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A QWERTY keyboard is a popular keyboard layout for Latin-script alphabets. QWERTY simply refers to the arrangement of the letters on the keyboard and is named after the first six characters located on the top left row of letters.

ORIGINS

The QWERTY keyboard layout became popular after it was released as a part of the Remington No. 2 typewriter in 1878. This layout was created by Christopher Sholes, but many myths surround the reason for its creation. Some say that he created the QWERTY keyboard to separate common letter combinations and keep typewriter keys from jamming. Researchers say there is no proof of this claim, especially since E and R are neighbors and are the fourth most common letter combination in the English language.

Another legend is that the keyboard was designed so typewriter salesmen could quickly type the sentence TYPEWRITER QUOTE all from one row to impress potential buyers. Although it is some coincidence that all the necessary letters to type the phrase are located in the top row, there is no evidence or historical documentation to prove it.

QWERTY ALTERNATIVES

Although we do not know the reasoning behind the character arrangement of the QWERTY keyboard, some are convinced that it was randomly assembled and is not conducive to efficient typing. This has led to the design of other keyboard layouts.

- Dvorak: This keyboard layout was created in 1936 by Dr. August Dvorak in order to increase speed and ease of use. The most commonly-used characters are on the home row and on the right side since most of the population is right-handed.

- Colemak: Shai Coleman created this layout in 2006 to have the most often used characters positioned in a way to be typed by the strongest fingers. Because there are only 17 changes from the standard QWERTY keyboard, Colemak is supposed to be easier to transition to than Dvorak.

There are more QWERTY alternatives, but Colemak and Dvorak are the only two that have gained traction. Of course, there are other QWERTY variations for users who type in other Latin-script languages besides English that include characters unique to that language.

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Vangie Beal is a freelance business and technology writer covering Internet technologies and online business since the late '90s.

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