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Which Office Essentials are Actually Essential? I Relocated to the Conference Room to Find Out!

Posted on [January 24, 2023](#) by [Olivia Smith Schlinck](#)



Hello and Happy New Year from my ~~office home office~~ temporary office/library conference room! January always brings new opportunities and challenges, but over here in NYC those challenges began at the end of 2022 when on Christmas Day three pipes burst at the Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law, causing significant flooding throughout the building including—where else—the law library. And my office. What's the saying? New Year, new temporary workspace? Something about this feels vaguely early-pandemic to me.

For the curious, here's some details about the pipes: the university has been working 'round the clock to get the building back in tip-top shape. When classes began after Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, most of the classrooms were operational, but the library, along with many faculty and administrative offices, took the brunt of the damage and is still facing repairs. While miraculously no books were harmed in the flood, most had to be boxed up to rip up the water-logged carpet, furniture, and walls. Most of the 16,000 (!) boxes of books are currently in off-site storage, but hundreds of boxes remain in the library, lining the halls and filling the study rooms of the currently off-limits floors.



Part of the library's construction zone.

As I write this, one-and-a-half of the library's three-and-a-half floors are open and operational, even if not aesthetically pleasing; from my office/conference room, I see a sea of boxes and concrete floors awaiting new carpeting.



The view from the conference room/temporary office. Boxes contain books temporarily relocated during construction. The carpeting had to be removed due to water damage and is awaiting new carpet installation.

Students can still access some tables, carrels, and study rooms on the open floors (and two nearby libraries, NYU Law and Cooper Union, have generously opened their doors to our students in need of study space while repairs are underway). It's not ideal, but it works.

The upper floors saw substantial damage, including the 8th floor, where my office is. Somehow, despite being surrounded on all sides by water and destruction, my office took no damage. But the 8th floor remains a construction zone and thus I have relocated to the library's 7th floor conference room for the foreseeable future. Which brings me to the point of this post: what items from your office do you *need* to do your job?

When it became evident that I needed more than my work-issued laptop to function, I was able to slip upstairs and retrieve some belongings. I can go back for more items should the need arise, but I have no interest in emptying out the space just to refill it again in a few weeks, so I tried to grab only the necessities. I came out with these:

- **My box of professional shoes.** Like most New Yorkers, I do *not* commute in work shoes. My daily commute includes a solid 30 minutes (combined) of walking to and from the subway. I'm not a fan of blisters, so I commute in sneakers and change into flats or boots or some other more “appropriate” footwear when I get to work each day. The day I returned to the building was also the first day of the semester, and I had to teach in the afternoon. As I got dressed on the day I was returning to the building, which also happened to be the first day of the semester and the first day of my class, I remembered with a slowly-impending sense of horror that *literally every single pair of professional shoes*—flats, boots, heels, you name it—was stored in a medium-sized fabric box in my office. Needless to say, the box was the first thing I grabbed when I finally got back inside my office. After teaching two sections of Advanced Legal Research in my commuting sneakers.



The shoebox, after relocation to my temporary office.



My temporary office. I'm not using the projector.

- **An extra computer monitor, wireless keyboard, mouse, and laptop stand.** As it turns out, I am completely useless if I only have one monitor. At some point over the last three years, I've become so accustomed to the extra screen that there are *very* few tasks I can complete with only one monitor: checking emails; reading blog posts and other online sites; taking notes on print research. Sending emails, but only sometimes; certain emails require toggling between notes or websites or—God forbid—other emails and I get flustered too easily to use one screen in those circumstances. Every other part of my daily work that involves a computer requires a second screen. Making slides for class? Two screens. Answering a reference email? How am I supposed to constantly consult the question while searching for the answer if not for two screens? Grading? Two screens, minimum; usually I have both screens plus something printed in hardcopy and three different colored pens. Which brings me to...

- **My pen cup, notebooks, and a small whiteboard.** I am weirdly particular about my writing tools. I swear by [Muji pens](#) for standard writing tasks; colorful gel pens for grading, annotating articles, and doodling; a black Sharpie for notes to myself that I need to pay particular attention to. I write all this in a variety of notebooks and on post-Its except for my daily To Do list, which I write in a narrow black dry erase marker on a small whiteboard I keep next to me at all times. I forgot about the whiteboard when I first journeyed to my office for supplies and felt so incredibly lost without it.
- **The Bluebook.** There are, of course, Bluebooks aplenty throughout the library, but **my** Bluebook is specially tailored to me, by me. It's tabbed, color-coded, and annotated based on my most frequent uses and questions. I'm not even sure if I'll need it before I get back into my office, but I couldn't leave it behind.
- **A seat cushion.** I left my office chair behind (a decision I'm regretting with each passing day) but did fetch my [Everlasting Comfort seat cushion](#) to make the hard wooden chair I'm using more manageable. Am I too young for chronic back pain? Probably, but when I was 19 I slipped and fell on some ice and my lower back hasn't been the same since. The seat cushion is one of my most prized possessions. Everyone should have one.
- **Advil.** I think this is self-explanatory.

Things I left behind:

- **Printer.** There are plenty of other printers in the library and setting up the printer only to move it and set it up again is a chore I am unwilling to undertake. That said, I will never again take for granted the luxury of having your own printer to use whenever the need strikes.
- **Art, photos, and plants.** AKA the things that make my office feel like *mine* and bring me joy throughout the day. Collecting the décor has taken time and moving it is not practical nor necessary, but I do miss seeing the photos of my dog and my husband and my nephew I keep on my desk.



My office, several months before the water damage and relocation. I've rearranged it a bit since this photo was taken. The plants are now mostly dead.

- **Sunlight and windows.** Technically I didn't leave this behind because I couldn't take them with me, but my office has two large windows with a beautiful view of the Empire State Building and 5th Avenue. My conference room has . . . walls. All things considered, having to work from a windowless conference room for a few weeks is obviously not the worst thing happening in the world or even in the building, but it's been an adjustment. I'm trying to remember to take a walk around the building or the neighborhood every few hours to get some vitamin D.



View from the northeast facing window in my office, looking up 5th Avenue towards the Empire State Building during the sunset.

Hopefully I've only got a few more weeks before the 8th floor is ready for me to return, so I'll try to live with these necessities only for now. What about you: what items do you use daily at work that you couldn't live without?

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