

Desk Space Planning

These are the 5 most commonly asked questions about desk space planning for commercial office environments, with straightforward answers to help you make a confident, well-informed purchase decision.

Top 5 Questions — Desk Space Planning

1

How much space does each employee workstation need?

Space allocation depends on the workstation type: ultra-dense benching uses 50–65 sq ft per person (technically achievable but consistently degrades satisfaction), standard open-plan benching uses 100–125 sq ft, traditional cubicles use 150–200 sq ft, and private offices use 200–300 sq ft. The practical sweet spot for open-plan knowledge workers is 80–100 sq ft per person. When planning, always account for the workstation itself plus clearances — 42–48 inches behind the seated user, 36–44 inches for primary circulation aisles, and 24–36 inches for secondary passage. The net usable floor area per person is what determines both density and occupant satisfaction.

2

What clearances do I need around a desk for ADA compliance?

ADA accessible workstations require a work surface height of 28–34 inches, knee clearance of at least 27 inches high, 30 inches wide, and 19 inches deep under the desk, and a 30" × 48" clear floor space at the workstation for a forward approach. For passage aisles serving accessible workstations, maintain 36 inches of clear width minimum (44 inches preferred). A 60-inch turning radius must be available within the accessible work area. Height-adjustable desks with a range of 22–34 inches automatically satisfy the surface height requirement. Fixed-height desks at the standard 30-inch height may not accommodate wheelchair users comfortably — verify actual knee clearance before placement.

3**How do I plan the layout of a multi-person office?**

Start with the room's total usable square footage and subtract the fixed elements (columns, mechanical rooms, restrooms, permanent walls). Divide the remaining area by the target square footage per person to get the maximum headcount the space can support. Lay out primary circulation aisles first (44-inch minimum width) to establish the skeleton of the plan, then place workstation clusters or desk rows within the resulting zones. Confirm door clearances (36–42 inches of swing clearance), window access, natural light distribution, and egress paths to exits. Use a scale floor plan rather than estimating by eye — furniture that appears to fit in a visual assessment frequently fails to provide adequate clearance when measured.

4**How much clearance do I need behind a desk for chair pushback?**

The minimum clearance behind a seated user (from the back of the chair to the nearest wall or obstruction) is 36 inches for a standard straight desk or L-shaped desk, with 42–48 inches recommended for comfortable daily use. Bow-front desks require 48 inches minimum because the curved front naturally positions the user slightly further from the desk edge. If a visitor chair is placed in front of the desk in a private office, add 36–42 inches from the visitor chair's back to the front of the desk. U-shaped workstations require separate clearance on both the front opening and the sides for the user to move freely between surfaces.

5**What is the correct desk height and what if it does not fit the user?**

Standard desk height is 28.5–30 inches, established for the widest range of seated adult users. The 30-inch standard was set for typewriter use and is slightly tall for modern keyboard work — 28.5–29 inches suits most users between 5'4" and 6'0". Users shorter than 5'4" may find even 28.5 inches too high, creating elevated shoulder posture and wrist strain; a footrest and keyboard tray can compensate. Users taller than 6'1" often benefit from adjustable-height desks with ranges extending to 32–34 inches. The cleanest solution for a diverse-height workforce is height-adjustable desks with a range of 22–48 inches, which accommodate virtually all users and satisfy ADA requirements automatically.

Have more questions? Our office furniture specialists are ready to help.

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