



Why teach touch typing to learners with literacy difficulties?

There are many advantages.

Firstly, touch typing is an increasingly important skill for all young people in this age of computers. Correct touch typing will enable all young people to word process quickly and accurately. This is particularly important for children with literacy difficulties, as they can then access features such as spell checkers, editing facilities and specialist programmes, such as TextHelp. Children with literacy difficulties often find it much easier and quicker to word process than to handwrite. They benefit from being allowed to use word processors in class or for homework and many benefit hugely from the ability to use laptops.

Secondly, touch typing is a fine motor and motor planning activity. Many children with learning disabilities also have a degree of fine motor immaturity. Dyspraxic children have this, as well as a difficulty with motor planning. These children benefit particularly from touch typing since it develops these important neurological aspects. It is not unusual to find that a child who has completed a touch typing programme also has greatly improved handwriting! This is because fine motor control has improved so much.

Thirdly, and possibly most importantly, children develop a kinaesthetic memory for spellings. Kinaesthetic means 'movement' and a child will develop a memory for the movement involved in typing a word, much as a pianist develops a memory for the movements involved in playing a piece of music. This 'by-passes' some of the key difficulties these children have with spelling and enables them to cope more quickly and confidently with written language. Many children have reported that they can spell when they type, but not when they write.

Will any touch typing programme do?

No, not usually. Most readily available programmes are too fast and not structured enough for learners with literacy difficulties and possibly fine motor weakness. They also do not take advantage of the fact that children can develop a kinaesthetic memory for words.



The most effective programmes are specialist programmes which are designed for children with literacy or other learning difficulties. **Englishtype** is one of the best of these programmes, incorporating a complete spelling programme (at different vocabulary levels), as well as a structured touch typing course with plenty of reinforcement.

Englishtype has full teacher facilities, uses only age relevant and useful vocabulary, and has a strong multi-sensory approach. It has highly structured content, clear design and is visually simple and uncluttered. It also has fun arcade-style games and short lessons to aid concentration and motivation, and is suitable for parents wishing to help their child acquire literacy skills. It can be found at www.englishtype.com