In 2000, Ericsson invited researchers to attempt to capture the reproducibly superior performance of expert interpreters in order to try to identify how mechanisms that mediate expert interpreting performance can be acquired through training. Almost 20 years later, it seems the exact mechanisms mastered by expert interpreters are yet to be clearly identified.

So, maybe the best we can do is train interpreting students to mitigate and adapt (Setton & Dawrant, 2016) or, in other words, help students develop into adaptive experts prepared to comprehend how procedures work; modify procedures flexibly; and invent new procedures when none are effective. (Hatano and Inagaki, 1986)

The importance of feedback
Practice alone will lead most individuals to plateau early in their journey towards expertise and no practice will lead to improvement without feedback. (Ericsson, 2000)

Who is available to help interpreters on the road to expertise?
Trainers, but only during the interpreter training programme.
Peers, during training and, if disciplined enough, afterwards in independent practice groups.
The interpreter him/herself, if properly trained to self-assess to avoid plateauing.

The role of metacognition in the development of adaptive expertise
Metacognition, or the awareness and understanding of one’s own cognitive processes, maximizes learning. (Moser-Mercer, 2008). Transcriptions of both originals and interpreting performances serve as a basis for a wealth of metacognitive exercises which can be used in class by trainers; inside and outside class by peers and as a lifelong self-assessment tool by interpreters wishing to maintain their high level of adaptive expertise throughout their careers.

How can transcriptions help trainers?
• Transcriptions are revealing of one’s cognitive processes;
• Reality check leads to readiness to accept feedback;
• Objective assessment helps identify the focus of further practice.

How can transcriptions help students?
• Paired-up transcriptions of original and interpretation divided into units of meaning allow for accurate assessment of syntax, vocabulary and accuracy.
• Transcriptions are revealing of one’s cognitive processes;
• Reality check leads to readiness to accept feedback;
• Objective assessment helps identify the focus of further practice.

The consequences of longer/shorter EVS can be analysed, if the transcriptions of original and interpretation are time-stamped.

The comparison of two interpretations of the same original elicits a broader range of interpreting solutions. (Hatano and Inagaki, 1986)

How to transcribe?
MS Word and Google docs dictation tools, dictation.io and other online voice-recognition tools; various apps.

Conclusion
Transcriptions are a powerful metacognitive tool students can use to work smarter -- and not only harder -- towards developing effective interpreting solutions that will eventually help them build adaptive expertise. Practitioners can also benefit from transcriptions to self-assess and ensure their performances are as consistent as possible. An option worth exploring is asking candidates to transcribe their own renditions at exams. Aside from prosodic features, the resulting transcriptions can serve as a basis for undisputably accurate assessments of their performances.

References: