

Computer Keyboarding Skills

As you know, our students are working more and more with computers to get information and to produce school work. Please use your student's teacher as a primary resource for the keyboarding skills they are focusing on in class, but here is some general information...

Students in kindergarten through second grade are using the computer to access educational programs like Lexia and Dream Box. They are learning letter and number key location on the keyboard, typing their username and passwords with some help at first, and using a computer mouse and trackpad to point and select, scroll, and drag and drop. In second grade, they are starting to work on touch typing skills using typingclub.com. In third and fourth grade, they are currently using typing.com to work on touch typing. In third grade, students start writing some essays on the computer, but planning is often done with paper and pencil. By 4th and 5th grade, students are producing most writing assignments on the computer. Much of their planning is done on the computer, but they also work on completing organizers with paper and pencil.

Balance

Handwriting is still needed for a good part of our school day. We are still practicing our best handwriting (including cursive), planning using graphic organizers, taking notes, and writing in our math workbooks, journals, science and social studies worksheets, etc. Research shows that handwriting plays an important role in learning. To balance things out, I've included a link to an article that I've been wanting to share for a while. It highlights the importance of using good-old pencil and paper in school.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2014/06/03/science/whats-lost-as-handwriting-fades.html>

Also please remember the importance of working all those larger muscle groups and building core strength through play. Good postural stability and a variety of motor experiences throughout the day will help our students sit and attend and use those smaller muscles for writing and typing.

Warm-ups and Breaks

Warm-up exercises can help your student with awareness of finger position without relying on looking at their hands, and provide practice of the finger isolation skills needed for typing.

- One finger tap: With hand flat on a surface, have student lift and tap each finger one at a time, first in sequence right to left, then left to right. Finally, have them lift and tap a specific finger that you name (e.g., right index finger). No peeking.
- Thumb opposition: Similar idea to above, but have them touch their fingers to their thumb, first in sequence, then to the named finger. This works different muscle groups and builds important arches in the hand.
- Up and down on the keyboard: With fingers correctly positioned in home-row, have them type up and down the keyboard using the correct finger. Have them use the color keyboard below to help them use the correct finger for each key. Repeating each row a couple times and saying the letter keys as they tap them helps to build muscle memory.

Move and stretch during typing to get rid of tension in the chest, shoulders, back, wrists and fingers.

- Shoulder shrug: Shrug shoulders to ears, hold for 3 count, relax. Repeat.
- Open and close fists: Make a tight fist, then spread fingers wide apart. Have them do 3 with hands by their sides, 3 with arms extended out to the side, and 3 with arms reaching overhead.
- Finger-tents: Start with hands pressed palms together at midline. Have them slowly separate their hands, first at the heel of the hand, the palm, the first knuckle, second knuckle, third, until only the tips are touching. Reverse to reconnect at midline one segment at a time. Repeat 3 times.

Helpful Learning Tips

Good Posture and Workstation: Please see the attached Workstation Area Checklist to be sure your student is in the best position for typing and viewing the computer monitor.

Home Row: All of my students peek at the keyboard while typing. This is not the fastest way to learn the position of letter keys for most, but if motor and memory challenges are present, visually monitoring their fingers can alleviate frustration and support learning.

When students are learning to keep their fingers on home row keys, consider writing the letter of the key they're resting on on their fingers. This will minimize shifting of fingers off of the correct keys.

I included a colorful keyboard at the end of this newsletter. This visual makes those diagonal rows clearer. To many of my students, the position of the keys seems random and the finger reach to the correct keys makes no sense until they see the layout in color. You can use this visual to help students learn and remember which fingers to use for which keys, and to minimize glances at the keyboard and shifting out of home row. Most importantly, students feel a great sense of accomplishment when they type the correct key without looking at the computer keyboard!

Vertical Easel: When typing from model sentences or notes, it will be easier for most students to view paper from a stand. Most students also benefit from a marker, ruler or highlighter that slides up and down to help them keep their place when copying.

Font Style and Size: I find larger font size (24) is easier for younger readers to view and read. Choose a style that is easy for them to read and is well spaced (I like Arial). Choosing font size, style, and color can be very motivating for students, so keep that in mind when you'd like them to practice just a little more.

Breaks: Make sure your student is taking regular breaks from the computer. Long periods of work on the computer can cause eyestrain, headaches, blurry vision, and muscle aches. The American Optometric Association recommends resting your eyes every 20 minutes by focusing on something at a distance (about 20 feet) for 20 seconds, "the 20-20-20 rule". Also, please remember the stretches above.

Typing Activities At Home

Learning proper keyboarding technique and eventually increasing speed takes a lot of practice. I've seen many recommendations for daily practice. Realistically, every day is a lofty goal with after school activities and homework, so I recommend 2-3 times a week for 15-20 minutes. Grade 2 can access TypingClub.com, and grades 3-4 can access Typing.com from Alcott's home page in the "Students" section of the navigation bar.

Some of my students also have Keyboarding Without Tears accounts. Please contact me if you need help accessing your student's account.

Below are some additional free resources that you and your child can explore online. A little variety and choice go a long way when practicing a new skill. Repetitive practice of letter keys at your student's personal challenge level is best for building keyboarding skills. Motivating games are great for warming up, taking a break, and reinforcing skills.

The Typing Club

www.typingclub.com

Free online program that tracks progress and stats. I love the simple graphics and large, high-contrast letters. Students need to achieve 80% accuracy before unlocking the next level. There is no time component, which alleviates stress for many. There are some advanced levels with interesting titles, but I haven't explored these yet.

Dance Mat Typing

[Dance Mat Typing](#)

Lessons are separated by levels and stages. You will need to keep track of the level and stages completed, as it does not track it or save progress if your student stops before completing the lesson. This one has animated characters, music and songs that students find silly and engaging.

[ABCya!](#)

This website offers several educational games, including early and more advanced keyboarding skills. You can search games by grade and adjust the challenge-level according to your student's skill level.

[Typing Games Zone](#)

Several games for practice of keyboard/typing and mouse skills. You can adjust the challenge-level by selecting the keys your student is familiar with. There are very detailed directions for most games. There is a discussion board when you scroll down, so be sure to monitor your student, as anyone can comment.

[10fastfingers.com](#)

Offers a one minute typing test. Students copy a series of single words and see how many words per minute they type. Other stats include strokes/minute, and correct words and wrong words count. I think it's appropriate for grades 4-5 since students in grade 3 are still learning the keyboard. If you have a more experienced typist, this might be fine for your grade 3 student.

[Speed Typing Online](#)

Another speed test that you can adjust from 1-20 minutes. The text is related (parts of familiar stories and songs) and you can choose by broad category. I like that you can change the view from 4 lines of writing to only half of one line of writing. Stats include words and strokes per minute, a breakdown of fastest and slowest characters, and most missed and most accurate characters. Again, speed tests are best for students who have learned all the keys.

