spirit Duplicator	0	0	1	10.0	7	70.0
Mimeograph Duplicator	1	10.0	1	10.0	6	60.0
Offset Duplicator	0	0	1	10.0	7	70.0
Word Processing Equip. (Mag. cards or tapes)	1	10.0	0	0	5	50.0
Other*	0	0	2	20.0	0	0

*Other machines listed:
    Acquaintance--copier

Personal Qualities

Table XII, on the following page, shows that both those firms
who require experience and those who do not consider honesty and depend-
ability as the most important personal traits for beginning stenographers
to possess. As is evident from the high rating of each of the personal
qualities listed, all are considered important. The least important
trait indicated by those firms who do not require experience was consci-
entiousness with 38.5 percent vote. Firms requiring experience selected
three traits, initiative, punctuality, and attendance (40%) as the least
important of the personal traits listed.

On several questionnaires, all of the qualities were checked as important. Other respondents had written that they considered all of the personal qualities as of equal importance.

TABLE XII

PERSONAL QUALITIES

Personal Qualities	No Experience Required (26 Respondents			Experience Required (10 Respondents)		
	Number	Percent	Rank	Number	Percent	Rank
Honesty	23	88.5	1	10	100.0	1
Dependability	23	88.5	1	9	90.0	2
Accuracy	19	73.1	3	9	90.0	2
Attitude	19	73.1	3	6	60.0	6
Cooperativeness	18	69.2	5	6	60.0	6
Neatness	14	53.8	7	7	70.0	4
Initiative	14	53.8	7	4	40.0	13
Attendance	14	53.8	7	4	40.0	13
Appearance	13	50.0	10	6	60.0	6
Adaptability	13	50.0	10	5	50.0	9
Personality	13	50.0	10	5	50.0	9
Punctuality	13	50.0	10	4	40.0	13
Loyalty	12	46.2	13	5	50.0	9
Conscientiousness	10	38.5	14	5	50.0	9

Improvement Areas

The last two sections of the questionnaire dealt with the weaknesses of beginning stenographic workers. Employers were asked to check whether their beginning workers were adequately prepared in certain skill areas or whether improvement was needed. The same response was asked for concerning personal characteristics.

Many firms were satisfied with the skills of their beginning employees and checked that no improvement was needed. These figures are listed in parentheses in Table XIII. Both those firms who require experience and those who do not agree that those areas needing the most .improvement are spelling, punctuation, and grammar.

TABLE XIII

SKILLS NEEDING IMPROVEMENT

Skills	No Experience Required (26 Respondents)			Experience Required (10 Respondents)		
	Number	Percent	Rank	Number	Percent	Rank
Spelling	16 (8)*	61.5	1	7 (2)	70.0	1
Grammar	15 (7)	57.7	2	6 (3)	60.0	2.5
Punctuation	12 (9)	46.2	3	6 (3)	60.0	2.5
Shorthand Speed	11(12)	42.3	4	2 (4)	20.0	5.5
Office Procedures	8(11)	30.8	5	2 (4)	20.0	5.5
Familiarity with Business and Office Forms	7(12)	26.9	6	1 (6)	10.0	7
Efficiency and Accuracy in Following Instructions	6(12)	23.1	7	3 (5)	30.0	4
Other**	3	11.5	8	0	0	8

*Parentheses denotes no improvement needed

**Other skills listed needing improvement:
    Independent thinking, Telephone courtesy, Vocabulary

The employers' responses on personal characteristics needing improvement are shown in Table XIV on the following page. Human relations and attitude were checked most frequently by both the firms who require experience and those who do not as the characteristics which

need the most improvement. The figures in parentheses indicate that many firms felt the personal characteristics of their beginning stenographic employees were quite adequate.

TABLE XIV

PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS NEEDING IMPROVEMENT

Personal Characteristics	No Experience Required (26 Respondents)			Experience Required (10 Respondents)		
	Number	Percent	Rank	Number	Percent	Rank
Human Relations	11 (6)*	42.3	1	3 (3)	30.0	1.5
Attitude	10 (8)	38.5	2	3 (5)	30.0	1.5
Punctuality	8 (7)	30.8	3	2 (5)	20.0	3.5
Attendance	3(11)	11.5	4	2 (5)	20.0	3.5
Behavior	2(11)	7.7	6	1 (5)	10.0	5.5
Manners	2(22)	7.7	6	1 (5)	10.0	5.5
Other**	2	7.7	6			

*Parentheses denotes no improvement needed

**Other characteristics listed needing improvement:
    Appearance, Personable

Chapter 5

CONCLUSIONS

In summarizing the results of this survey, it is clearly indicated that a majority of the businesses contacted do hire inexperienced stenographers. This, along with the findings of others educators that short-hand skills will be necessary in the future, would indicate a continual need for the training of high school shorthand students.

In order to meet the needs of those employers who do require work experience before hiring and those who would prefer workers with experience, it is recommended that business teachers and guidance counselors continue to urge students to participate in the cooperative work programs available in our schools.

Although high school graduates are needed as stenographers, if an employer is given a choice, his first choice would be to hire a stenographer with business-school training. This fact has been noted by other researchers in different parts of the country.

In the Suffolk area, less than one-half of the firms (47.2%) reported administering employment tests. This is a lower figure than has been found in other regions. Typewriting speed tests and shorthand dictation tests were the most frequently given tests. Most firms indicated that they required 80 words a minute in shorthand and 50 words a minute in typewriting.

Despite the use of other dictation methods, shorthand is the method most frequently used today. However, several firms indicated that shorthand and dictating machines were equally important in their companies. A stenographer who could arrange hand-written notes was the second most popular method in use. Because of these facts, it is advisable that a stenographer be prepared to use dictating machines and to transcribe from longhand material.

While the majority of firms felt that beginning employees should have an acquaintance skill on most of the machines listed, the majority also indicated that training was not needed on the spirit duplicator, mimeograph duplicator, offset duplicator, and word processing equipment. In Suffolk, the use of word processing equipment is not as great as is found in other areas of the country.

Because of the mobility of our population and the employment opportunities within commuting distance of Suffolk, it is recommended that basic instruction still be provided on the machines for which Suffolk firms indicated no training was needed.

Although Suffolk employers consider many personal qualities important in beginning employees, they place the greatest value on honesty and dependability.

On the average, employers in the Suffolk area were satisfied with the skills and personal qualities of their beginning employees. However employers in this survey, as well as other surveys, indicated that improvement is needed most in spelling, grammar, and punctuation. This need has long existed, and educators must face up to the challenge to provide instruction in this vital area.

Human relations and attitude are other areas in which employers see some need for improvement. While it may be more difficult to teach such a thing as attitude, the need is definitely there.

As a result of this survey, the following recommendations are being made:

1. The business departments of the Suffolk City Schools should evaluate their stenographic programs to determine their strengths and weaknesses.

2. The business teachers should attempt to develop quality rather than quantity of speed in the students' shorthand and typing skills.

3. Training should be provided for students in setting up long-hand and rough-draft material.

4. Evaluate the stenographic courses to make sure that provisions are made for developing such qualities as attitudes and human relations.

5. Plan for a mini course in business communication which will develop acceptable English skills stressing punctuation, grammar, and spelling.

6. Cooperate with English Departments to develop coordinating units of study in basic English skills.

7. Teach office machines on an acquaintance level. Make the students aware of what skills employers expect of them in the Suffolk area and in other areas.

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APPENDIX A

107 Northbrooke Avenue
Suffolk, Virginia 23434
May, 1976

To: Selected Suffolk Businesses

·Attention Director of Personnel

Dear Sir:

As a graduate student of Old Dominion University, I am conducting
a survey of Suffolk firms to determine what qualifications they
would like their beginning stenographic employees to have. The
results of this study will be used by the Suffolk City Schools to
evaluate their business programs and to make any possible changes
to better provide you with the type of future employees you want
and need.

Will you please take a few minutes of your time to complete the
enclosed questionnaire. A self-addressed, stamped envelope is
enclosed for your convenience in replying. Please feel free to
make any additional comments you wish. Thank you for your
assistance.

Sincerely yours,

Margaret W. Willett

Enclosures

APPENDIX B

1. Name of Firm_____
   Address_____
   Total No. of Employees_____ No. of Office Employees_____

2. Does your firm require prospective stenographic employees to have previous experience? ____yes ____ no

3. How do you rate your company's preference for hiring beginning stenographic employees as far as training is concerned? (Use 1 for first choice, 2 for second choice, etc.)

   ____ No preference
   <u>Preference</u>
   ____ Recent high school graduate
   ____ Business school graduate
   ____ College graduate

4. Does your firm administer employment tests? ____yes ____no

5. If your firm administers employment tests, please check the types of tests given and briefly describe the degree of skill required.

   <u>Test Given</u>   <u>Skill Required</u>
   ____ a. Typewriting, Speed
   ____ b. Typewriting, Production
   ____ c. Shorthand, Dictation
   ____ d. Shorthand, Transcription
   ____ e. Other (Specify)

6. Of the following methods, please indicate the ones most frequently used by your company. (Use 1 for first choice, 2 for second choice, etc.)

   ____ a stenographer who can take dictation using a shorthand symbol method
   ____ a stenographer who can transcribe from a dictating machine
   ____ a stenographer who can arrange hand-written material
   ____ other (specify)

7. Office Machines. Please indicate by checking the appropriate block, the machine skill expected of beginning stenographic employees.
   <u>Mastery</u> - ability to perform the skill rapidly and accurately.
   <u>Acquaintance</u> - ability to use the machine for simple operations only.
   <u>Training Not Needed</u> - machine not used.

	Mastery	Acquaintance	Training Not Needed
Ten-key adding machine			
Full-key adding machine			
Calculator			
Spirit Duplicator			
Mimeograph Duplicator			
Offset Duplicator			
Word Processing Equipment (magnetic cards or tapes)			
Other (Specify)			

8. **Personal Qualities.** Please check the most important personal characteristics that you look for in beginning stenographic workers.

____Honesty	____Neatness	____Appearance
____Loyalty	____Adaptability	____Punctuality
____Dependability	____Conscientiousness	____Attendance
____Cooperativeness	____Attitude	____Accuracy
____Initiative	____Personality	____Other (Specify)

9. **Weaknesses.** Of the following skills, check whether you feel beginning stenographic workers are adequately prepared or if improvement is needed.

	Adequate	Needs Improvement
Spelling	____	____
Grammar	____	____
Punctuation	____	____
Shorthand Speed	____	____
Office Procedures	____	____
Familiarity with Business and Office Forms	____	____
Efficiency and Accuracy in Following Instructions	____	____
Other (Specify)	____	____

10. **Weaknesses.** Of the following personal characteristics, check those areas which you feel beginning stenographers need improvement.

	Adequate	Needs Improvement
Attitude	____	____
Behavior	____	____
Attendance	____	____
Punctuality	____	____
Manners	____	____
Human Relations	____	____
Other (Specify)	____	____