



Ergonomics & desk sharing

What is desk sharing?

For the purposes of this document, desk sharing refers to an office that provides a pool of desks rather than assigning individual desks to individual people.

Tips to make desk sharing successful.



Participatory approach

Each office is unique. Managers and teams are encouraged to work together in planning equipment, layout, degree of personalization, booking processes, and expectations.



Good communication & support

Change can be challenging, especially when people do not feel they have control over the decision. Good communication can increase trust and minimize misperceptions or discontent. Check-in with each other, encourage feedback, address concerns, and provide accessible support.



Get the right equipment

Shared workstations should have excellent adjustability in order to facilitate a wide range of users with different heights and equipment needs. Some people may require specialized equipment.



Zoning and space planning

Review the type of work being done in your office and try to organize the space into quiet zones and collaborative zones. Zoning will provide people working on high concentration tasks with a quieter space to focus. Work with your team to try to make the space inviting and conducive to the type of work being performed.



Booking system, lockers and expectations

Determine how and when workstations can be booked (A week in advance? A day in advance?). Can one individual book the same workstation every day, or will there be a limit to the number of consecutive days at the same workstation? Does the booking system allow workers to filter workstations according to features, e.g. quiet zone, keyboard tray, etc.? Will lockers be available? Where will equipment be stored when working out of the office? What are the expectations for cleaning the space after each use?



Tips for getting the right equipment.

Background

Shared workstations should have excellent adjustability in order to facilitate a wide range of users. Traditional office desks are 29" high—the right height for someone that is 6'1. Most of us need a keyboard tray or a footrest in order to get our keyboard and mouse below elbow level and our feet firmly supported.

Laptops should not be used as a stand-alone computer—an external keyboard, mouse and monitor should be provided if using the laptop for more than 1 to 2 hours per day. Working directly off a laptop increases the likelihood of awkward postures and wrist contact stress, both of which are risk factors for repetitive strain injuries. Working off a small laptop screen can increase the risk of errors and lower productivity due to smaller font sizes. Smaller screens mean more time spent flipping between open programs and documents, as opposed to having both open side-by-side, as a larger screen may allow.

General workstation guidelines

Please refer to UBC's [Ergo purchasing guidelines](#) for the office ergo design guidelines and checklist including information such as desk depth, lighting, keyboard tray, etc. The information below is meant to address some of the unique challenges associated with shared workstations.

Desk height, keyboard trays and footrests

- If feasible, install height adjustable desks with a height range of 22.6" to 48.7". This height range will accommodate individuals from 5'0 to 6'4. See UBC's [Ergo purchasing guidelines](#) for examples and more info.
- If height adjustable desks aren't possible, you will need to outfit some desks with keyboard trays and footrests. Keyboard trays and footrests are not necessarily interchangeable. For example, if the max height of the chair isn't high enough for the user to have their keyboard below elbow level, then a keyboard tray is needed. Some users may require both a keyboard tray and footrest because the chair or keyboard tray cannot go low enough for their feet to be firmly supported on the ground. Check in with your staff to see how many are currently using (or want to use) a keyboard tray and footrest to help you determine what percentage of desks will need them.

Chairs

- UBC's standard office chairs are adjustable and should be able to accommodate a wide range of users (see UBC's [Ergo purchasing guidelines](#) for chair specifications and examples). You will still need to check in with your team to see if there are any who need a specialized chair, but you will reduce the need for specialized equipment if your standard chairs meet UBC's ergonomic guidelines.



External keyboards, mice, monitors and accessories

- External keyboards, mice and monitors should be available at all workstations.
- Standard keyboards and mice may be sufficient for most users—see notes under specialized equipment for more information.
- Height adjustable monitors are preferred. If not available, provide monitor risers or books so individuals can adjust the monitor to their preferred height. Alternatively, adjustable monitor arms can be installed; however, please note that poor quality monitor arms and monitor arms installed near a wall can be challenging to adjust. Please see UBC's [Ergo purchasing guidelines](#) for examples and talk with vendors about your specific environment.
- Determine if headsets, webcams or other accessories are needed at each workstation.

Specialized equipment

- The best way to reduce the need for specialized equipment is to provide good quality and adjustable equipment from the start. Additionally, you may want to have a pool of specialized equipment such as frequently used ergonomic keyboards and mice available for use.
- If it is not possible for *all* workstations to have height adjustable desks, consider investing in at least *some* so people can alternate between sitting and standing throughout the day.
- Even with good quality adjustable equipment, you will still need to check-in with your team members to see if there are any that require specialized equipment. Depending on the needs in your DEPT, you may need to plan additional storage space or workstation allocation accordingly.

Lockers and storage space

- Provide a safe and secure place for team members to store personal items such as jackets, purses, wallets, backpacks while working in the office.
- Provide a space for items to be stored when working out of the office. For example, some team members may have purchased their own specialized keyboard or mouse they want to keep at the office.
- You may need to consider how laptops can be stored in the office so that individuals do not need to cart their laptop back and forth each day. Sustainable modes of transportation like cycling, walking, and public transit, can make carrying a laptop challenging.

Training and taking time to adjust equipment

- Provide your team with information on how to adjust the specific (brand/model) chairs, desks, and equipment in your office.



- Provide your team with 5 to 10 minutes at the start of the day to make all the necessary adjustments.
- As a staff or faculty member, schedule yourself 5 to 10 minutes at the start of the day to set-up and adjust your equipment.

Additional resources

- Refer to UBC's [office ergo resources](#), including how to request an [ergonomics assessment](#) and [webinars](#) for more information.
- Contact ergonomics.info@ubc.ca for ergo assistance with planning
- Contact and work with your facility manager (and/or space planners and designers if available), UBC Safety and Risk Services, HR, and your team to help create a safe, comfortable, and productive workspace.