



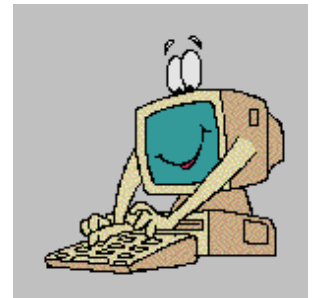
## SUGGESTIONS FOR LEARNING TYPING AND USING WORD PROCESSING

"I am trying to get the hang of this new fangled writing machine, but I am not making a shining success of it. However this is the first attempt I ever have made, & yet I perceive that I shall soon & easily acquire a fine facility in its use. . . One chiefly needs swiftness in banging the keys. . ."

(Mark Twain's first typewritten letter: December 9, 1874)

### One Way to Approach It:

1. **Talk to your child** about his or her interest and possible commitment to learning to type.
2. **Provide appropriate guidance for learning:** yourself, your partner, a sibling, an academic tutor, a computer tutor, a class, a teacher, a peer, a camp, a club, a neighbor, alone. . .
3. **Talk to the classroom teacher(s)**, if necessary, about his/her or the school's expectations regarding work completed with a word processor. You may also want to inquire about software supported by the school's program and teachers.
4. **Encourage application of word processing** at home at every opportunity.
5. **Set up a reward system** to promote practice of keyboard skills.



### A System for Keyboard Practice at Home: Why?

Parents must recognize that few students find practice of typing a particularly enjoyable activity that they will seek out on their own. It is crucial in most cases to acknowledge that this is "work" and requires "pay" to maintain motivation.

## How?

For most students, it is much more appropriate to reward time spent practicing rather than progress as measured by speed and accuracy. There is no way of predicting how fast or readily any student will progress at any point. Some learn quickly, some learn slowly, and others will go through peaks and valleys in the rate at which they progress.

- 1. First, agree on certain rewards** to be gained based on total accumulated practice time. Reward only for total time spent: do not allow the student to fail to reach the award because he or she did not practice a certain minimum time or number of days or failed to meet some other requirement.
- 2. Provide some suggested practice activities** (see below). Allow the student to choose which to do at any given time.
- 3. Find or make a monthly calendar** on which he or she can record minutes spent in practice sessions. The student should record the time each session and review this chart periodically with the parent.
- 4. Provide rewards at appropriate intervals.** It might be important to set some short-term, easy-to-reach goals in the beginning, especially until you get a feel for how your child is responding to this system. Later, you can make longer-term goals. You can even make short-term and long-term goals simultaneously, in which the time spent for the short-term rewards also accumulates for the long-term goals.

**Rewards?** Whatever works! Some ideas:

- \* praise, of course, plus. . .
- \* a privilege otherwise reserved for special occasions
- \* equal time for extra TV or video games
- \* software or video game purchase
- \* rent a movie or go to the theatre
- \* exchange typing practice for required reading time if you already have a system of required reading
- \* cold, hard cash
- \* matching funds for a large purchase such as a computer or a car (e.g., "When you reach 8 hours of practice, I will double your savings toward this purchase with a matching amount of money.")
- \* whatever else works in your household

## 5. Make deals to keep things interesting. For example:

- \* "I see you practiced for 15 minutes each time this week. Each time you practice for 25, you can have an extra 15 minutes credit."
- \* "If you practice 5 days in a row, you get one extra session's credit at the end of the 5 days."
- \* "Tomorrow you can get double credit for time if you finish your practice before breakfast."

## Practice Activities:

**1. Typing software** ("Mavis Beacon Teaches Typing" is probably the most educationally sound and effective product on the market right now, though most kids do find it somewhat tedious. "Mario Teaches Typing" is an example of a very poor program which promotes bad habits rather than teaching skills.)

To get the most out of a typing program, it is best to make a chart for specific activities the program offers. The student can record scores for each short task on the chart and highlight each improved score with marking pens, stickers, etc.

## 2. Word processor activities

- \* **Type your name repeatedly.** Then try it without looking. Next, type words that rhyme with your name or have similar letter patterns.
- \* Type the home row/the qwerty row/the bottom row. . .
  - . . . while looking at the keys
  - . . . not looking
  - . . . from dictation in random order
- \* Turn off the monitor but leave the computer on. Then type something (e.g.. a sentence or paragraph). Then turn the monitor back on to see how you did.
- \* Type the alphabet. Note how the position and fingering for letters are related on the keyboard in this sequence:  
A | B | CDE (all one finger) | FGH (in a row) | I  
JKL (in a row) | MN (same finger) | OP (in a row)  
Q | R | S | TU (opposite fingers) | V  
WX (same finger) | Y | Z

- \* Find an interesting magazine article. Type one paragraph per day from the article. Or find a series of individual paragraphs, type each one and give it a heading or a title.
- \* Type some jokes or tongue twisters.
- \* Type personal letters (especially repetitive thank-you notes for gifts).
- \* Type a grocery list that you can print out and use to check off items needed each week.
- \* Type personal inventories: a list of all your baseball cards, a list of all your CD's, or a list of books read.
- \* Make lists of anything: brands of cars, places you'd like to visit, favorite musicians. . .
- \* Make a list of frequently called numbers to put by the phone. Include emergency numbers such as 911, doctors, veterinarian, etc.
- \* Type the plot of a favorite movie.
- \* Type the words to a favorite song from the jacket of a CD or tape.
- \* Type anything!

### How Much Practice Time Should Be Expected?

There is no clear answer here: expectations are highly dependent on individuals. Ten to thirty minutes in a session is realistic for independent work. Beyond that, the time is probably not going to be very focused. Longer time can be expected if the student is working with a tutor or partner. Don't expect the student to practice every day of the week. Experiment to find out what is viable; then use "deals" to promote increased effort.

### How Much Progress Should Be Expected?

Again, no clear answer here. Progress is dependent on motivation, fine motor ability, visual memory, quality of instruction, quality, quantity, and pattern of practice, new learning vs. correcting old habits, etc. The important thing is to acknowledge progress without setting any expectations that you have no real way to predict.

### How Young Can You Start?

By fourth grade, most students have the fine-motor development and enough experience with the writing process to begin a regular program of keyboard training. Students younger than that often are better off continuing their focus on paper and pencil skills, as they have probably been using printing for some time and are just getting "in the swing" of

using cursive writing. They may experiment with word processing along the way, but beginning in fourth grade gives them plenty of time to learn to type.

In the case of students who have specific learning problems, there are some other considerations. They may have some fine-motor difficulties that make the writing process particularly frustrating. Though these same difficulties may also make keyboarding difficult, it is imperative that such students have as many tools at their disposal as possible in order to facilitate writing, justifying an earlier start at typing. Work which is completed on the computer allows these children to believe that it is possible to turn in work which looks every bit as good as other children's work and thus builds pride in their work. Word-processed work also allows for better support from an adult: for example, you can agree to type a certain portion of the work if the student has already hand-written it in school, or if he has written one paragraph, you might agree to type a second that he dictates. This allows a student who is limited by the writing process to more fully express ideas and not develop the habit of limiting what is written to what he can endure writing down.

There is no specific age that is too early; you need to use your judgment to find the balance between offering a useful tool and pushing an additional learning task on a child before he or she is ready. When in doubt, don't rush it.

If you are interested in getting as early a start as possible, consider introducing children to drawing programs such as "Kid Pix" or clip art programs such as "The Print Shop" which will allow them to use the computer as a tool without requiring systematic keyboard instruction.

### What About Looking at the Keys?

Traditional touch-typing has been taught through constant repetition of a few letters at a time until mastery has been achieved. Today's children need something different because they are starting younger. They need to be able to see typing as communication, not just a discipline, and you can't communicate anything with just A, S, D, and F. They need to use all of the letters right from the start. Since it is unrealistic to memorize all the locations immediately, it is better to insist on proper fingering but allow looking at the keys to locate them. Eventually, if the student uses consistent fingering, the recall of the locations is likely to become automatic.

## How Important is Posture?

Repetitive stress injuries aren't just for secretaries and tennis players any more! It is important to insist on good habits right from the start in order to ward off problems in the future. The typist should be seated firmly back in the chair, with the back held straight. Legs should be in front, not crossed, resting flat on the floor or on a footrest. Arms should be slightly out from the sides, with the forearm held parallel to the floor. Most important, the wrists should not be bent; they should be up off of the table surface. Wrist pads have become popular recently, but may not be the best idea in most cases since they can inhibit circulation and tend to reinforce the habit of resting the wrists rather than holding them in place with straight hands. Many computers now come with a printed guide to ergonomics that clearly show the best placement of the computer, the position of the chair, and the relationship of the typist to the monitor and keyboard. Look for these guidelines and follow them.

## More Word Processing Suggestions:

- \* In the beginning, **help out with the typing**. You could type every other line, or every other paragraph.
- \* **Write rough drafts directly on the computer**, rather than handwritten.
- \* For the majority of students, the best approach is to **encourage writing without stopping to make corrections** along the way. Save editing as a separate chore for the end or as a break.
- \* **Pre-writing** (plans, outlines, notes) may or may not be done on the word processor. The word processor can work very well for this, but may not be a good idea until the student has sufficient command of typing to concentrate more on the ideas than on the typing.
- \* Automatic corrections (such as programs that change "hte" to "the" or automatically capitalize a single "I") probably do not foster good habits.