Dear Counselors, Staff etc.

Here is another boring newsletter. I thought I would write about one handed keyboards since I have done several recent evaluations regarding this issue.

Not to make this a history lesson about the keyboard but I think it helps to understand how the keyboard was designed and why a one-handed keyboard can mean many different things. The first keyboards were designed for manual typewriters and they were a different layout (ABC). The problem was that people would type too fast and the mechanical arms that came up would get stuck together so they had to make a design that would slow people down and be more inefficient so the QWERTY layout was designed. From the manual typewriter we went to the electric typewriter and then the computer keyboard. When the electric typewriter came out, August Dvorak tried to introduce a more efficient layout where the most frequently used keys were closer to home row. But since most people already new the QWERTY layout they did not want to relearn a new layout and the QWERTY became the industry standard. Keyboards with a Dvorak layout are still available and even a standard keyboard can be converted but you will need some labels. Since most people know the QWERTY layout it can be difficult to relearn a new keyboard layout. Studies have shown that a Dvorak layout does increase users speed slightly. In one study it made a 10% decrease in finger excursion which can mean a 10% increase in speed. Which means a person typing 20 wpm would maybe increase to 22 wpm. Another factor to consider is people often use different computers throughout the day; at work, at home etc. And having to either bring their keyboard with them can be a deterrent.
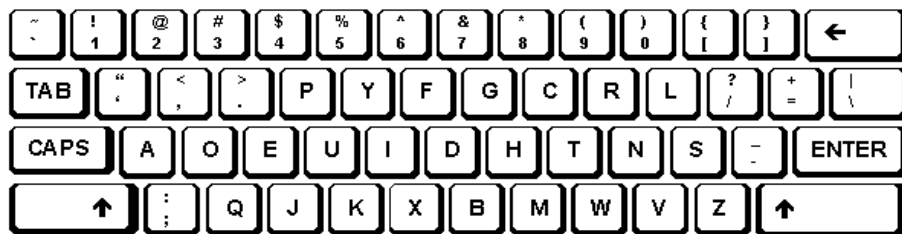
Dvorak 2 handed layout

Dvorak Right handed Layout
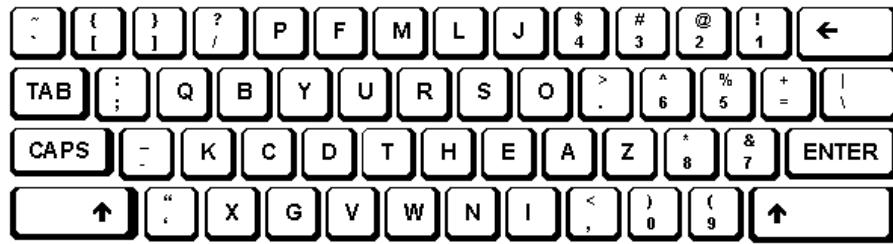
Dvorak Left Handed Layout

Some useless trivia about the QWERTY keyboard. I used to ask my children what they learned new in school and they always said "nothin dad" (with attitude). Tonight you can impress them with what you learned new today. What word can you type using only the letters from the top row of the QWERTY keyboard. I will give you a hint: the answer is above.
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And the answer is "Typewriter".

There are a number of other options for people typing with one hand or only partial use of a hand. What I have found most successful is a contracted or smaller keyboard that is still in the same QWERTY layout but the keys are easier to reach with one hand. There is also a CD available that can teach people with one hand the proper fingering to use on a standard keyboard. There is also a website www.aboutonehandtyping that has a lot of examples of these keyboards. I have often found that people may have use of some digits on their injured hand and like to use that. It is good for them to use any digits they have as the old saying goes "use it or lose it" (does not work for the hair on my head). In these cases they may be a 6 or 7 finger typist and may benefit from a smaller keyboard where they can still use the remaining digits.

Another option I often show is a way to abbreviate frequently typed words or phrases. With abbreviation expansion they can type in an abbreviation and it is automatically expanded out thereby reducing the number of keystrokes. This is most beneficial when the person types certain phrases or words over and over again. I used this for many company names and addresses as it makes it easy to enter this information. There are several software programs that are not very expensive that enable a user to create abbreviations for frequently typed words and phrases. However these do not work with all applications and may not work on mainframes. I have attached an attachment which explains how to this within MS Word.

It is also important to realize that a person with one hand must be very careful about any repetitive motion injuries. Since they only have one good hand you want to make sure they do not injure that so they cannot use either hand. Another option we often discuss is voice recognition software which will probably be the topic of my next newsletter. Voice recognition software does work very well but it also has some limitations. My next newsletter may deal with voice recognition.

If you would like not to receive this newsletter please let me know and I will take your name off the list. Also if you think someone else might be interested in this newsletter please forward the newsletter to them as well.

If you have any questions I can be reached by email at jtsymons@sbcglobal.net or (916)933-2375.
Thanks,

Jeff Symons, MSE, ATP

"OK, Mr. Hook. Seems you're trying to decide between a career in pirating or massage therapy. Well, maybe we can help you narrow it down."