

Have to work from home? 5 quick things you can do to prepare your space

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So you've just been told to work at home, and now you're wondering how to get it done.

Thanks to advancements in technology, it's never been easier. But where to start?

We've got a few ideas. Here's what you need to know, the 2020 edition.

You'll start with the basics like a good internet signal, without which, you're toast. From there, let's focus on the workspace you've dedicated for your new home away from the office.

After all, this is the place where you'll be spending a good eight hours a day for the foreseeable future. Why not make it comfortable and enjoyable?

1. Set up your home office

Pick a dedicated, comfortable place to hang your shingle and park your laptop, hopefully one with few distractions, like nearby food. If you have a desk, great. But a dining table will do, too.

If you'd like to recreate the office experience, you could always put a picture of the kids or significant other on your desk. I like to have a notebook by my computer, for obvious reasons. Beyond the journalists out there, it helps to have an old-fashioned tool to write down phone numbers and keep a running list of the tasks for the day.

If you prefer, you could create a document with the same information and leave it up and running on your computer, or have an iPad or other brand of tablet on your desk to replace the physical notebook.

2. Clean up your home office space

Get rid of all the junk on your desk. You'll be making video calls with

the office and don't want to look like Pig-Pen.

Let's be honest, the cleaning up can be as simple as throwing everything onto the floor, or possibly in a box, to be more organized. You can deal with it later. A nice, clean, spare desk will make a great impression.

(Remember that when you do make your video calls, don't sit with a window behind you. You're likely to be backlit. The computer webcam will expose for the window light and turn you into a silhouette. Instead, turn around and face the window, which will light you nicely.)

And if you really don't have time to clean (or you're choosing to be lazy), the Zoom tool, which many companies use for video calls, has a fun feature that can blur the background and all your junk. TheVerge has a good primer on how to use it.

Microsoft Teams also has a blur feature that works a bit like the Instagram filter on steroids—everyone else sees your outline surrounded by a blur over everything else around you.

3. Powering your home office

The biggest challenge at home: finding a place to plug all your stuff into. You already have lamps and clocks plugged in. How to make space? Get a good, dedicated power strip. Belkin has two models on Amazon, for eight outlets or 12, both in the \$20 range. You can plug in lots of stuff, and since there's a surge protector, you're "safeguarded" in case the power blows. Eight and 12 outlets sound extreme, but they're not at all. Consumer electronics companies have a habit of making products with giant connectors that can hog at least half of your strip space. With an eight-outlet or 12-outlet strip, you're not going to struggle to plug in the four to five products of your choice.

4. What you need for your phone

After you've added the teleconference phone numbers you need, put the phone on speaker and have it available all day long for calls while keeping your two hands available for other things. A \$10 investment will get you a cellphone stand to have next to your computer. Amazon offers many different brands in this price range. Since you'll be using the phone all day, don't let the battery drain. Invest in some of the newer cables that offer faster charging, like Belkin's Boostcharge USB-C Wall Charger (\$24.99), which it says can take recent iPhones or Google Pixel phones from zero to 50% in 30 minutes. Anker's PowerPort PD2 (\$21.94) will fast-charge USB-C devices, which means it works with recent Samsung Galaxy premium phones, GoPro cameras and more.

Oh, and don't forget to charge.

5. Printer

If you're going to be at home for a long time, you might want to invest in a printer. Our sage advice: Skip out on the cheap color printers, which let you get in for under \$100 but then make it up by selling you expensive inks. (Often a whole new printer can cost less than continuing to refill the ink. Not very environmentally friendly.) Ask yourself: Do I really need color ink to print an expense report?

We fell in love with the Brother line of black-and-white laser printers two years ago and have never looked back. (We've only had to refill the ink once during that time period.)

The Brother "Compact Monochrome Laser Printer, HL-L2350DW" sells for just under \$90 on Amazon, prints via Wi-Fi and won't gouge you on ink costs.

And with your new power strip, you'll have room to plug it in.

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