



HOUSING

Efficient furniture arrangement I

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by C. Birdsong¹

Quick Facts...

Developing an accurate floorplan is the first step to managing a particular space.

Mark traffic patterns on the floorplan.

A family's needs and activities should be planned in consultation with those who will be using the space.

Most spaces today must serve a variety of purposes; planning multipurpose spaces takes careful thought.

For any plan to function well, provide adequate space for people to move easily within the area, to use the furniture in the area and to clean the space.

With present day increases in the cost of building, and in many cases a matching decrease in size and scale of homes, managing space becomes more apparent and important. Managing space well involves coordinating the individuals, the interior structure and the furnishings in order to provide an interior environment that is attractive, convenient and comfortable.

These features largely depend upon an efficient arrangement of furnishings: 1) the careful planning of the amount of physical space consumed by the furnishings themselves and the amount of space allotted to individuals using the furnishings, and 2) the apparent size of the space created by the arrangement of furnishings in relation to each other and in relation to the space and its architectural features.

Developing a Floorplan

Since it is much easier to move a pencil than an object of furniture, develop an accurate, scaled floorplan of the space. Once completed, this plan enables you to see, with the addition of furniture "cutouts," the relationship of the furnishings to the space, and the relationships among pieces of furniture within a space, as well as the relationships between adjacent spaces. (See fact sheet 9.516, *Drawing a Floorplan*.)

After completing the floorplan, measure the pieces of furniture that you currently have or plan to acquire. Draw these shapes to scale (just as you did the floorplan) on lightweight cardboard, cut them out and label them. These cutouts can be moved easily about on the floorplan and allow you to experiment with various arrangements.

Traffic Patterns

On the floorplan, begin at the entrance to the space, mark with a colored pencil or felt-tip pen a direct line or path to every other door in the space. These lines serve as a constant reminder of the natural traffic patterns created by the architecture of the space. While traffic can be redirected by the placement of furniture, it is best in the early planning stages to identify the natural traffic patterns.

Analyzing Family Activities

Because families differ widely in their interests, hobbies and activities, you need to consciously plan for your family's needs. Consider the individuals using the space, the activities they will perform, and the furnishings and equipment needed to accomplish these activities. Since it is the day-to-day activities that we should plan for most carefully, it is helpful to record routine as well as occasional activities.

A chart, such as Table 1, is a concise method of gathering the information needed.³

In determining your family's needs, be sure to solicit their help. When possible, have each family member complete a chart such as Table 1 for each space under consideration. This allows each person to participate in the planning and may indicate differing needs and/or expectations of the space than you, alone, would perceive.

Since the completed chart identifies only generic pieces of furnishings and equipment (i.e., seating for four persons, not "a sofa and chair"), you will have a more objective idea of the types and amounts of furnishings needed. Now is an excellent time to examine the furnishings your family currently has. By doing this, you may find that new acquisitions are necessary, that some pieces have little function but may hold meaning to you or other family members, or that some pieces have little function and little intrinsic value.

Conflicts in the use of a given space also may be pointed out during this planning process, and now is the time to establish workable compromises. You may be able to settle conflicts through a new furniture arrangement (i.e., placing a large, comfortable chair in a corner away from the television set) or by redefining the use of a space (i.e., the dining area also becomes a library/study).

Most spaces today must serve a variety of purposes. In planning multipurpose spaces, give careful thought to the type of activities that may occur simultaneously, the amount of space each will consume, and the effects of activities upon each other. If activities do not occur at the same time, give thought to the possibilities of furnishings that can be shared from one activity to another.

Remember too, that individuals do not always want to be exposed to the sights and sounds of others. Like food, sleep and exercise, privacy and isolated activity—silent or noisy, active or contemplative—are essential for continued healthy development and must be provided for in a well-planned space.

Human Spatial Requirements

In order for any plan to function well, provide adequate space for people to move easily within the area, to use the furniture with convenience, and to clean the area. Some recommended clearances are listed below.⁴

- Living area
 - Major traffic path—36" to 72"
 - Minor traffic path—16" to 30"
 - Floor space in front of chair or sofa—18" to 30"
 - Seating space at a desk—36"
- Dining area
 - Table surface space—24"
 - Space to rise from a table—32"
 - Space to edge past a seated person—16"
 - Space between table edge and wall for serving—44"
- Sleeping area
 - Space for bedmaking—22"
 - Space in front of closet—33"
 - Space for dressing—42" circle
 - Space in front of dresser—40"

Note: Some spatial requirements can be shared. For example, the 22 inches required for making a bed could be part of the 33 inches required to use a closet.

References

³Adapted from: St. Marie, Satenig. *Homes Are For People*. New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1973.

⁴*Family Housing Handbook*. Midwest Plan Service. Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa, 1971.

For more information on furniture arrangement, see Service in Action 9.515, *Efficient furniture arrangement, Part II*.

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Table 1: Family living space requirements.

Area	Activity centers within area	Persons using using centers	Generic furniture needed	Space required
Living	Dining	Dad, Mom, Steph, Jim, Gary	Flat eating surface; Seating for five	Diameter of round table 3'8"-4'; Square table with four sides 40"x48"; Space for chairs 26"; 30" for chairs and passage 42" for serving behind chairs 30"-40" rising from chair Total: Round 10'4" x 10'4" Square 10'8" x 10'
	Conversation	Dad, Mom, Friends	Seating for 6-8; Flat surfaces	Diameter of circle for conversation 10'; Sitting relaxed 30" x 34"; Rising from chair 32"-34" Surface area 12" Total: 10' x 10' max.