

It guesses your thoughts, then types

▶ DAVID MACKAY SET OUT to invent a better way of entering text on devices such as digital assistants and mobile phones. His creation, which he calls "Dasher", is a little like an arcade game: *Attack of the Killer Alphabets*, perhaps.

A reader in physics at Cambridge, he used his knowledge of probability to devise a system where the letters appear to flow – on the screen – towards the writer's pen or cursor. As the letters flood by, the shape of your word appears as if by magic, stretching out into the alphabet soup like a character in a colour blindness test.

It's smart maths rather than magic: the system guesses the word you are trying to write and flows the next character towards the cursor. It also learns the kinds of words you use.

Only minute movements of pen or cursor are needed, making Dasher a prime candidate for use by both able-bodied and disabled.

It could, for example, be driven by a device which tracks eye movement.

MacKay is a co-founder of Transversal, a commercial venture which, again, exploits probability theory to make the interrogation of computer databases simpler. MacKay believes in sharing software and Dasher is free to download from the web, much to his Transversal colleagues' horror. Get your copy before they shrink wrap it.

www.inference.phy.cam.ac.uk/djw30/dasher/download.html

