

How to work

'A tidy desk is the sign of a tidy mind' so the saying goes. Many organisations have a 'clean-desk' policy which requires employees to remove everything from their desks at the end of the day. Managers say that 'clutter' – all those papers, files, pens, books, notes, post-its and coffee cups - is bad and an obstacle to work.

Management consultants write books with titles like 'Winning the fight between You and Your Desk' (Jeffrey Mayer) and claim that studies (which studies?) show that messy desks waste time. This is all very similar to the 'paper-less office' predictions – absolute nonsense.

Attempts to impose paper-less offices have failed because most people like paper and need it to work. Paper is more flexible than computer windows. People like to spread multiple sources of information around on a desk and work with the materials in order to do the task efficiently. On a computer screen only one window is active at any one time and navigating between them is slow and annoying.

People who like clutter organise it a systematic way, which makes sense to them and is in fact a representation of what is happening in their heads as they work. It seems to be organised in concentric circles from the centre where the person is: stuff near them is more important, stuff further away is less important. When the job is finished then the important stuff is filed away.

Other people like to quickly file things away into complex filing systems with difficult to remember categories which can cause problems when things need to be retrieved quickly.

Technology can get in the way in other ways too. Some police forces in Britain tried giving laptops to constables. They found that witness statements written into the computers were not as good as those taken and noted down in notebooks because the computers got in the way of communicating with people.

A: Think of someone you know, who:

- is hard- working
- is capable
- is dynamic
- is creative
- is a well-organised person
- is messy
- is mean
- is very helpful
- distracting
- is workaholic

What kind of person are you?

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B: Find workaholics in the group by asking the group mates the following questions.

- a. Do you arrive at work 10-20 minutes earlier?
- b. Do you leave work later / Do you work overtime?
- c. Do you take work home at weekends?
- d. Do you think about work when you are alone or at home?
- e. Is your desk always full of different useful things for your work?
- f. Do you use your personal computer at home in professional purposes?

Be ready to discuss the results.

C: You will be working in two groups and your teacher will give you a role card.

You will be discussing a work issue with two colleagues. Read your role card and prepare what you will say.

D: After presenting your role-plays discuss in what happened in your groups and prepare the first draft of guidelines 'How desks should be organised' or 'Office Rules'

Also consider these things

- having coffee with colleagues while working
- using mobile phone while you or others are writing something important
- socialising with somebody in the room where other people are working
- listening to background music

How can you improve your ability of using different skills (computers, taking notes, being tolerant...)?

E: In the next lesson you will present your briefing to the class and then agree on the final draft of the office guidelines for the whole group.

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Role cards to copy

Situation 1.

The action takes place in an office.

Student A You are the boss who wants his employees to be workaholics and who promotes “clean desks policy”. You are against coffee breaks and private calls. You don’t want people to listen to any background music. You will be talking to the Chief of the Personnel Department and an employee.

The action takes place in an office.

Student B You are the employee who doesn’t like order on his desk or has another point of view on the style of work. You like listening to music while working. You can’t imagine your work without drinking coffee. Talking helps you much to find the best solution. You will be talking to your boss and the Chief of the Personnel Department.

The action takes place in an office.

Student C You are the Chief of the Personnel Department who is responsible for the situation in the whole office and are faced with this issue therefore you decide to draw up some guidelines. Listen to A and B talking and take notes to produce the first draft of guidelines for “How the desk should be organised”. /”Office rules”. You will be talking to an employee and the boss.

SITUATION 2.

The action takes place in an office.

Student A You are the boss who doesn’t care much about the process happening in the office. The only thing you need is the result. You prefer flexible office hours. You give your employees much freedom. You will be talking to your boss and the Chief of the Personnel Department.

The action takes place in an office.

Student B You are the employee who would like to fish for a compliment from his boss about how well you organise the office and how accurate you are. You prefer working exact hours and you need constant instructions from your boss. You will be talking to your boss and the Chief of the Personnel Department.

The action takes place in the office.

Student C You are the Chief of the Personnel Department who is responsible for the situation in the whole office and are faced with this issue therefore you decide to draw up some guidelines. Listen to A and B talking and take notes to produce the first draft of guidelines for “How the desk should be organised”. /”Office rules”. You will be talking to an employee and the boss.

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Teacher's notes.

Procedure:

1. The teacher turns on a recording of different noises, recorded in an office or police station. (The telephone is ringing, people are talking, the door is opening....)
2. The teacher asks: Where are you? What is happening?

The teacher brings the topic for the discussion to work.

3. The teacher describes three different kinds of desks. The students may draw any of the descriptions if they feel like doing this.

a). You can see a massive oak desk with a very expensive and modern computer, all possible technical things are in the drawers, different kinds of telephones are standing neatly in one line waiting for somebody to call. There is a photo of a very beautiful woman with a teenager son standing on the embankment in front of the yacht.

b). This desk is in quite a dark room. There are a lot of books and an Oxford dictionary on the desk next to three cups of coffee. A pile of exercise books mountains between a pen with red colour ink and a diskette.

c). On this desk you can see a lot of scrap paper, various open and closed books with book markers everywhere. You can see a mobile phone that poking out from under the newspaper and a bag standing on the corner of the desk.

The teacher asks the students to give their opinions whose desks are these what do the people do for the living and what can the desks tell about the people working at them.

4. The teacher asks those students who have drawn any pictures to show them with any comment they would like to give. The discussion might lead to the conclusion that:

Different people organise themselves and their working place differently.

5. Before giving the sts the text it is advisable to read the title and to ask a question like

What do you suppose the text is going to be about?

6. Ask students to compare their predictions with the impression after they have read the text.

7. Ask the sts what the text is about?

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8. The teacher repeats the statement:

Different people organise themselves and their working place differently

and encourages students to think about their colleagues, friends, partners etc in **A**.

9. The teacher suggests that a lot of time is spent at work and suggests there might be some workaholics in the group and suggests that the sts find out by asking the group mates the questions in **B**.

10. The teacher divides the class into groups of three and gives the roles to students A, B and C. A and B should negotiate while C observes and makes notes.

11. After the role play, the sts stay in their groups and discuss what happened the issues mentioned on the worksheet to prepare a first draft of the first draft of guidelines 'How desks should be organised' or 'Office Rules'

12. Homework is to prepare a briefing for their group on the guidelines and prepare a final draft of the office guidelines to share with the other groups.