

# Straight Desks

These are the 10 most commonly asked questions about straight desks for commercial office environments, with straightforward answers to help you make a confident, well-informed purchase decision.

## Top 10 Questions — Straight Desks

### 1 What size straight desk do I need?

Desk width should be determined by the equipment and workflow at the workstation. A 48-inch desk is the minimum for productive work and suits a single-monitor or laptop setup in a compact space. A 60-inch desk is the practical standard for a single-monitor workstation with adequate space for a keyboard, mouse, phone, and some documents — this is the most commonly specified commercial size. A 66-inch desk adds a reference area beside the primary monitor zone. A 72-inch desk is recommended for dual-monitor setups or for users who regularly work with printed materials alongside digital screens. Desk depth is equally important: 24 inches is the commercial minimum, but 29–30 inches is the standard that provides proper ergonomic monitor viewing distance (20–28 inches from eyes to screen). Only specify a 24-inch desk if the user works exclusively from a laptop without an external monitor.

### 2 What surface material should I specify for a commercial straight desk?

Thermal Fused Melamine (TFM) is the commercial standard — the surface layer is bonded under heat and pressure, creating a harder, more scratch- and stain-resistant finish than standard laminate. TFM resists daily wear from keyboards, coffee cups, and cleaning products and maintains its appearance through years of commercial use. High-Pressure Laminate (HPL) is the premium upgrade with slightly greater impact resistance and an even wider range of finish options. Standard laminate (without thermal fusing) is adequate for light commercial or home office use but chips and peels under daily commercial wear — do not specify it for high-use commercial workstations. Wood veneer is appropriate for executive offices where natural grain appearance is the priority and the desk will receive careful daily maintenance. Always specify TFM or HPL for any desk in a commercial environment with daily multi-user or single heavy-use.

**3****What pedestal configuration should I choose for a straight desk?**

Pedestal configuration determines the type and amount of built-in storage at the workstation. BBF (Box/Box/File) is the most versatile configuration — two shallow box drawers for supplies, pens, and personal items, plus one deep file drawer for hanging folders — and is the most commonly specified option for general commercial workstations. FF (File/File) with two file drawers is appropriate for roles with heavy paper filing needs, such as accounting or legal. BF (Box/File) provides one shallow drawer and one file drawer in a more compact format for desks where full-depth pedestals would feel too bulky. Single-pedestal desks are specified with the pedestal on the right side by default; left-handed users should explicitly request left-side placement at order time — this is factory-set and cannot be changed after manufacturing. Mobile pedestals (on casters) are appropriate for hot-desking and flexible environments where the storage unit may need to move with the user.

**4****What clearances do I need around a straight desk?**

The most critical clearance is behind the desk — where the chair rolls back when the user stands. Allow a minimum of 42 inches behind the desk for chair push-back and comfortable standing; 48–60 inches is preferred in private offices. Side clearance between the desk and a wall should be at least 24 inches for egress, with 30–36 inches preferred for comfortable movement. In front of the desk, allow 36 inches for a visitor chair with the user seated at the desk; 42 inches if visitors need to pull the chair back to sit down. Door swing clearance of 36–42 inches must be maintained from the desk edge to the door arc. A 60-inch desk in a private office requires a room approximately 8 feet by 8 feet as the absolute minimum to meet these clearances — smaller rooms will create a cramped, non-functional workspace.

**5****How should I handle cable management on a straight desk?**

Plan cable management at the time of order — drilling grommets after delivery voids most manufacturer warranties and risks cracking the laminate surface. Specify grommet locations at the back of the desk where monitors sit and at the side where peripheral devices connect. Under-desk wire management trays (metal or plastic trays mounted under the surface) hold power strips, adapters, and cables off the floor — this is the single most effective cable management accessory and should be standard on any commercial workstation. If the desk has a modesty panel, confirm it includes a cut-out or cable pass-through so cables can run from the back of the desk to floor outlets without being pinched or crimped. For sit-stand desks, add a flexible cable spine or coil to accommodate the full range of desk travel without pulling cables taut at the maximum height position.

**6****What is the standard height for a straight desk and how does it affect ergonomics?**

Most commercial straight desks are fixed at 28.5–30 inches high. The traditional 30-inch standard was established for typewriter use, which required an elevated wrist position — modern keyboard and mouse work is more comfortable at 28.5–29 inches for most users between 5'4" and 6'0". A desk that is too high causes shoulder elevation and wrist extension during typing, contributing to repetitive strain injuries over time. For offices with diverse user heights, specify height-adjustable desks (manual adjustment range 24–34 inches) or fully electric sit-stand desks (22–48 inches) — these satisfy ADA accessibility requirements automatically and accommodate the widest range of users. Always specify adjustable leveling glides on all desk legs or end panels to compensate for uneven floors, which are common in older buildings.

**7****What is a modesty panel on a straight desk and do I need one?**

A modesty panel is a vertical panel attached to the front of the desk that blocks the view of the user's legs and under-desk area from the opposite side. It provides visual privacy in open-plan environments where desks face each other or are visible from public areas. Full modesty panels span the entire desk width and provide maximum privacy but reduce under-desk airflow and may restrict legroom for taller users over 6'1". Partial modesty panels cover the center portion only, balancing privacy with ventilation. Metal mesh panels provide visual screening while allowing airflow — a good choice for open-plan environments. No panel (open-frame legs) is appropriate for training rooms, hoteling stations, and anywhere the workspace is temporary or shared. ADA note: if a full modesty panel is specified, verify that the under-desk knee clearance remains at least 27 inches high, 30 inches wide, and 19 inches deep for accessible workstations.

**8****What edge banding specification should I look for on a commercial desk?**

Edge banding protects the exposed edge of the desk surface from chipping, moisture, and impact — it is the most vulnerable part of a laminate desk surface because the core material (MDF or particleboard) is exposed at all edges without it. PVC or ABS edge banding in 3mm thickness is the commercial standard — it provides a visible protective border with a slight radius that is pleasant to touch and highly resistant to impact. Thinner banding (1mm) is found on economy commercial and home-office products and chips more readily under daily desk edge contact. The edge banding should match the surface finish exactly — mismatched edge banding is immediately noticeable and looks unprofessional, especially when adding desks to an existing installation. Confirm the edge banding profile (straight edge vs. radius edge vs. waterfall/curved edge) matches existing furniture in the space before ordering replacement units.

**9****Can I use a straight desk in an open-plan environment?**

Straight desks are the most common choice for open-plan commercial environments because their rectangular footprint is the most space-efficient configuration for row-and-column or back-to-back layouts. In open-plan settings, desks are typically arranged facing each other across a shared aisle, or all facing the same direction in rows. When desks face each other, allow combined behind-desk clearance of at least 84 inches (42 inches per person) between the back edges of opposing desks. When desks face the same direction, allow 36–48 inches for shared aisles between rows. Straight desks in open plans are often specified as shells (no pedestal) with mobile pedestals that roll under the desk and can be repositioned or assigned to specific users. Add privacy screens in 24-inch heights above the surface for visual separation between facing workstations without full panel enclosure.

**10****What is the difference between a straight desk and a benching workstation?**

A straight desk is a freestanding unit with its own support structure (end panels or legs) and typically includes integrated pedestal storage. Each desk is a complete, independent piece of furniture. A benching workstation is part of a system where multiple work surfaces share a common structural frame or beam — instead of individual end panels per desk, a single beam runs the length of a row and supports multiple work surfaces. Benching creates a more open, collaborative aesthetic and is more space-efficient in open-plan environments. However, benching typically does not include integrated pedestal storage (mobile pedestals are specified separately), offers less personal workspace definition, and requires all workstations in a run to be specified and installed together. Straight desks are appropriate for any environment, including private offices, while benching is specific to open-plan multi-user environments.

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

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