4 Steps to Create a Study Space in Your Room

In order to create a study space, follow these four steps;

1. Remove all distractions.
2. Have easy access to everything you need before you start.
3. Experiment with lighting.
4. Adjust your study space to the ideal temperature.

1. Remove Distractions from Your Study Space

As in so many areas of life, it’s useful to start with what to leave out and then add things from there. Naturally, what puts you in a studious mood will differ from person to person, but here are some things you should probably avoid in your study space:

- Video games.
- Your phone.
- Lots of open tabs (link to study apps for students that can help avoid this).
- Multiple monitors unless it’s really imperative to your work (a separate external monitor is fine if you’re using it as your main screen or as part of a standing desk setup).
- Messy food/drinks/junk food.
- Other people (unless you’re working on a group project, in which case you should be working somewhere else).

These are all things that, while fun or even productive-seeming, are ultimately distracting. The goal of a study space is to maximize the attention you can devote to studying while minimizing the amount of effort necessary to do so. You can’t do that if the space is full of distractions.

2. Have Easy Access to Everything You Need Before You Start

Now that we’ve gone over what to leave out, let’s get to what to include. This is a long list, and much of it depends on what exactly you’re studying.

For instance, you’ll need different materials for writing an English paper than for preparing for a chemistry exam. To help you out, I’ve divided the list into two sections: essential and optional items.

**Essential Study Space Items**

1. Comfortable yet ergonomic chair or standing desk. If you’ve never tried a standing desk setup, I strongly suggest trying it. It’s been a game changer for my productivity and health. The Spark standing desk is a cheap starter option that I love. It’s made of cardboard, but mine’s still holding up great after 6 months of daily use. You can also make your own.
2. If standing, something soft to stand on (a yoga mat or soft rug works great).
3. An external mouse (it’s way more ergonomic than using the trackpad).
4. Your computer, if necessary.
5. Textbooks or e-reader with relevant books loaded.
7. Index cards.
8. Pad of paper to write down distracting thoughts. While studying, you’re bound to have “great” ideas or just to remember stuff you need to do like laundry or emailing a professor. Don’t let these thoughts distract you—just write them down on the paper to get them out of your head and let you review them later.
9. Plenty of writing utensils appropriate for the subject (mechanical pencils for math, etc).
10. Calculator or other subject specific tools as necessary.
11. Good lighting. If you can’t see your paper, it will be harder to work and it will make reading more difficult. Natural light is best, but a good desk lamp can make a world of difference as well.

Optional Items

- Whiteboard and dry erase markers (not essential, but super helpful for practicing math, sketching out designs, brainstorming essays...I could go on).
- Tactile thinking aids. For example, a Rubix cube, some putty/clay, or even just a pen to click. These are great because they give your hands something to do when working on a tough problem, helping you engage your brain’s non-linear, pattern matching R-mode (for more on this concept, check out Pragmatic Thinking and Learning).
- Tea, coffee, or water.
- Healthy snacks that don’t make a mess (nuts, banana, granola bar, carrots, dried fruit, etc). These help keep your blood sugar up, ensuring that you can stay in the “flow state” for longer.
- Inspiring decorations. Like a low maintenance plant or a cool poster. I personally have some inspiring quotes written on index cards.
- Paper calendar. This is way more helpful than you might think. For example, when you’re writing an essay and need to check the date without distracting yourself by going on Google or looking at your phone.
- Study music or ambient noise (I suggest Rainy Mood or Coffitivity).
- A kitchen timer. These are helpful for Pomodoro sprints or other time oriented drills.
- Headphones. Great for blocking out distractions wherever you are.

3. Experiment with lighting.

- I don’t know about you, but sunlight tends to energize me and get me excited.
- According to a German study that looked at the effects of color temperature and brightness on the productivity of students at the Cologne University of Applied Sciences, researchers found that the students were more creative under warm light (3000k), yet concentrated better under cold light (6000k).
- To put this into action, try to study near a window, so you have some natural light coming in.
- Another tip is to experiment with different brightness levels and color temperatures until you find something that works well for you. And no, you don’t have to buy a gazillion lightbulbs from the hardware store to figure out what works best for you—you can just get a lamp with a dimmer and play with the switch.
• Lighting is especially important if you’re reading from a paper textbook or doing other paper work (such as math problem sets). If you’re having to squint at the book, then you probably need more light (or glasses). A desk lamp is a worthwhile investment in this case, as the overhead fluorescents in most dorm rooms are often too diffuse to give you the clear, focused light required for reading.

4. Adjust Your Study Space to the Ideal Temperature (if possible)

• Aside from color temperature, the actual warm-cold temperature of the room you’re in is also a big factor. Not only can an environment that’s too hot or cold cause you to be consciously distracted, but it can also cause you to make more mistakes in your work unconsciously.
• Researchers at the University of Helsinki and Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory reviewed several studies on how temperature affects office worker productivity. They found that, on average, productivity is highest in a temperature range between 72°F and 77°F (22°C and 25°C). Below or above that range, errors increase.
• You won’t always have control over the temperature of your study space (looking at you, arctic dorm room air conditioning), but do what you can to get the temperature into this ideal range. If it really is unbearably hot or cold, then it may be worth it to temporarily move to another study area that has a more pleasant temperature (such as the library or student center).

I know, that previous section was a pretty long list. While certain items are key to creating a study space, don’t lose sight of the real goal. Because when it comes down to it, creating a study space is all about the way it makes you feel. It’s about what puts you (and no one else) in a studious mood.

In addition to having the right materials, here are a few more principles that will make your study space (and study time) more effective:

1. **Make sure all your study materials are functioning.** Do this before you start studying. You can get derailed easily if something stupid happens like your pen isn’t working, your pencil runs out of lead, or your computer isn’t charged.
2. **Make your study space ergonomic.** Don’t slouch, keep your feet on the floor, position your screen at eye level (otherwise you’ll wreck your neck), and type with your wrists in a neutral position. For an illustration of this, have a look at this graphic from Zapier.
3. **Keep your study space as clean (or messy) as you like.** Some research suggests that messy spaces can be better for creative work, since they encourage unconventional thinking. Other productivity experts swear by a minimalist, decluttered desk. Really, I think it comes down to personal preference. If a cluttered study space works best for you, then rock on. If you can’t stand to have things messy, then don’t. I would, however, suggest you experiment with both ways, as the results might surprise you. Whatever you do, don’t let old pizza or take out boxes pile up— that’s just gross.
4. **Take breaks every 30-60 minutes.** Besides being good for your health, **regular breaks** also boost your productivity and focus.

5. **View your study space as a WIP.** Don’t go out and buy everything we suggest in this article. Try one or two things and see if you like them, then add from there. Remember, the ultimate goal is to **make your study time more effective**, not to create the best workspace just for its own sake.

6. **Make the best of the space you have.** Especially if you’re in a dorm with a roommate, it can be tricky to get everything perfect. You have to work with the furniture that the university provides you, as well as your roommate’s preferences. But don’t let that discourage you—view it as a reason to **get creative**.