How to Use a TTY

What is a TTY?

The teletypewriter, or TTY, is a device that lets deaf and hearing people type back and forth using regular telephone lines.

Teletypewriters were used for many years by news organizations and businesses. These organizations used teletypewriters to send and receive news using existing telephone lines. Other machines were directly connected to each other on private lines. In the 1960's, these teletypewriters were modified for use by deaf people. Robert Weitbrecht, a deaf physicist, designed an acoustic coupler that could convert the electrical signals coming from the TTY to activate the keys of the TTY and print the message.

The teletypewriter has been called by several names, including Telecommunication Device for the Deaf (TDD) or Text Telephone (TT). However, a national organization, Telecommunications for the Deaf, Inc. (TDI), has taken a firm stand and endorses the acronym of "TTY" to represent all text telephones. TDI publishes a national directory and guide to resources that are available to enhance telecommunications accessibility for persons who are deaf, hard of hearing, deaf-blind, and speech impaired.

What equipment is needed for a TTY conversation and how much does it cost?

TTY equipment weighs two to five pounds and includes a three or four-row keyboard, a display for reading the typed message, a modem or modular connection, AC power, and rechargeable, replaceable batteries. It can also have a printer/auto answering machine. There are many different models and styles of TTYs for sale. Prices range from $200 to $1,000. They can be purchased from the manufacturer, catalogs, and electronics stores.

How do you make a TTY call?

To make a TTY call:

1. Place the handset in the acoustic coupler (modem) attached to a regular telephone and turn on the power. Two small lights will come on. Only the power light will stay on: the phone light waits to respond to any sounds picked up by the acoustic coupler.
2. Dial the number and watch the phone light, which shows the dial tone, busy signal, or ringing by corresponding light patterns. The light remains on for the length of the sound and goes off when there is no sound. For example, the light flashes rapidly and rhythmically with a busy signal.
3. People answering the phone will respond with their names and a short message followed by "GA" which means "go ahead."
4. You start typing at this point and identify yourself at the beginning of the TTY call.
5. To end a turn in the conversation, type "GA", and the other person will begin typing again. Each person is expected to take a turn only after receiving a "GA" from the other party.
6. When you are done with your conversation, type "GA to SK", meaning "go ahead to stop keying" or "good-bye", to let the person know you are finished with talking on the TTY.
7. A TTY message in process cannot be interrupted, even if one knows what the other person is going to type.

How do you save time when making a TTY call?

TTY calls take longer, because typing is slower than talking. To save time, common English abbreviations frequently are used. In addition, some punctuation, articles, or prepositions are omitted when it does not interfere with meaning. Many TTY users type without commas or periods, creating telegraphic but intelligible messages. The result is an efficient exchange of information.

Common TTY abbreviations are:

GA	=	go ahead
SK	=	Stop Keying or good-bye
GA to SK	=	completing all messages and getting ready to hang up
U	=	you
XXX	=	mistake
HD	=	hold
Q	=	question mark
MSG	=	message
THX	=	thanks

TMW   =   tomorrow
BEC or CUZ = because

Abbreviations being used in a TTY conversation look like this:

Hello ga
HELLO SAM IS MARK THERE Q GA
Yes this is mark how are you q ga
I AM FINE WANT TO JOIN FOR A MIOVXXX
   MOVIE Q GA
Sure what time q ga
AT 7:00 NIGHT AND M EXXX MEET ME AT
   MY PLACE GA TO SK
Ok I will see you at 7:00 sksk

Errors are often corrected in this way:

Typing errors are corrected easily on some TTYs by using a backspace key to delete the message. Equally acceptable is typing XXX several times directly after the mistake and then retyping the word. If a misspelled word can be understood within the context of the sentence, it need not be retyped.

TTY Etiquette

Good TTY etiquette includes:

1. When calling TTY users, let the phone ring at least 7 or more times before hanging up. Many deaf and hard of hearing TTY users rely on flashing lights to alert them to ringing phones. Flashers can take longer than sound to attract attention.
2. Callers should identify themselves at the beginning of calls. Any other people who may be watching the conversation also should be identified.

3. Callers should use the standard abbreviations of GA, Q, HD, and SK.
4. Always tell TTY users when calls are going to be put on "hold" or transferred.
5. When TTY users type "Can you read me?" they want to know if the message is clear and without garbled letters and numbers. If the message is garbled, hit the space bar a few times. If this does not clear up the message, both parties should hang up and try the call again.

Tips for educators

TTYs make it possible for teachers in postsecondary educational settings to notify deaf or hard of hearing students of any class changes or cancellations. These students can also use a TTY to contact instructors when necessary. Both parties, of course, must have a TTY device to use with their regular telephone.

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Cagle, S.J. & Cagle, Keith M.
GA and SK ETIQUETTE: Guidelines for Telecommunications in the Deaf Community. 1991, Bowling Green Press, Bowling Green, Ohio