

ICT 2

Hardware; the QWERTY Keyboard

Read the passage below at least twice and answer the questions which follow it.

Some things about computers never change. An example of this is the QWERTY keyboard, named after the first six letters in the top line of the keyboard reading left to right. It was first used in September 1873, on the first workable mechanical typewriter to be sold to the public, the 'Remington'.

The layout of the letters was designed to slow typists down because the earlier mechanical typewriters could not cope with the speeds of early typists; the keys kept getting jammed. Most people are right-handed; the QWERTY layout gives the left hand more work to do than the right by putting two of the most often-used letters, 'e' and 'a', on the left-hand side. The weakest finger a right-handed person has, the little finger of the left hand, is used to press the 'a' key. Only one vowel key, 'u', is meant to be pressed by either index finger, the strongest fingers. Nearly every word in the English language contains at least one vowel.

The QWERTY arrangement was also designed to make it easier for salesmen to sell the early mechanical typewriters. Salesmen could impress buyers by typing out the word 'typewriter' without actually having to be trained to type themselves. This was because all the letters in the word 'typewriter' are in the top line!

Now answer these questions, using complete sentences:

- 1 After what is the QWERTY keyboard named? When and on what was it first used?
- 2 What was the layout designed to do? Why?
- 3 How does QWERTY give the left hand more work to do?
- 4 Which finger is used to press the 'a' key? What is unusual about the vowel key 'u'?
- 5 What was the QWERTY arrangement also designed to do? How? Why?

Vowels are the letters a, e, i, o and u. Sometimes the letter 'y' is used as a 'stand-in' vowel, with a sound like 'i' (as in 'fly'). **Every word in the English language contains at least one of these letters.** Perhaps the reason why vowels are in every English word is that they are the easiest sounds to make. Put your hand on your throat and say the vowels out loud. Does your throat move very much? Do your mouth, tongue, teeth and throat do much 'work' to make these sounds?

Activity. Write out the letters of the alphabet. With your teacher's help, cut out the letters and design your own keyboard layout, which will let you type faster. Where will you put the vowels? Which letters will you use most? Which will you use least? Are you left-handed or right-handed? How will this affect your choices of where to put letters?

Follow Up Activity. With your teacher, work through a dictionary. Which is the letter that starts most words? Which is the letter that starts the fewest words? Count the number of pages for each of the 26 sections of the dictionary. Why are there 26 sections? Now think again about your keyboard layout. Do you need to change it?