

# Dvorak Typing Part II: Three Months Later

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**Dvorak Typing Part II demonstrates the process I learned to use the Dvorak keyboard, offers some resources, and recommends the switch—I jumped back in 1995, and STILL haven't had the return of what used to be daily wrist pain.**

Life is full of simple joys, and moving my fingers once again over the keyboard without struggling for every key is one of them. Doing it without the pain that I was previously experiencing is another, and the relief I've experienced since I moved from QWERTY to Dvorak has been immense. I'm still not going to set the universe ablaze with my speedy typing, but I'm competent again, and that is, for the time being, pleasure enough.

## **So what about the Dvorak keyboard layout?**

Why is it better, why is it worth turning some portion of your life into hash over, why not just stick to QWERTY, which is the apparent no-brainer (since every computer automatically comes with a QWERTY keyboard, and you have to go into your

settings or preferences and hunt around to change your computer to Dvorak)?

Others have enumerated far better than I can all the worthwhile reasons for changing—the biggest two reasons for me were that, first, if I changed, the Dvorak keyboard promised to decrease the amount of effort I had to expend to get in a full day's work by some gawdawful number like six-hundred percent (it kept that promise) and second, I hoped it might alleviate my wrist pain (it has so far put an end to it entirely.) Has it been worth the frustration and the anguish I described a couple of months ago? Absolutely—I figure that I've extended my typing life by years, and in doing so extended my career and my ability to take care of myself and my family by that same number of years (all other things being equal, of course.)

If you want to find out about the Dvorak keyboard and why it is different, and why it is worth your time, start with this link to **Introducing the Dvorak Keyboard**. From there you can explore a number of links that will introduce you to other people who, like me, have taken the plunge. I haven't yet found anyone who, having switched, would consider for a minute going back.

If you just want to hear about how I switched, stay right here. (And if you don't want to hear about either of these things, skip to the next essay. There are plenty of things here that *aren't* me raving about how much better my life is since I switched my keyboard.)

My investment was minimal—a copy of Mavis Beacon Teaches Typing for around \$45 dollars—and my time and tears. You don't have to buy a new keyboard. You don't have to get new software. You don't have to do anything except decide in advance that you're going to make this change come hell or high water, because it will be good for you. Do hold that thought in mind—**It will be good for me**—because hell and high

water will both come. Then you switch, and you grit your teeth, and you make yourself stick with it by whatever means, psychological, physical, or spiritual, you can contrive.

I use Windows 95. (Well, I did when I wrote this back in 1995. I went over to the Mac side a few years later. And stayed there. There's an essay in that, too. But not today.)

So physically all I had to do to acquire a new Dvorak keyboard was go into Windows Control Panel, click on Keyboard, and under the Language tab, click on Properties. That took me to the choices between English (United States) and English (United States) Dvorak. One click, one Apply, and my keyboard spoke a foreign language. After that all I had to do was learn it. (There are Dvorak keyboards out there, but I have a Microsoft Natural, and they don't make one. And I wasn't going to give up my Natural.)

Learning the language was, of course, tougher. First, to make myself keep my head up, I drew a little diagram of the keyboard with all the new keys colored by finger placement (red for index, green for second, yellow for third, blue for pinkie.) The thumb on the spacebar I figured I already had cold, and there were times when I was grateful that I knew that. I taped that along the top of my monitor, right in the center. Not elegant, but there are still days when I can't remember where the \* key is, for example, so it's still there.

Then, because I know me, and I knew from the start that if I gave myself a chance to back out when things got miserable, I'd take it, I took a flat peach nail polish and painted over the keys on my keyboard. No more falling back on QWERTY. I went over the peach with clear nail polish. I can recommend Sally Hansen Hard as Nails—I haven't used it on my fingernails, but it covered the keys on my keyboard beautifully, and so far has resisted chipping and peeling through about half a novel. And it doesn't ever feel tacky or stick to my fingers when they get hot and sweaty (yeah, they do that when I've been doing a lot of typing.) Sally Hansen

would probably die to find out about my irreverent and unlovely use for her product, but what the hell. Whatever works.

My bridges effectively burned, I sat down with Mavis Beacon, and when I needed to work on the book, I kept my eyes on my keyboard diagram and felt my way along one slow, painful letter at a time. I'll admit I could have done the entire thing without Mavis Beacon, and saved myself \$45 bucks, but I would have learned a lot slower, and I would have struggled a lot longer, and I wouldn't have had the opportunity to zap ants with a chameleon's tongue... and have you really lived if you haven't done that.

I've made the change completely now, and no trace of the old typist remains. Three months after I first made the jump, I cannot type at all on a QWERTY keyboard. I have to hunt and peck because the M and the A are the only keys I can find without looking. (Those two are the same on both keyboard layouts, and you'll like them almost as much as you like the spacebar.)

Since the only keyboard I have to type on is my own, this QWERTY aphasia is no handicap for me. If you're considering making the jump and have to move between a work system and a home system, and you can't configure your work system the way you want, you can still switch. There are people who describe their own experiences with switching who shuttled between a Dvorak system at home and a QWERTY system at work for years, so it can be done. I wouldn't want to do it. I like Dvorak too much. But it can be done, and any damage you can keep from doing to your hands and your wrists is all to the good.

Dvorak isn't the cure for cancer, I know. It won't feed the starving masses, or give shelter to the homeless, or put a Congress with sense into office. It will reduce your workload. It might (along with other common-sense precautions) prevent you from developing repetitive stress injuries in your hands

and wrists. It might alleviate or eliminate pain you already have from too much typing. (It did for me.) It will (eventually) make typing more fun for you. Really, I think that's more than enough to get from a simple change of keyboards.

**NOTE:** If this article resonates with you, and you want to meet other writers who share your passion and who are working in a friendly, supportive environment, come hang out with us and make progress on your writing in my free writing community. Some of us there are Dvorak typists.

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