

Straight Desks

Q1. What is the best width for a commercial straight desk?

A: The correct width depends on the role and the equipment load at that position. For administrative and general office positions with a single monitor setup, 60 inches is the practical commercial standard — it accommodates a 27-inch monitor, keyboard, mouse, a phone, and incidental items with adequate working space remaining. For positions with dual monitors or large-format reference material requirements, 72 inches provides substantially more usable surface and is worth the incremental cost and floor space. Widths below 48 inches are appropriate only for very space-constrained positions or for secondary workstations where a user visits periodically rather than working for extended periods. A 42-inch desk provides enough space for a 24-inch monitor and keyboard but becomes congested immediately if the user has any additional equipment or paper-based workflow. In commercial environments, the productivity cost of insufficient workspace far exceeds the cost differential between a 48-inch and a 60-inch desk. Widths above 72 inches — 78 and 84 inches — are available in commercial lines and appropriate for roles such as drafting, large-format document review, or positions where very wide display configurations are used. At these widths, a single-motor height-adjustable frame may show slight surface flex during adjustment; dual-motor systems are recommended for surfaces wider than 72 inches.

Q2. What surface depth should I specify for a standard office workstation?

A: 30 inches is the commercial standard for straight desk depth and is the correct specification for most office applications. This depth accommodates a standard monitor at the ergonomically recommended viewing distance (20 to 40 inches from the user's eyes) when the keyboard is at the front edge, with approximately 10 to 12 inches of space remaining behind the monitor for peripherals or reference materials. Users with visual accommodations or those using monitors larger than 32 inches may need to confirm that monitor placement at 30 inches of depth still meets their visual requirements. 24-inch depth surfaces are appropriate for benching configurations where floor density is a planning priority, but only when combined with a monitor arm that extends the display back into the visual reach zone rather than placing it at the surface back edge. A monitor placed flat on the surface at the back of a 24-inch desk will be closer than the ergonomic standard for most users. Budget for monitor arms as part of the specification when specifying 24-inch depth surfaces in benching applications. 36-inch depth surfaces are available for specialized applications — drafting, large-format review, or positions where the user works with physical materials spread across the full depth. These are not common in standard commercial office specifications and add cost and floor space without benefit for typical office workflow. Specify 36 inches only when the actual workflow clearly justifies the additional depth.



Q3. What is the difference between a fixed-height desk and a height-adjustable desk for commercial use?

A: A fixed-height straight desk is manufactured at a standard height of 29 to 30 inches and cannot be adjusted. It is appropriate for environments where all users fall within the standard ergonomic range for that height (roughly 5'4" to 6'1" for seated work) and where the organization has determined that sit-stand functionality is not a priority. Fixed-height desks are lower cost, simpler, lighter, and generally more durable over time because they have no motorized components that can fail or require maintenance. A height-adjustable straight desk can be raised or lowered through an electric motor system, accommodating both seated and standing work positions. BIFMA G1 guidelines recommend an adjustment range of 22.6 to 48.7 inches to cover the fifth through 95th percentile of adult users in both sitting and standing positions. Height-adjustable desks support ergonomic accommodation for users outside the standard height range and can contribute to wellness initiatives that encourage alternating between sitting and standing throughout the workday. The total cost of ownership comparison between fixed and adjustable models should account for the initial cost differential, the motor system maintenance and eventual replacement cost, and the potential productivity and health benefit from the adjustable model. In environments with high employee turnover where desk height reassignment is frequent, the adjustability value is higher. In environments with stable, long-term desk assignments where employees are within the standard height range, fixed-height models may provide equivalent ergonomic outcomes at lower cost.

Q4. What BIFMA standard applies to straight desks?

A: BIFMA X5.5 is the primary structural performance standard for commercial straight desks. The standard includes tests for uniform distributed load (minimum 250 pounds on the working surface), concentrated load at specific surface locations, leg and frame strength under lateral forces, and stability testing under edge-loaded conditions. A desk that meets BIFMA X5.5 has been validated to withstand the structural demands of normal commercial use across these test categories. Importantly, BIFMA X5.5 also covers the surface material's durability — abrasion resistance, impact resistance, and the permanence of the surface finish under simulated use conditions. This is distinct from just testing the structural frame and is relevant to the long-term appearance and performance of the work surface itself. When reviewing compliance documentation, confirm that the surface material testing is included, not just the frame structural testing. For height-adjustable straight desks, additional BIFMA standards apply: BIFMA X5.5 covers the desk structure, and BIFMA G1 provides the ergonomic guidelines for height adjustment range. Manufacturers of commercial sit-stand desks should be able to provide documentation confirming compliance with both. If a supplier cannot produce this documentation, that is a significant red flag in a commercial procurement context.



Q5. How should straight desks be arranged for optimal workflow in an open-plan office?

A: Open-plan straight desk arrangements fall into four primary configurations: row-facing-same-direction (all users face the same wall), row-facing-each-other (users in opposite rows face each other), cluster-of-four (four desks arranged with two facing two, creating shared zones), and benching runs (multiple surfaces sharing a common frame along one or two sides of a beam). Each arrangement has different implications for privacy, acoustic performance, collaboration, and supervision visibility. For focused work environments — legal, financial, programming — rows facing the same direction provide the most privacy and the fewest visual distractions. Users can see their monitor without seeing their colleagues' faces, which reduces social distraction. For collaborative environments where interaction is a daily functional requirement, clusters of four provide easy eye contact and communication across the work surface while maintaining defined individual territory. Regardless of arrangement, confirm that aisle widths comply with OSHA egress requirements. Primary aisles in commercial offices must be at minimum 44 inches wide; secondary aisles (between rows) must be a minimum 36 inches wide. For environments with higher occupancy density — call centers, trading floors, operations centers — work with the local fire marshal to confirm compliance with occupancy load calculations before finalizing any high-density layout.

Q6. Can straight desks be used in benching configurations?

A: Yes, and benching is one of the most common applications for straight desk surfaces in contemporary commercial office design. In a benching system, individual surface panels are attached to a shared structural beam or frame rather than being supported by individual legs. This approach reduces the material cost per position, simplifies cable management through a centralized spine, and enables higher occupancy density than individually framed desks. Position widths in benching systems typically range from 48 to 72 inches, with 60 inches being the most common commercial standard. When specifying benching, confirm that the shared frame design prevents vibration transmission between adjacent positions. This is the most common complaint in deployed benching systems and is almost impossible to mitigate after installation without replacing the frame. Require a physical demonstration of the proposed system under simulated use conditions — a user typing, placing items on the surface, and pushing their chair back — while an observer at an adjacent position assesses the transmitted movement. Benching systems also require careful cable management planning because the electrical and data infrastructure must serve multiple positions along a shared spine. Confirm the power capacity of the benching system's spine (typically 20 amps per run in standard commercial installations) and the data connectivity options (hardwired Ethernet, USB-C hub, or wireless-only) to ensure the system meets the technology requirements of the positions it will serve.

Q7. What privacy screens work best with straight desks?

A: Privacy screens for straight desk positions are specified based on the level of visual and acoustic separation required by the work environment. For general open-plan offices where moderate separation is appropriate, a 12-to-18-inch above-surface screen provides visual separation between adjacent seated users without creating an enclosed feel. For call center or phone-intensive environments, taller screens at 24 to 30 inches above surface reduce sound transmission between adjacent positions and provide greater concentration-supporting visual separation. Acoustic performance of the screen material is measured by the Noise Reduction Coefficient (NRC). Specify screens with NRC ratings of 0.65 or higher for environments where acoustic separation is a functional requirement. Lower NRC values indicate screens that primarily provide visual privacy without meaningful acoustic benefit. The fill material within the screen panel — fiberglass, dense foam, or mineral wool — determines the NRC value; fabric alone provides negligible acoustic absorption. Screen mounting compatibility with the desk must be confirmed before specification. Screens mount either to the desktop surface via clamps, to a spine or beam in benching systems, or to the wall behind the desk. Surface-clamp screens require confirmation that the desk surface thickness and edge profile are compatible with the clamp hardware. Beam-mount screens are the most stable option for benching applications and should be specified as part of the benching system rather than as aftermarket additions.

Q8. How do I properly plan cable management for a straight desk deployment?

A: Cable management planning for a straight desk deployment should address three questions: where does power enter the desk from the building infrastructure, how do cables travel within the desk structure from that entry point to desktop equipment, and how are excess cable lengths managed invisibly. The answer to the first question is determined by the building electrical design (floor boxes, wall outlets, or overhead feeds); the answer to the second and third questions is determined by the desk specification and should be designed before the order is placed. At minimum, specify a desk with a back-rail cable channel or modesty panel raceway that allows cables to travel horizontally from the floor entry point to the equipment location without exposure. Add a surface grommet of at least 2.5 inches in diameter for cables that must rise from the channel to desktop devices. For power strips or USB hubs, specify a mounting location within the modesty panel channel rather than leaving them to sit on the floor behind the desk — floor-level power strips are a trip hazard and make cleaning more difficult. For benching configurations, the shared cable management spine must be planned to serve the total number of positions on the run. A standard 20-position benching run with full equipment loads may require two or three separate electrical feeds and a structured data patch panel at the end of the run. Work with the project's electrical and IT infrastructure teams to confirm cable management requirements before the furniture specification is finalized. Furniture cable management infrastructure and building electrical infrastructure must be planned as a coordinated system, not sequentially.



Q9. What should I know about deploying straight desks in a 24-hour operations environment?

A: 24-hour operations environments — control rooms, dispatch centers, security monitoring positions, news operations, and similar — place fundamentally different demands on straight desks than standard commercial offices. The desk structure experiences continuous occupant loading without rest periods, which accelerates fatigue in joints, hardware, and surface materials. For these environments, specify desks with enhanced structural ratings (300 to 400 pounds surface load), commercial-grade HPL surfaces rated for continuous use, and frame connections using threaded steel hardware rather than particleboard-embedded fasteners. In control room applications, monitor configurations are often more complex than standard office positions — three to six displays per position, large-format displays above the desk surface, and specialized communication equipment. Confirm that the desk structure can support the total monitor arm and display weight at the specific mounting locations used, not just the aggregate surface load rating. Point loads from multiple monitor arm bases concentrate stress at specific structural locations that may exceed the desk's designed capacity even when the total load is within the rating. Ergonomic requirements are heightened in 24-hour environments because user fatigue accumulates faster and the risk of repetitive strain injuries is higher under continuous use. Specify height-adjustable desks for all 24-hour positions, confirm that task chairs are rated for 24-hour use (most standard commercial chairs are rated for 8-hour use), and plan for shift handoffs that allow each incoming user to adjust the desk and chair settings for their individual ergonomic requirements.

Q10. How long should a commercial straight desk last, and what maintenance is required?

A: A properly specified, BIFMA-compliant commercial straight desk in a standard single-shift office environment should achieve a useful life of ten to fifteen years. The most common service items over that period are leveling glide replacement (typically every three to five years as glides compress), surface grommet cover replacement (subject to occasional breakage), and periodic retightening of leg-to-surface hardware connections (annually in the first three years, then as needed). None of these are structural failures; they are predictable maintenance items that facilities teams should plan for proactively. Surface wear varies significantly by material specification. HPL surfaces in active use environments typically show no meaningful wear at fifteen years. TFL surfaces may show minor edge wear at the front edge (the primary contact point for seated users) after eight to ten years; this is largely an aesthetic issue rather than a structural one and can be addressed with edge re-banding if it becomes a concern. Veneer surfaces will show localized wear at the keyboard position after five to seven years of daily use without surface protection pads. Height-adjustable desks have an additional maintenance variable: the lift mechanism. Electric motors in commercial sit-stand desks are typically rated for 10,000 to 50,000 cycles depending on quality tier. Motor replacement, when necessary, is typically a field service procedure that does not require desk removal or replacement. The control board electronics are a more common failure point than the motors themselves in well-specified commercial systems; confirm with the manufacturer that replacement control boards are available and stocked as service parts before completing the specification. Download PDF Buyer's Guide PDF Shop Straight Desks Talk to an Expert 1.800.460.0858 Monday – Friday, 7am to 6pm CT

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