GETTING STARTED ON THE COMPUTER

Who is this section for?

If your student wants to use the computer to help develop their literacy skills, then this section will offer you some guidelines to help them get started. You don't need to be a whiz on the computer yourself. You just need some basic word processing skills.

Literacy and technology

For people who struggle with literacy, dealing with everyday technology presents a double challenge. Since your role as a literacy facilitator is to help your student with the real life literacy tasks which confront them, this may include helping with the literacy involved in using a mobile phone, sending SMS text messages or using an automatic teller machine.
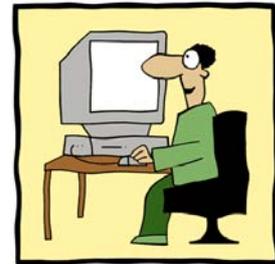
Using the computer can also be an important skill to develop and can be an invaluable tool in helping to develop literacy. To develop a piece of writing on the computer, edit it and see it looking very professional is an enormous confidence booster for many students.

Learning to send emails is another important skill which will give your student useful writing practice, even if it is just exchanging emails with you.

You don't need to be a computer whiz to help someone else get started. Some basic word processing skills are all that you need. In fact, if it is a voyage of discovery for both of you, students may feel less intimidated if they feel that you are both learning together.

Remember, using the computer is just one approach to helping students improve literacy skills. They still need to be doing a lot of pen and paper literacy since we all still need to fill out forms and write impromptu notes etc without the aid of the computer. Keep checking with your student that what you are doing is meaningful and relevant to them.

Word processing

This section has been adapted from *First Click for Adult Literacy Students*, WA Department of Education & Training, 2000.

Some advantages to writing on the computer:

- Tapping a key on the keyboard is easier than struggling to write legibly with a pen if you are not used to it.

- Dealing with errors and re-drafting is also much easier. Your student will get a feeling of success with much less pain and this is likely to be a strong motivating factor.

- Writing with a word processing program can also help the student's reading. The word processor teaches us a lot about the conventions of print. For example, as students consider the need for different sized fonts or bold print for headings or important information, or the use of bullet points to organise information in their writing, they are learning lessons which will help them when they come to reading books and newspapers etc. They are learning how writers organise their print. You could also reinforce this learning by looking at how different fonts and layouts are used in newspapers and magazines.

Getting started

You don't need to wait until your student has developed some literacy skills before starting on the computer. Even beginning students can get started with the computer. For example, together you could write up a language experience story. You might type in most of the story as you compose it together, and your student types in a few words which you have written out to be copied.

Students who are beyond the very beginning stage of needing to copy can be encouraged to compose directly on the screen, rather than copy from a handwritten draft. Composing on the screen encourages re-drafting and perfecting because it is so much easier than rewriting several drafts.

Don't overload your student with too much information at one time. Decide what you want to teach in each session and don't bother the student with extra information. For example, for beginner reader/writers you might just concentrate on turning the computer on and off and getting them used to the keyboard for a few sessions.

Introduce new computer functions one at a time and give plenty of time for practice before you move on to the next one.

Remember how difficult it was to manipulate the mouse when you began to use a computer? Show your student how to point, click, hold, drag and double click. Your student can get plenty of practice doing this using a game such as 'Solitaire'.

Briefly explain the function of the various parts of the computer and use the correct computer terminology (monitor, desktop, click, drag, delete ...). Using the appropriate terminology gives the student the language to communicate with others about computers.

Students who have access to a computer to practise on during the week will probably need some written instructions or reminders to take with them. The instructions which accompany most computer programs are usually very wordy so you may find your student responds better to brief instructions which you write together. At the end of

your session, as a review activity, you could go over the steps or functions which you covered in the session, and write them out together.

Microsoft Office has a function for printing the whole screen which you have open, showing the toolbars and icons. Press the 'Print Screen' key on the keyboard, open a word document and press Ctrl V then Print. You can then produce instructions similar to the following one:

Opening a New Document

1. Click the 'start' button on the bottom taskbar to display this pop-up menu.
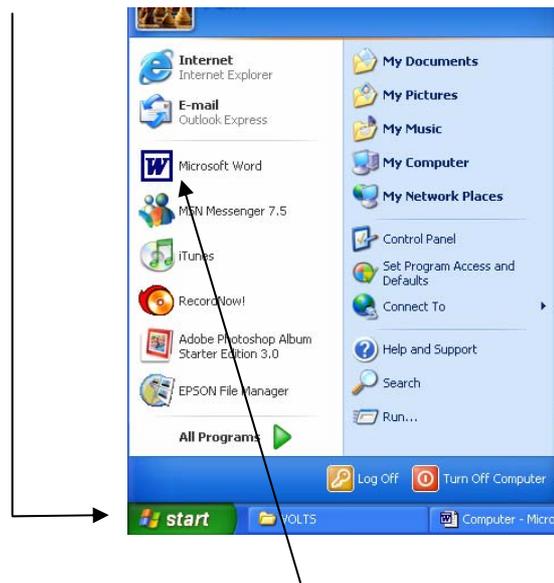
2. Slide the mouse pointer on to Microsoft Word.

3. Click on Microsoft Word.

4. Start typing on the white screen.

What about spelling?

Many tutors think that using the spell checker is cheating. They worry that because the computer is doing the thinking the student will not learn the correct spelling.

The spell checker doesn't do the whole job; it is just another tool. Explain what the red wriggly line means and encourage the student to try to work out the correct spelling before right clicking to see what the alternatives are. Working out which of the alternatives is the right one is a useful spelling activity. You should then treat the spelling error just as you would with other writing activities. Make a note of it and deal with it later.

The grammar and punctuation checker can be a bit more confusing and you might want to simply turn it off or tell the student to ignore it and rely on their own proofreading skills.

The internet

For someone who is developing their literacy skills, it is important that they do a lot of reading. The internet can provide a wealth of reading material that interests your student. Help them search for information about something they may be interested in, then use it the way you would if it were a magazine or newspaper article. Ask about where it came from, who wrote it, why you think they wrote it that way, who they think the author was writing it for … You may want to discuss the concept of information overload and that not all that is published on the web is necessarily reliable.

Most websites or manuals to help you find your way around the internet are very wordy. However, your student may find the following useful: http://www.bbc.co.uk/skillswise/ . Click on 'Webwise' at the bottom of the home page.

Using email can provide excellent writing practice for your student. If you email each other during the week, you are giving the student another authentic reason to write and by replying, you are providing a useful writing model.

Hotmail and Yahoo offer a free email service. Register at www.hotmail.com or www.yahoo.com.

Computer based literacy programs

There are a number of websites and CD-ROMs which have been developed to teach reading and writing and numeracy. Some of these are listed in the Useful References section at the end of this resource.

If you or your student become aware of any others that you think may be useful, there are a number of criteria you could use to evaluate them:

1.   Is it adult-oriented?

There is a lot of educational software on the market written for children that may be unsuitable for adults. Check the illustrations. Are they cutesy, childish images? Are the examples relevant only to children? *(*Eg: *If you have six marbles to share among three friends …*)

2.   What level of reading is required to use the program?

The level of reading required to use the program should be consistent with the level of the learning activities. The written instructions provided in some programs are too wordy and not appropriate for beginning students or those who are not confident in their literacy or computer skills.

CD ROMs with sound effects, narration etc can support the student with additional clues and reduce the reliance on text-based instructions.

3.   Is it easy to use?

Is it easy to find your way around the program? Is it easy to move back and forth? Is it clear what you have to do when you complete an activity?

4.   Does it provide good feedback?

Does the feedback provide good, positive reinforcement that is adult-oriented and constructive?

5.   Does the student have some control over the activities?

Does the student have some control over the rate and sequence of information? Can they flip through to find exercises they like and exit the ones they don't like? If there is a timing function, can they override it? Can they select the level of exercises or text they wish to work on? Lock-step programs can be very frustrating for adults.

6.   Does it reflect the student's interest?

Make sure that the program relates to your student's goals and/or interests. For example, there are driver education CD ROMs or websites teaching skills related to a range of specific occupational fields.

Some useful references for this section

- Hajncl L. and Livingstone J. *Getting Started in Word*, Adult Multicultural Education Services (AMES), Melbourne, 2001.

  This is a thorough and accessible introduction to Word 2000.

  Available from: AMES   www.ames.net.au

  GPO Box 4381QQ

  Melbourne

  Victoria 3001

  Ph: (03) 9926 4600

- Hazell P. *Untangling the Web*, AMES NSW, 2005.

  Contains very accessible information about using the internet.

  Available from: AMES   www.ames.edu.au

  PO Box 1222

  Darlinghurst

  NSW 1300

  Ph: (02) 9289 9255.

- *First Click for Adult Literacy Students*, Read Write Now, WA Department of Education, 2000.

  Available from: Read Write Now   www.read-write-now.org/write_on!.htm

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