

Keyboarding: An Important Skill

When I was in the 11th grade in high school, I turned in a typed paper to Mr. Haslett, one of my teachers at the Michigan School for the Blind (MSB). At this time, I was taking classes in the morning at MSB, and in the afternoon at Sexton High. Mr. Haslett returned my paper with a comment something like this:

"I hope that you do not make so many typing errors on your papers at Sexton; this paper was impossible to read because of the many mistakes."

I and my fellow students all took typing as fourth graders. Unfortunately, our teacher did not emphasize proper keyboarding skills. As a result, I and my fellow students suffered as we went through school.

You can do your students no greater favor than to teach correct, efficient, and effective keyboarding skills. I cannot emphasize this too strongly. If your students are to use computers, it is so very important that they develop proper keyboarding habits.

Two years ago I had the honor of teaching a gang of high school students advanced JAWS. They had all been students of mine for several years in elementary school. One day I said to them in utter joy and amazement, "where in heaven's name did you guys learn to type so very well!" Their response to me was a snappy:

"You taught us!"

I cannot tell you the warmth I felt inside hearing those wonderful words.

My experience is that under normal conditions visually impaired youngsters should be introduced to keyboarding at about the

third grade. Their lessons should be consistent, not sporadic, and they should use a program to practice seriously what they are learning.

There are many typing programs that might be used. I will mention just one right now. I mention it because it is a good program, and it can be purchased through the Federal Quota Program from the American Printing House for the Blind (APH). It is called Talking Typer.

This program can also be [purchased from APH](http://www.aph.org/products/index.html) directly via their website at <http://www.aph.org/products/index.html>.

Talking Typer starts right at the beginning. Lesson one is a, s, d, f, and at the beginning of the lesson, proper fingering instructions are provided. There are many options available within each of the 30 or more lessons, such as:

- The computer dictates to the student.
- An open dictation option.
- Teacher programmed dictation.
- Open typing.
- Hurry Scurry (a game that is both enjoyable and challenging).

In conclusion, correct keyboarding skills are vital and basic to good computer operation with JAWS and any other screen reading or magnification program.

Suggested Skills by Grade Level

Second Grade

- Learning the use of a few special keys: enter, control, spacebar, up and down arrow, left and right arrow, tab, escape, shift, windows key, alt, and backspace, etc.
- These keys could be introduced through the use of audio games, reading (listening to) children's stories, et cetera.

Third Grade

- A student will understand and be able to use the special keys on the keyboard. The special keys being control, windows logo key, the alt key, the up, down, left, and right arrow keys, tab key, escape key, and backspace key.
- An introduction to beginning keyboarding skills. It is recommended that third grade students start learning to use the keyboard. Thus, they would learn PROPER FINGERING. Students would become comfortable using the home row, third row of keys, and the first row of keys; in other words the alphabet letter keys. Once again, the emphasis would be aimed at PROPER FINGERING.
- Development of touch typing skills. The goal should be a typing speed of ten words per minute (10 WPM) with an accuracy of 90%.

Fourth Grade

- Development of touch typing skills. The goal should be a typing speed of 12 words per minute (12 WPM) with an accuracy of 90%.
- Students should understand the desktop, the programs menu, the HJ-Pad and Microsoft Word screens.
- Students should be able to write a document of at least two or three paragraphs using HJ-Pad and Microsoft Word.

- Students should be able to read documents using the basic JAWS reading commands.
- Students will develop understanding and skill at simple editing HJ-Pad and Microsoft Word documents: backspacing, and deleting.
- Students will learn how to save, open, and print documents.

Fifth Grade

- Development of touch typing skills. The goal should be a typing speed of 15 words per minute (15 WPM) with accuracy of 90% or above.
- Students should be able to write and read documents using Microsoft Word.
- Students should be able to edit documents using the various editing tools including the use of the spell checker.
- Students should know how to organize documents using drives, folders, and files.
- Students should learn the use of Window's Explorer and My Computer.
- Students should be introduced to surfing the world-wide-web.
- Students will learn how to save, open, and print documents.

Sixth Grade

- Development of touch typing skills. The goal should be 20 words per minute (20 WPM) with an accuracy of 90%.

TIP: I find it very helpful to put orientation marks on certain keys (some people refer to them as key locators). The keys to be marked might be: f, j, 1, 5 and 10. You can use such markers as Velcro, puffy paint, and I personally like little rubber dots available from Exceptional Teaching Aids. Their telephone number is 1-800-549-6999.

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