

## Computer keyboard A voluntary standard to facilitate writing French

**Improved ergonomics and making it easier to write French, regional and European languages: this is the dual objective assigned to a standard of voluntary application on the French keyboard, published today by AFNOR.**

Did you know that writing capital letters without accents is incorrect and can cause confusion? This is an example of bias generated by flaws in the “azerty” keyboard model, which takes its name from the first six alphabetic keys on the keyboard. Certain very common characters in the French language are quite absent from keyboards: this is the case, for example, of the “e in the a” ligatures for “et cætera”, of the “e in the o” of “oeuf”. Others are difficult to access or absent, depending on the operating systems. This is the case for example for capital [é] and [ç].

### Accents and midpoint

Current “azerty” keyboards also limit the entry of regional languages. However, in Occitan, it must be possible to add low and high accents to all the vowels, something difficult today with a basic keyboard; in Catalan, the midpoint must be accessible; Breton and Corsican require the use of the n tilde... In a context of European openness, it therefore became urgent to facilitate the writing of languages in the Latin alphabet: the eszett in German, the tilde in Castilian or Portuguese, the inverted question marks or exclamation marks, the O crossed out for Danish and Norwegian...

These findings, shared in 2015 by the general delegation for the French language and languages of France<sup>1</sup> (Ministry of Culture), motivated the launch of a project entrusted to AFNOR: bringing together the stakeholders able to define optimal layouts to write more easily with a keyboard. Difficulty within difficulty: in the absence of a reference “azerty” model, models vary from one keyboard manufacturer to another, from one computer operating system to another. THE

@ and € symbols, for example, are not always available in the same place.

### Increase writing skills

After more than three years of work and a public inquiry which collected thousands of comments consolidated in the final document, AFNOR is today publishing the result of this collective project: a standard, of voluntary application, which responds to all the issues identified by delivering specifications allowing operating system publishers and keyboard manufacturers

to adjust, without revolutionizing, French keyboards. Referenced “NF Z71ÿ300”, the voluntary standard offers character layouts and engraving rules allowing characters and symbols to be materialized.

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<sup>1</sup> [Consult the 2015 “Report to Parliament on the use of language”: page 51 “Towards a French standard for computer keyboards? »](#)

### An optimized “azerty”

The voluntary standard offers two models of keyboards, each offering the same writing possibilities, but aimed at different audiences and uses. The first is an optimized azerty model. The 26 letters of the alphabet and the numbers do not change place, unlike certain other signs such as certain accented vowels, the at sign, punctuation, the pound sign (hashtag), monetary symbols, braces, etc. Interested users will therefore be able to easily integrate these developments.



Improved “azerty” keyboard model

The second proposed model, called “bépo”, is already commonly used within a community of followers. The project was an opportunity to increase the possibilities offered via dead keys, and have no impact on key engravings. This model is today recognized as offering the most ergonomic and efficient layout possible for entering French and other languages with a Latin alphabet, but also for programming.



“bépo” keyboard model



### A new market for manufacturers

The NF Z71300 standard is now available to keyboard manufacturers who would like to offer new models on the market. They are free to comply with it, knowing that their business and administration customers could make it a prerequisite in their calls for tenders aimed at renewing their office equipment.

### AFNOR group press contact: To

receive the standard

 To receive the press kit

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### AFNOR, in brief

AFNOR is the French reference organization for voluntary standards. It manages the collection of existing documents and leads the work of interested parties for the creation and revision of standards and to identify subjects that could provide material for developing new ones. Launched at the initiative of market players, the voluntary standard is a reference framework which aims to provide guidelines, technical or qualitative requirements for products, services or practices serving the general interest. Anyone can participate in its creation and any organization may or may not use and refer to it. This is why the standard is called voluntary. As coordinator of standardization in France, AFNOR has one ambition: to contribute to the dissemination of good practices and effective solutions, for the benefit of all. <https://normalisation.afnor.org>