

Proven Techniques For Teaching QWERTY Keyboarding

by
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Introduction

Jill Hallows taught computer keyboarding in a K-8 computer lab atmosphere for several years and has implemented and tested a variety of keyboarding curriculums, computer application programs and teaching methods. This booklet is a compilation of techniques that she has found to be most effective and wishes to share with you.

Through her experience in teaching both basic ed and special ed students, Jill has found it to be incorrect for anyone to assume that LD students are likely to struggle with keyboarding as they do in many other learning areas. Because keyboarding is a psycho-motor skill, the playing field can become quite level with that of peers... even adults.

Learning to keyboard can be compared with learning to playing the piano or another instrument where the brain and fingers must work together. For people who memorize things quickly and have good finger dexterity, keyboarding can be particularly easy to learn. Speed can usually be significantly increased if students will just practice consistently. But as in all subjects, there are still some LD students with learning barriers severe enough to prevent them from even wanting to begin until they have some tangible assurance of tasting success.

In this booklet, you will find ways to help even an unmotivated student grasp a vision of how using the computer for keyboarding and word processing can improve both the speed and legibility of their written work. Hopefully, they will also be able to envision how it could affect their future employability.

For a detailed list of technology applications that assist students with Learning Disabilities, please visit the Washington State Special Education Center website: www.cwu.edu/setc and click on the sidebar links to the LD Tech, NO LIMIT! or TLD projects.

Jill's favorite program to use with students, and particularly learning disabled students, is *Ultra Key* by Bytes of Learning because of its ability to speak the text in program directions and activities. It also is easy to track lesson progress and keep records.

Contributing factors for helping students succeed in keyboarding are individually addressed in the following pages:

- 1) Position
- 2) Memorization
- 3) Motivation

Position

- **Seat:** Position the chair or bench the correct distance from the keyboard by sitting up straight with arms at sides and hands in lap. While in this natural and comfortable position, the student should lift the hands straight up and then measure how far the seat or keyboard should be moved to align fingers with the home keys with arms still in this natural position. (Benches work well with students because they generally don't slouch as they will do in a chair, but could be a bit dangerous to students who can't resist tipping them back.)
- **Hands and Wrists:** Hands should be placed over the home keys at a natural angle. The angle should be the same as if the person was standing or walking with hands at their sides. Hand position should be symmetrical with wrists flat and relaxed, preferably not resting on the keyboard frame or counter. Resting the wrists definitely restricts finger movement and reach. The "bump" key should be identified along with correct finger placement.
- **Legs:** Upper leg (thigh) position should be symmetrical (not crossed). Lower leg (from knees down) position doesn't seem to affect symmetry (crossing is okay).
- **Head and eyes:** Monitor should be positioned so eyes are looking straight ahead and neck straight, not bent too far forward or back.

Memorization - Touch Typing

Learning to touch type is necessary to develop speed beyond the speed of handwriting (about 10-20 words per minute), and requires memorization of the keyboard. Most keyboarding programs have a definite sequence for memorizing the keys, some work better than others for different individuals. Here are some tried and true ideas:

- Idea #1 **Find the "Bump" key** - Have students close their eyes and try to find the correct finger placement on the keyboard by locating and putting the correct fingers on the "bump" keys. (One key for each hand on the home row has a raised bump, or something similar, on the surface, akin to a Braille letter.)
- Idea #2 **Keyboard Copy** - Use a keyboard chart to explain the layout of the keyboard to students (finger placement in diagonal columns, reach, etc.) A photocopy of a keyboard works well to have students label keys in the diagonal columns and "color code" them using colored pencils. These could be sent home for practice as a homework assignment to include parents in the learning process, or could be laminated and taped to each student's desk. Tests may also be given by having students fill in blank keys on a keyboard photocopy.
- Idea #3 **Write on Fingers** – Use a fine-point marker to write the letters, numbers, or symbols that correspond with each finger. Practice spelling words or play a game with other words by pointing the correct finger that corresponds with each letter. (Warning: students will probably be silly at first about pointing the middle finger.)

- Idea #4 **Handprints** – Have students draw around their hands on a piece of paper and then write the corresponding key letters, numbers, or symbols on each finger. These make great “Typing Turkeys” at Thanksgiving time.
- Idea #5 **Cover the Hands** – Students will progress more readily with touch-typing if their hands are covered while they perform the keyboarding lessons. This can be done easily with a piece of printer paper taped onto the monitor so that it drapes over the hands. (If students complain that the paper distracts them, remind them that all good typists have to learn to block out distractions.) A more sophisticated cover can be made from cardboard, but students may peek under it. Covering the letters on the keys with sticky dots will work too, but frequent replacement may be required when students pick them off.

Idea #6 **Practice with Discarded Keyboards** – Cut off the cable and have keyboards available for students to use at their desks for practice.

Motivation

Activities:

- **Teacher Demo** – (Teacher must be able to touch type correctly with some speed.) Have students time you for one minute while you copy some written material by hand. Count the words and write down the number. Now, have students time you again for one minute while you type from the same written material. Again, count the number of words and compare to the first number. Students will likely grasp the concept of how keyboarding saves time and is more legible. If you’re lucky, they may even consider that it might be worth it for them to learn how to type! You could even issue a challenge that if any student in your class can type faster and as accurately as you can, you will give them a special prize.

You can also set a good example by occasionally sitting down to a computer along with your students, using the same keyboarding program as they do. They will see that you must also work at it to improve your typing skills. Keep trying to beat your previous score and post your high score as a milestone for students to beat.

- **“Help Wanted” ads** – Show students the demand for computer skills in the workplace by highlighting ads in newspapers which require computer skills and even keyboarding skills in particular. Show them how you use keyboarding in your job. Show them some of your handwritten, rough drafts vs. final, computer draft documents so they can compare.
- **Write vs. Type Comparison** – Have students do their own comparison by timing each other as explained above.
- **Music/Metronome** – By having students type while listening to music with a steady beat or typing to the beat of a metronome they can improve their keyboarding rhythm and continuity. Keeping a steady typing rhythm without pauses can be a real challenge for some students.

- **Help** – When a student is struggling, you might occasionally sit down at his/her computer and keyboard some of their writing for them. It can make them see how good it feels to receive help from a caring teacher, and gives them hope that if they keep trying, they may be able to type faster someday.

Incentives:

- **Set a Goal:** At the beginning of the year have each student set a reasonable goal, and keep a record of it where the student can see it often.
- **Watch Each Student:** Show interest in your students' progress by strolling around the room and watching each one of them for position, hand placement, and technique. It's much easier to make small corrections on a frequent basis than it is to undo a bad habit.
- **Keep a Record of Student Progress:** Monitor students' progress by keeping a record of lessons completed, along with speed and accuracy. Although some computerized keyboarding programs automatically keep track of lessons and scores, keeping a written record that can be reviewed at a glance will help both you and the student to instantly know how they are progressing. It can also serve as a back-up record in case of any technology disasters. In addition, you could do a timed test with a student periodically, and records of progress can be given to parents.
- **Testing** – One way to test a student is to hold a cover just above the keyboard so you can see their hands but they can't. (The student will be nervous.) Call out the letters of the alphabet and have the student touch the corresponding key. You can also have the student perform one of the keyboarding lessons while you evaluate their technique and make positive comments and suggestions for improvement.
- **Rewards** – When first learning to type, students sometimes struggle to build enough speed to make typing worth it. Small classroom rewards each time a lesson or goal is completed work well to keep them plugging away. For reaching a major goal, an ice cream, pizza or other party could be held for that group of students.
- **Awards** – Students like to be recognized among their peers for their efforts. Awards can be given at assemblies or other times during the year or even at the end of the year. A perpetual plaque could be hung in the computer lab with the name of the fastest, most accurate keyboarder in the school engraved on it so others who see it have a goal to beat.