

TIPS FOR TEACHING

National Handwriting Association 
Promoting good practice

Key-boarding

Touch-typing and Effective Use of Keyboards in Class

Digital communication is so important in 21C that the effective use of a keyboard is an essential educational tool for all children. For those with SEND or handwriting difficulties typing can provide an alternative to handwriting. Evidence suggests that to be able to type effectively all children should receive explicit keyboard instruction from the start.

The benefits of keyboarding:

- Provides consistency
- Produces legible script
- May be easier to learn than handwriting for those with handwriting difficulties
- Is a necessary skill for any student.

The advantages of touch-typing over other methods of keyboarding:

- Touch-typing uses all the fingers, whilst looking at the screen or speaker (creative), or visual source (copying). Touch-typists never look at the keyboard.
- Reduces burden on working memory allowing brain to process higher-order writing skills (such as composing).
- Reduces likelihood of physical discomfort (such as head or neck aches due to changing position).
- Produces faster speeds than other typing methods.
- Spotting spelling errors is easier as the typist looks at the screen.

When is the best time to learn?

Below 8 years old	The child is likely to be physically and emotionally immature
8 - 9 years old	Still a little early but useful for those with severe handwriting problems or other SEND issues.
10 - 11 years old	The best time from a motor learning point of view. It also prepares a child for secondary school when keyboards are used more frequently and where bad habits could hinder the development of speed.

A Key Question:

Is it necessary to use a commercially produced programme?

Answer:

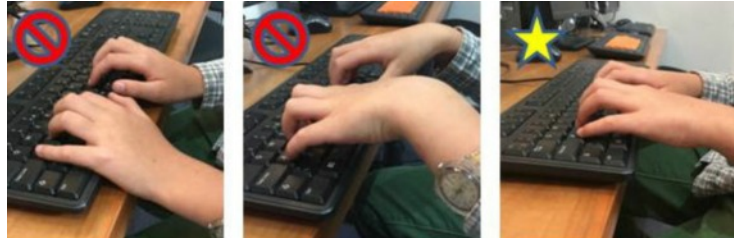
Not if certain key principles are observed (see overleaf)



It is important to sit correctly to reduce the risk of Repetitive Strain Injury (RSI)

Symptoms include: pain, aching, cramp or tenderness, stiffness, tingling, numbness, weakness in upper body (forearm, elbow, wrist, hands, neck and shoulders)

Recommended Body and Finger Position for Typing



Fingers, hand, wrist and arm should all be in a line. Curl the fingers onto the keyboard.

- Sit up straight with the lower back supported and the feet flat on the floor.
- Sit with shoulders relaxed and upper arms hanging straight down.
- Ensure elbows don't stick out and are slightly higher than the wrists.

Tip



Sit at the keyboard with the letter B opposite your tummy button.

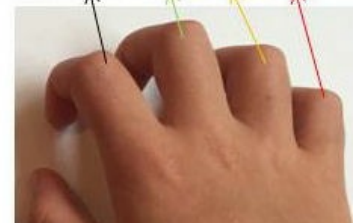
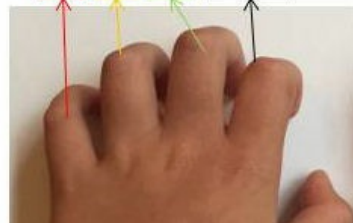
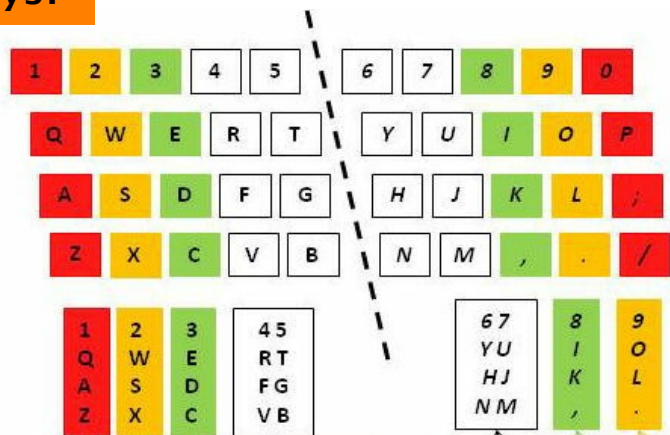
Which Fingers? Which Keys?

To touch-type effectively the learner needs to be able to locate the keys without looking at them.

Tip



F and **J** have a raised mark so the typist can feel where the index fingers rest.



Use either thumb for the space bar

Tip



Hide the alphabet and common punctuation keys by:

- blank stickers
- a cover over the whole keyboard
- Tippexing out the keys

How to learn to touch-type:

left hand right hand

1. Locate the home keys (**asdf** - **jkl;**). Each finger has its own 'home' e.g. the left index finger rests on **f** and moves across to **g**, up to **r** & **t**, higher up to **4** & **5**, and down to **v** & **b**. Only the index fingers type two keys in each row.
2. Practise using the keys in your chosen order (see below) but first learn the vowels in each group.
3. Type new keys 7 times saying the letters out loud. Bring your finger back to its home key after each set e.g. 'eee home eee home eee etc.
4. Build up to typing words e.g. red red red red red red. Always return to the home key after each word.
5. Repeat already-learned keys to consolidate e.g. reg red fed led
6. Progress to new letters only when fully secure with those already learned.
7. Practise 10 -15 minutes every day for the first 6 weeks.
8. Once the student is familiar with the alphabet, progress to copying sentences, then paragraphs and longer passages.

Order of learning: left hand right hand:

By Row:

Home Row	a s d f g	h j k l ;
Top Row	q w e r t	y u i o p
Bottom Row	z x c v b	n m , . /
Very Top Row	1 2 3 4 5	6 7 8 9 0 - =

Some prefer to use a phonics order:

Set 1	s a t p
Set 2	i n m d
Set 3	g o c k
Set 4	ck e u r
Set 5	h b f ff l ll ss
Set 6	j v w x
Set 7	y z zz qu

Tip



A multi-sensory approach can help:

VISUAL



AUDITORY



KINAESTHETIC



Tip

Invent your own mnemonics e.g.



Home row	ASDFGH - A dults S ay D on't F orget G ood H ands
Middle row	RT - R each up for R and T iptoe across for T
Bottom row	MN - N is nearer the G ood H ands; M is miles away

This method takes time to teach and practice is essential to consolidate the skill. Advantages:

- Promotes accuracy (no requirement for speed too early)
- Builds typing stamina (typing sentences, paragraphs and pages)
- Inexpensive!

A few suggestions:

Always monitor learners carefully – unsupervised children may develop bad habits.

Commercially-available software can be used to supplement as long as:

- Children with SEND use real words straight away. (*sequences such as asasdf are confusing*)
- Typing games are only used after the keyboard has been securely learned.
- The speeds set for games are not too high for the student's ability. (*The temptation to look at the fingers in order to win the game is too great!*).
- The student does not only use typing games for practice as this does not increase typing stamina and may reduce the ability to type text at speed over a long period of time. See *Speed Building* overleaf).

Tip



Encourage and reward progress with stars/stickers or whatever is appropriate for the individual.

Handy tips for the student

- Take your whole hand off for **Enter** and **Delete** buttons and return to home row to promote speed.
- Learn to use the **Full Stop** and **Shifts** keys early so you can type full sentences:
Full stop – lift the little finger out of the way or pull the whole hand down to the bottom row.
Shift keys – Instead of the **Caps Lock** use the opposite **Shift** to the letter to be written as a capital.
- Learn these common symbols once you have learned the alphabet: ! “ ; : () ‘ / @ £
(Note: The apostrophe and speech marks are swapped on Mac and PCs.)
- Type real words and realistic sentences.

Speed building

- Practise copy (not creative) type.
- Warm up with alphabet/keyboard drills e.g. zaq1 xsw2 cde3 vfr4 bgt5 nhy6 mju7 ,ki8 etc.
- Practise pangrams that use all letters of the alphabet: e.g. “The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog”.
- Rhythm – use a metronome and increase its speed each day.
- Type from a foreign language – to help focus and build rhythm.
- Do speed games and typing stamina exercises: 1 minute races and 10 minute typing sessions.

Tip



Every time you touch the mouse or mouse pad you slow down: use these keyboard short cuts

- Save/Save As
- Print (doc. and pages)
- Undo last action
- Bold/Italics/Underline
- Spell check and Thesaurus
- Jump: word by word/paragraph/page
- Margins: Left/Right/Centre/Fully Adjust
- Highlight: word/line/paragraph/document
- Document: Beginning/End
- Line: Beginning/End

[Google ‘Key-board Shortcuts + (Mac/Windows 7’ etc.)’ to find command.]

Tip



Practise little and often

Three vital questions:

Q How do you know you are ready to use a keyboard for school work?

A *When you can copy type for 5 minutes, at 30 wpm, with 90% accuracy on every row (including basic punctuation); or copy type twice as fast as your creative writing speed.*

Q How long does it take to learn? – Do you have enough time to build speed?

A *Depends on age/ability (cognitive and physical). On average, learning the keyboard takes about 8 hours and building speed needs an additional half a term. More time may be needed for those with SEND.*

Q What about using a laptop in class?

A The following need consideration:

- *security (of both data and device),*
- *where to print and charge,*
- *back-up of files,*

From an article by Amanda McLeod, www.amandamcleod.org