

# Chapter 1: Getting Started

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## The role of the keyboarding teacher

In order to be successful, we believe it is important to have a clear idea of your role as a keyboarding teacher. As a keyboarding teacher your job is to:

1. Teach keyboarding by touch.
2. Teach the proper technique necessary for successful and safe keyboarding.
3. Promote the lifelong value of the skill of keyboarding to colleagues and school administration so that:
  - Appropriate time is scheduled for keyboarding.
  - Funds are allocated not only for computer equipment but also for adjustable chairs and desks.
  - Students' achievements are recognized by the school.
4. Inform students and their parents about repetitive stress injuries, and teach correct posture and work station adjustments, so that the risks of RSIs are minimized.

It is not an absolute necessity that you be a skilled typist to teach keyboarding. You can learn along with your students, or improve a rusty skill, as you teach them.

### **What is important:**

In order to achieve the goals listed above, you must firmly believe the following:

- The operation of a keyboard by touch is one of the more valuable skills your students will learn.
- Correct technique is of paramount importance in acquiring this skill.

Far from being an onerous assignment to be slotted in "somewhere" in an already jam-packed curriculum, you should see keyboarding instruction as a priceless key that will continually open new doors for your lucky students. You are privileged to have the opportunity to make such a significant contribution to their lives.

With this attitude and the stated beliefs, you are ready to promote keyboarding instruction in your school as a necessity in the curriculum and not an add-on.

# The learning environment

Before you meet your first class, you should assess your classroom or lab to see what equipment is there and what adjustments you will have to make to accommodate the students.

Are the desks arranged so that the students can see you easily and so that you can move around to assist each student? Are the chairs adjustable? Are some of the computer screens reflecting the sunshine or will any students be looking into the sun? Repositioning equipment may have to be done for the safe operation of the computers.

The chairs will probably not be the adjustable type. If your students are small in size, they will need to modify their seating at the computer. You will have to direct and assist in the first few classes.

Students should learn to make these and other necessary adjustments to their work station at the start of each class. For further information on work station modifications, see *Chapter 2: Keyboarding Safely*.

To aid in the seating modification, you should assemble a variety of household objects. Telephone directories, small sturdy cardboard boxes and bundled newspapers can be very useful. Send home a memo asking the students' parents to send old hand or bath towels that can be rolled up and used as lumbar supports. A fanny pack stuffed with paper or cloth is also a good lumbar support. At the same time, you can request the donation of out-of-date phone books and booster seats.

Obtain or make a large keyboard to use in your teaching of key



*An example of a typical school computer lab.*



*It is a good idea to have items on hand that can be used to modify work stations.*

locations and fingering. The keys should be color-coded by finger. Make sure the keyboard chart is displayed in a prominent place where all can see. Prepare copies of this keyboard in different sizes that the students can affix above their monitors, or on a paper rest or holder.

Assess the computer equipment. Are all the computers the same make and approximate age? If some computers are going to be more popular than others, make plans to ensure fairness of use, and an orderly movement to the work stations. A race and scramble to grab the best equipment is not the way you want to start your keyboarding lesson. See *Chapter 4: Tips for Teachers* regarding one idea for handling this situation.

Are the computers networked? How many printers do you have? Is there a computer with a large monitor or a projector for you to use for demonstration purposes? What is the system for reporting computer problems? How long does it usually take for a technician to get a computer back in service? Will you have any spare computers? These are a few questions that need to be answered before you begin your first lesson.

## Planning your instruction

You must also familiarize yourself with the keyboarding software you will be using. If you are in the fortunate position of choosing a software program to use, please refer to *Chapter 5: Evaluation* where you will find important tips about selecting the right software.

If software has already been purchased, preview it. When you run the software, use it as though you are a student. Intentionally make errors and see how the software responds. You should go through all the lessons, but you should not attempt to run through all the program in one sitting. Once you have worked through 5 or 6 lessons, you should have a good idea of the focus and makeup of the lessons. While you operate the program, consider the teaching style and activities, what constitutes a lesson, and how long it should take to work through each lesson at a particular grade level.

Make sure you know how to start the program, how to create a personal file and how to move around within the program to different lessons and activities. Be sure you know how to save work, print, and exit the program.



*A keyboard chart like this one can be purchased or made.*

It is very important that the students are introduced to the entire alphabetic keyboard during the time you have them. After the entire keyboard has been taught, you can review all the lessons and reinforce the stroking patterns for all the letters.

In order to be sure that you can cover all of the letters, you should know how many class meetings you will have for keyboarding instruction as well as the duration and frequency of classes. In your planning, consider how much material you can cover during each class period. Suppose you are a grade 3 teacher who has been scheduled for the computer lab for two 40-minute periods per week for the whole year, and you have only this time to teach all the computer applications required of this class. In this case, you should block out the first 14 to 16 classes solely for the introduction of keyboarding by touch. Thereafter, the first 10 minutes of each computer period should be devoted to a review of all keystroke responses plus some speed and accuracy building. It would also be wise to take at least one full period per month for keyboarding evaluation purposes, free typing of the student's own material, and practice on numeric keys and common symbols. Some work on the numeric keypad would also be beneficial if time permits.

Should you have any influence on class scheduling, consider the following:

- It is far better to meet your classes every day for three months than to meet them once a week for half a year. This is especially true in the early stage of learning the reaches to all the keys.
- If you are going to be teaching several classes of keyboarding, try to have the same grades on the same day. It can be difficult to change your personality and activities each time the classes rotate.
- It is preferable to have the younger children in the morning and older children in the afternoon. Also, advanced students can concentrate better during after lunch than students who have learning problems.
- Try to arrange for two or more extra computers to be available for students who need more practice or need to catch up because of absence.
- While you are trying to arrange for optimum learning to occur, circulate a memo to fellow teachers explaining the time required to cover the keyboard. Request that they defer any computer keyboarding assignments until your students have had a chance to know their way around the entire keyboard. It really isn't fair to ask students to use a skill they don't yet have.

While you are planning your classes, think carefully about the atmosphere you want. Maximize the time spent on keyboarding by establishing class rules and procedures that minimize disruptions and confusion. How will students get your attention when they need help? How will you have students identify themselves on their computer records and how will you identify them on your class record? Class rules and procedures are very important when students are working with

computers. Be prepared to reinforce the fact that they are learning an adult skill. In your class you want to achieve attention to instruction, concentration on task, respect for equipment being used, respect for the teacher, and co-operation with classmates.

Children do better when they know their limits and what you expect of them. In a well organized atmosphere you will enjoy being with them, teaching them, and sharing their excitement in learning to keyboard. It is difficult to find students who don't want to learn to use the computer well, so capitalize on their eagerness.

You will find specific ideas for classroom organization and procedures in *Chapter 4: Tips for Teachers*.

## Summing Up

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### **Getting started requires planning:**

1. Set up appropriate work stations for the students. Provide the necessary materials for students to adjust their work stations. You should collect as many telephone directories and small sturdy cartons as you can. These will enable you to compensate for desks and chairs that are not adjustable.
2. Select the best keyboarding software program available to assist, not replace you. If you are in the fortunate position of being able to make the selection, see the section on Evaluation of Software for Keyboarding Instruction. Otherwise, you could pass that section along to the person in charge of software selection.
3. Preview the software program thoroughly, deciding when to use the various activities. Work through it yourself at a pace similar to that of a new learner. Learn how to start the program, move to different activities within the program, create files, save, print, and exit.
4. Look at the overall time allotment you have to teach the entire alphabet, return or enter key, space bar, backspace, hyphen, and apostrophe. The number keys, common symbols and function keys may be taught after the whole keyboard is covered if time permits.
5. Your students should not be required to enter information into a computer before they have had the opportunity to learn and practice the entire keyboard. Your primary task is to instruct them on the absolute necessity of correct hand and body position and the correct keying technique, even under time pressures.
6. Create a businesslike atmosphere with appropriate rules and routines.
7. Make each class a positive experience. Capitalize on the students' eagerness to learn to operate a computer well. Encourage and praise genuine effort and display your own excitement and commitment.