ENSURE A SAFE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

It is important that the area you set aside to work on your course is a safe and healthy one. When working on a computer it is important that you try to take a break, stand up, move around and exercise your eyes at least every 2 hours.

Ergonomics

Ergonomics refer to the relationship between the human body and the equipment used to work or study. The main focus is on ensuring your individual work area and environment support health and safety.

Personal Work/Study Areas

When you work at a computer, you need to ensure the equipment you work on and the environment your work in supports your physical requirements and well being.

Chair

You should ensure your chair is ergonomically designed to adjust to your requirements. Well-adjusted chairs will improve your body position, improve your blood circulation, reduce muscular effort and decrease pressure on your back. Make sure that your chair is adjusted to suit your requirements (a gas lift chair is best for this). Your back should be straight and your feet should be flat on the floor or on a footrest.

You should be able to adjust your chair to ensure:
- Your feet can rest comfortably on the floor or on a footrest
- The seat slope is level or slightly forward so that the blood flow to your legs is not restricted
  - The height and angle of the back rest support your lower back

Desk

Your desk should be adjusted to ensure your lower arms (elbow to wrist) are parallel to the floor when you sit with your hands resting over the keyboard.

There are two ways to achieve this:
1. If the desk and chair are both adjustable, adjust the chair so your feet are flat on the floor then adjust the desk so your arms are parallel to the floor
2. If only the chair is adjustable, adjust it so your arms are parallel to the floor, and then find something your feet can rest firmly on (a wedge of wood or phone book/s will do).
**Computer**

The top of your screen monitor should be at eye level and be about 0.7 m away from you.

Set the distance between your eyes and the screen so that you can focus on the screen easily. Usually this will be within an arm's length.

Adjust the brightness and contrast of the screen to a level that is comfortable for you.

**Keyboard**

Remember to place the keyboard in a position that allows your forearms to be close to horizontal and your wrists to be straight; that is, each hand should be in line with the forearm.

If this causes your elbows to stick out, away from the side of your body, you should re-check the height of the work surface.

Your computer keyboard should be sloping at about five degrees.

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**Occupational Health & Safety**

It’s important to be aware of occupational health and safety factors, such as:

**Lighting**

Poor lighting can cause glare and reflections and make working on your computer difficult or dangerous.

- The screen should be positioned so that the light coming from windows and overhead lighting does not cause reflections on the screen.
- The screen should be placed so you do not face directly into, or away from, a window. Special filters can be placed over the screen to cut down on the glare.

**Noise**

Noise from information processing equipment, such as computers and printers, can be a major source of irritation and can even cause headaches.

If using a computer in a small space, it is advisable to keep the printer in an adjacent room or well enough away not to be a concern.

**Ventilation**

Technical equipment can also produce considerable amounts of heat. Ensure there is sufficient ventilation so your workplace does not become hot and stuffy.
Cables

They are everywhere!
Take notice of the cables around your computer and other equipment. These cables can be quite dangerous if not taped down or secured in a manner that does not make them an obstacle.

- Always be aware of the location of cables and power points
- Never plug a loose cable into a socket while power is still supplied to the system
- Tape down or secure all cables

Posture

Poor Posture is a major source of health problems associated with using computers.

Ensure your workspace meets the ergonomic requirements as listed above.

- Try not to sit on the edge of your chair
- Sit tall with your shoulders down and pulled back.

The diagram below shows the correct posture when using a computer.

Eyestrain

Working constantly with computer screens (VDU’s) can produce tired and sore eyes.

To reduce strain, take short breaks and rest your eyes. Look away at your computer at a longer distance and try rolling your eyes and looking side to side. You could also close our eyes for a short while.

Using colourful posters or other visual distractions can also help provide relief from eyestrain.

Exercise

Every few hours take a break and perform some gentle exercises and stretches.

- Stand up, move around
- Stretch your wrists, shoulders and perform some gentle and controlled head roles

You will feel revived and refreshed in no time!