Online Marking

Advice on Setting Up Your Computer and Workstation
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INTRODUCTION

The incorrect use of computers, display screen equipment (DSE) and associated equipment has been recognised as contributing to and causing a range of adverse effects for individual users.

On-line marking (as with all forms of software) adds an extra dimension to the issues that need to be considered when assessing the effects for an individual.

With any new software it can mean all the difference to the user if it is logical, easy to use, and intuitive, is simple to use and fulfils a need. Difficulties can arise when software is none of these things. However good a package is, all users will benefit from training in the use of that software.

For any member of staff that needs additional training in the use of the on-line marking software should contact itsupport@northampton.ac.uk.

All of the advice within this document is relevant not only to the workplace but also to home. Whilst at work the University has a responsibility to ensure that where reasonable, you have adjustments made to enable you to use your computer safely. This also applies to those staff that may be contracted to work from home. This does not apply to those staff that work from home through an informal agreement with their line manager (please refer to the University’s ‘Working from Home Policy’).

Computer/Workstation Assessments

The University has an on-line awareness and assessment package to enable staff to learn how best to set up their workstation for optimal computer use and consequently how to reduce the likelihood of any associated problems.

Where concerns are identified through the self assessment, and the individual is unable to rectify themselves, their local DSE assessor will automatically be notified. If the issue is beyond the local assessors capabilities they will notify the Health and Safety Office for further input.

What if You Have Existing Health Conditions?

Where staff have existing health conditions (e.g. some musculoskeletal conditions or conditions affecting the eyes) and feel this may affect their ability to engage with on-line marking or that on-line marking may affect their health; they should speak to their line manager in the first instance. If the individual does not feel able to discuss with their line manager then the HR Business Partner can be consulted. Staff are requested to raise any concerns at the first opportunity and not wait until the assignment submission date.
Depending on the health concern, it may be possible for this to be addressed by the introduction of adjustments. This may mean the use of adaptive equipment or alterations to work processes.

It may be appropriate in the first instance to contact the Health and Safety Office for a more detailed workstation assessment, however for particularly complex medical conditions or where adjustments prove ineffective, it may also be necessary to refer for an Occupational Health opinion.

**SETTING UP YOUR COMPUTER AND WORKSTATION**

The University has an on-line computer awareness and assessment package, which assists you to identify and correct some of the more common problems with computer set ups. For those you can’t correct yourselves, your local DSE assessor will automatically be notified of your concerns. If they are not able to address the problem they will notify the health and safety office.

Perhaps one of the most common problems many users have is spending too long at the computer screen. The current best advice is to take regular short breaks away from using the computer – 5 minutes every hour is better than 10 minutes every 2 hours. This can be achieved by scheduling in a telephone call, doing some filing or getting up to make a drink.

If you are finding that you are unable to schedule in the short breaks, it would be helpful if you are able to identify why this and especially if this is related to workload, discuss this with your line manager.

**Basic Principles of a Good Set-Up**

Irrespective of what work is being performed with a computer there are some basic principles that will help avoid all users from experiencing difficulties:

**Adjust Your Seat Height**

Sit in front of your computer and adjust the height of your seat so that your forearms are roughly horizontal and your wrists are straight when your hands are on the keyboard.

If your feet are not comfortably flat on the floor, or there is pressure on the back of your thighs from the seat edge, then use a footrest.

If you sit too high or too low you will be forced to type with bent wrists or in a hunched or stooped position. This can cause discomfort in your wrists, arms, shoulders, neck or back and therefore it should be avoided.
Adjust Your Backrest

Make sure your bottom is towards the back of the seat and then adjust the height and angle of your backrest so that it supports your lower back. If you still need extra support put a cushion in the small of your back. If necessary, try altering the angle of the seat base so that it is tilted slightly forward. This makes it easier to maintain a comfortable upright posture.

Avoid slouching or perching on the edge of your seat as you will not get any support from the backrest if you do. Also, the slouched ‘C’ shape posture is damaging to your back - discs, muscles and ligaments are stressed in this posture.

You may feel uncomfortable at first, but this because you have to ‘unlearn’ bad posture habits reinforced over many years.

Adjust Your Screen Position

The height and angle of your screen influences the position of your head and neck. If the angle is wrong you may suffer from neck and shoulder pain. Usually the most comfortable position is looking slightly down (at an angle of approximately 10-15 degrees).

If your screen is too low you will not be able to maintain an upright posture or your neck may be bent too far forwards - try using proprietary screen raisers to overcome this. Ideally, the screen should be positioned so that the central part of the screen is at eye level.

Touch typist - make sure you are sitting in the correct position, with your hands in your normal typing position. Without moving your head you should just be able to look over the top of the screen; then lower your eyes to the middle of the screen; adjust the screen height to achieve this.

Non-touch typist - again make sure you are sitting correctly with your hands resting on the keyboard. Start by looking at the keyboard, then raise your eyes (not your head) and look at the middle of the screen; adjust screen height to achieve this.
**Screen/Seat Position**

The ideal position is one where the screen is in front of you, to allow your body to remain in a neutral position (not twisted).

For some people this means the screen is in, or near, the middle of the desk; for others it may be offset in which case you must swivel your chair so that your whole body is parallel with the screen.

**Keyboard and Mouse**

If necessary, support the wrists with a wrist-rest when using the keyboard. When using the mouse, try to support the whole forearm on the desk or use a mouse mat to support the wrist and forearm. Also, if you do a lot of repetitive mouse movements, try to reduce the amount of time spent using the mouse by:

- using the keyboard controls
- training yourself to use the mouse with either your left or right hand
- taking frequent breaks, rather than continually operating the mouse

**Laptop Advice**

Laptops are not designed for extended periods of use, and from a postural point of view laptops can cause significant problems. The keyboard is small which means users have to pull their wrists in close together to type, twisting them away from what is comfortable for us to do.

As the screen is attached to the keyboard it is also very low, leading most people to bend and extend their necks forward to see the screen clearly.

The mouse is often a small button/pad, which we tense our hands to use with one finger and because we can put a laptop anywhere we put them on our laps - the end result can be tensed arms and wrists twisted inwards and a spine bent almost double.

It is obvious that if we sat in this position for any length of time or on a regular basis we would be very uncomfortable. **So a laptop alone does not make a suitable primary workstation.**
Solution

It is easy to add a few extras that mean when we sit at our desks we have a good workstation set up and still have the flexibility of a laptop should we want to move away from the main desk.

The easiest way to set up a workstation for use with a laptop is to get a docking station, separate screen, mouse and keyboard. Monitor risers can be provided to bring the screen up to the normal height (top at about eye level) and any additional items can be provided as needed.

There are various ways of achieving this outcome - a monitor riser can be provided and the laptop itself placed on it so the screen from the laptop is still used as the main screen with a separate mouse and keyboard.

The recommendation is that if a laptop is provided as the primary workstation then a docking station and peripherals also need to be provided.

ADDITIONAL POINTS

Make Sure You Can Read the Screen Comfortably

Tired eyes and headaches at the end of the working day may be the result of difficulty reading your screen. This could be due to a number of factors, such as:

Dirty Screens

Screens quickly attract dust and then text becomes difficult to read, so it is important to clean screens regularly with proprietary cleaner. If you use a filter, remember to clean the screen behind the filter as well. Working with a dirty screen means your eyes have to work even harder.

Vision

DSE work, like any other close work, requires good or corrected vision. Ideally, you should have your eyesight checked on a regular basis. If you feel that DSE work is affecting your eyesight or causing discomfort, then inform your manager. You are entitled to have your eyes screened every two years, free of charge, or more frequently, if you experience discomfort. If necessary, you will be referred to an optician or recommended to do so without preliminary eye screening.
Reflections and Glare

Reflections and glare from windows or artificial lights makes the screen difficult to read. There are several things which will help:

- try moving your screen to a different angle
- avoid sitting with windows or light directly in front of or behind your screen
- if possible, sit at right angles to light coming through windows
- use window blinds
- if lighting levels are too high, try selectively turning off lights or use task lighting
- adjust the brightness and contrast controls on the monitor to suit the lighting conditions
- if you still have problems see your manager

Organise Your Work Area

How you organise your work area will influence the way you sit. The best arrangement will depend on the tasks involved in your job.

If your work area is badly arranged so that you have to sit in a bent or twisted position, then back or neck ache is likely to result. This can be avoided if you think carefully about the requirements of your job and arrange your work area accordingly.

Document Holders

Do you spend most of your time reading from source documents, or looking at your screen? Many people assume that the screen should be placed directly in front of them. If you are reading mainly from hard copy documents the best solution could be to move the screen to one side and use a copy holder to raise documents to a comfortable height. The important thing to remember is to keep the document holder level with the screen. The idea is to minimise head and neck movement and also to reduce the need for your eyes to keep refocusing.

Try to place your screen in position where background distractions from such things as moving people, shiny surfaces or wall notices are not visible on the screen.
**Take a Break**

The human body is designed for movement and it does not like prolonged periods of static posture. Whenever possible, try to break up any long periods of DSE work with other activities such as photocopying or telephoning. The aim is to move around and change your posture, so that your eyes and body get a rest from DSE work.

If it is not possible to build in these natural breaks then aim to take a 5 minute break every hour. Be sensible about taking breaks - do not be a martyr.

**Report any Problems**

If you start to experience any problems when working with your computer, please report these to your line manager and your designated DSE assessor.