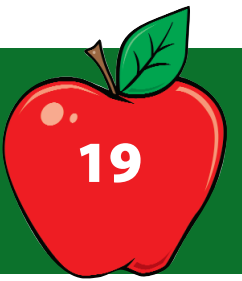


Back to SCHOOL



Plan for Success: Set Up Your Study Space

by Yael Goldman
Saratoga TODAY

It's that time of summer, when the first day of school is just a few weeks away and vacation freedom starts losing its charm, even stirring excitement in some students.

In many families, outfitting for a new year is a tradition. There's back to school clothes shopping (which for me was the best kind), trips to pick out new notebooks and highlighters, visits to the hairdresser or barber, and, of course, new sneakers.

But the preparation shouldn't stop at what you're going to wear or fill your backpack with. Homework, tests and plenty of assignments are ahead. It may pain you to think prudently, to risk spoiling the last stretch of summer with thoughts of deadlines and Scantron sheets, but the truth is it's coming, so you might as well be prepared.

Now is the perfect time to start planning your study area - the designated place where you can most effectively get your work done and absorb as much information as possible before a big exam.

First and foremost, find a space with the fewest distractions and remember to turn off all those easily concealed gadgets that draw your attention - cell phones, iPods, iPads, etc.

According to Cassandra Luthringer, Schuylerville Central School District

counselor, avoiding the majority of common distractions is easy.

"It can be everything from TV to radio to your bedroom and bed," she explained. "Most people who have a desk in their house also have a computer, and we find kids are not studying, but surfing the Internet or Facebook and doing everything they shouldn't be doing."

Oftentimes, a student's homework will involve researching online or typing a paper, which makes it hard to avoid the computer altogether. Luthringer said parents should set up the computer in a living room or space that's fairly open, so they can walk by and check to make sure the student is staying on task.

Siblings and a family's day-to-day activity can also count as distractions.

For most students, the where and how of creating a study area really depends on their family. Some homes may be large enough to accommodate a quiet office or a private bedroom, but if you have a large family with multiple siblings, finding a distraction-free zone is difficult.

Dawn DiLorenzo, interior expert and owner of Locust Grove Designs, said that choosing the right space depends on a student's learning style as much as their family's schedule, dynamic and living space.

"Some people don't have big houses, so maybe they study in the dining

room or kitchen, where they have access to mom and dad; wherever works, every house is different," she said.

If family members are coming from and going to activities, and you are sharing a home workspace, then set up a routine. Find out when you can have the space to yourself, or set aside "quiet time" when everyone can study together.

For DiLorenzo, space, organization, lighting and color are also important things to consider when designating your productive place.

"For me, one of the most important things is quietness; that's why libraries are so quiet," she said.

Consider the library atmosphere and what elements, or lack of, make their work stations so conducive to productivity. For starters they are typically well-lit, slightly rigid and clean as a slate. There are no glaring distractions, and that right there is the key.

"You want a nice desk or table that's organized and neat. Consider the lighting; you want to be able to see what you're looking at without really harsh overheads," she said. Use task lighting or a "daylight type of bulb."

And as far as space is concerned, most students don't work well when

they are too comfortable or reposed, which eliminates cushy couches and beds.

Clutter can be very distracting. Make sure your books and papers are organized, and keep implements like pens, paperclips and calculators handy but out of the way.

"It's about having everything within reach, you don't want to be getting up every few minutes," DiLorenzo said.

Luthringer also emphasized the importance of keeping your utensils organized and available. She said that getting up to find things like pens, notebooks and crayons is a big distraction, and recommends keeping everything together so it is easily found and moved from place to place.

"Use a little Rubbermaid tub or caddy, so all you have to do is pick it up and take it with you to your study space," Luthringer said.

You should also designate a singular place to keep all your notes and resources, that way you know where everything is when it's time to hit the books and are less likely to misplace something or leave an important assignment behind when you head to school.

"Find one place somewhere [near your study area], maybe a cupboard

or a study corral," Luthringer said.

With the bare minimum taken care of (place and organization), you can plan beyond the basics and add personal touches to make your space more inviting.

"The most fun part of a good study space is color," DiLorenzo said, explaining how certain hues can be calming and thought provoking. "Yellow is considered a good color for memory, so throw in some pretty yellow accents, and neutrals can promote concentration and good decision-making."

The possibilities are endless. You can enclose your space with a room divider or hang floor-to-ceiling curtains, or choose colorful organizers like pen holders, bins, shelves and bulletin boards. Do whatever it takes to make your designated area enjoyable, but don't forget that you're there to study!

After all, doing your homework fully focused and distraction-free makes you far more efficient and takes a lot less time.

For more tips, contact Dawn DiLorenzo of Locust Grove Designs by phone at (518) 222-9551 or via email at dawn@locustgrovedesigns.com.




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