

# Team develops app that makes texting easier

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A smartphone app that makes texting and emailing much easier – particularly for older people and those who have difficulty spelling – has been created by University of Strathclyde researchers.

The MaxieKeyboard has been developed by a team led by Dr Mark Dunlop, senior lecturer in Computer and Information Sciences at Strathclyde.

The free [app](#) for Android phones is the first product of its kind that has been created in conjunction with older adults. The keyboard can be used with all of users' existing apps, replacing the default manufacturer's keyboard.

Dr Dunlop said: "Touchscreen [smartphone](#) technology is still relatively new which, in itself, can make using it daunting for [older people](#). When you add in the extreme sensitivity of screens and the lack of physical feedback from them, it's easy to see why many older people either have frustrations or avoid using smartphones altogether.

"However, that demographic is now more active on social media channels and other platforms well suited to smartphones than many people realise. We wanted to develop an app which would allow them to be digitally active with the latest technology and MaxieKeyboard is a step towards that."

The majority of modern smartphones have touchscreens, presenting a number of challenges which can be particularly problematic for older

people. With very sensitive, non-physical keyboards, these touchscreen phones can be difficult to use for those with common effects of ageing such as reduced visual acuity, reduced motor control and impaired working memory.

While some phone manufacturers have sought to cater for this by providing tailored handsets, these tend to be simplified versions of older models. The research team at Strathclyde sought to take a different approach by working with older adults through design workshops to develop a keyboard app that would allow them to confidently use the newest smartphones.

One of the team's findings was that [older adults](#) were often more careful to send error-free messages than younger users so their solution focusses on supporting error correction and reviewing messages.

The MaxieKeyboard app is available to download for free from the Google Play store from [play.google.com/store/apps/det ... com.strathclyde.oats](https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.strathclyde.oats) (currently only supporting Android devices).

The app includes an advanced spell-checking and suggestion engine to reduce mistakes and potentially embarrassing auto-corrections. It also uses an innovative colour-bar tool which alerts users to spelling errors without having to look away from the keyboard. This system improves the speed and accuracy of typing texts and e-mails on touchscreen devices.

The app also offers users the ability to easily review the correctness of their full message, regardless of length, before sending it. This allows any mistakes to be identified and corrected, giving users increased confidence in using the technology without risk of embarrassment.

Dr Dunlop said: "It's free to have, simple to install and use and makes

life easier by providing assistance with spelling and reducing the risk of missing mistakes. Perhaps its biggest benefit is that it can restore people's confidence when texting and typing on touchscreen devices. It also reduces the chance of auto-correct bloopers."

Dr Dunlop, and colleagues Emma Nicol and Andreas Komninos, worked closely with a focus group of 35 older people to develop the app. Listening to their initial suggestions and feedback after using trial versions enabled the team to create a product which makes a real difference.

The opportunity to work closely with the research team and be part of the focus group is still available to anybody who wishes to help develop the product further. For more details, please see [mobiquitous.cis.strath.ac.uk/?q=node/6](https://mobiquitous.cis.strath.ac.uk/?q=node/6)

Provided by University of Strathclyde, Glasgow

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