Design Your Best Learning Environment

(Prepared by R. Polansky for Learning to Learn Week, 1/07)

Chances are that you have had your own designated study space since you were young. Perhaps it was a desk in your bedroom or the den of your house. Maybe it was the kitchen table or the spare room above the garage. Whatever the space, you used it to complete homework assignments, build models, assemble projects, and reflect quietly about your work.

But how much input did you actually have in designing this space? Now that you are in college, is it still the right size for you? Do you have the correct amount of light and background noise? Is the décor and furniture appropriate?

If you have not given much thought to these elements of your learning environment, you are not alone. We are often too busy with school, work, and family obligations to remodel a study or office space to our specifications. However, there are some simple steps to follow that can help you design the best learning environment for you.

1. Visualize Your Ideal Learning Environment

Imagine for a moment that the obstacles presented by money, time, and availability do not exist, and you have the opportunity to design your optimal learning space. Reflect, take notes, or draw a picture incorporating the following elements of your ideal learning environment:

- **Location**- Where is it located-- at home, work or school? What size would you like it to be?

- **Sound**- Is the area quiet, or does it have some background noise? What kind of noise? Are there others learning around you, or are you alone? If music is playing, what kind?

- **Lighting**- How is the space lit? Is the light source natural or artificial?

- **Décor**- What decorations do you see around you? What color scheme inspires you? Is the area fully or sparsely furnished?

- **Furniture**- What equipment do you need? A computer? A desk? A comfortable chair?

Now that you have pictured your ideal learning environment, ask yourself how closely your current study space matches that vision. It is likely that there are several elements of your current space that do not measure up to your ideal.
2. Make Adjustments to Your Learning Environment

Believe it or not, you can make adjustments that are neither time-consuming nor costly. It just takes a little more thought on your part.

Sound

Some people like background noise when learning, and others prefer complete silence. Some listen to instrumental and/or classical music, and some listen to their favorite band. Certain studies suggest that extroverted people require a stimulating environment while introverted people need a quiet area with few distractions. If you prefer music, you can play a stereo if you are alone or use headphones to avoid disturbing others. If you fall somewhere in the middle and want neither music nor silence, consider using a fan or other machine that produces white noise. If you prefer silence but must study in a noisy environment, consider buying a pair of earplugs from your local pharmacy. Try to achieve the level of sound that is right for you.

Light

It is important to use adequate lighting to avoid hurting your eyes, but you can still make choices with regard to the type of lighting you use. If you prefer natural light, try moving your workspace near a window. If this is not possible, increase your artificial lighting to create a bright, white setting. An inexpensive desk or floor lamp is one way to do this. Prolonged computer work can easily strain your eyes, so consider buying a filter for your monitor which blocks most of the glare from other lighting sources. Make sure the lighting in your space is conducive to your best learning.

Décor

We have all seen the home improvement shows which demonstrate the difference that a coat of paint can make in the overall perception of a room. Think about the colors that would work best in your learning environment. Warm colors, such as reds, oranges, yellows and browns, are cheerful and lively; cool colors, such as blues, greens, and grays, are calm and peaceful. If you cannot change the color of the room itself, try to accessorize your learning space with rugs, chairs, pillows, and art that fit your color scheme. Include photos and personal items that make your learning space inviting. Even your folders, notebooks, and writing utensils can be customized according to your preferences. Just a few splashes of color can make a big difference.

Furniture

Try rearranging the furniture in your current learning space. Can you remove any items that are cluttering the area? If you would like to try this virtually before engaging in heavy lifting, try one of the online options listed below. You can also visit office supply and outlet stores to gain inspiration for your room arrangement or purchase some discount or used items. IKEA, Target, and Wal-Mart offer reasonably priced furniture as well. If you work in an office, check to see if redecorating is in the budget any time soon. You may be able to
obtain some used pieces for free. You would be surprised how much one new piece of furniture—or simply a new arrangement—freshens a room.

3. Find Your Best Learning Environment on Campus

What if your best learning space is not at home, but here on campus? Here are some options for you:

- **Library**- If you prefer to work in silence and with few distractions, consider the library as your learning environment. There are study carrels, open tables, computer stations, and couches. There is usually plenty of room for you to spread out and work comfortably. Of course, library staff members are available if you need help.

- **ASC (Room 244)**- If you seek a learning environment where there is some level of noise and more activity, try the Academic Support Center. Fifteen computer stations and a printer are available, and you can ask a tutor for help if you need it.

- **Commons**- If you learn best in a social environment with music and plenty of activity around you, study in the Commons. It has several computer stations and ample table space available; snacks are also handy if you get hungry. You can even play a game of pool if you take a break.

**Online Tools To Try:**

**Decorating Ideas**- Scroll Down and Click “Office/ Workspace”

[http://www.hgtv.com/hgtv/dc_room_design/0,1792,HGTV_3497,00.html](http://www.hgtv.com/hgtv/dc_room_design/0,1792,HGTV_3497,00.html)

**Room Planner**- Customize your learning space in a virtual format

[http://www.hgtv.com/hgtv/pac_ctnt_wide/text/0,,HGTV_17897_23822,00.html](http://www.hgtv.com/hgtv/pac_ctnt_wide/text/0,,HGTV_17897_23822,00.html)

**Tips for Room Arranging**-
