

France to 'modify' AZERTY keyboard to improve French writing

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The French are known for being sticklers about the correct use of language, but they have discovered something is getting in the way of perfect prose: the AZERTY keyboard.

A recent report from the communications ministry said the layout of

French keyboards makes it "nearly impossible to write in correct French."

With the French unable to cap up accented letters, or write crucial symbols—or those that are just useful like the euro sign—the government wants to tweak the [keyboard](#)'s layout.

While English speakers have the QWERTY keyboard, which refers to the first six letters on the top row, the French layout is AZERTY.

There is no norm for the French keyboard and different manufacturers have different characters in different spots.

"According to your operating system or keyboard manufacturer, some keys aren't in the same place, or aren't even available at all," the report said.

The ministry has begun looking into ways to improve the keyboard, a pursuit almost as old as the typewriter itself.

"It is obviously not a question of changing the AZERTY keyboard as I have read here and there," Culture Minister Fleur Pellerin said Thursday.

"It is about studying the ways in which we can improve the functioning of existing keyboards to allow access to letters that will allow us to write correctly in French," she said in an interview with iTele news channel.



Due to a lack of certain symbols and accents, typing on some French keyboards, as these students at the Catholic University in Lyon are doing, can require near-acrobatic shortcuts

The report lays out many of the difficulties faced by the French when typing.

They include the nightmare that is trying to write accented letters in the upper case—on some keyboards it requires near-acrobatic shortcuts, while on others users have to know obtuse tricks to get it right.

"These limitations have even led some of our fellow citizens to think that one is not supposed to put accents in the upper case," the report said.

But "non!" The report points out warnings from the prestigious guardians of the French language, the Academie Francaise, of the extreme

confusion that this could cause.

Broken eggs

Also unavailable is the "ligature"—a letter made up of a squashed together "a" and "e" or "o" and "e"—used to correctly write the French name Laeticia or the words "oeuf" for egg and "coeur" for heart.

What about typically French symbols? The language of love is not supposed to use double apostrophes for quotation marks but a horizontal double chevron, which is not available.

Other symbols that would be useful, like the euro sign, simply cannot be found on the keyboard, while trying to find the @ symbol or a hashtag can frustrate the most patient of Francophones.

The [report](#) points out that different smartphones have come up with a variety of alternative keyboards while touch-screen tablets make it easier to find the letter one is looking for.

The English QWERTY keyboard layout became popular in 1878 after it was introduced by typewriter manufacturer Remington.

The earliest keyboards were laid out according to the alphabet, with numbers and letters in just two rows.

But once typists built up speed they found that the machines would jam because some of the most commonly paired letters such as "s" and "t" were next to each other.

The QWERTY layout put a distance between such pairs, as well as arranging the keys in four rows.

The origin of AZERTY is not clear, but it became popular in France in the 19th century.

Many have tried to improve on QWERTY over the decades, to reduce repetitive stress injury and improve typing speed.

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