

**THE HOME FRONT**  
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**HOMework**





# HOT DESKS

How to create a fun but functional study area.  
By **Caroline Basham.**

**G**etting children to sit down to do their homework can be a minefield of tears and tantrums but it's made easier when your children have a study area they like – and that keeps distractions at bay.

Freya Taylor was just seven years old when she started badgering her mother, Tania, for her own desk. The problem was a lack of space in her bedroom.

"As she is the youngest of my three children, Freya was stuck with the smallest bedroom in our village house as her older brothers were already in the larger rooms when she was born," Tania says. "Her room has a built-in wardrobe and drawers so we don't have the luxury of shuffling furniture around and if we tried to fit in even a small desk she either wouldn't be able to get to her bed or open her wardrobe doors."

Freya suggested a platform bed and, although Tania wasn't keen as her daughter's existing bed wasn't old, she capitulated as it was the only solution available.

"Part of the reason Freya was so keen on this 'bedroom solution' was the excitement of climbing a ladder to bed," Tania says. "But her friends had also started to get desks so I'm sure she kept asking for one because she wanted to be the same as



Platform beds, incorporating a desk like this one from Flexa, are a good solution for small spaces.

them. She is young and her homework is minimal, but because she kept insisting she wanted to study in the peace and quiet of her bedroom rather than downstairs on the dining-room table, I felt I should encourage her."

Bumps to Babes ([www.bumpstobabes.com](http://www.bumpstobabes.com)).

com) and Indigo Living ([www.indigo-living.com](http://www.indigo-living.com)) have loft-style beds incorporating desks, wardrobes, drawers and bookshelves. The Stuva modular bed by Ikea ([www.ikea.com.hk](http://www.ikea.com.hk)), which Tania chose for its price (\$3,650) and size, includes a platform bed, shelves, mini wardrobe

and desk. The desk can either fit directly beneath the bed, running the length of the mattress, or if there is more space it can be positioned at a right angle at one end. The wardrobe doors and desk drawers come in four mix-and-match colours.

Creating a productive study isn't only about space. As anyone who works in an office can attest, health and safety requirements have changed the ergonomics of desks and chairs. At home, the use of computers from an early age has an inevitable impact on a child's posture and physical development, so choosing the correct desk-and-chair combination is essential.

Chair height should be set so the feet can rest flat on the floor with shins vertical and knees bent at 90 degrees. Dangling legs or knees knocking the underside of a desk can restrict blood circulation, leading to discomfort and loss of attention. The desk should allow the child to rest their elbows and forearms on the desktop

## Study aids

### How to increase the chances of effective homework.

**Noise:** Create a quiet period each day when homework can be done – especially if you have children of different ages. If your child has to wear headphones to deal with the noise, something's wrong.

**Drinks and snacks:** Make sure the child has a water bottle on the desk, and possibly a supply of nuts, fruit and

protein bars for when concentration wanes.

**Timers:** Many students (particularly teens) work well by setting allocated times to complete a piece of work. Use a dedicated alarm clock rather than a smartphone.

**Smartphones:** These phones are a formidable distraction that don't mix with concentrated study. Leave it in another room, switched to silent.

without hunching their shoulders or leaning forward.

Some children's desks have surface heights and seating that can be adjusted for children aged three to 13. Top-of-the-range models can be tilted for writing (flat), reading (15-degree tilt) and drawing/painting (45 degrees), keeping the distance from the eyes to the work surface within a healthy range. Before buying one, however, consider whether the child can adjust the tilt and extension mechanism themselves rather than relying on an adult.

The German-made Moll Champion desk (\$12,980 from Nerd Kids for Living, 19/F, Horizon Plaza, Ap Lei Chau, 3105 9887) is split in two, allowing one side, matched to whether the child is right- or left-handed, to be tilted for drawing, writing and reading while the other side remains flat. Moll also

makes ergonomic chairs such as the height-adjustable Maximo (\$5,980) in a range of funky colours, with a swinging backrest for extra support.

Danish company Flexa (261 Queen's Road East, Wan Chai, 2688 2303) specialises in the design and manufacture of children's furniture that ticks all the boxes when it comes to style, practicality and ergonomics. Its Study desk (from \$4,000) is height and tilt adjustable and can be personalised with legs in blue, yellow or white and desktops in clear lacquered pine, whitewashed pine or white MDF. It was designed by Danish architect Anders Smidt.

"Making a study table for kids that is functional, ergonomic and grows with the child was a great challenge for me," he says. "The table provides intuitive height and tilt adjustability, colour personalisation

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She wanted to study in the peace and quiet of her bedroom

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as well as easy technology integration in a seamless whole while utilising friendly, environmental and safe materials that are long lasting."

As for working in a messy bedroom, studies have shown we are all more effective with less clutter. However, to your child, clutter may not be a distraction at all – except when they realise something precious or familiar isn't there. A key issue here is that the worktop is clear and books, treasures and stored resources are readily accessible.

Many furniture companies sell under-desk storage cabinets and filing boxes. Consider buying a small filing system to help your child become organised and more systematic in their work routines.

The next consideration is lighting. The light level at the desktop surface should be 500-700 lux, which can be measured by downloading a free Lux Meter app onto your smartphone. Choose a desk lamp that enables your child to easily move the light source, such as an Anglepoise design. This allows children to learn to control the glare from artificial lights. Daylight is ideal as long as strong sunlight can be defused by a blind or curtains to avoid glare and heat build-up.

"Freya enjoyed picking out the colour of the drawers and doors of her new desk area and if that all makes her keen to do her homework so much the better," Tania says. "At least now she doesn't have any excuse not to get it done." ●

Caroline B ([www.caroline-b.hk](http://www.caroline-b.hk)) is a bespoke personal-assistance service for families and individuals.



The Moll Champion desk has a split desktop that can be tilted for reading and painting.