The Art of Keyboarding

Adjust seating and positioning

Effective seating and support can make a huge difference to comfort, speed and endurance when using a computer, as well as avoiding potential injury. Similarly, it is essential to have the computer screen, keyboard and mouse at the correct height and position.

Correct Keyboard Position

Ensure the keyboard is placed directly in front of the seated position. This prevents the need to twist the hips, shoulder and neck. Straight arms prevent nerves and muscles from being restricted.

Provide a minimum space in front of the keyboard to rest palms when not typing. This allows the muscles in the hands and arms to relax. A wrist rest may be appropriate but should not be rested upon whilst typing.

Ensure the user sits close to the desk and removes all items between them and the keyboard.

Don't automatically deploy the keyboard's rear feet – these are only required when the arm is positioned below desk height. In this case the use of a sloping board to angle the keyboard towards the user may be beneficial.

Keep elbows tucked in. If elbows are away from the body it causes a static load in the shoulders and upper arms, which can lead to aching in the upper back, shoulders and neck.

Adjust chair height so that when fingers are placed on the middle row of the keyboard the forearms and arms are horizontal with elbows positioned vertically under your shoulders and no angle at the wrist.

Developing Basic Two Handed Keyboarding Skills

It is important to differentiate between touch typing and keyboarding. These terms are used interchangeably but mean different things. Touch Typing is keeping your eyes on the text you are copying and finger placement on the home row keys. Keyboarding skills can include touch typing but for most children with disabilities, it means functional use and does not have to be as sophisticated and refined.

You can teach keyboard skills either in the context of any curriculum area or as discrete skills. It has been found that for Key Stage 1 and 2 pupils the optimum lesson time is about 25 minutes. Motivation drops away in longer lessons, while shorter periods may not allow learners to make enough progress.

Children need to be shown how to place both hands on the keyboard and to use all their fingers. This should be started from an early age in order to prevent bad habits that will hamper development later.

Children of course need to learn the location of the keys so that they can find them without thinking. However, true fluent typing will only happen once the children have reached a certain level of reading and spelling proficiency.

- Ensure that the children have regular opportunity to practice and at the early stages, ideally daily.

- Warm up fingers, hands and arms before using the keyboard.

- Move keyboard closer to the body if stretching to use the keyboard.

- Children should be taught keyboard familiarity - i.e. where the keys are. This can be done away from the computer with paper or plastic keyboard templates and bingo or quiz style games.

- Always encourage children to have both hands on the keyboard and use a soft touch while typing.

- Use the thumbs for the space bar.

- Rest arms while not typing but ensure pressure is not placed on the soft inner part of the wrist where you would normally take your pulse by the wrist rest or on the edge of the table.

- Keep your wrists straight and try not to bend them upwards when typing

- Use 'rest break software' to ensure adequate breaks throughout the day

- Vary the fingers you use if you not a touch typist. This spreads the load preventing excessive strain on one or two fingers. Use other fingers especially when noticing any discomfort occurring.

- Children should be using the right hand for pressing keys on the right-hand side of the keyboard and the left hand for keys on the left-hand side. If they keep both hands on the keyboard, then this comes more naturally.

- Use a soft touch while typing

- Use the shift key (not Caps Lock) and two hands for creating capital letters i.e. one finger from one hand (preferably me little finger) hold down one of the shift keys while a finger on the other hand presses the appropriate letter. Caps Lock should only be used for sustained typing in capitals.

- Avoid having documents between you and the keyboard. This encourage stretching of the wrists and arms
- Keep your keyboard parallel to the edge of the desk when using it.

- Begin teaching more formal typing from the end of Year 3 upwards and/or when reading and spelling levels are up to the challenge.

- Encourage the children to watch the screen more than their fingers as their skills increase.

Encourage support from home and try to make it as enjoyable as possible.

The one-handed typist

If you were using two-hands, the keyboard would centre straight out from the middle of the body. The keyboard for a one-handed typist should be slightly offset to the side.

As with traditional touch typing, one handed typing has a "home position" or "home keys". These are the group of keys from which all key strokes are made and to where the hand returns. With one handed typing the home keys are: F, G, H and J. The four Home Keys should be positioned just about straight out from the hip. The arm should not be stretching too far forward, left, or right. Position the keyboard so the F G H J keys on the keyboard are directly under the hand.

A very useful activity to guide a person who is effectively single handed through learning an efficient typing method can be found at:

https://www.doorwayonline.org.uk/typing/singlehanded/

On-Screen Keyboard. Some people have a physical condition that means they find using a tactile keyboard very difficult. Many of them, however, may be able to use a mouse or mouse equivalent. These people may find using an on-screen keyboard the best way to input information.

Software

A good typing program will allow the child to develop their skills with the keyboard quickly without losing motivation to use the computer. The first consideration is the needs of the individual. Are they likely to need engaging software title that feels more like a game, or would they respond well to a structured approach that put a greater emphasis on key skills?

A free online typing tutor is available from Doorwayonline

http://www.doorwayonline.org.uk/typing/texttype2/

Game based resources to practise touch typing skills.

Dance Mat is still very popular with children

Also try:

https://www.freetypinggame.net/

https://games.sense-lang.org/type4life/#

Other Websites for free typing games, lessons and tests include:

- o https://www.helpkidzlearn.com/ (Option of free or paid account)

- o https://www.typingtest.com/games.html

- o http://www.onlytypinggames.com/ (games only)

- o https://www.learninggamesforkids.com/

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