

# Organising your workspace

Everyone wants to a good job. Sometimes they can't because they don't have the right tools or equipment, and sometimes they can't because, although they have it, they can't find the right tool or piece of equipment. They waste time looking for it, or clearing stuff away to get at it. This can mean that they lose concentration and get irritated or annoyed, which isn't good for anyone.

There are various ways of ensuring that you organise your workspace to ensure that you can work safely, efficiently and effectively, and one of these is called '5S'. It was developed in Japan as part of the *lean manufacturing* approach, which is designed to reduce waste and ensure that approaches like *just in time* can operate.

Although developed for use in factories and warehouses, it can just as well be applied to offices - and home offices. It is particularly useful if you are having to set up and take down your workspace every day, perhaps to free up the dinner table or reduce clutter around the house. It also makes it safer and reduces the likelihood of health problems, like bad backs.

There are some things that will require your employer's help and support, but it is in their interest to give it, as it will help you to work more effectively and reduce risks. Remember, employers still have a duty of care even if you are working at home (especially if you are working at home), and they have a responsibility to do anything that's needed that will eliminate hazards and reduce risks in your workspace.

## The 5S

The 5S are five Japanese words:

1. Seiri
2. Seiton
3. Seisō
4. Seiketsu
5. Shitsuke

These can be translated as:

1. Sort
2. Set In order
3. Shine
4. Standardise
5. Sustain

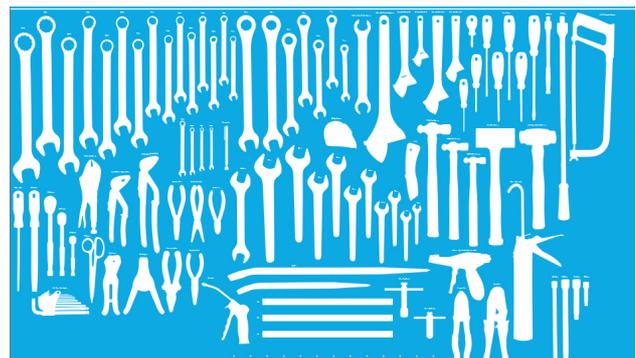
### 1. Sort (Seiri)

The first step in 5S is to sort all those things that you use into the things that you need regularly and need ready access to, and the things that you only use occasionally.

- How often do you leave a stapler on your desk, even though you may only use it once a day, at most?
- Why is that file you haven't opened for two days taking up workspace while waiting for you to do it something with it?
- Do you struggle to use your mouse because of the clutter on your workspace?

### 2. Set In order

Layout your workspace so that the things you use regularly and need to hand are in the best place for you to use them. Have you ever seen a workshop with boards on the wall with outlines of tools on them (there's one in the image alongside)? It serves two purposes – it ensures that tools are kept in the same place so that they can be found easily, and that if anything is missing, it is immediately obvious.



You can create your own shadow board for your workspace – although you may not want to draw on your own desk or table. Instead, you can use a sheet of A3 or A2 paper, an old piece of wallpaper (with the backside up), or a piece of hardboard. Layout (set in order) your workspace and, once you are confident that it is the right layout (after a few days), create your shadow board layout by tracing round the items so that you can easily recreate it every morning.

This is the point when a sixth 'S' is important – Safety. Check that your workspace is safe for you and for your family.

- Trailing wires should be laid so that they don't create a trip hazard. If you have multiple plugs, then use a single extension lead with sufficient sockets (NOT adapters, as they can overheat and cause fires). Make sure the lead runs along the floor and is covered by a mat, a cable protector or gaffer tape, and then runs up a leg (ideally secured to it by a piece of string or zip tie). If you don't have the right equipment, your employer has a duty to supply it. You are entitled to be as safe working at home as you are in the office.
- Is your screen at the right height? The top of the screen should be level with your eyeline. If you use a laptop this can be impossible, unless you set it on blocks or books (but only if it is stable), which then means you can't use the keyboard! However, you can have a separate keyboard (and mouse) that plugs in or connects using Bluetooth. These are both more ergonomic than a laptop keyboard and trackpad for constant use so, again, you should ask your employer to supply them. The costs of this equipment is very low and is much cheaper than the time lost through neck, wrist and back pain.
- Are you sitting comfortably, with sufficient lumbar (lower back) support? A kitchen chair isn't designed to be used as a desk chair and doesn't provide the support you need. An office chair is ideal, and it may be possible to have one delivered from work. If not, make sure that you use cushions to create adequate support, and take regular breaks, so stand and stretch.

When you have *Set in order* your workspace, carry out a risk assessment, looking for hazards (things that might cause an accident, like tripping you or others up or electrocuting you) and, if you find any, do what you can to remove the hazard. If you can't, then take steps to ensure that the likelihood of it happening is significantly reduced (like a mat over a cable).

### 3. Shine

This is all about keeping your workspace clean and tidy. One way of ensuring that it doesn't get too dirty is not to eat or drink at your desk (even if it is the kitchen table). There are several reasons why not:

1. A keyboard or mouse doesn't take kindly to having tea poured over it, or crumbs getting in to it. If an accident can happen, it will.
2. It's unhealthy. An American dietician has said that healthy eating includes 'only eating at a table, and that a desk is not a table'. It also encourages grazing, constantly having something to eat, which is an easy way to put on unwelcome weight.
3. You should take regular breaks. This is good for your posture (reducing the risk of back, neck and wrist pain), reduces tiredness and helps you to reflect on your work. Getting up to eat or drink somewhere else, only for a few minutes, is good for you and your work.

Cleaning up at the end of the day also ensures that items are restored to their correct place. If you have to use the workspace for something else, such as eating your meal, then it is also good hygiene.

Remember that 'Shine' means clean *and* tidy, so ensure that you maintain the order that you have created. The biggest problem on most desks is the tendency for files and other documents to build up in uneven piles – and then fall over. File trays can help, but one of the main assets of the office, filing cabinets aren't available (unless you can find a way of bringing one home!). But, there is an alternative; archive boxes (made of cardboard and arriving flatpacked) will hold suspension files. These make a good alternative to a filing cabinet, are light and, at the end of the working day, you can put the lid on them and push them out of the way.



#### **4. Standardise**

Make your workspace layout the standard you work to; get into the habit of laying it out correctly every morning. Things are a lot easier if they are done by habit, but deliberately creating good habits isn't easy, so you will need to make a conscious effort at first. This is where one of the challenges of working from home can become an opportunity; if you have younger (primary aged) children, then get them involved in creating your standardised workspace, setting it out to the required layout, or you can get them to check you every morning, to see if you have done it properly!

#### **5. Sustain**

This doesn't just mean keeping it going, but looking for ways to improve your workspace, Sorting, Setting in order, Shining and Standardising again!

#### **Final note**

Having the right equipment is essential if you are to work safely, effectively and efficiently from home. You can make do on the odd day, but after several weeks or months, just 'making do' will lead to massive reductions in performance, possible physical problems, and a lot of frustration. There are various simple ways that you can improve your workspace and they don't involve major expense for your employer. Equipment can be lent or bought, if necessary. To make sure that you get the equipment you need, you can emphasise the employer's 'duty of care', but you can also present a clear business case – it's not hard. A 10% reduction in efficiency for someone on the national average salary costs an employer £3,000 (give or take) in lost output. A week off work with back, neck or wrist pains costs about £600 in lost output, not to mention the possibility of an injury at work complaint. By comparison, a few tens of pounds in extra equipment, is a worthwhile investment.