

A letter to a typewriter manufacturer

Edsger W. Dijkstra. (EWD947)

<http://www.cs.utexas.edu/users/EWD/ewd09xx/EWD947.PDF>

Gentlemen,

I would like to acquire --and I trust that this is a wish you applaud-- a first-class electric typewriter that enables me to produce my technical notes, reports and scientific articles in what is now known as "camera-ready" form.

After having spent the major part of a day calling or visiting the major typewriter shops of Austin, Texas, I decided to contact you directly, for what those shops could provide was useless as far as I am concerned. And I hate to think that the typewriter industry is unable to produce a typewriter I could use, the more so as my wishes --well within the technology of today-- seem as modest as reasonable.

As a mathematician/computing scientist, I need besides the 52 letters, the 10 digits, and the usual interpunction signs a bunch of special characters. The total number of symbols is less than 100 and would fit on a single daisy wheel. And with a very few exceptions my special characters are not so very special either in the sense that they can be found on some daisy wheel.

Invariably I was offered the solution of buying enough different daisy wheels so that I would have (almost all) the desired symbols at my disposal. But that solution is utterly unrealistic, for, when using a typewriter, I wish to compose the text at the keyboard, formulae and all. (If I did not compose at the keyboard, the use of the machine would cost time instead of saving it.)

I am however unable to do mathematics at the keyboard if

- (i) a few vital symbols are lacking, and
- (ii) I would have to change daisy wheels a dozen times per line.

Unless I have all the symbols at my fingertips, the "solution" is unrealistic.

Do you think that as typewriter manufacturer you could manufacture the typewriter I need? If so, I would only be too pleased to specify my needs in the required detail. If my needs leave a few positions unused I shall be glad to assist you in the completion of the design.

Looking forward to your reply,

Edsger W. Dijkstra

prof.dr. Edsger W.Dijkstra
Department of Computer Sciences
The University of Texas at Austin
Austin, TX 78712-1188
United States of America

Transcription by Javier Smaldone.

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