11-year-old children to touch-type in under 10 hours. This approach is based on the work of American psychologist BF Skinner. In this method, the beginner tears the page out of the manual and types out the answer beneath the exercise set. This follows the traditional method of teaching in which the student copies set exercises exactly. The exercises are accompanied by drawings of hands in the correct position on the keyboard.

One school to bring old-fashioned touch-typing methods directly in line with modern thinking is Sight and Sound, an organisation with 11 training centres in Britain and more abroad. Sight and Sound's teaching methods involve the use of flashing lights and recorded cassettes. This audio-visual teaching system simulates the responses of seeing, hearing and reacting simultaneously. On a large overhead board a light flashes a letter. The recorded tape synchronises with the board and the pre-recorded voice of the instructor calling 'Now!' will set the speed at which letters are to be typed. As you become more advanced, the speed at which the instructor will call for the letter to be typed will increase. Sight and Sound's technique has been described as 'brainwashing', and even the instructors will admit that they do not fully understand why this method works so effectively. However, the number of satisfied customers who learn to touch-type efficiently and effortlessly indicates that the system works, whatever the reason.

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Software Roundup

Computer programs that teach touch-typing are either text- or games-based. Text-based packages rely heavily on exercises, repetition and drills. Most lessons in this sort of program are text-based, usually in the form of written exercises that the user must copy exactly. Games-based packages teach through the use of graphics, fast action and sound.

IAN McKINNELL

Type Invaders

Publisher: Carswell Computers
Price: Disk/£10.50, cassette/£6.95
Machine: BBC Model B

This is a games-based package for those with rudimentary typing skills. Its simple graphics display 'attacking' letters that must be destroyed by typing them correctly. Words and letters that have been missed attack again and can eventually blow up defence lines and occupy your land. There are 10 different levels of play, ranging from capital letters only to five-letter words incorporating upper and lower case, capitals and figures. There are also four separate speeds: easy, fast and rapid. Skilled typists will find even the 'rapid' option easy. However this is a fun, practical package for slow to average typists. Beginners should practice first with the Typeasy package from the same manufacturer

Sprintyper

Publisher: Micro Software International
Price Cassette/£14.95
Machine: Commodore Vic-20

This is a text-based package, which claims to promote speed and accuracy for both beginners and advanced typists. It has a library of 356,635 sentences to improve skills. To begin with, an easy sentence is show on the screen, to be typed as quickly as possible. A low tone signals a mistake, and will stop only when a correction has been made. Once the sentence has been copied correctly, the typing time, number of errors and a record time appears on the screen. Sprintyper is essentially a speed test, offering the beginner little in the way of constructive exercises

Typing Tutor II

Publisher: Microsoft
Price: Disk/£21.85
Machines: Apple IIe and Apple IIe+

To run this package you will need Applesoft in ROM, 48K of memory, a disk drive and DOS 3.3. This is a menu-driven text-based package, providing a combination of lessons, practice paragraphs and speed tests. Typing Tutor's most important feature is the 'Time Response Monitoring' system, which checks the typing 100 times per second, detecting even the slightest pause that occurs should the eyes move from the screen to the keyboard. Beginners start with a number of letters to practise. As they become familiar with these letters, and when the speed of typing is equivalent to 30 words per minute, those letters are transferred to a FAST column and new letters selected for practice. For experienced typists, the progress report on the practice paragraph details the number of errors made, the keys on which these errors were made, speed and accuracy. This is highly recommended for typists at all levels of skill. It is initially a little difficult to follow, and users are advised to study the documentation carefully beforehand