



## Creating your study space

### At home and on campus

It's important to know that there is no perfect study environment: there is only the study space that works for you. Below is a short list of some things to consider when setting up or reviewing your study space.

#### Furniture

For the majority of your study time you'll likely need a desk and a chair. Depending on your task, you might need a lot of table space to spread out all manner of books, readings, Post-It notes, and mind maps in addition to your computer or device. Huge **group study room** tables in the Library are useful for this, as is the kitchen table at home. Individual desks at home and private study pods in the Library are most often utilised for unit and research reading and short individual assignments and tutorial tasks.



Keep in mind that the occasional change of scenery can help manage the ebbs and flows of productivity. Is there a comfy armchair or rug nearby to do a portion of your readings? Is there a quiet time at the campus cafe or your local cafe to enjoy an afternoon caffeine boost and some brainstorming or mind mapping? Is there a picnic blanket and cushion nearby that you could take to the backyard, local park, or campus grounds for a sunshine-infused free-writing session?

#### Light and temperature

Speaking of natural light, are your study spaces on and off campus well-lit during the day? Do you have a good study lamp for any late night sessions? Ideally, you should have three or more sources of light from above, beside, or behind you. These multiple sources should work together to reduce the shadow you see over your work area.

Have you ever had a single light in the centre of the room cast a shadow of your head on to your book or laptop? When you position your desk and chair next to or at an angle to a window it makes your study space appear a little bigger. Remember, too, that since lighting is connected to our vision, and over 80 per cent of our perception of the world is through our eyes, it's important to monitor lighting for our visual health in the long run.

Study space temperature is a hot topic – pun intended! Safe Work Australia advises that sedentary (i.e. inactive, seated) work zones should be 20 to 26 degrees Celsius, depending on the season and the worker's clothing. In contrast, **researchers exploring temperature and productivity** have identified 21 to 22 degrees Celsius at the temperature-productivity hotspot. Anything above 23 to 24 degrees Celsius shows a marked drop in productivity of workers.

Fortunately, on-campus facilities have temperature control. While at home you may need to invest in a fan or heater (or snuggie). Don't forget that four-legged study buddies (pets) double as excellent hot water bottles in winter!

### Sound and smell

Music can make repetitive tasks easier to complete, which is why [music boosts a runner's performance](#). It can also help you escape a noisy workplace or your inner thoughts, which is why it's used for guided meditations. Some music (irregular beats and progressions with lyrics) can, however, interfere with and distract from learning.

When it comes to studying, your best bet is ambient noise at a moderate level. Apps like [Noisli](#) provide this free and online. You can also try study playlists and nature noises for free online, and through other streaming services like [Spotify](#). Alternatively, you can make your own playlist at home. Research informs us that baroque music ([a study by The American Roentgen Ray Society](#)) and repetitive ambient electronica ([a study by Mehta, Rhu & Cheema, 2012](#)) are best for concentration, while your favourite music can be best when you need to focus on work.

Scents can unconsciously enhance or impede your productivity. Just as incense and oil burning is used to signal sacred spaces, some people like to use these to create a focused and relaxing atmosphere in their study space. Similarly, the odours from people, perfumes, the great outdoors, and food can disrupt your train of thought. Controlling these environmental factors can be difficult in group study spaces. If it's distracting you, then relocate to a better suited area.

### Equipment

Personal study spaces and group study spaces in the Library are multifunctional with display screens or writing boards (chalkboard, whiteboard or pinboard). Aside from your device of choice, it's best to have a bookshelf and/or cabinet space to store all study related items and maintain a clean working space.

It's equally important to ensure basic amenities and resources are accessible or very close at hand. Get to know the location of toilets and water fountains at your campus Library. Invest in a water bottle to stay hydrated, and put snacks on your desk and in your bag to keep your energy up.

### Online

Accessing your units and all manner of learning materials and resources online can quickly become a messy and confusing affair if you don't develop your own system of bookmarks and quick links. The most time efficient workers set up their devices to cater towards the work they're doing.

## Activity

What are the most common online resources you use for your study at Western Sydney University?

### Example

<b>Bookmark Toolbar</b> <b>= Important / Everyday</b>	<b>Bookmark Menu</b> <b>= Irregularly used</b>	<b>Menu Folders</b> <b>E.g. Assignment Essentials</b>
Student Email	Subject Outlines (via Library > Resources)	eResources (aka Databases) (via Library > Resources)
vUWS	Study Smart Librarians (via Library > Services)	Subject Guides (via Library Guides)
Reserve (for readings) (via Library > Guides)	PASS timetable PASSwrite timetable	Referencing and Citation (via Library > Guides)
Library (for catalogue searching)	MESH (Mathematics Education Support Hub)	Turnitin and GradeMark (via Library > Guides)
	Exam Papers (via Library > Resources)	

## Projects

When you're enrolled in a full-time study load, it's easy to lose sight of what you're working on and where files and resources are located. In addition to bookmarking the essentials, you'll need to decide on a system that will help you locate and access digital items after you've used them. Many people use software and apps that provide for data tagging – from MS Outlook to Gmail, to Evernote. Your unit codes and topic descriptions are a great first level tag to attribute to your notes and files.

## References

Mehta, R., Zhu, R., & Cheema, A. (2012). Is noise always bad? Exploring the effects of ambient noise on creative cognition.

*Journal of Consumer Research*, 39(4), 784-799. doi:10.1086/665048.