

Benching & Open-Plan Workstations

1 Always specify sound masking for open benching — it is the single most effective acoustic tool

Sound masking raises the ambient noise floor to make conversations unintelligible at distance. Sound masking is a standard acoustic infrastructure investment. Without masking, open benching environments typically achieve Privacy Index values of only 20–60 — functionally insufficient for concentrated work.

3 Specify 4 power outlets per station minimum — not 2

Users typically have 4–6 plugged devices: monitor, dock, task light, phone charger, personal fan, etc. Two outlets per station leads to power strips on desks, which violate fire codes and defeat clean benching aesthetics. Inventory actual device counts before finalizing.

5 Specify fabric-wrapped privacy screens — acrylic screens do not absorb sound
Acrylic and glass screens provide visual separation but zero acoustic benefit. Fabric-wrapped screens contribute meaningfully to local sound absorption. In an environment where every decibel matters, this distinction is critical.

7 Coordinate floor box locations before finalizing the benching layout

Benching runs are stationary once installed. If floor boxes are not aligned with the run, power feeds must run exposed to the nearest box — a safety hazard and aesthetic problem. Coordinate with the electrical engineer or facilities team early.

9 Use carpet or carpet tile under benching zones — hard floors amplify noise
Carpet adds absorption across mid frequencies and significantly reduces sound reflection between hard surfaces. The difference between carpet and hard flooring in an open benching zone is immediately audible. Specify carpet tile for easy maintenance and replacement.

2 80–100 sq ft per person is the practical sweet spot for density

Ultra-dense layouts at 50–65 sq ft per person are architecturally achievable but consistently degrade acoustic comfort and employee satisfaction in post-occupancy surveys. Resist the temptation to over-densify.

4 Pair 24-inch-deep surfaces with monitor arms — without exception

A monitor sitting flat on a 24-inch surface is too close to the user and consumes the entire depth. A monitor arm reclaims 6–10 inches of depth and allows proper 18–30 inch viewing distance. This transforms a tight station into a fully functional ergonomic setup.

6 Plan focus rooms at a ratio of 1 room per 8–10 benching stations

Benching works for collaborative tasks but cannot provide acoustic privacy for phone calls, video conferences, or deep focus work. Adjacent enclosed focus rooms are not optional — they are essential infrastructure for making open benching sustainable.

8 Insert a cross-aisle break every 10–12 stations for circulation and egress

Long uninterrupted benching runs become acoustically oppressive and complicate cable access. A 36–48 inch break provides cross-aisle circulation, emergency egress, and a natural separation point between teams.

10 Do not specify benching for roles that need sustained deep focus without providing enclosed alternatives

Software developers, financial analysts, writers, and legal professionals find open benching acoustically and visually disruptive. If these roles must sit in benching zones, ensure bookable focus rooms are steps away — not down the hall.