Technology & Older Adults: Overcoming the Barriers

The Barriers:

1. An out-of-date learning style
2. Fear & lack of confidence
3. Lack of knowledge & understanding
4. Lack of an efficient skill set

Note: Memory is not usually a major barrier

These barriers may be overcome if older learners are helped to understand and acquire the following:

1. A new learning styles:

    - Trial and error is the learning style of today. Fiddling and playing are not only legitimate learning techniques, they are **essential** for electronic devices. It is difficult to break or harm any device by doing this (though you may get yourself confused at times). Old methods of rote learning are very inefficient when confronting new technology – there is too much to learn and it is constantly changing.

    - An ability to see 'errors' in a good light is essential. Errors are not bad things. They are just not the right way to do it. Do not beat yourself up when you make a mistake, try to use it as knowledge of something that didn't work (and thus to be avoided in your quest for how it does work).

    - Consult friends – they are a wealth of information. However, **do not** consult people under 30 years of age. They have no idea what you don't know and will start from somewhere you can't understand and go somewhere you have no hope of following. You will end up feeling stupid, when in fact it's their fault!

    - When you have a bit of an idea what you are doing **then** consult the instruction book (not before – it will just confuse you).

2. Respecting ones own intelligence:

    - Electronic gadgetry does have an understandable (though different) logic behind it. There is not a secret that you don't get if you are over 40 and there is no world-wide conspiracy to make people look like idiots. With a little understanding and a few skills learners are able to use them.

- Electronic gadets/computers talk to you, usually via a message on a screen (text or pictorial) or by voice. Get used to looking, reading or listening to this message. Think about it and then do what seems most obvious. Do not think too long, but do think!

3. <u>Knowing how electronic devices are structured:</u>

- Most electronic devices used in everyday life will have some kind of menu structure menu. These are the **key to understanding and mastering the device.**

- Menus can come in the following formats:
  i. Small pictures (icons) – eg computers, mobile phones
  ii. Words (written or spoken)

- Menus are like chapter headings in a book. Once you get to each chapter, there are sub headings to further help find the information you want.

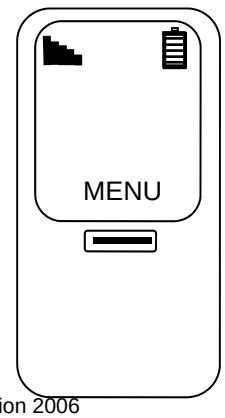
- Many of these menus are cyclical (ie chapter headings that go in a circle!). You can go in either direction – it doesn't matter (ie clockwise or anti-clockwise)

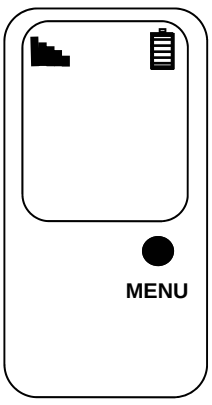
- They are like Babushka Dolls – ie menus inside menus inside menus! Your dive in, you back out. Hence the feeling of going round in circles and feeling totally lost!

- Electronic devices need to be told at each step what to do – **they cannot read you mind!** They are idiots, you've got to tell them everything (a little like children though, thankfully, a lot more obedient).

- There are many and varied ways of seeing and accessing a Menu. Some will just appear in front of you (eg on a computer), others you will have to physically 'go into' then.

- Mobile Phone menus are commonly accessed by either word menu is written on your screen. Alternatively you may have a Menu button.





4. Learning a new set of skills:

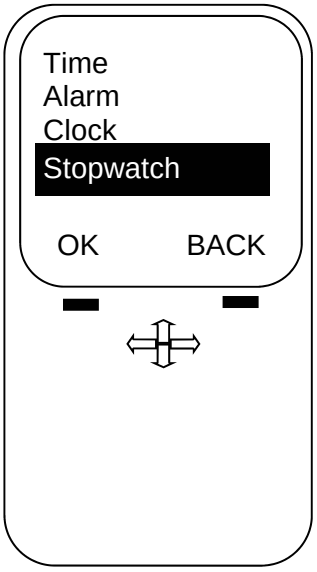
- Getting modern technology to do anything generally takes two steps:

    1. Find the thing you want to do
    2. Tell then equipment you want to do this (and sometimes how you want to do it).

- For example, on a mobile phone you **MUST** tell your phone what you want it to do **(**remember, it's an idiot). This is usually done by pressing a button. This may be:

    i. The **MENU** button (which may or may not be obvious)
    ii. A button **BELOW** a word on the screen.
    iii. Pressing OK when a word is highlighted (ie the word is shaded somehow).

Pressing OK will get you into the Stopwatch function.



Learners must get used to reading the screen!

- SCROLLING – using arrows or a mouse to get around the menu options, thus find the thing you want the phone to do.

- SEARCHING – Unlike books or simpler electric tools, electronic devices often have most of their information hidden. Learners need to understand this, and consciously look for more information or options.

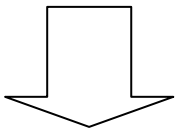
- SELECTING - clicking on a word or button to somehow indicate that, yep, this is what I want to do

- CANCELLING – (or Back) – allows you to undo what you've just done, or get out of a menu option.

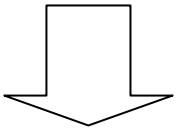
A process often looks like this:

(eg. Changing the time on a video recorder, accessing messages in a mobile phone, getting into a Word document and changing the font colour)

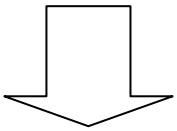
1. Enter the Menu



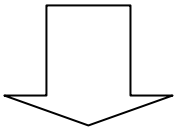
2. Search for what you want with the scrolling arrows or mouse



3. When you find what you want, make sure you have selected it or have made any necessary changes required and press OK or Enter to make it happen.



4. If you can't find it, keep looking. If you need to look in a different place, perhaps using the cancel or back key to get out of the bit you're in and look somewhere else



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