the typist moves on to the space bar (pressed with the thumbs), and the shift key for capital letters and for keys with two characters allocated to them.

Unfortunately for the home computer user, the correct use of number keys is rarely if ever touched upon in touch-typing courses or manuals. For the programmer, especially, the number keys form a vital and integral part of the computer keyboard. Touch-typing of numbers is fairly easy to learn once the concept and operation of the home keys have been mastered. The fingers of the left hand simply extend above the alphabetical keys to take in the numerals one to six, while the fingers of the right hand are responsible for seven to nought, and any following symbol keys.

An interesting extension of the 'home key' approach can be made when using a home computer with graphics characters that can be accessed directly from the keyboard. By learning the location of the graphics symbols, it should be possible to incorporate them into your touch-typing programme.

Training the eyes on a screen (or paper) is learned at the same time as mastering the keyboard. This is the most important aspect of touch-typing, setting it apart from 'two finger tapping' or the 'look and search' approach to typing. Covering the keys with tape or specially designed caps is a useful aid for the beginner as it cuts out the temptation of looking down at your hands. In this respect, a keyboard and monitor are better than a typewriter and paper. The screen is at eye level, and the temptation to glance downward is lessened. Errors can also be corrected immediately, ensuring greater accuracy, which is the next stage in mastering touch-typing.

Accuracy is a matter of practice and concentration. You must strike the key with a firm, quick tap, squarely in the middle of the key; hitting the keys with an equal degree of regularity, which builds up a rhythm that, in time, becomes natural. Eventually, using the wrong finger or striking the wrong key feels awkward, and this natural rhythm contributes greatly to building up speed.

Speed is measured by time tests and exercises, and is learned only after the first three stages we have discussed. Top touch-typists can reach speeds of over 100 words per minute (wpm). For the beginner, a reasonable speed to aim for is about 30 wpm.

Several different teaching manuals are available, and over the years a number of teaching methods have been devised. These still employ the principles we have outlined. Pitman, the international secretarial school, still produces a manual that was first published 35 years ago, as well as an updated version that teaches the keyboard through the typing of *words* from the very first exercise. Because small and commonly used words are used in these initial exercises, little effort is required to handle the spelling, which leaves the beginner free to concentrate on acquiring the necessary technique.

The Dico Typing Course claims to have taught

Home Base

This illustration shows the location of the home keys for the left and right hands and the allocation of keys for each finger. The index and fourth fingers are responsible for the largest range of keys because they have the greatest freedom of movement

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