

What Is 5S?

5S is a systematic form of visual management utilizing everything from floor tape to operations manuals. It is not just about cleanliness or organization; it is also about maximizing efficiency and profit. [5S is a framework](#) that emphasizes the use of a specific mindset and tools to create efficiency and value. It involves observing, analyzing, collaborating, and searching for waste and also involves the practice of removing waste.



5S includes five terms that all start with the letter "S."

What Does 5S Stand For?

5S, sometimes referred to as 5s or Five S, refers to five Japanese terms used to describe the steps of the 5S system of visual management. Each term starts with an S. In Japanese, the five S's are *Seiri*, *Seiton*, *Seiso*, *Seiketsu*, and *Shitsuke*. In English, the five S's are translated as Sort, Set in Order, Shine, Standardize, and Sustain.

There are five key practices involved in 5S. They are as follows:

Japanese Term	English Term	Definition
Seiri	Sort	Sort through materials, keeping only the essential items needed to complete tasks. (This action involves going through all the contents of a workspace to determine which are needed and which can be removed. Everything that is not used to complete a work process should leave the work area.)

Japanese Term	English Term	Definition
Seiton	Set in Order	Ensure that all items are organized and each item has a designated place. Organize all the items left in the workplace in a logical way so they make tasks easier for workers to complete. This often involves placing items in ergonomic locations where people will not need to bend or make extra movements to reach them.
Seiso	Shine	Proactive efforts to keep workplace areas clean and orderly to ensure purpose-driven work. This means cleaning and maintaining the newly organized workspace. It can involve routine tasks such as mopping, dusting, etc. or performing maintenance on machinery, tools, and other equipment.
Seiketsu	Standardize	Create a set of standards for both organization and processes. In essence, this is where you take the first three S's and make rules for how and when these tasks will be performed. These standards can involve schedules, charts, lists, etc.
Shitsuke	Sustain	Sustain new practices and conduct audits to maintain discipline. This means the previous four S's must be continued over time. This is achieved by developing a sense of self-discipline in employees who will participate in 5S.

5S Methodology



The 5S methodology is a systematic approach to workplace organization. This method includes the five steps of Sort, Set in Order, Shine, Standardize, and Sustain. Generally speaking, the steps of 5S involve going through items in a workspace, removing what's unnecessary, organizing items, cleaning, performing maintenance, and making sure these things become habits. These steps should occur in this order, and there must be a plan in place for performing the tasks associated with these steps on a regular basis. At the end of a 5S implementation you will see characteristic things such as policy manuals, glow-in-the-dark tape or photo luminescent tape on the floor, colored bins, red tags, and 5S walks taking place. In the end, it should all add up to efficiency.

The 5S methodology originated in Japan and was first implemented by the Toyota Motor Corporation. The methodology was developed as a way to make [just in time \(JIT\) manufacturing](#) possible. This type of manufacturing intends to produce only the amount of a product that is needed, when it is needed. Having an organized workplace that utilizes visual cues to maintain itself allows JIT manufacturing to proceed more smoothly; in this type of environment, it's easier to see problems and move materials efficiently.

Origin of 5S

Toyota Production System

The 5S methodology traces its lineage to post-war Japan, where the leaders of a burgeoning Toyota Industries (néé Toyoda Automatic Loom Works) were seeking to reduce manufacturing waste and inefficiencies. Their solution, dubbed the [Toyota Production System](#), encompasses a number of methodologies that would become famous in their own right, including [Just-In-Time manufacturing](#), [Jidoka](#), and the core concept of the [visual workplace](#).

Initially, the Toyota Production System was a closely-guarded secret, but the massive economic boom Japan experienced in the 1980s drew intense interest from foreign corporations wondering how Toyota, the shiniest jewel in Japan's manufacturing crown, was able to build so many products, so quickly, at such a high quality level. As a gradual, international exchange of ideas began to take shape, author and ULVAC Inc. executive Hiroyuki Hirano devised the five pillars of the visual workplace, a concept that would metamorphose into the 5S methodology as we know it today.

The 5S methodology has gained importance throughout the years and is now one of the basic foundational elements of Lean, along with other Lean processes and practices such as:

- [Visual Workplace](#)
- [Six Sigma](#)
- [Kaizen](#)
- [Kanban](#)
- [Gemba](#)
- [TIMWOOD](#)
- [Lean Manufacturing](#)

Quick Answers about 5S

What is the 5S methodology?

The 5S methodology is a system for handling workplace organization. It includes 5 steps known as the 5 S's that turn organization into a step-by-step system for people to follow. This methodology is often considered the foundation of Lean manufacturing because for a workplace to reduce waste and become more efficient, it needs to first be organized.

What is the purpose of 5S?

The purpose of 5S is to make a workplace function better by making it an easier place to work. This occurs by making spaces make sense; tools and materials are placed in logical locations based on who needs them, how frequently they're needed, etc. Spaces are cleaned regularly. Cleaning and organization become habits. When used correctly, 5S ultimately makes processes safer and more efficient.

What does 5S stand for?

5S stands for the 5 steps of this methodology: Sort, Set in Order, Shine, Standardize, Sustain. These steps involve going through everything in a space, deciding what's necessary and what isn't, putting things in order, cleaning, and setting up procedures for performing these tasks on a regular basis. When there's a plan for making 5S an ongoing effort and not just a one-time event, it can be sustained over time.

What is the 6th S?

The 6th S stands for Safety. Some businesses choose to add this step at the end of 5S to ensure safety is a key component of work practices. Other businesses believe safety should be a part of all the steps of 5S and therefore doesn't need to be its own step. Either way, safety does play a role in 5S. Arranging spaces in logical ways, organizing tools and materials, and cleaning regularly make it easier for people to do their jobs without tripping, slipping, experiencing an ergonomic injury, etc.

How does 5S relate to kaizen?

Kaizen is a Lean manufacturing concept that refers to the ongoing process of "continuous improvement." Kaizen seeks to find small ways to improve processes over time. For kaizen to work well, everyone in a workplace participates by looking for ways their tasks could be improved.

The goal of 5S is also to improve processes. It does so by increasing organization and efficiency. This means 5S sets a workplace up well to use kaizen. Once an organizational system exists, people can more easily look for improvement opportunities.

What Is Lean?

Lean, often called Lean manufacturing, is a method used to identify and eliminate waste from a manufacturing process. Lean aims to remove anything from the production process that does not add value to the end product or service the customer purchases. The Lean manufacturing principles of eliminating waste and streamlining processes originated with the manufacturing industry in Japan in the mid-twentieth century, and in the late twentieth century grew popular with other businesses.

5S is a Lean manufacturing tool that serves as the foundation for all other Lean endeavors. 5S creates a visual logic in the workplace and puts things in order so waste can easily be identified.



5S Lean

The term 5S is often paired with Lean because 5S is a foundational part of Lean manufacturing. Implementing 5S in a workplace makes it easier for people to navigate, find what they need, and keep things organized. Once a sustainable 5S system is in place, other Lean manufacturing initiatives such as [kanban](#) or [kaizen](#) can be implemented more successfully because the workplace is already easy to work in. Without 5S to keep everything in order so problems are easily identifiable, other Lean efforts often see less success. In many cases, 5S is what makes the rest of Lean possible.

Visual Management

Visual management, sometimes called visual control, is a method of managing a business that uses visual signals to communicate important information. These visuals can include diagrams, pictograms, color-coding, floor markings, photographs, and more. This type of management allows people to quickly understand the information being conveyed. In many cases, visual management techniques make it possible for everyone in the workplace to understand the current state of work processes. For example, a green and on light shows a process is moving smoothly, while a red light calls attention to a problem with a process.

5S is a form of visual control that focuses on organization and can improve productivity. Visual markings in a storage area can help workers return materials to their proper locations, floor markings can create boundaries around work cells, and signs on the floor can point out the proper locations for trash and recycling bins. Using visual tools like these allows a business to communicate information to workers without needing to actually say anything.

Visual Workplace

A visual workplace is a workspace where visual tools provide people with the information they need to complete their work. These visuals explain the workplace so people do not need to ask unnecessary questions. A visual workplace is often described as being "self-explaining, self-ordering, self-regulating, and self-improving" because the visual signals it uses allow it to operate with minimal extra effort from users. A workplace that uses 5S is often called a visual workplace because 5S is a method for making an organizational system visual.

Why Lean 5S?

There are many benefits associated with the implementation and continued use of 5S. Some of the top reasons to begin 5S include:

- 5S is a sub-part of the entire Lean philosophy.
- 5S is simple to start and shows the value of Lean.
- 5S is easily recognizable by both employees and members of higher management.
- 5S is a component of visual control, which can: recognize operational efficiency, create opportunities for abnormality detection, build specific behaviors and discipline, and promote new culture.
- When a plan/vision is in place, employees know how to be effective and are able to work towards higher levels of efficiency.
- 5S creates better problem-solving skills and improves [employee morale](#) and [employee engagement](#).
- 5S aids in decreasing the number of workplace injuries.

Employee Involvement

Employee involvement is an absolute must for successful 5S implementation. In fact, many people may argue that a company simply cannot be successful in 5S without total employee involvement.

Employees should be involved in nearly all stages of 5S implementation and should also be involved in all tasks involving 5S practices and/or procedures. For instance, employees should participate in the decision-making process regarding the red tagging of unneeded items. Employees should also be utilized as a valuable resource when it comes to overall organization. It is the employees who are out on the work floor each day, engaging in processes and noting both the pitfalls and peaks of each work process.

Another large component of employee involvement includes education. Employees should not be expected to understand and comply with the methodologies of 5S if they do not understand them or the overall purpose.

[Employee buy-in plays a huge role in the success of any 5S effort.](#) It is critical that both employees and management are educated on the value of 5S as a "tool" instead of just simply as a philosophy. When 5S is viewed as a "tool," staff will begin to believe in the processes involved, which will help promote greater levels of efficiency, quality, and staff flexibility.

Costs Involved with 5S

There are two main costs involved when starting and continuing 5S. These two costs are:

- **Redirected Labor Cost** - When starting a 5S project, many hours are used to help promote employee buy-in, discuss pitfalls and barriers, create a plan of action, etc. These hours of lost production are simply the "nature of the beast" so to speak and may easily be recouped once 5S processes have been established and plans are carried out. This is most easily looked at as a small donation, which will yield large results.
- **Materials and Goods Costs** - Many different types of materials and goods may need to be purchased and/or ordered to help make 5S a success. Some of these products may include, but are not limited to: [floor tape](#), [industrial label printers](#), [foam tool organizers](#), shadow boards, shelving units, and whiteboards for warehouse mapping.

How to Get Started



Before implementing 5S

Starting any project that involves the potential for large changes can be somewhat daunting. However, there are a few ways to help establish a rich soil for abundant levels of growth.

One thing that is critical to the success of any 5S endeavor is employee buy-in. Employee buy-in essentially means that the employees are open, willing, and committed to making contributions to make the endeavor a success. Some helpful ways to develop employee buy-in include:

- Educating employees.
- Providing examples and a framework for success.
- Allowing employees to discuss the potential barriers and pitfalls of the recommendations.
- Providing insight about how the process will actually operate to help alleviate some of the unknowns that could hinder the process.

Throughout the employee buy-in process, many teams will show excitement and interest when it comes to discussing the pitfalls and barriers associated with the new changes. However, as this is done and details are hashed out, great insight and information will be gathered on how to best approach the team in the future. When pitfalls and barriers are met with a positive mental attitude, even some of the most intimidating tasks can be conquered. It is important to remember that positive attitudes are contagious.

5S System



After implementing 5S

The 5S system of visual management has improved organization and efficiency in many workplaces including manufacturing environments and offices. This system consists of five

pillars—Sort, Set in Order, Shine, Standardize, Sustain—that make maintaining the workplace in good condition a visual process. Employees throughout an organization must contribute to the system by performing routine housekeeping tasks throughout their workdays.

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