

Guest & Side Chairs

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

Top 5 Questions — Guest & Side Chairs

1

How many guest chairs do I need and where do I use them?

Standard quantities by location: reception and lobby areas need 4–8 chairs (or more for high visitor volume), sized for 15–45 minute waits; private offices typically have 2 guest chairs positioned across from the primary desk; waiting rooms in healthcare, legal, and financial settings need chairs sized to client/patient volume; training rooms need the full class count plus 10% extra. Always order 10–15% more guest chairs than the minimum count — guest chairs are used by the widest range of visitors and take varied abuse, making replacement needs inevitable, and having matching replacements on hand avoids mismatched seating over time.

2

What upholstery is most durable for commercial guest chairs?

Contract fabric rated at a minimum of 250,000 double rubs on the Wyzenbeek scale is the baseline for any commercial guest chair — residential upholstery rated at 15,000–30,000 double rubs shows visible wear within a year of commercial traffic. Vinyl or faux leather (rated 200,000+ double rubs) is the best choice for healthcare environments, food-adjacent spaces, and high-traffic areas where wipe-down cleaning with disinfectants is required. Polypropylene shell chairs (molded plastic) offer near-unlimited durability and are appropriate for cafeterias, flex spaces, and modern-aesthetic offices. Genuine leather is appropriate only for executive reception areas with a maintenance program. For high-traffic areas, specify medium-tone fabrics rather than light colors — whites and creams show stains dramatically faster.

3**What is the right seat height for a guest chair?**

Standard guest chair seat height is 17–19 inches — this is the ADA-accessible range and accommodates the widest variety of adult visitors for sitting down and standing up comfortably. Seat heights outside this range create problems: too low (below 17 inches) and mobility-impaired or elderly visitors struggle to rise from the seat; too high (above 19 inches) and shorter visitors cannot sit with feet flat on the floor. Guest chairs have fixed seat heights (unlike task chairs), which means selecting the correct height at purchase is critical and cannot be adjusted later. Always verify the actual seat height measurement, not just the overall chair height, before ordering.

4**Should guest chairs have armrests?**

At least one chair in every waiting and reception area should have armrests. Armrests provide leverage for visitors who need assistance rising from the seat — this is particularly important for elderly visitors, individuals with mobility limitations, and any post-operative or injured visitors. Armless chairs pack tighter and provide a lighter aesthetic, but they offer no assistance for those who need it. Sled-base chairs are harder for mobility-impaired users to exit than four-leg chairs with armrests, so any accessible seating area should include at least one four-leg option with armrests. For ADA compliance, include at least one accessible chair per seating area that meets the 17–19 inch seat height and firm cushion standards.

5**Can I use folding chairs for overflow seating in client-facing areas?**

No — folding chairs look temporary and unprofessional in client-facing environments such as reception areas, executive offices, and conference rooms. Stack chairs provide the same flexibility (they stack 4–12 high and can be brought out for overflow) with a finished, intentional appearance. Nesting chairs provide even more storage efficiency (8–15 chairs in 6 linear feet of wall space) with professional aesthetics. Both stack and nesting chairs are available in upholstered versions that coordinate with existing seating. Folding chairs are appropriate only in back-of-house, warehouse, or event environments where the temporary appearance is acceptable.

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

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