

Although standard computer keyboards are designed for two-handed use someone with just one hand can access a computer in several ways.

Standard keyboards

The most straight-forward technique is simply to use a standard keyboard. This technique means you can sit down at almost any machine and use it effectively. Five Finger Typist (£45) from Inclusive Technology is a program for teaching single-handed touch typing - either left or right hand. Single handed typists may also find it easier to type on a slightly smaller Compact Keyboard, which are also easier to position on a tray or lap because they are physically smaller than standard keyboards.

Single-handed Dvorak keyboard layouts

The standard QWERTY layout is not designed for single-handed typing, but you can re-map the keys on a standard keyboard to use a different 'Dvorak' layout optimised for either left or right-handed use. Once you have re-mapped the keyboard, lever off the keys and re-position them, or use key stickers to re-label the keys.



Dvorak Left-handed keyboard

Dvorak layouts can be set within the Mac and Windows operating systems, or downloaded and installed for free. On Windows XP, for example, go to **Start > Control Panel > Regional and Language > Languages > Details > Add**, then tick **Keyboard layout and choose 'United States - Dvorak'** (for both, left or right hands). Look in the Help for your own computer, or do a search for 'Dvorak keyboard' on the internet for more information. A disadvantage with this technique is that you have to change the keyboard layout on every computer you use, and also carry your Dvorak keyboard with you.

Single handed keyboards

Maltron sell ergonomic curved single-handed keyboards with both QWERTY and Maltron layouts.



The **FrogPad** is a special keyboard designed for one-handed use (either left or right). It is small, does not require special software, and connects to Mac or PC via USB. The 15 letters that the makers claim are used for 86% of text are immediately available with a single keypress - with the remainder you press two keys at a time, or one key followed by another.



The **Half-QWERTY** and **Half-Keyboards** are exactly how they sound. The Half QWERTY lets you touch-type without moving your hand - you hold the Spacebar down to type a different letter, while the Half-Keyboard is the same sort of idea, but is literally half a keyboard. The makers of Half-QWERTY claim it is easier to use than Chording.



The **CyKey** is a small 'chording keyboard' that can be used either left or right-handed. It has a wireless infra-red connection and connects to Mac or PC. No software is required. The makers claim you can learn to touch type in less than an hour.



Device	Cost ex VAT	Supplier	Telephone/internet
Compact Keyboards in various shapes and sizes, some with built-in trackballs or trackpads	From £45	Inclusive Technology, Maxess, KeyTools	01457 819790 www.inclusive.co.uk 01608 811909 www.maxessproducts.co.uk 023 8058 4314 www.keytools.com
Maltron dual and single-handed keyboards	£295	Maltron	0845 230 3265 www.maltron.co.uk
FrogPad	£79.95	KeyTools	023 8058 4314 www.keytools.com
Half-QWERTY	£445	KeyTools	023 8058 4314 www.keytools.com
Half-Keyboards	£295	KeyTools	023 8058 4314 www.keytools.com
CyKey	£99	KeyTools Bellaire Electronics	023 8058 4314 www.keytools.com 01271 324759 www.bellaire.demon.co.uk

Standard keyboard versus single-handed keyboards

Choosing which is best depends not only on the price but also on the acceptability of the solution to the user. For many, not being different is important although having something that is easily portable and can work on a range of devices (the FrogPad has USB and Bluetooth) may be viewed as okay. A standard keyboard can be accessed on any computer whereas a specialist device needs transported wherever it is to be used. The more compact the device the better.

According to one author on the subject, speeds achieved using one hand can be as fast, if not faster when touch-typing, as those achieved by two-handed typists with the standard 'hunt and peck' method. A smaller keyboard can cut down on the amount of distance to travel and may be particularly ideal for younger children or those with a narrow hand span. A USB version would, in most instances, be easily attached to any computer and thus be considered a portable solution.

If you wish to find out more about the debate on which is best to use then this site is well worth a visit: <http://www.aboutonehandtyping.com/> Apart from a wide range of information and advice, the author (a one-handed keyboard user herself) also sells her own one-handed touch-typing program and manual. A more concise article, written by the author of the site, which covers a lot of the main issues, can be viewed at <http://www.keytools.com/advice/onehand.asp>

Laptops

When using one hand to type, the keyboard is best positioned to the side that is being used. However, with a laptop as the two cannot be separated the monitor is no longer in a central position. Additionally, when using a laptop the screen is not usually at the correct height and may be better positioned up on a stand. This provides the one-handed keyboard user the opportunity to attach their preferred keyboard without being any different to any other laptop user. Alternatively, there are now laptops (Toshiba Portege) which have a swivel monitor although this does not get round the problem of the keyboard not necessarily being at the correct height.

Typing Programs

Whilst Five Finger Typist is specifically designed for those using one hand it is not as much fun as many others. A structured program for one-handed users is available to purchase from <http://www.aboutonehandtyping.com/> although it is her view that many standard typing programs can also be used if you ignore the finger positioning and use those for single-handed. Worth considering are two free programs <http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/typing/> for a fun, talking on-line tutorial (perhaps more appealing to primary pupils) and www.senselang.com for an online or downloadable program with high contrast options and large clear keyboard.