

home office/study



reading writing computing communicating

The home office needs to be designed so that all functions can be accommodated within the space. Its location is important so it could be advantageous to position it to be easily accessed from the front entrance if it is a home based business. This allows clients or company representatives convenient access, and you can retain privacy in more personal areas of the home.

If it is a family office/study it may be better positioned near the kitchen or living room, or within a bedroom or rumpus room if it is mainly being used for students to do their homework.

When planning to renovate a home office, take into consideration access to telecommunication cables and electrical connections to run computing and communication/telephone systems and equipment.

While the home office needs to be functional and efficient do not overlook the importance of comfort and aesthetic aspects when planning this room.



quiet reflective or creative stimulating

The office or study is a space where you should be able to focus on the tasks at hand without the interruption of other family or flatmates. The feeling within the space depends on the needs of those using it. Some like to study or work in a private and quiet environment, while others prefer a space that is buzzy and stimulating.

Teenagers often enjoy listening to their music while doing homework, and younger children enjoy their artworks and models being out on display.

If it is a working office, people who spend a lot of time on the telephone or interviewing people may require privacy and quietness.

Sometimes these spaces are also used for hobbies or creative crafts as well as essential tasks.



functions + equipment + services

What activities will take place:

- Study/homework for school or college.
- Operating a home-based business.
- Personal accounts and administration.
- Creative writing or art and crafts.

What equipment will be required:

- Desk and chair/s.
- Telephone, fax, photocopier.
- Computer, printer, scanner.
- Drawing board or art easel.
- Filing cabinets, drawers, shelves.
- Storage for books, stationery, etc.

What services will be needed:

- Electricity, gas, water.
- Heating, air conditioning, lighting.
- Telephone/internet connection.



space + planning

- How many people will use the space at one time?
- Will more than one activity take place in the space?

- Does the activity create mess - rubbish removal?
- Is special lighting required for various tasks?
- What soundproofing is necessary for the space?
- How much storage will be needed for equipment and supplies?
- Will the office be a separate room or part of an existing space? e.g. basement, attic, landing, hallway, outbuilding.
- Security - does the area need additional locks, alarm, window security?
- Should the space be isolated or close to other facilities? e.g. bathroom or kitchen.
- Is there convenient parking for visitors if it is a home office?
- Design the space and equipment so that it is ergonomically safe and everything is within easy reach.



desk

Because the desk is usually the work centre of the office, think about this first. If there is a view or outlook from a window you may want to maximise this when positioning your desk in the space. Ensure you have easy access to the desk and adequate space around it to move your chair in and out.

The height of the desk depends on the person using it, but they are usually between 620 and 720mm from the ground. If computing, a desk height of around 660mm off the floor is considered ideal for comfortable operation with the screen at eye level. The operator should be able to look at the screen with their head straight, not tilted backward or forward. Likewise, forearms should not be angled up when your hands rest on the keyboard.

Adjustable height chairs for computer workstations are also important to ensure the operator is adequately supported. Usually 500mm clearance is needed from the chair seat to the desktop for leg room (knee space). Feet should be flat on the floor, or a footstool used.

The surface material of the desk should be practical and easy to maintain. A highly reflective surface causes eye strain, and some surfaces are more noisy than others. Timber or laminate are always popular, glass tops are better frosted to minimise glare.



seating

The task chair is probably the most important piece of furniture in this space - it must ergonomically support the person seated upon it.

Like the bed where we spend eight hours a day, the office chair is often used for similar periods of time and therefore an investment in one that is suited to your particular body type and tasks to be undertaken is critical.

Most office chairs have adjustable seat heights and back supports, and are on wheels so they can be moved around.

Take time to select the right chair and have it adjusted by the supplier to ensure a good fit and support to your body.

If more than one person is using the space, individual task chairs may need to be provided as not many of us are disciplined enough to adjust the chair each time we sit in it.

Visitors seating is normally needed as well, small tub chairs or similar are ideal. A window seat can double up as storage underneath if space is limited, or be used as a spare bed for overnight guests.



storage

Make a list of the items regularly used when working at the desk - apart from the computer it will usually include pens, paper, telephone, lamp, calculator, files, wastepaper bin, reference books, stapler, punch, etc.

Design a storage system to suit - each item should be easy to reach from your chair as well as being kept in order. Pen pots, file trays, baskets and tins keep things contained on the desk. Do not cover the desk with items - leave plenty of room to work as well.

Filing cabinets, floor to ceiling cupboards or shelves and free standing units can accommodate things used less often such as stationery supplies, file boxes, books etc.

Pegboards and metal grids allow objects to be hung around the desk such as timetables, calendars, reminders, artworks.

The example above shows a room-divider wall of storage. which has a pull-out office desk and lots of great storage.



Good lighting is needed for overall safety when moving about the home office, and a good level of task lighting is very important to reduce eye strain and retain good posture when seated at a work station.

Overall lighting can be achieved by downlights, while task lighting is usually achieved with a desk lamp and accent lights may be used to display a pin board or book collection. Larger windows with translucent glass allow more natural light into the space, as well as provide better ventilation. Glass, metal or timber louvers provide good air flow and ventilation.

Ensure that the lighting is not directly hitting the screen of a monitor, or creating shadows on the work surface of the desk. A desk lamp with adjustable arm is useful to direct the light exactly where you need it at the work station.

Fluorescent lights with daylight tubes give the closest to natural light if working with colour and fine details.

Supplement natural light with task lighting.

ventilation + heating + comfort

Good ventilation is always important for health and wellbeing, to energise us when working long hours or studying, as the brain needs oxygen to function effectively.

Keeping the space warm in winter is also imperative for comfort, but if overheated a work space becomes stuffy and those within it will become drowsy and less alert. Generally a room temperature of 18 to 20°C is considered ideal for learning/working. It is better to put on a sweater and woollen socks rather than overheat the space in winter.

Natural fragrances enhance a work space, and plants help to balance the air especially in a room with lots of computing and electrical equipment.

'White noise' is the background noise created by whirring computers, printers, lights, heaters, etc. and something to think about when designing the home office. Low level music may offset this.

The right environment supports brain function.



floors + walls + ceilings

Flooring materials most often used are carpet or carpet tiles as they help to minimise noise. Timber, cork or vinyl are easy to clean if messy tasks are being undertaken such as art etc. Industrial rubber flooring or polished concrete are other options for a modern treatment.

The walls and ceilings are most often painted in a satin or low sheen acrylic and a panel of blackboard paint is great in a kid's space.

The colour and style of the room may need to work with the architecture and style of the house, or if a totally separate room the space can stand alone.

The home office is often streamlined, modern and professional if clients visit the premises, or maybe more cosy and casual if it is just for the family to use.



office/study colours

As most offices are busy places, soft neutral colours generally provide a good backdrop to the computers and equipment. Beiges, warm greys, oxidised pastels, warmed or colour infused whites.

Stark white can be too reflective and cause glare if there is lots of light in the space, and strong colours such as red and orange are best avoided in work space as they are too confrontational. Yellow is supposed to help us retain information, but again this should be pale if used on the walls.

Lighter colours also keep the space light and airy, open and clean, especially if there are not a lot of windows.

Resene

the paint the professionals use

Timber surfaces provide warmth, and wool upholstery provides texture and being a natural product also breathes and is less harsh on clothing than many synthetic fabrics. The office seating may be the best place to use stronger accent colours.

Neutrals and pastels work best in office areas



As office equipment gets smaller, the office space can also be more compact. Mobile telephones and laptop computers make us more mobile in business today. The workstation on wheels can be pushed away into a corner or cupboard when not in use. The laptop computer only requires a small stand like the one on the right.



shelves + books

There's never enough storage! Remember to store the things you use all the time within reach. Shelves fixed to the wall are idea for books and files. Leave enough room on your desk to work!



space for kids

This is a great kids space in an attic with plenty of room to do homework as well as spaces to put artworks and stuff. The hammocks are great to stretch out in and think. Kids need regular snacks of good brain food and lots of water when studying.



hide away

The study area incorporated into floor to ceiling cabinets can be tucked away when not in use. The above workstation folds away into a small cupboard which looks like a piece of furniture.

working from home



Today more and more people are operating a business from home or working on contract to other companies from a home-based office. Distractions can be a difficult problem - make a distinction between business and domestic tasks.

Prevent friends and family interrupting you during work hours by letting them know the days and hours you will be working in your office, and stick to these hours yourself. If possible put in a separate phone line for work use and the home phone onto answer phone when working.

The rewards of independence and flexibility by working from home are well worth the effort but one needs to be disciplined and organised to make it work successfully. You cannot easily combine childcare, housework, socialising etc within your dedicated work hours.

It is equally as important to shut the office door at the end of your 'work day' and not be tempted back into the office during the evening when most people are spending time with their family and friends, or enjoying some relaxation or recreation out of work.

compiled by

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