

14 Strategies to Help You Stay Focused in an Open Office

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Nearly 70% of employers in the US have adopted an open office layout even though numerous studies have found that they reduce productivity and increase distractions. Their popularity may be mainly due to the fact that they're economical because more employees can be packed into less space.

While the lack of walls may also be handy for collaboration and learning from your peers, **what do you do when you have tasks that require concentration?** Try these strategies that will help you to focus on your work.

Steps to Take on Your Own:

1. **Wear headphones.** Sometimes the obvious solution is the one that's most effective. Bring headphones or earbuds to work. Your employer may even be willing to cover the cost for noise cancelling devices.
2. **Post a busy signal.** If your office doesn't have a system in place yet, create your own version of a do-not-disturb sign. It could be your headphones or a sign that you can place on top of your computer.
3. **Lower your voice.** When one employee starts talking louder, there's a **tendency for the rest of the room to follow.** Monitor yourself throughout the day to be sure you're using your indoor voice, especially when you're on the phone.
4. **Stay home.** If your employer allows you to work remotely, take advantage of that flexibility. If possible, schedule your lengthy phone calls and tasks that

require close attention for the days that you'll be at home.

5. **Accept interruptions.** Changing the way you think about interruptions helps too. Try to let go of anxiety and frustration.
6. **Gather your thoughts.** At the same time, distractions have a real cost. **One famous study found that it takes 23 minutes to get back on track.** You may be able to speed up that process by taking a moment to assess your activities and plan your next moves.

Steps to Take with Your Colleagues:

1. **Designate quiet hours.** Maybe you and your coworkers can agree on blocking out time for quiet tasks. It could be a few hours in the morning or afternoon on certain days of the week.
2. **Book a conference room.** Some companies encourage employees to move around when they need more privacy. You might be able to use an empty meeting room or temporary offices where you can close a door.
3. **Send a message.** Instant messaging apps let you carry on some conversations silently. If you need to talk face to face, consider going somewhere out of earshot.
4. **Batch communications.** If you and your coworkers are overwhelmed by emails and voice messages, try cutting back on the frequency. **Keep a running list of subjects you need to discuss and address them all in one or two daily communications.**
5. **Shield your eyes.** Visual noise counts too when you're sidetracked by watching

what your office neighbors are doing. Some employers are limiting the line of sight with oversized plants, privacy screens, and curved computer monitors.

6. Turn down the lights. Neutral colors and softer lights also decrease the urge to keep looking up. If it's time to redecorate the office, you might want to work with a designer who can suggest options that encourage psychological privacy.

7. Relocate office equipment. Copiers and vending machines rarely make great roommates. Try to position work areas away from noisy equipment.

8. Talk with your boss. Your boss has an interest in your performance too. Be creative and proactive about offering suggestions that can help you and your coworkers to be productive.

You can make an open office less chaotic and distracting. Take steps on your own and with your employer to create more privacy and quiet time for concentrating on your work.