

TITLE

KEYPAD

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

5 The present invention relates to the field of information technology. More particularly, the invention relates to a keypad that is optimised for modern computing devices. The keypad finds particular application in compact computing devices using touchscreen technology such as smart phones, tablets and surface devices, as well as laptops and desktops, and remote or cabled
10 keypad devices.

BACKGROUND TO THE INVENTION

 The most common key layout for a computer keyboard is known as the QWERTY keyboard, so named because the first six letters are q, w, e, r, t and y.
15 The keyboard was originally designed for use with mechanical typewriters that used downwards force on keys to actuate pivoted typeset to impact against an inked ribbon. The QWERTY keyboard was specifically designed to reduce the speed of a typist because the typewriters suffered from jamming when typists struck keys in quick succession on more intuitive keyboard layouts, such as
20 those with an alphabetic layout.

 Clearly such a mechanical limitation is not a problem with electric typewriters, word-processors or computer keyboards, yet the QWERTY key layout has persisted in these devices. The persistence is even more remarkable for compact devices, such as smart phones and tablet devices, on which users
25 type with a single finger, one or two thumbs or one-handed. This is true of both physical keyboards and virtual keypads (generated on a touchscreen using software).

 The problem applies also to other character sets, such as keypads using other Roman-based alphabets (Spanish, French, Indonesian, etc.), non-Roman

alphabets (Greek, Cyrillic, Korean, Thai, etc.), or character based scripts such as Japanese and Chinese.

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OBJECTS OF THE INVENTION

It is an object of the present invention to overcome or at least alleviate one or more of the above limitations by providing a more intuitive keypad.

10 SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

In one form, although it need not be the only or indeed the broadest form, the invention comprises a keypad comprising at least consonant keys and vowel keys such that the vowel keys are arranged in a column between two edge columns of consonant keys, or in a row between two edge rows of consonant keys, wherein the vowel keys and the consonant keys other than Z
15 follow an alphabetic progression from A to Y.

In another form, the invention resides in a keypad comprising at least consonant keys and vowel keys such that the vowel keys are arranged in a column between two edge columns of consonant keys, or in a row between
20 two edge rows of consonant keys, wherein the consonant keys other than Z follow an alphabetic progression.

The columns or rows can be curved to map the rotation of the thumb joint and in one preferred arrangement there is split-keypad with a space
25 between a right side block of keys and a left side block of keys. The space can optionally include a screen. The columns can also rotate away from the vertical or the rows away from horizontal, to accommodate different typing positions.

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In a further form, the invention resides in a keypad in which the keys are arranged beneath a "strike zone" of input keys so that most commonly accessed keys are most easily reached. Most suitably, the keys are arranged in a right side block of curved columns or rows beneath a strike zone of a right

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thumb of a user and a left side block of curved columns or rows beneath a strike zone of a left thumb of a user.

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Preferably additional function, toggle or punctuation keys (symbol keys) are arranged around the alphabetic keys, such as one or more space bars/keys, a capitalisation toggle key, a number pad toggle key and an enter key. For example, the rows or columns of consonant keys can include one or
10 more symbol keys, or the rows or columns of vowel keys can include one or more symbol keys.

The consonant and vowel keys can also be interchangeable with mathematical symbol (for example +, -, =) and/or numerical keys.

The alphabetic progression of the keys can be from left to right, right to left, top to bottom, or bottom to top of the keypad.

5 Preferably the keys of the keypad are arranged in a 6x5 grid of keys: 6 keys across and 5 down, or 5 keys across and 6 down.

The keys of the keypad can be flush with the keypad, raised above the surface of the keypad, or indented into the keypad.

10 Further features and advantages of the present invention will become apparent from the following detailed description.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

15 To assist in understanding the invention and to enable a person skilled in the art to put the invention into practical effect, preferred embodiments of the invention will be described by way of example only with reference to the accompanying drawings, in which:

FIG 1 shows a preferred keypad layout;

FIG 2 shows the keypad layout of FIG 1 indicating strike zones;

FIG 3 shows an alternate numeric keypad layout;

20 FIG 4 shows a keypad layout suitable for right-handed typing with the device in horizontal mode;

FIG 5 shows a keypad layout suitable for left-handed typing with the device in horizontal mode;

25 FIG 6 shows a keypad layout suitable for 2-thumbbed typing with the device in horizontal mode

FIG 7 shows an enhanced keypad layout for 2-thumbbed typing, based on the layout in FIG 1;

FIG 8 shows the key layout of FIG 6 in an alternate form, with a split keypad (for two-thumbbed typing) in horizontal mode;

FIG 9 depicts typing with two thumbs;

FIG 10 shows an alternate right thumb keypad layout;

FIG 11 shows an alternate left thumb keypad layout (in horizontal mode)

FIG 12 shows a keypad layout for a tablet computing device, depicting
5 one-handed typing;

FIG 13 shows an enhanced keypad layout similar to FIG 11, with key
columns spaced;

FIG 14 shows an alternate keypad layout similar to FIG 11, for left-
handed one-handed typing;

10 FIG 15 shows another alternate keypad layout similar to FIG 11, for right-
handed one-handed typing;

FIG 16 shows another physical keypad layout of the invention as used
on a laptop computer;

15 FIG 17 shows the keypad as in Fig 16, with a user using one-handed
typing;

FIG 18 shows another alternate keypad layout of a physical keypad as it
may appear in the form of a smartphone-sized wireless keypad;

FIG 19 shows the keypad of Fig 18 in elevation;

20 FIG 20 shows a preferred keypad layout of the invention as it may
appear on a mobile computing device;

FIG 21 shows an alternative keypad layout of the invention, with left
hand bias, as it may appear on a mobile computing device;

FIG 22 shows an alternative keypad layout of the invention, with right
hand bias, as it may appear on a mobile computing device;

25 FIG 23 shows an alternative keypad layout of the invention, with right
hand bias, as it may appear on a mobile computing device;

FIG 24 shows an alternative keypad layout of the invention, with left
hand bias, as it may appear on a mobile computing device;

FIG 25 shows an alternative keypad layout of the invention, with left hand bias, as it may appear on a mobile computing device; and

FIG 26 shows a keypad layout of the invention in an alternative form, with a split keypad (for two-thumb typing) in horizontal mode.

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DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

Embodiments of the present invention reside primarily in a physical or virtual keypad. Accordingly, elements of the invention have been illustrated in concise schematic form in the drawings, showing only those specific details that are necessary for understanding the embodiments of the present invention, but so as not to obscure the disclosure with excessive detail that will be readily apparent to those of ordinary skill in the art, having the benefit of the present description.

In this specification, adjectives such as first and second, left and right, and the like may be used solely to distinguish one element or action from another element or action, without necessarily requiring or implying any actual such relationship or order. Words such as "comprises" or "includes" are intended to define a non-exclusive inclusion, such that a process, method, article, or apparatus that comprises a list of elements does not include only those elements but may include other elements not expressly listed, including elements that are inherent to such a process, method, article, or apparatus.

Referring to FIG 1 there is shown a layout of keys in a keypad 10 that forms part of a smart phone 11, such as an Apple iPhone® or Samsung Galaxy®. The particular keypad shown is a virtual keypad (generated by software) but could also be a physical keypad such as provided on other smart phones, such as the Palm Tréo® or BlackBerry®.

The keypad has a number of significant features that make it easy for thumb or single-finger typing. The keys are circular (as opposed to square, oblong or rectangular) to better match the size and shape a human fingerprint makes when lightly contacting the screen. Each key is separated from adjacent keys by a large buffer zone to reduce the chance of a mis-hit and thus striking

the wrong key. This also means that adjacent key pairs (a & b, a & d and a & f for instance) can be typed by dragging a fingertip across the touchscreen's surface from one key to the next rather than two discreet and sequential fingertips on two distinct keys.

5 The letters are laid out in columns and rows in substantially alphabetic sequence, except for one letter, 'z' which is relocated. All the vowels are formed into one column 12 and coloured distinctly for easy identification. The other letters are also formed into columns on a symmetric pattern. There are four columns of five keys and two columns of three keys. The two columns of three
10 keys are set with one column either side of the block of four columns. The keys are round or oval to minimise overlap of the thumb or finger onto adjacent keys.

 The keys are arranged in alphabetic sequence reading left to right and down the keypad, except for z which is relocated to achieve the symmetric arrangement. Two space bars 13 are provided at the left and right edges of the
15 screen, adjacent to the letters block. Editing keys (cursor left, delete/backspace, enter, etc) are preferably positioned on the right margin 14.

 Keypad toggle keys that display a different character set, such as capital letters, numbers & math symbols and punctuation, are preferably positioned on the left margin 15. It will be appreciated that the position of the non-alphabetic
20 keys is not limited to the arrangement of FIG 1. Nonetheless, the inventor has found that the particular arrangement shown is convenient.

 As shown in FIG 2, the most commonly used keys are located in strike zones 20 that are most easily accessible by a digit of a user. In the particular arrangement of FIG 1 and FIG 2, the strike zones relate to the thumbs of the
25 user. The left strike zone covers the letters a, e, z, i, n, o, t and u and the right strike zone covers the letters d, h, l, m, r, s, x and y. The letters a, e, i, n, o, t, d, h, l, r, s and c are found in 80% of English words.

 The invention is not limited to a keypad useful for English. The letters e, a, o, s, r, n, i, d, c, t, u, m are the most common letters in Spanish; e, n, i, s, r, a, t,
30 d, h, u, l are most common for German. These same letters are extremely common in, for example, Portuguese, Bahasa Indonesian, Tagalog, French and

Vietnamese.

As shown in FIG 3, the same basic column layout is also suitable for numeric and special purpose character sets. In FIG 3 there is shown a math/numeric keypad 30 featuring a standard block of the 0-9 numeric keys 31,
5 a currency symbol row 32, two columns of brackets 33 and a math operators column 34. In a preferred embodiment the numeric keys are distinctively coloured.

It will be appreciated that other collections of keys can be arranged on a similar grid pattern.

10 It will also be appreciated that the keypad is not limited to the vertical arrangement depicted in FIG 1. The keypad can also be deployed for horizontally oriented devices. The keypad may be deployed in several ways:

- a) to the right of the screen as shown in FIG 4;
- b) to the left of the screen as deployed in FIG 5; or
- 15 c) as a split keypad with the screen in the middle as deployed in FIG 6.

In another preferred embodiment shown in FIG 7, the columns are curved to better match the strike zone to the rotation of the thumb when thumb-typing. The keypad is also separated into two halves to further suit typing by the user's thumbs as they hold the device. The keys are round or oval to minimise overlap
20 of the thumb onto adjacent keys.

Referring to FIG 7, there is shown a layout of keys in a keypad 70 of a smart phone 71. The letters 72 are arranged in the same unique alphabetic sequence described above but the columns are curved to particularly suit typing with two thumbs. The columns are separated into a left block 73 and a right
25 block 74 to further enhance the logical arrangement of keys. In addition to the alphabet keys other function keys are provided. For instance, the keypad has two space keys 75, one for each thumb. There is also space for six function keys 76, three on each side. These keys may include a shift key to switch between upper case and lower case, a numberpad toggle key to activate the
30 math/numeric keypad, an enter key and a backspace key as on a standard keypad. These are just examples and the function keys are not limited to any

specific function.

As shown in FIG 8, the keypad is well suited to either portrait or landscape use. The separation of the keypad into symmetric halves leaves a work space in the middle with the keys remaining in optimal a thumb-reach and the strike zones mentioned in FIG 2 intact.

Referring to FIG 9, the efficacy of the key layout for thumb typing is clear. The curve of the key columns maps the rotation of the thumb joint. The column of vowels a-e-i-o-u is directly below the left thumb and curved to follow the thumb rotation. Adjacent to the vowel column is a column of consonants, b-f-j-p-v, easily reachable with a slight extension of the thumb. A minor bend and rotation of the thumb is required to access z-n-t. The right thumb accesses the letters d-h-l-r-x in a symmetric location to the vowel column and the letters c-g-k-q-w by easy extension. The letters m-s-y require a minor bend and rotation of the right thumb. The function keys on each side are also easily accessible by a slight bend and rotation of either thumb.

The speed and accuracy of thumb typing is enhanced by arranging the keys, particularly the vowels and commonly used consonants, in a strike zone beneath each thumb.

The keypad may be adjusted to suit the typing behaviour of individual users without affecting the efficacy of the unique alphabetic arrangement in columns under the strike zone of the typing digit. For instance, a person who types only with their right thumb would find the preferred embodiment in FIG 10 particularly intuitive. In the embodiment of FIG 10 the keys are arranged in columns with the unique alphabetic sequence. The columns are curved in one direction so as to closely follow the rotation of the right thumb as it rotates over the keys but without a separate left and right block.

In similar manner, a person who types only with their left thumb would find the preferred embodiment of FIG 11 most useful. In the embodiment of FIG 11 the keys are arranged in the same columns with the unique alphabetic sequence but the columns are curved so as to closely follow the rotation of the left thumb as it rotates over the keys, again without the space. Note, that in this

arrangement, the alphabetical order runs left-to-right an almost mirror image of the right-handed orientation in FIG 10.

As can be seen by a comparison of FIG 9 and FIG 10, the change in orientation between portrait and landscape does not affect the core layout of the keypad.

The invention is not limited to thumb-typing. The same keypad layout with the alphabetic sequence and distinct vowel column is also useful for one-handed typing such as is often required with mobile nature of tablet computing devices. As depicted in FIG 12, the tablet may be held in one hand while a user types with the other hand. As shown in FIG 13, the spacing of the columns can be adjusted to further enhance the typing convenience and ergonomic factors dictated by the dimensions of human hand. It is anticipated that a user typing on the keypad of FIG 13 would use their index finger for the column of vowels and the adjacent 'b' column. The middle finger would be used for the 'c' column, the ring finger for the 'd' column and the pinkie for the 'm' column. The 'd' and 'm' columns are spaced slightly further apart to be more ergonomically suitable. The 'z' column and function keys on the left are struck by the thumb. In addition, the columns may optionally be staggered to further enhance the ergonomic match, as seen in FIG 14.

Other variations to the embodiments described above may be conceived without departing from the principals explained by reference to the embodiments. For instance, the key layout may be mirrored for left-hand typing as shown in FIG 14 or the curve of some of the columns may be accentuated for more extreme hand dimensions, as shown in FIG 15. Individual columns may be wrapped such that the alphabetic order is maintained but columns are repositioned.

Still other variations to the embodiments described above may be conceived without departing from the principals explained by reference to the embodiments. For instance, the keypad is not limited to virtual, on-screen keypads. A keypad of the invention may be used as a physical, manufactured keypad for desktop computers and laptop computers as shown in FIG 16. In this instance, the keypad integrates a touchpad 161, re-positions various function

keys, retains two spacebars 162, and rotates 90 degrees anti-clockwise the entire a-e-i-o-u column 163 to a row, and the z-n-t column 164 to a row so that they can be struck with the right hand thumb, as shown in FIG 17. It also incorporates a set of up-down-left-right arrow keys 165.

5 In a more compact physical format, the keypad can adapt to a smaller size such as that of a physical smartphone cover as shown in FIG 18. In this instance, the same key layout may be used as depicted FIG 1 for alphabetic keys, and as in FIG 3 for numerical keys. The elevational view FIG 19 shows the curved raised surface of the keys functioning as physical buttons.

10 In each instance of FIGs 16-19 the button order can be arranged as a mirror image to facilitate typing with the left hand.

The inventor also realises that the invention is not limited to the Roman alphabet. The principle of arranging the keys in curved columns beneath a thumb strike zone also applies to other alphabets, such as Cyrillic, Hebrew, Kanji, etc. It is also useful for arranging a Braille keypad for thumb typing.

15 Although the keypad has particular advantage for single finger and thumb typing, the inventor also considers the arrangement of keys is more intuitive than the QWERTY keypad as the keys are arranged in alphabetic order, but for the 'z' key, and could therefore also be applied to physical keyboards and keypads, as the disadvantages inherent in mechanical typewriters are no longer relevant to modern keyboards and keypads.

FIGs 20-25 illustrate use of the keypad of the invention with a electronic information display terminal such as an IPAD®. FIG 20 shows the vowel keys as a column and the key alphabetical progression left to right and top to bottom. FIG 21 shows the same key arrangement but with alphabetical progression from right to left.

25 FIGs 22-25 show the vowel keys as a row, with alphabetical progression from top to bottom and left to right (FIG 22); bottom to top and left to right (FIG 23); bottom to top and right to left (FIG 24); and top to bottom and right to left (FIG 25).

30 As shown in FIG 26, the split keypad can include function keys between

the letter keys, in this case directional keys.

The above description of various embodiments of the present invention is provided for purposes of description to one of ordinary skill in the related art. It is not intended to be exhaustive or to limit the invention to a single disclosed
5 embodiment. As mentioned above, numerous alternatives and variations to the present invention will be apparent to those skilled in the art of the above teaching. Accordingly, while some alternative embodiments have been discussed specifically, other embodiments will be apparent or relatively easily developed by those of ordinary skill in the art. Accordingly, this invention is
10 intended to embrace all alternatives, modifications and variations of the present invention that have been discussed herein, and other embodiments that fall within the spirit and scope of the above described invention.

CLAIMS

1. A keypad comprising at least consonant keys and vowel keys such that the vowel keys are arranged in a column between two edge columns of consonant keys, or in a row between two edge rows of consonant keys, wherein the vowel keys and the consonant keys other than Z follow an alphabetic progression from A to Y.
2. The keypad of claim 1, wherein the vowel keys and the consonant keys are arranged in six columns or rows.
3. The keypad of claim 2, wherein all the vowels are in a single said column/row.
4. The keypad of claim 3, wherein the vowel column/row is a second column/row.
5. The keypad of claim 3, wherein the columns/rows are adjacent to each other.
6. The keypad of claim 3, comprising a spacing between the columns/rows such that some said columns/rows are on one side of the spacing and other of said columns/rows are on the other side of the spacing.
7. The keypad of claim 4, wherein the columns map to a human hand with the first column adapted for contact by the thumb, the second and third column adapted for contact by the index finger, the fourth column adapted for contact by the middle finger, the fifth column adapted for contact by the ring finger, and the sixth column adapted for contact by the pinky finger.
8. The keypad of claim 2, wherein the first column/row comprises the letters ZNT, the second column/row comprises the letters AEIOU, the third column/row comprises the letters BFJPV, the fourth column/row comprises the letters CGKQW, the fifth column/row comprises the letters DHLRX, and the sixth column/row comprises the letters MSY.

9. The keypad of claim 6, wherein the columns on one side of the spacing comprise the letter ABEFZIJNOPTUV, and the columns on the other side of the spacing comprise the letters CDGHKLMQRSWXY.
10. The keypad of claim 1 wherein the keys are arranged in a right side block of columns beneath a strike zone of a right thumb of a user and a left side block of columns beneath a strike zone of a left thumb of a user.
11. The keypad of claim 10 wherein the columns are curved.
12. The keypad of claim 10 wherein the right side block of columns is separated from the left side block of columns.
13. The keypad of claim 12 wherein the right side block of columns is separated from the left side block of columns by a screen.
14. The keypad of claim 10 wherein the keys are arranged in a right side block of rows beneath a strike zone of a right thumb of a user and a left side block of rows beneath a strike zone of a left thumb of a user .
15. The keypad of claim 11 wherein the rows are curved.
16. The keypad of claim 11 wherein the right side block of rows is separated from the left side block of rows.
17. The keypad of claim 12 wherein the right side block of rows is separated from the left side block of rows by a screen.
18. The keypad of claim 11 or claim 15 wherein the curvature approximates the angle of rotation of a human thumb.

19. The keypad of claim 1 wherein the rows or columns of consonant keys include at least one symbol key.
20. The keypad of claim 1 wherein the row or column of vowel keys includes at least one consonant key.
21. The keypad of claim 1 wherein the row or column of vowel keys includes at least one symbol key.
22. The keypad of claim 1 wherein the consonant and vowel keys are interchangeable with mathematical symbol and numerical keys.
23. The keypad of claim 1 wherein the keypad includes functional keys adjacent to the edge rows or columns of consonant keys.
24. The keypad of claim 1 wherein the alphabetic progression is from left to right of the keypad.
25. The keypad of claim 1 wherein the alphabetic progression is from top to bottom of the keypad.
26. The keypad of claim 1 wherein the keys are arranged in a 6 x 5 grid.
27. The keypad of claim 1 wherein the surface of the keys is raised or indented.
28. The keypad of claim 6, wherein the spacing comprises a screen, or function keys.
29. The keypad of claim 8 where the first and second column are rotated anti-clockwise 90° about that letter "u", which acts as the pivot point for the rotation.