chair height: 17.5 inches

desk height: 26"

standing: 43"

Writing Desk Ergonomics

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By

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Writing desk ergonomics results in a comfortable workspace.

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Writing desk ergonomics addresses the position of your desk, chair and body to maximize productivity, minimize physical discomfort and prevent health-related issues. Although basic ergonomic principles can apply to everyone using a writing desk, some aspects require individual tweaking to accommodate your specific height and work tasks. When you use a writing desk for reading and writing as well as for computer or laptop work, implement the ergonomic recommendations that apply to your workplace.

Sitting Too Low

When you're sitting too low at a writing desk, it forces you to sit on the front edge of a chair to lift your arms to a comfortable working level. You must reach upward to grasp objects on top of your desk as well as raise arms, hands and wrists when you're typing. Information from the Michigan State University's physician's office states that reaching upward to a desktop when you're in a low chair can cause wear and tear as well as thickening of the bursa and tendons of the shoulder, which can lead to tendinitis and bursitis of the shoulder.

Sitting Too High

If your chair is too high for your desk,you have to bend forward to reach down to the low desktop. According to the Michigan State University's physician's office, this unnatural posture results in undue back stress as well as abnormal positions for your wrists. Because leaning forward causes the lower back to support the upper body weight, which is up to 50 percent of your total body weight, it also makes the back muscles more prone to injury and fatigue.

Just Right

The American National Standards Institute has developed recommended guidelines for ergonomically based workstations such as writing desks. It suggests a writing-desk height between 27 and 29 inches, leaving ample room under the desk for legs and knees. Proper ergonomic sitting position at a writing desk is a 90-degree angle between your lower and upper arms; your hips and lower back; your upper and lower legs; and your feet and ankles. Modify the work-surface height for a keyboard to about 2 inches lower than your desk height. Adjust your chair or desk to accommodate the recommended ergonomic height for your stature.

Additional Tips

Even though a proper desk and chair height are crucial components of office ergonomics, you can implement additional ergonomic ideas to improve your comfort level. For example, place a task lamp on your desk for reading and writing; choose a writing desk with rounded edges to avoid uncomfortable forearm stress; and keep your wrists in line with your forearms and palms when typing. In addition, situate the top of a computer or laptop screen at eye level and at a comfortable distance that allows you to read the monitor without leaning your neck, head or trunk backward or forward.

Writing Ergonomics: Top Tips for Proper Posture, Alignment, and Movement

September 12, 2011 By John Soares 70 Comments

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Authors and everyone who writes or works at a computer needs to pay attention to proper body posture/position, alignment, and movement — if you want to be a faster writer and be a happier writer, you must learn about writing ergonomics.

What Is Writing Ergonomics?

Ergonomics is the science of work. When specifically applied to writing, it addresses how you should position yourself and how you should move when writing so you maximize productivity, minimize physical discomfort, and prevent damage to your body. We’ve already examined how to minimize eyestrain when writing at the computer in a past post, so now we’ll look at the details of what else you need to do.

Proper alignment and posture for a sitting writeProper alignment and posture ergonomics for a sitting writer working on a computer: feet, legs, hips, spine/back, neck, shoulders, and arms.r working on a computer: feet, legs, hips, spine/back, neck, shoulders, and arms.

Proper alignment and posture ergonomics for a sitting writer working on a computer. (Courtesy Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory)

Posture, Alignment, and Movement for the Sitting Writer

Your Writing Chair

You want a high-quality chair that provides a cushioned seat, excellent support for your lower back, and the ability to adjust the height of the seat and the position of the backrest. Go to an office supply store with a large selection and make sure you get one that really feels good, regardless of price. Don’t skimp on your chair; outside of bed, it’s probably where you spend most of your time.

Your Writing Posture

Think 90-degree angles between:

1. Your feet and lower legs (ankles)

2. Your lower legs and upper legs (knees)

3. Your upper legs and torso (hips and lower back)

4. Your lower arms and upper arms (elbows)

Note that you may need to get a different desk so that you can maintain the 90-degree angle at your elbows. Frequently desks are too high. You can compensate by raising the height of your chair; if necessary, get a good, properly sized footrest so you keep your lower legs in the proper alignment.

More important posture pointers:

1. Keep your weight evenly distributed on your buttocks and hamstrings, and let your feet take the weight of your lower legs.

2. Distribute weight evenly across all major surfaces of the foot.

3. Elongate your spine from your tailbone to the crown of your head (the point on your skull directly above the tops of your ears).

4. Rotate the bottom of your tailbone forward and the top of the sacrum backward, but don’t force it.

5. Pull your chin back gently; seek to have your ears directly above your shoulders.

6. Relax every muscle that is not needed to either keep you in proper posture or to do the task at hand.

Your Typing Hands

You know that your elbows need to be at 90 degrees. Here’s how to protect your hands and wrists:

1. Keep your wrists in line with your forearms and palms. Don’t let your palms droop or rise up.

2. Consider using a wrist rest: a rectangular, soft pad you place in front of your keyboard. (Although some experts say you shouldn’t use a wrist rest.)

3. Don’t write uninterrupted for long periods of time.

4. Occasionally stop and trace clockwise and counterclockwise circles with your fingers; also massage your palms and do gentle wrist stretches.

Using Your Computer Mouse:

1. Maintain the 90-degree angle at the elbow as much as possible.

2. Hold it gently.

3. Initiate movement from the elbow, not from the wrist.

4. Keep your hand off of it except when you need to use it.

Movement at the Computer

Even when sitting at a desk clicking away at the keys, you’ll occasionally need to look at research materials on your desk, grab a pen, etc. Here are 2 important points:

1. Maintain proper body alignment as much as possible. For example, don’t let your head jut forward or allow your spine to slump.

2. Stay relaxed.

Writing on a Laptop: Posture and Alignment Tips

Some writers, and I was one of these for nearly a decade, only use a laptop. Laptop use necessarily involves some postural compromises. Here’s how you can minimize body strain:

1. Keep the top of the screen at eye level, or as high as practical.

2. Use a separate mouse rather than a trackball or other cursor-moving device.

3. Consider using a separate keyboard.

Other Posture/Alignment/Ergonomics Resources

Visit these sites for more details on proper ergonomics:

Office Ergonomics, from the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work

Computer Workstation Ergonomics from Cornell University

Ergonomics at Wikipedia

Suggestions for Improving Your Writing Posture

1. Check yourself frequently to make sure you adhere to these principles.

2. Print this post and keep it right by your computer for easy reference.

3. Evaluate your work area for all ergonomic considerations. Be willing to invest time and money in your health by purchasing the right equipment.

4. Consider using software programs that send you scheduled messages to take breaks and monitor your posture and degree of relaxation. I haven’t used any of these (yet), but I’ve heard good things about them.

5. Take regular breaks from the computer. Get up and take a short walk, or do some stretches, or drink a glass a water. Shoot for at least 5 minutes of movement for every 60 minutes you spend at the computer.