



CREATING A HOME OFFICE

In 7 Easy Steps

INTRODUCTION

Business executives have had ergonomic chairs for decades now, chairs that make fine-tuned postural adjustments for the user. Why? It wasn't just for comfort. Researchers had discovered that these subtle shifts could also improve the THINKING abilities of these executives. In the 1980's the idea spread to the secretarial pool. It has yet to reach the classroom, however, where thinking is the primary activity all day, or the desk or dining room table, where important homework is done each evening.

While fancy and costly chairs may be out of the question, we also know that there are many other small adjustments that can enhance learning as well. So let's start making small changes where it is the easiest – in the home. You can create a "home office" that makes homework much easier. If you begin this process when you are in middle school, by the time you reach high school, your homework routine will have become streamlined and you will be much more able to become a successful scholar. If you are already a high school or college student, you will find that creating your ideal study space can make homework much less stressful.

LOCATING THE HOME OFFICE

This may sound like you need to dedicate an entire room to your study space, but that is not the case. Even if the dining room table is the only space you have to use, you can make it work just fine with a few adjustments. And if you are fortunate enough to have a study desk somewhere in your house or apartment, that is a bonus.

DECIDING WHERE TO SIT

The first decision will be the location – not just the room or the table, but the seating. Which chair around the table feels best, gives a feeling of a protected back, provides the best visual environment (we'll talk more about that later) AND provides the best lighting. If you are looking at a student desk in your bedroom, consider the possibility of moving the furniture around so the desk feels right. Think about what will be at your back. If that is where the door is located, or where a lot of clutter sits, chances are the location won't work very well. If you tend to have so much energy that just sitting at all seems difficult, you can experiment with standing at a counter, or sitting on a therapy ball that lets you roll around a bit.

ADJUSTING THE LIGHTING

Not everyone wants the same amount of brightness to read. So if the lighting can be on a dimmer switch or if a desk lamp can have two or three levels of brightness to it, you can adjust the brightness to fit. The location of the lighting also makes a difference. When the only source of light is a chandelier or ceiling light, it is likely to create a lot of glare on the white page and this can create eye strain very quickly and even lead to headaches with some readers. If you can also set up a floor or table lamp to soften the lighting pattern, that would be ideal.

SELECTING THE READING ANGLE

Have you ever seen a Ben Franklin desk? It is a standing desk with a slanted top. Ben Franklin probably had a bit of hyperactivity and needed

to drain it off by standing. He also preferred to place his books on a slant when he read. He had stumbled upon another adjustment that we now understand. If you find it easier to read a page on the computer than in a book, it is quite likely that your eyes don't track across a page easily. If that's true, then propping the book nearly upright will make reading much smoother. You won't lose your place as often, and it is much easier on your neck muscles. Fortunately, office supply stores now carry wire book holders that are usually under \$5 and work just fine. Not only that, they fold up and can slip into a back pack if you want to use it during a study hall or in the library.

ARRANGING THE VISUAL ENVIRONMENT

You may prefer an office with a window so you can look up from your close work and rest your eyes on a pleasant long view every so often. This is great for the eye muscles, and if you are primarily an auditory learner, an actual window will provide a nice break. It won't distract you because you spend most of your study time listening to your own thoughts in your head. But if you are primarily a visual learner, you can lose your train of thought more easily if the view is full of interesting activity. You are likely to fare better with a fixed view – an arrangement of dried flowers, a wall hanging or a piece of artwork. You will need to create something pleasing to the eye but unchanging, so it doesn't take your mind off of your work. And if you are a kinesthetic learner, having some objects that your free hand can fidget with and perhaps a tilting foot rest that lets you exercise your legs will be more important than any visual touches. [If you aren't sure which kind of learner you are, try the checklists in the activity called Checking the Channels to find out.]

INSULATING THE AUDITORY ENVIRONMENT

Everyone's ears are different. Some of us can do our best work surrounded by the chatter of a coffee house, while others need complete quiet in order to concentrate. But home life can't be completely quiet, and its chatter is far too interesting to ignore. So this will call for some

family planning. Perhaps the TV can be turned off during key study times. You could try using musician's ear plugs or sound insulated ear muffs from a sporting goods store to hear yourself think better. You may find that you can focus well on certain subjects and assignments with music too. Usually music without lyrics, music with a steady fast beat, and lively classical music work best. Another possibility would be tracks of environmental sounds – the sound of rain, spring time in the country, or ocean waves, for example. However, if the assignment involves writing, these same sounds can drown out your inner speech, making writing extremely difficult. It may also make mathematical thinking just about impossible because you need to enter a very unusual high speed zone to do math well.

GATHERING OFFICE SUPPLIES

The final touch in this home office project calls for a trip to an office supply store. If you can afford it, plan on buying \$25 worth of supplies, but if money is scarce, even \$10 will work. The point is to choose for yourself which organizational tools will help the most. Sticky notes, file folders, a file rack, note cards, highlighter pens, a stapler and paper punch, paper clips, report jackets, a book holder – your goal is to get small items that can help you get organized. Don't be discouraged if some of those items aren't as useful as you thought. Just taking these active steps toward order is what counts. In time you will come up with the best supplies for your ideal home office!! Have fun with it!

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