

Based on The FM Lexicon by Martin Pickard
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The wide variety of designs in the modern workstation evolved from the desks developed in medieval times to support the activities of reading and writing. Indeed the basic principle of a sturdy flat surface usually made of wood placed at an ergonomically suitable height for writing has not changed in all of those years. The word 'desk' comes from the Modern Latin *desca*, "table to write on" and has been in common use since the 17th Century.

Before the invention of the movable type printing press in the 15th century, any reader was potentially a writer or publisher or both, since any book or other document had to be copied by hand. Since manuscript volumes were sometimes large, and heavy, desks of the period usually had massive structures.

The desk forms we are familiar with were born mostly in the 17th and 18th centuries. These included the Knee Hole Writing Tables which allowed the user to be able to write at the desk without compromising comfort, storage or freedom of movement. The Victorians advanced the design of the desk still further with the introduction of pedestals and large flat, stretched leather writing surfaces with plenty of drawer storage space and legroom

A small boom in office work and desk production occurred at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th with the widespread introduction of the typewriter. Steel desks were introduced to take heavier loads of paper and withstand the pounding meted out on the typewriters. The L-shaped desk became popular, with the "leg" being used as an annex for the typewriter.

Another boom occurred after the Second World War when even executive desks became mass-produced, built of cheap plywood or fiberboard covered with wood finish, as the number of people managing the white collar workers became even greater.

Through the 1980s, office worker numbers skyrocketed along with the cost of office space rent. The cubicle desk became widely accepted in North America as an economical way of putting more desk workers in the same space without actually shrinking the size of their working surfaces.

The ergonomic desk is a modern desk form which, like the adjustable drafting table of the 18th century, offers mechanical adjustments in order to maximize user comfort and efficiency. While desks like these have become highly complicated pieces of equipment many other modern desk designs have returned to a simpler flat surface more suited to occasional use by tablet users working flexibly.

Those interested in the development of modern office interior design should read "The New Office" by Francis Duffy published by Conran Octopus ISBN-10: 1850298912