



Workplace Sensory Audit Checklist

Assess your environment for overwhelm triggers and safety signals

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Important note

This resource is intended to support understanding and good practice in neuro-inclusive workplace design. It provides general guidance and does not constitute legal, medical, or clinical advice. Organisations should apply the principles in line with their own policies, regulatory obligations, and professional judgement.

Purpose

To identify sensory factors that:

- quietly increase stress, fatigue, and errors
- trigger overwhelm, shutdown, or escalation
- undermine focus, participation, and wellbeing

This audit supports **preventative design**, not individual coping.

When to use

- Onboarding new teams or staff
 - Reviewing sickness absence or burnout signals
 - Before office moves or refurbishments
 - After repeated complaints about “distraction” or “tension”
 - As part of ND-inclusive workplace reviews
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How to use

- Walk through the space (or observe a typical day)
 - Complete sections honestly... **neutral observation only**
 - Focus on **patterns**, not perfection
 - Use results to prioritise **small, practical adjustments**
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Section 1. Sound (Auditory Load)

Observe:

- Constant background noise (HVAC, printers, traffic)
- Sudden or unpredictable sounds
- Overlapping conversations
- Phone alerts / notification pings audible to others
- Loud meeting rooms next to quiet work areas

Safety signals present?

- Quiet zones available
- Noise-reducing materials (carpets, panels)
- Headphones / ear protection accepted and visible

Notes / quick wins:

Section 2. Light (Visual Comfort)

Observe:

- Harsh or flickering overhead lighting
- Glare from windows or screens
- Mixed lighting temperatures
- No option to dim or switch off lights

Safety signals present?

- Lamps or adjustable lighting
- Blinds / anti-glare screens
- Choice of seating away from bright light

Notes / quick wins:

Section 3. Visual Complexity (Cognitive Load)

Observe:

- Visual clutter (posters, notices, cables)
- Busy screens or dashboards always visible
- Multiple information sources competing for attention
- Constant movement in peripheral vision

Safety signals present?

- Clear, minimal work surfaces
- Information grouped and prioritised
- Calm areas with reduced visual input

Notes / quick wins:

Section 4. Temperature & Air

Observe:

- Temperature varies significantly during the day
- Poor ventilation or stale air
- Strong smells (cleaning products, food, perfumes)

Safety signals present?

- Adjustable heating / cooling where possible
- Windows that open
- Scent-aware or scent-light policies

Notes / quick wins:

Section 5. Space & Proximity (Social Load)

Observe:

- Crowded desks or narrow walkways
- Frequent interruptions due to proximity
- Lack of personal space or quiet retreat areas

Safety signals present?

- Clear boundaries between work zones
- Bookable quiet rooms
- Permission to step away without explanation

Notes / quick wins:

Section 6. Movement & Interruptions

Observe:

- Constant foot traffic past desks
- Unplanned “quick questions” culture
- No visual signals for focus time

Safety signals present?

- Clear interruption norms

- Use of status indicators (DND, desk signs)
- Asynchronous communication encouraged

Notes / quick wins:

Section 7. Hybrid & Digital Sensory Load

Observe:

- Back-to-back video calls
- Cameras always expected
- Multiple platforms demanding attention at once
- No breaks between online sessions

Safety signals present?

- Camera-optional norm
- Meeting agendas shared in advance
- Scheduled regulation breaks

Notes / quick wins:

Section 8. Safety Signals (Overall)

Tick what is clearly communicated and visible:

- It's okay to wear headphones / use sensory aids
- It's okay to step away briefly
- Quiet spaces are valued, not stigmatised
- Adjustments are normalised, not exceptional
- Leaders model these behaviours

If these signals are missing, people will mask... at a cost.

Prioritisation (What to change first)

Top 3 overwhelm triggers identified:

1. _____

2. _____
3. _____

One low-cost change to trial this month:

Leadership reminders

- Sensory strain often shows up as “performance issues”
- People adapt silently until they can’t
- Small environmental changes have outsized impact
- You don’t need disclosure to make spaces safer

Signals the audit is working

Over time, you should see:

- reduced fatigue and irritability
- fewer interruptions and conflicts
- improved focus and participation
- earlier adjustment requests
- better retention and wellbeing feedback

Policy framing (optional)

“The organisation regularly reviews sensory factors in the workplace to reduce unnecessary strain and support focus, wellbeing, and inclusion. Environmental adjustments are considered a standard part of good workplace design.”

Bottom line

Sensory environments shape behaviour.

When spaces are overwhelming, people burn out quietly.

When spaces signal safety, people can think, contribute, and stay.

This checklist helps you **design for the nervous systems you already employ.**