

Sensory Environment Audit (Workplace Edition)

A practical tool to notice what's draining you—and what you can actually change.

Why This Matters

Your environment isn't neutral.

Fluorescent lights. Open-plan offices. Background noise. The smell of someone's lunch. The temperature. The chair that's just slightly too low.

For neurodivergent brains, these aren't minor annoyances. They're constant low-level stressors that drain your regulation capacity before you even start working.

This tool helps you audit your sensory environment—so you can change what you can, and protect yourself from what you can't.

How to Use This

Go through each section below. Notice what's true for you. You don't need to fix everything—just notice what's costing you energy.

Then pick 1-2 things you can actually change.

Your Desk

What to notice:

- Is your chair comfortable? (Or are you adjusting constantly?)

- Is your desk the right height? (Or are your shoulders hunched?)
- Is your screen at eye level? (Or are you craning your neck?)
- Is your workspace cluttered? (Or can you see what you need?)
- Do you have what you need within reach? (Or are you constantly getting up?)

What you might change:

- ✓ **Adjust your chair** (or request an ergonomic assessment)
 - ✓ **Raise your monitor** (books work if you don't have a stand)
 - ✓ **Clear your desk** (even if it's just 10 minutes of tidying)
 - ✓ **Keep essentials within reach** (water, snacks, headphones)
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Lighting

What to notice:

- Are the lights too bright? (Or too dim?)
- Are they flickering? (Fluorescent lights often do)
- Is there glare on your screen?
- Do you have natural light? (Or are you in a windowless room?)

What you might change:

- ✓ **Turn off overhead lights** (use a desk lamp instead)
 - ✓ **Adjust your screen brightness** (match it to the room)
 - ✓ **Wear sunglasses indoors** (if you need to—seriously)
 - ✓ **Request a desk near a window** (if that's an option)
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Sound

What to notice:

- Is it too loud? (Open-plan offices, phone calls, keyboard clacking)
- Is it too quiet? (Silence can be just as draining)
- Are there unpredictable noises? (Doors slamming, people walking by)
- Is there background noise you can't tune out? (HVAC, traffic, music)

What you might change:

- ✓ **Wear noise-canceling headphones** (even if you're not listening to anything)
 - ✓ **Use white noise or brown noise** (to mask unpredictable sounds)
 - ✓ **Request a quieter workspace** (if that's an option)
 - ✓ **Work from home on high-sensory days** (if that's allowed)
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Temperature

What to notice:

- Are you too hot? (Or too cold?)
- Does the temperature change throughout the day?
- Can you control it? (Or is it set by someone else?)

What you might change:

- ✓ **Keep a cardigan or hoodie at your desk** (layers help)
 - ✓ **Use a small fan** (if you're too hot)
 - ✓ **Request a desk away from the AC vent** (if that's the issue)
 - ✓ **Work from home on extreme temperature days** (if that's allowed)
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Smell

What to notice:

- Are there strong smells? (Food, perfume, cleaning products)
- Do they change throughout the day? (Lunchtime, cleaning crew)
- Can you avoid them? (Or are you stuck?)

What you might change:

- ✓ **Eat lunch at your desk** (or away from the break room)
 - ✓ **Request fragrance-free policies** (some workplaces have these)
 - ✓ **Keep a small fan at your desk** (to disperse smells)
 - ✓ **Work from home on high-smell days** (if that's allowed)
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Movement

What to notice:

- Are you sitting all day? (Or can you move?)
- Is your body restless? (Or are you forcing yourself to stay still?)
- Do you have space to stretch? (Or are you cramped?)

What you might change:

- ✓ **Stand up every 30 minutes** (set a timer if you need to)
 - ✓ **Use a standing desk** (or request one)
 - ✓ **Walk during phone calls** (if that's an option)
 - ✓ **Fidget** (doodle, squeeze a stress ball, tap your foot—whatever helps)
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Meetings

What to notice:

- Are you on camera all day? (Or can you turn it off?)
- Are you in a loud meeting room? (Or can you dial in?)
- Are you sitting still for hours? (Or can you move?)

What you might change:

- ✓ **Turn off your camera** (if that's allowed)
 - ✓ **Dial in from your desk** (instead of going to the meeting room)
 - ✓ **Stand during meetings** (or walk if you're on the phone)
 - ✓ **Take breaks between meetings** (even if it's just 2 minutes)
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Hybrid Days

What to notice:

- Do you have a consistent workspace? (Or are you hot-desking?)
- Do you have what you need? (Charger, headphones, snacks)
- Is the commute draining you before you even start work?

What you might change:

- ✓ **Book the same desk** (if hot-desking is required)
 - ✓ **Pack a sensory kit** (headphones, snacks, fidget tools)
 - ✓ **Adjust your commute time** (avoid rush hour if you can)
 - ✓ **Work from home more often** (if that's an option)
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What to Do With This

After you've audited your environment:

1. **Pick 1-2 things you can change this week**

Don't try to fix everything. Just start small.

2. **Advocate for what you need**

"I work better with headphones" is a complete sentence. You don't need to explain your neurodivergence.

3. **Protect yourself from what you can't change**

If you can't control the environment, control your exposure. Work from home. Take breaks. Lower the bar.

A Note on "Accommodations"

You don't need a formal diagnosis to make these changes.

- Wearing headphones isn't an accommodation—it's a tool.
- Adjusting your chair isn't an accommodation—it's ergonomics.
- Taking breaks isn't an accommodation—it's regulation.

You're allowed to make your workspace work for you.

When to Use This

- **When you're drained but can't figure out why**
 - **When you're working from a new space** (office, co-working, hybrid)
 - **When you're considering disclosure** (this helps you name what you need)
 - **When you're advocating for accommodations** (this gives you specifics)
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This tool supports the ZONE Framework: noticing your state, understanding what's driving it, and choosing how to respond.

This tool is part of the ZONE Starter Vault.

For more workplace regulation tools, visit neuroadapt.ai