

## PRODUCTIVITY

# 17 Work-From-Home Accessories and Other Things That Make Life a Little Easier (Because We Could All Use Some Help)

by [Rebeca Piccardo](#)

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As is true for so many, the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic marked a huge change in my day-to-day life: My tiny 400-square-foot apartment, which had just enough room for a loveseat, a small table, and a folding chair, suddenly became my home office. This unconventional setup seemed bearable when we all thought the confinement would last for a few weeks—a couple of months, tops—but obviously it's taking far longer to get back to how things used to be before 2020.

Luckily, my lease was up in just a few months, and moving into a new, larger space allowed me to rethink my work-from-home setup. And it turns out many of my coworkers here at The Muse were on the same page. Most of us were adjusting to working 100% remotely for the first time—and in finding ways to make ourselves comfortable and stay productive long term, we discovered products that made a huge difference.

Here are 17 things that made our work-from-home lives easier in 2020—and may help you live your best WFH life, too, in 2021 and beyond (though I hope at some point it's more of a choice than a necessity!).

Looking for general work-from-home tips? Read more [here](#).

## 1. A Computer Monitor

Back in the office, we were all used to working on large computer monitors (in some cases, double monitors) rather than plugging away on 13-inch laptops. During the pandemic, many on our team were eager to recreate this setup at home.

"I had never really worked from home before. Once the work-from-home order occurred, I cleared off my desk and figured it would be good to have a second screen like I had in the office," says Peenak Inamdar, Senior Director of Engineering at The Muse. After researching online reviews on Wirecutter and YouTube, he decided on a 4K monitor (which offers more pixels per inch, or higher resolution, than an HD display) to use as a second screen. "My laptop is still my primary screen—the new monitor is really used for when I need more real estate like when I'm working on big spreadsheets."

In January 2020, Travis Sanders, Data Engineering Manager at The Muse, upgraded his home office with a wide-screen monitor and a proper desk chair, both of which became all the more essential when the pandemic started. "The monitor especially has been indispensable during this whole thing," he says. "As an engineer, more screen space means less minimizing and shifting windows when I'm switching between various software I use throughout my day. I purposefully bought a very wide monitor for this reason."

## 2. A Desk

There are all kinds of desks to choose from nowadays—from L-shaped to wall-mounted. You can even use a C-shaped end table by your couch as a laptop desk (as I like to do to enjoy the open living room space). It all depends on how much room you have and the type of layout

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Regina Borsellino, an editor at The Muse, recently switched her corner desk—which forced her to face her walls for hours on end—to one that allowed her to make better use of the space in her apartment and have a nicer view. “With my new desk, I’m able to see more of the room peripherally while I’m working and, importantly, the windows, so that I’m getting some form of natural light.”

For Sean Kiejar, a sales development representative at The Muse, a standing desk was the ideal home office setup to recover from a recent back injury. “I knew standing throughout the day would be beneficial,” she says. “I still have issues with my back and sitting or laying all the time makes it worse.” After researching options on Amazon, Wayfair, and Overstock.com, Kiejar [found one](#) for about \$100 that she could place on top of the desk she already had at home. “It definitely helps to have products that allow for strength and posture training, and anything that is ergonomically friendly will benefit me in the long term,” she says.

### 3. A Laptop Stand

Not everyone has the room for a sophisticated setup with a desk and monitor at home (I sure didn't). If you'll be using your laptop as your main computer, a laptop stand is the key to turn any table into an [ergonomic](#) workspace. It elevates the screen to eye level, which helped me with my terrible posture.

### 4. External Keyboard and Mouse

Whether you opt for a fancy big-screen monitor or prop up your laptop on a stand (or both), the external keyboard and mouse combo will make it easier to work comfortably for a prolonged period of time.

It's also good to have an external keyboard on hand in case your laptop goes haywire (as it's most likely to do right before a big deadline, of course). “I needed a keyboard literally to get my job done,” says Brooke Katz, a senior editor at The Muse. “I was using a laptop with a spacebar that didn't work—not very conducive to being productive while editing and writing all day long!”

*Looking for work-from-home tech tips? Read more [here](#).*

### 5. An Office Chair

A comfortable desk chair goes a long way toward WFH happiness, as Katz learned when she grew tired of working from her wooden dining chair. She pored over online research to understand what to look for in an office chair (the main takeaway is that it should be adjustable—armrests, seat height, and lumbar support) and found an affordable option at Staples. “The chair is a lot more comfortable and I'm able to sit for longer stretches without my back and butt hurting,” she says. “Though I do still get up a lot to walk around and stretch during the day.”

### 6. ...or a Seat Cushion

This is the best budget alternative to buying a whole new chair. When Kiejar was researching standing desks, she also looked into a versatile [cushion](#) that could provide back support when she switches from standing to sitting. “It's great because it's comfortable to sit on, helps you to maintain a good posture while sitting, takes up *way* less space than a full exercise ball, and allows for other core training—I stand or kneel on it while I'm working sometimes to strengthen my ankles and core,” she says.

The cushion is also useful on the couch, Kiejar says. “I enjoy the ability to find comfort in different environments throughout the week.”

*Looking for more tips for ergonomic work-from-home setup? Read more [here](#).*

### 7. A Foot Rest

This is an ergonomic must-have, according to Muse Content Marketing Manager Kayla Ellman, who purchased a footrest to help with her posture. “I waited so long to invest in anything new because the pandemic has been so unpredictable,” she says. “But after seven months, I realized it was worth it because we are still going to be working from home for a while.”

Ellman found a lot of options at various price points, and chose a [foam footrest](#) with a washable cover from Amazon. The biggest selling point was that it's adjustable, so she could add or remove a few inches of height to ensure it was just right for her.

She's noticed a big difference: “When I actually sit with my feet planted on the foot rest, my back feels a lot better! It has helped me sit up straight more naturally and not hunch over my laptop,” she says.

## 8. A Webcam Cover

This one is a no-brainer now that our professional and personal lives are happening all in the same square footage. Many of us already had Muse-branded webcam covers on our work laptops, but I also purchased [one](#) for my personal laptop and sent them as gifts to family members. The ability to swipe the cover on and off gives me a moment to prepare before a call, and it's an extra safeguard (along with turning off your video) to minimize any accidental on-camera moments in front of coworkers.

## 9. Noise-Canceling Headphones

Even when you're working from home, good noise-canceling headphones are a worthy investment if you have to share space with others. Stav Ziv, a senior editor at The Muse, made the case pre-pandemic for [why it's worth splurging](#) on a pair of your own for work and other settings.

"I was initially dismissive about schmancy noise-canceling headphones," she wrote. She discovered that they truly helped tamp down any noise and chatter around her at the office so that she could really focus—even without playing any music. She also found that the headphones send a strong signal to others that they're serious about getting work done without any distractions. "I was wrong though, and I hereby declare that I have been converted to Team Noise-Canceling Headphones."

These days, you may not be trying to drown out the sounds of your coworkers in an open-plan office, but headphones can help you get in the zone if your roommate's talking loudly, if you can hear your neighbors through the walls, or if there's ongoing construction outside your window.

## 10. A Coffee Subscription

In the pre-pandemic days, our team stayed properly caffeinated thanks to the nearby coffee shops as well as our steady supply of cold brew and K-Cups in the office. When we started working from home, some of us took advantage to upgrade our personal coffee stash. I, for one, missed our office cold brew so much that I signed up to get a [five-liter box](#) of it delivered twice a month.

In the case of Nicolette Finder, Sales Growth Specialist at The Muse, she quickly figured out what she needed to sustain her three-cups-a-day lifestyle. In April, she signed up for a [coffee subscription](#) that delivers a bag of whole beans once a month. "It was a necessity from the start—coffee is my most important meal of the day," she says.

## 11. A Coffee Grinder and Machine

Along with her monthly coffee subscription, Finder bought a grinder and coffee machine that can make up to 12 cups of coffee at a time. "Before...I had to make at least two batches of French press coffee per day," she says. "In my opinion, that was a waste of coffee grounds and too much work during busy work-from-home days."

Finder bought a programmable coffee machine at Target for just \$25, and now sets it up the night before so she can have a fresh-brewed cup ready and waiting for her every morning. "It also reminds me of going into the office," she says. "I'd always grab a coffee or make coffee before sitting down at my desk which allows me to get right to work—no distractions first thing in the morning."

## 12. A Mug Warmer

Another accessory that has made WFH better: a mug warmer to keep your cup hot all day, whether you're drinking coffee, tea, hot chocolate, etc. Dani Gibbs, Accounting Analyst at The Muse, purchased one online after a friend recommended it. "I would get so busy with work that I would forget about my coffee and it would be gross and cold so I would have to make a new one," she says. No more. Now she can set her cup on the warmer and sip throughout the day without any lukewarm (or just plain cold) surprises.

## 13. Scented Candles

Many of us remote work first-timers have had to learn the hard way how important it is to separate our on and off hours so we don't overwork ourselves and get [burnt out](#). For Karen Nissim, Social Media Coordinator at The Muse, splurging on fancy scented candles to change the aroma in her room did the trick. "Now that the days feel blended, it's a nice way to treat myself and break up the day," she says. "When I'm working I burn Auraflowne by [Overose](#): It's citrusy, which I read can help with alertness. It also just makes me happy. When I'm not working, I like to burn Narguile by [Diptyque](#)—it kind of smells like parties to me, which feels nostalgic now."

## 14. Blue-Light-Blocking Glasses

After months of remote work, Samantha Denoncour, HR Generalist at The Muse, was dealing with frequent headaches and vision problems that were affecting her work. “I knew I needed to find a resolution because I am very detail-oriented and I was missing numbers or making small errors,” she says.

She decided to try blue-light-blocking lenses, though she didn’t buy into the hype about them at first. “Once my eyes were really bothering me, I became open to any suggestions— and they’ve made a world of difference,” she says. While [experts](#) say there is no need to buy special glasses for computer use, these coated lenses have become an increasingly popular trend among eyewear companies, from direct-to-consumer brands like [Warby Parker](#) to international retailer LensCrafters.

Denoncour found an inexpensive non-prescription pair on Amazon that she could wear with her contact lenses, and later asked her eye doctor to have her regular glasses coated with blue light resistance. “Any symptom I was having of eye irritation or fatigue has gone away.”

*Looking for tips to get your screen time under control during the pandemic? Read more [here](#).*

## 15. A Dry-Erase Board

If you love jotting down your to-do lists, a dry-erase board is a good way to stay organized and on top of your workload. While upgrading her desk setup, Borsellino also bought a small dry-erase board she keeps by her monitor to write down quick notes (along with a second laptop charger—“I also obtained a slight online shopping problem,” she says.)

Sanders bought a [dry-erase board](#) for his home office, too, and it has (mostly) replaced his need for notebooks. With the board set up by his desk, Sanders can keep track of the tasks he absolutely needs to get done by the end of the day. “I always read the board before closing my laptop for the night to make sure I didn’t miss anything,” he says. “When something is finished, just erase it!”

His pro tip for neater writing: “Get the finest tipped dry-erase [markers](#) you can find!” Sanders says.

## 16. A Tablet

Even with his new laptop-and-monitor setup at home, Inamdar recently splurged on an iPad for added flexibility. “It’s about being able to physically move myself during the day or in the evenings, still get some light reading done, while being able to sit next to my family instead of feeling chained to my desk,” he says.

An added bonus is the iPad’s scribble feature with the pencil (which turns handwriting to typed text). “Being able to put searchable notes directly into Evernote is a big win,” Inamdar says.

## 17. Bonus (When Inanimate Objects Aren’t Enough): A Furry Coworker

One of the hardest parts of the pandemic has been the isolation and lack of social interaction, especially for folks who live alone. However, having a pet at home has been a huge consolation to many of us at The Muse. Our team was already an animal-friendly bunch, with Slack channels dedicated to showing off our fur babies. But in this new reality of remote work, our pets are who we spend most of our time with, and they have become honorary coworkers in a way. (I mean, whose dog or cat hasn’t sat in on at least one of their Zoom meetings?)

Some of us even took advantage of this time to bring a new pet into our homes. Borsellino was inspired to adopt her dog, Cleo, who constantly reminds her to spend more time outside and take breaks throughout the day. “On a five-minute break, instead of automatically looking at my phone or another screen, I can pet my dog and that makes us both happy,” she says. “It also gives me someone to talk to—even if she doesn’t quite get it when I talk about work.”



Rebeca Piccardo is Assistant Editor at The Muse. She was previously a staff writer at the *South Florida Sun Sentinel*, where she wrote about breaking news and crime, and then worked in editorial and creative services for a travel company. Originally from Caracas, Venezuela, Rebeca studied journalism in Miami, Florida.

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