Keys to Keyboarding

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WHY A TECHTORIAL?

What will I learn today?

This techtorial provides simple tips for the classroom teacher or lab instructor who wants to improve students' keyboarding skills.

What hardware and/or software does the techtorial apply to?

This techtorial applies to any type of computer keyboard.

Which National Educational Technology Standards for Teachers does the techtorial address?

The techtorial will help teachers accomplish standards II.C. and III. A. in particular.

The International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) has developed a set of National Educational Technology Standards for Teachers. Standards or Performance Indicators are included for each techtorial to help teachers and administrators improve technology proficiency. For a complete description of the standards indicated, go to NETS for Teachers, click Standards in the menu bar on the left, and then click the arrow to the right of Standards and Performance Indicators for Teachers.

KEYBOARDING BASICS

Today, quick and accurate keyboarding -- typing on a computer keyboard -- is a vital skill for all students, from the primary grades through high school and college. Although students in grades 2-12 benefit most from keyboarding instruction, even K-1 students are not too young to practice some keyboarding techniques.

Begin keyboarding instruction by teaching all students correct

Posture

- Sit up straight with feet resting on, or pointing toward, the floor.
- Curve fingers "like cat claws." (The imagery helps younger students visualize the correct form.)
- Keep wrists straight.

Students in grades 2-12 also should be taught correct

Positioning

- Rest fingers of the left hand on **A, S, D,** and **F** keys.
- Rest fingers of the right hand on **J, K, L,** and **;** keys.
- Rest both thumbs on the spacebar.
- Focus eyes on the monitor or text, not on the keyboard.

SOFTWARE FOR TEACHING KEYBOARDING

Teaching keyboarding at the elementary level has never been easier. Simply install an instructional software program on your classroom computer and have students take turns using it throughout the week. A number of such programs -- costing between $20 and $30 -- are available; most are easy-to-use and require little teacher guidance.

Some of the more popular programs include the classic Mavis Beacon Teaches Typing, and JumpStart Typing (grades 2-4), Type To Learn3 (grades 2-12), and Typing Tutor 10 (grades 6-12). The last three programs are by Sunburst.com.

If you're not sure which program is best, request an evaluation copy to see if the programs you're interested in fit your needs.

No money for software? Check online for free keyboarding programs, including demos, trial versions, and shareware. You might begin with Typing Master or Learn to Type.

MORE TOOLS FOR TEACHING

Hide the keys! For $12-14, you can buy a typing mask, which covers the entire keyboard. Educational Computer Supplies offers one evaluation mask free to each school! Or you can place the top from a box of computer paper over the keys and cut out areas so students can put their hands under the cover and over the keys.

You might also want to spice up your instruction with a few online games. Try Sweet Little Piano or RoboRaid at Dexter's Laboratory.

ASSESSING STUDENT PERFORMANCE

How do you know if students are learning what they're supposed to be learning during classroom keyboarding sessions? Try using the **S*T*A*R** system of assessment:

- **S**peed: Most commercial programs track how fast a student is typing. Once a week, check each student's speed. Twenty to 30 words per minute is a reasonable goal for middle and high school students. (Speed is less important in elementary grades.)
- **T**echnique: As students type, check to be sure their feet point toward the floor, their hands are on the home row keys, and their backs are straight against the chair.
- **A**ccuracy: Many students focus on speed and sacrifice accuracy. Most commercial programs track accuracy as well as speed. Students whose accuracy rate is less than 85 percent (middle school) or 90 percent (high school) should be required to reduce their keyboarding speed.
- **R**espect: All programs have loopholes that allow kids to "cheat." Check occasionally to make sure students really are working on improving their keyboarding skills.

Base your **S*T*A*R** system grading on a score of 100. Award 25 points for improved speed (it doesn't matter how slow the starting point was); 25 points for correct technique; 25 points for an accuracy rate of 85 percent or better; and 25 points for good work effort. Deduct points as needed.

KEYBOARDING TIPS FOR K-1 STUDENTS

Although some first graders can learn correct finger positioning, such instruction is difficult for most students in the primary grades. At this level:

- Focus on posture rather than positioning;
- Emphasize correct use of the mouse -- especially in kindergarten;
- Put a sticker on the left mouse button of a PC to help students learn which button to click;
- Put a sticker towards the left side of the mouse button on a Mac to help students get used to using a PC.

Note: Child-sized keyboards (See About One-Hand Typing) and Sunburst's keyboarding programs Type to Learn, Jr. and Kid Keys are available for K-1 students.

GENERAL KEYBOARDING TIPS

The following tips will help make keyboarding instruction more successful -- and less tedious.

- Remind students that a computer keyboard requires a lighter touch than a typewriter.
- Pick software programs with lots of games; keyboarding practice easily can become boring.
- Limit classroom keyboarding sessions to 20 to 30 minutes; any longer and young hands get tired and students get off-task.
- Encourage students to practice at home, if possible, and ask parents to encourage that practice as well.
- Expect progress to be slow -- be patient.
- Be aware that students with special needs can also succeed in keyboarding. Check out About One-Hand Typing for ideas on teaching keyboarding to those with physical disabilities, or ask your special education staff for help with other needs.
- Consider forming a keyboarding club that offers group games and contests.

TELL ME MORE!

Where can I find more information?
Mrs. Cannon's Computer Lab provides links and tips for keyboarding at all ages. Also, check out Teaching Keyboarding -- When? Why? How? from Education World, MrKent's Typing Test at Gamequarium.com, and Keyboarding Practice.