

A QUICK GUIDE TO HOME WORKING

ORDERLINESS GUIDE 11

Challenge and Opportunity

Working from home will be a new thing for many people. You may have one of two instinctive reactions. Some will have looked at friends or colleagues in the past who work from home with a degree of envy, and look forward to the opportunity to have a go yourself. At the other end of the scale, some will be thinking ‘Oh no, how do I make this work with my home situation?’

Aware we will all fall somewhere between the two ends of this spectrum, and that some may find working from home more challenging than they expected, here is a quick guide to home working. It begins with top tips culled from the experience of those who have worked from home for a while, and then considers three common challenges. I’ve also included links to additional material for those who want to explore further.

Top Tips

1. CREATE A COMFORTABLE WORKSPACE

Few will have the luxury of a dedicated room for work, but if possible, identify a workspace in a room and set it up to function well. This may be as simple as a table/desk set up with a chair and some basic office equipment (pen, paper, stapler etc), a computer and phone. Give attention to comfort and ergonomics to make it as suitable as possible for a day’s work. Comfort of the chair, placement of the screen, angle of your arms and wrists, lighting are



all things to consider. For more on this, take a look at [this article](#).

If you don’t have a specific space to designate as your workspace, for example you will need to work from the same space where you normally do your personal work on your home computer, create some symbolic things that help you to know when you are working from that space and when you are doing other things. For example:

- Have a coffee cup that you only use when working.
- Put a post it note on the bottom of your screen that says AT WORK, a sign on the door that says the same.
- Place a small clock in the space that is only there when you are working.
- Remove other items that might be a distraction that aren’t related to work and put them in a box near your space so you can retrieve them quickly when you have stopped working for the day.

And a few other tips for using your workspace well. If at all possible:

- Do your work here and don’t bring other things into this workspace, and try not to take your work into other parts of your house.
- Try not to set up your workspace in your bedroom.
- Don’t eat your lunch where you are working. Find somewhere else, even if it has to be in the same room.
- At the end of the working day tidy it up and prepare it for tomorrow’s work.

2. ESTABLISH A ROUTINE

Going to work helps us by offering a number of routines that bring structure to our working day. As much as possible, establish a similar bunch of routines for working from home. For example:

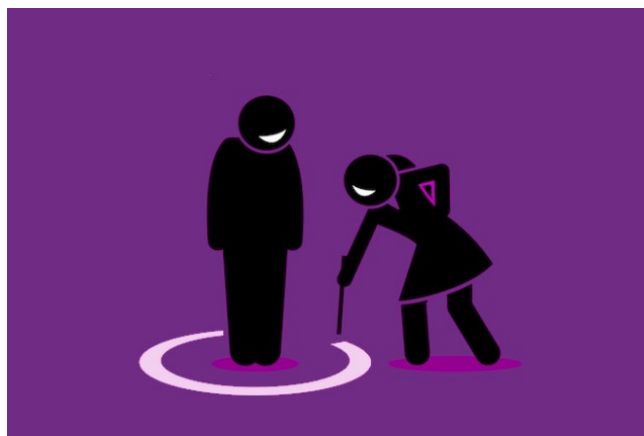
- Wake up at the same time, don’t have a lie in.
- Get dressed for work. Don’t wear your PJs all day. You may want to wear clothes as if for dress down Friday, but put on your work clothes, and when your working day ends, change into non-work clothes.

- If you normally empty the dish washer before you go to work, or make a packed lunch, or put the slow cooker on for dinner, continue to do these things. They build structure and help your brain get ready for work.
- Walk to work. Some people find it helpful to literally go out of their house, round the block and come back in to the house to start work. And if this isn't possible due to lock down, walk round your accommodation for a minute and then into your space for working. They also end their day by walking home.
- Create a timetable for the day and stick to it. It might look like... Start work at 9am, 15 minute coffee break at 10.45am, lunch break at 12.30, afternoon tea break at 2.45, finish work at 4.45. For those working part time or annualised hours, try to work out a timetable for your day that fits with other responsibilities. Do be sure to build breaks into your day.
- Be careful of the common temptation of home working – the fridge. It is very easy to constantly snack through the day, especially if you are finding your work boring or you are feeling lonely. Eating well helps our energy and attention levels, so try to get some healthy snacks in and lock away or give away the unhealthy ones.
- Set up an alarm on your phone to go off at least every hour (probably best every 30 minutes) and move for a few minutes (we tend to move less when working from home, with less trips to the printer, coffee point, quick conversation with a colleague in a different place in the office and so on). The NHS have some great [10 minute workouts](#) to do in the comfort of your own home, great advice on [moving more](#), and if 10 minutes seem to long try these [five minute exercises](#).
- Be sure to stop work when you have determined to stop work. It is very easy to continue beyond this time, or to sneak back to work later in the evening. On occasions this may be necessary, but try to have a clear time to end your working day.

3. SEE IT AS AN OPPORTUNITY

This is a new way of working, whilst it has its challenges, it also has its opportunities. In particular, we can learn to use some new tools that may well enable better working in the future (for example Microsoft Teams and Zoom). We may also learn new work patterns that will serve us well into the future. Inevitably, as with anything new, there will also be some frustrations, but even these are an opportunity to grow in patience, flexibility and creativity.

For more top tips read [this article](#) based on research among 500 home workers, full of practical tips and ideas. Or for those who prefer to watch something, [this video](#) is a couple reflecting on the lessons they have learned as homeworkers over the last ten years, and [this video](#) is another home worker offering his top ten tips for staying productive without going crazy.



Three Common Challenges

1. BOUNDARIES

Many people find managing the boundaries a lot more difficult when working from home, especially if you have others in your home space during working hours. Where appropriate, try to talk with housemates, partners or children about how you are going to maintain some boundaries around your work time. For example:

- Is it ok for a partner to interrupt you and ask you to put the washing on?
- What level of noise is acceptable?
- Can a housemate ask you a question about a project they are working on?
- How will you handle potential broadband conflicts if everyone wants to be online at the same time during your conference call?
- Who is responsible for the children?
- Can the children come into your workspace and expect your attention?

Each person has to work out their answer to these sorts of scenarios. There isn't necessarily a right one, but what is needed is *clarity* and *flexibility* for you and your individual set up. Be clear about what your expectations are, and then be flexible to rethink them once you have tried things out for a few days.

2. ISOLATION/LONELINESS

Many people find working from home lonely. The normal buzz of an office space, and social interactions, both formal and informal, are missing. The normal recommendations to get out of your home, go to a coffee shop, and meet with people are not so appropriate given our current social distancing policy, so here are a few ideas:

- Arrange a daily online video meeting with your team or colleagues to touch base with one another.
- Share your coffee break with someone virtually (work colleague or friend).

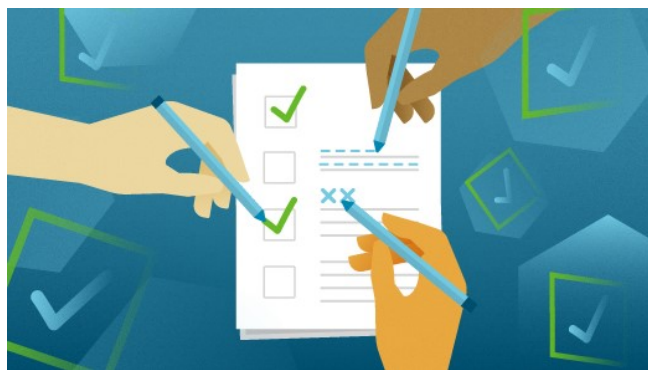


- Work with someone else online with you at the same time, but be clear about what level of communication you want to have. Lots of people find it helps their ability to concentrate just having someone else in the background who is also working. You can use Microsoft Teams to connect via video.
- Listen to music. Generally music without words is best, and [Focus at Will](#) and [Brain FM](#) have created playlists you can use according to what sort of work you are doing (you can also find playlists on Spotify and YouTube; for more on the science behind this see this [article](#)).
- If possible, get out of the house for a walk once a day. If you are able to go with someone even better, obviously keeping an appropriate distance.
- If you're feeling the need for a chat, message a colleague or friend and see if anyone is up for a quick conversation.

Isolation can also exacerbate mental health issues, so if you know you are susceptible to these where possible talk with your line manager about how you might best manage your social contact.

3. PRODUCTIVITY

When we face an empty day with little structure it is easy to fritter away the time and actually accomplish very little. It is also an opportunity to learn new practices that will help bring energy and focus to our working practices. Here are a few ideas:



- Set yourself 'The Big Three'. What are the three things you want to accomplish today? Write them down either at the end of the previous day, or at the start of the day. They won't capture everything you are going to do that day, but the three big things that you need to do for it to be a productive day. For more on this listen to [Michael Hyatt's podcast](#).
- Ideally your daily Big Three relate to your weekly Big Three that you have identified at the start of the week. Same principle, what are the three things to get done this week that will make it a good week.

- Read the CPAS orderliness guide on 'How to focus' (one of a number of articles we have been working on over the last year related to orderliness and productivity), which contains all sorts of ideas on how to focus, eliminate distractions, and handle interruptions. A top tip is to turn off all notifications so that you only go the things when you decide to and you aren't constantly distracted by those tempting banners or pings.
- Reflect on your natural body rhythm for the day and what work is best done when. This is more important when working on your own, as some of the natural things that carry you through your less energised parts of the day in an office aren't there in the same way at home (again see the focus article for more on this). This may also need to link with the wider realities of your home as you manage around child care and other responsibilities, but where at all possible work with your energy levels.
- If you have one, make yourself accountable to your line manager (and if you don't, a friend?) around the things you want to accomplish. Accountability is all about helping us to do what we have decided to do, and most people find they are more motivated to accomplish things if they know someone else will ask 'how is it going?'

There may also be a bit more space for a different type of work, for reflecting and learning, for creativity and planning. Embrace this opportunity. For example:

- Set yourself a clear project to work on: a book to read, a piece of work you simply have never got round to, a new idea you need to research.
- Go through all your emails and delete unnecessary ones, reorder your inbox.
- Think through a better protocol for handling your emails (another of our orderliness guides covers this).
- Reflect on processes you use for other common tasks. Is there a better way of doing them in future?
- Catch up on some CPD (continued professional development) in consultation with your line manager. Is there an online course you could do, a book to read, a webinar to attend?
- Prepare for something coming up later in the year to take the pressure off a future pressure point.
- Have a go at something you've always thought of doing related to your work but perhaps not central to your particular role. Give 10% of your time to it over a couple of weeks and see what develops.

This guide is produced by CPAS. To receive our freely monthly Lead On email full of ideas and insights on leadership click [here](#).