

THE COMPLETE ADA SIGN REQUIREMENTS GUIDE

**YOUR RESOURCE FOR
UNDERSTANDING ADA SIGNAGE
CONTENT AND MOUNTING
REQUIREMENTS**

2021

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*We appreciate suggestions for how we can improve The Complete
ADA Sign Requirements Guide. Send a message to
Info@GreenDotSign.com.*

INTRODUCTION

Brands, designers, and building owners have a lot to consider during facility renovation or construction. Because structural and engineering components play a critical role in project deadlines and building longevity, aesthetic decisions like signage often become an afterthought. While understandable, rushing building product purchases is problematic. Low-quality signage, signs in the wrong color, or other oversights cause an unprofessional appearance. Even worse, non-compliant ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990) signs can result in lawsuits, federal fines, and diminished accessibility.

Unfortunately, mistakes in ADA signage are more common than you might think. In 2020, Green Dot Sign® observed that over 50% of ADA sign system designs submitted by project designers were non-compliant. Clearly, brands and AECO (architecture, engineering, construction, and owner) industry professionals will benefit from ADA sign design and location requirements clarification.

The leader in sustainable ADA and wayfinding signage, Green Dot Sign® is a nationwide ADA sign company focused on maximizing biodegradable and recyclable content. Green Dot Sign® has created The Complete ADA Sign Requirements Guide as a resource for signage designers and buyers, and those who influence sign design and purchasing. The Guide provides easy-to-understand information sourced from the U.S. Department of Justice 2010 ADA Standards for Accessible Design (SAD), 2018 International Code Council Building Code (IBC), and other relevant regulations.



At every doorway, ADA signs illustrate your organizations' values, brand, and aesthetic. From restroom signs for your restaurant to room signs for a LEED® certified sports stadium, ADA signs are an integral part of stakeholder experience and brand messaging.

Reviewing relevant Guide chapters and partnering with a trusted sign company will ensure long-term satisfaction with your sign system investment.

ADA SIGNAGE

The acronym “ADA” refers to the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. ADA compliant signs must meet requirements established by the “SAD”, or U.S. Department of Justice Standards for Accessible Design.

ADA compliant facility signs are integral to wayfinding systems for the sighted, and provide the 7.5 million legally blind or visually impaired Americans equal access to public spaces and your organization.

ADA SIGNAGE HISTORY

On July 26, 1990, President George H.W. Bush signed the ADA into law. This civil rights legislation prohibits discrimination against disabled people in access to goods, services, and employment. Accessibility to goods and services is accomplished through requirements covering the construction and modification of places of public accommodation, including signage requirements.

Since March 15, 2011, signage requirements for all public buildings in the United States have been set by the SAD. §216 (Sign Scoping Requirements) and §703 (Sign Standards) cover the majority of regulations. However, many other sections supplement these chapters. All ADA requirements related to signage are covered in this guide.

The signage laws of some states and municipalities go above and beyond federal ADA regulations. For example, the presence of all gender restrooms has significantly increased in the last decade through state and city Bathroom Bills. In all cases where local jurisdictions implement complimentary requirements, the federal requirements remain intact. Local requirements may only add to federal requirements.

It is always recommended to contact your local building inspector during the project planning phase to ensure that the signage you are considering meets local standards.

Building owners are ultimately responsible for meeting ADA regulations. Architects, interior designers, sign companies, and other construction professionals entrusted by building owners must have knowledge of U.S. accessibility requirements.

ADA violations are often related to failure to provide equal access or amenities in public spaces for the disabled. If the requirements are not met, federal fines are up to \$75,000 for first offenses. Subsequent penalties of up to \$150,000 may be imposed. In addition to federal fines, ADA non-compliance is penalized through potentially large civil lawsuits.



INTRODUCTION TO ADA SIGN REGULATIONS

Purpose

Federal ADA sign regulations apply to the permanent signage of public buildings. Per SAD §216, required signs serve three primary purposes:

1. Identify permanent interior office rooms and spaces.
2. Provide direction to or information about permanent spaces.
3. Identify, direct to, or supply information about accessible features.



Accessibility refers to the ability of a space to be used by people with a wide range of abilities and disabilities. In this Guide, "accessible" refers to features explicitly defined in the ADA. For example, accessible restrooms or elevators have space requirements sufficient for a wheelchair to maneuver as well as other ADA requirements. If all requirements are not met, the feature is not "accessible".

Usage

In most facilities the majority of interior signage has some type of ADA requirement; however, not all signs are subject to ADA regulations. Changeable signs, including menus, directories, and signs lasting seven days or less, are not required to meet federal requirements. Additionally, signs that strictly enhance branding, such as name and logo signage, are exempt from regulations. In correctional facilities, signs that are not in public areas do not need to comply. Finally, if a building is on the historical register, it is exempt from ADA sign requirements.

In addition to general location requirements, SAD §216 specifically states ADA compliant signs are necessary in the following situations:

1. **Exits** - Exit passages, including doors, stairs, and routes, shall be identified with a sign that includes braille and raised characters. Pictograms are optional.
2. **Areas of Refuge**
 - a. **Identification** - Areas of Refuge shall be marked with signage that includes braille, raised characters, and the ISA pictogram. If an illuminated exit box is required, a lit area of refuge sign must also be used.
 - b. **Instructions** - Areas of Refuge must contain instructions that direct persons on actions to take during an emergency. Instructions must meet ADA visual character requirements (which are discussed on page 28).

***Need help?** Green Dot Sign® is happy to answer many questions free of charge and offers full ADA sign consulting services.*

Usage, continued

3. **Entrances, Elevators, & Restrooms** - All inaccessible entrances, elevators, and restrooms must have directional signage with visual characters indicating the location of the nearest accessible alternative. The ISA, in turn, is required at the accessible feature to which these directional signs are pointing.

a. The ISA must also be used to mark accessible check-out aisles and amusement park ride access.

b. In California, the ISA is required at all accessible entrances whether or not a facility has inaccessible entrances.

4. **Symbols of Accessibility** - Signs utilizing the four formal symbols of accessibility, the ISA, TTY (teletypewriters), ALS (assistive listening systems), and volume control telephones must be in place whenever these features are available (see page 18 for guidance on symbols).

5. **Sign Content and Mounting** - The intended use of each sign determines what information it must display, material options, and where it must be mounted. This Guide discusses these considerations in Section 1. Sign mounting is discussed in Section 2.



While ADA signage requirements focus on interiors, a few exterior signs also have requirements. For example, bathrooms, classrooms, and other permanent rooms that are accessible via an exterior doorway opening directly into that room must be marked by an identification sign complying with raised ADA sign content guidelines.

SECTION 1: ADA SIGN CONTENT

ADA sign content requirements vary based on the sign's purpose, per SAD §703. Sign content requirements pertain to all aspects of the sign's physical and visual characteristics, including letter spacing, color contrast, tactile depth, and fonts. Although some ADA compliant signs include braille, raised characters, and pictograms, not all signs are required to include all content types in order to be compliant. Interior designers, project managers, and other individuals involved in project aesthetics will benefit from familiarity with these requirements.

The table on the following page provides an introduction to the Standards for Accessible Design by ADA sign type.



It is not unusual to associate "ADA sign" with only tactile signage. However, ADA sign requirements cover a wide gamut of signs, situations, and locations.

	ADA SIGN TYPE	
	IDENTIFICATION	DIRECTIONAL & INFORMATIONAL
PURPOSE	Identifies a permanent room, space or feature	Provides information about a permanent room, space or feature
FINISH REQUIREMENTS	Non-glare	
CONTRAST REQUIREMENTS	High contrast required between background and all content except braille	
VISUAL CHARACTER REQUIREMENTS	Font, size and contrast requirements apply	
TACTILE CHARACTERS REQUIRED	Yes	No
PICTOGRAMS REQUIRED	Sometimes	No
MOUNTING REQUIREMENTS	Yes	Yes
MOST COMMON MISTAKE	Missing signs	Wrong font or contrast

Finish and Contrast

All ADA signs, whether tactile or visual, are required to have a non-glare finish, per SAD §703.5.1. This means glossy materials and finishes must be eliminated from design consideration.

Furthermore, high contrast between sign background and raised characters, visual characters, or pictograms is always required. This means that a sign should have a light background and dark characters, or a dark background and light characters. Contrasting background and characters improve readability for both visually impaired individuals and individuals with no vision difficulties."

In the past, a 70% Light Reflectance Value (LRV) contrast was required. While this requirement has been revised to "high contrast" it is recommended to abide by this standard. However, comparing LRV between dissimilar materials, such as natural wood and a Pantone color, is not really possible. If there are questions regarding contrast, we recommend consulting an experienced ADA sign manufacturer.

To further assist legibility, contrast in a given wayfinding system should be designed uniformly. Maintaining the same color scheme and design format throughout a building facilitates recognition. Additionally, when hanging signage, remember to prevent shadows from distorting or hiding content.

Because braille is not meant to be read using vision, there is no specific visual braille requirement. Any color braille, including clear or matching the sign background, satisfies accessibility requirements.



Smart designers tackle wayfinding and tactile signage at the same time to maximize value.

Sign Content



Depending on the content of an ADA sign, its elements may be required to be raised. Raised characters, sometimes called tactile characters, are three-dimensional in order to be perceived by touch. Braille is a type of raised character.

Flat characters, also called visual characters, are two-dimensional and meant to be perceived by sight.

In some circumstances, both raised and flat characters may be required on a sign. When both raised and flat visual characters are required, either one sign with both types of characters or two separate signs, one with each type of character, may be posted.

Exception: If both visual and raised characters are used to identify the same room or space, raised character height can be reduced to 1/2". This is most useful for hotels and similar environs.

Braille in ADA Signage

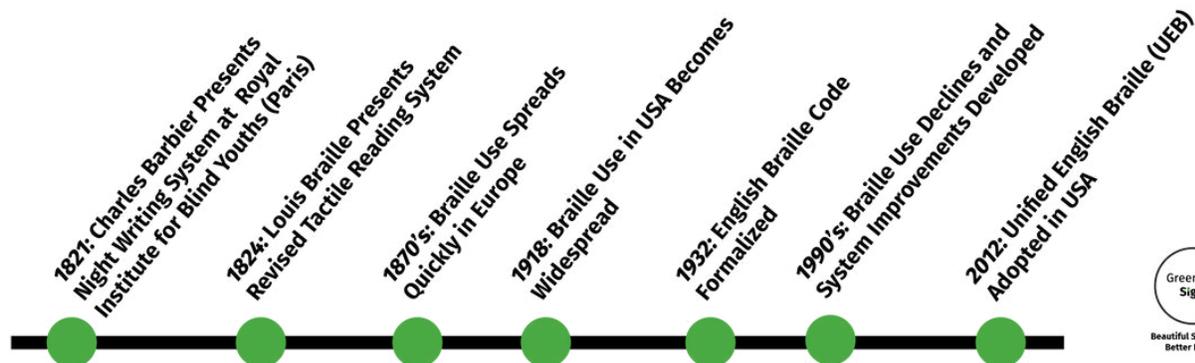


Signs with tactile characters are sometimes referred to as braille signs.

This term is most frequently used when a sign marks an interior room or space and, therefore, includes braille.

Braille is a tactile reading and writing system used by blind and visually impaired people who would not otherwise have access to printed materials.

Braille was created around 1824 by Louis Braille. To create braille, he revised “night writing”, a French Army system for reading by touch.



The Unified English Braille (UEB) code standardized braille across many English-speaking countries. Today’s braille uses a standardized set of raised dots to represent the letters of the alphabet and other elements in written language.

A basic understanding of the braille system helps contextualize raised character ADA signs.

Braille symbols are comprised of cells consisting of six raised dots. Within each cell, the raised dots are arranged in two parallel vertical columns of three dots, like the number six on a dice. There are sixty-three combinations of dots, each using one or more of the six braille cell dots. A single braille cell can represent a letter, number, punctuation, part of a word, or a whole word.

Grade 2 Braille Alphabet

At Scale with ADA Sign Requirements, 5/8" Letters

ABCDEFGHIJ

⠠⠠⠠⠠⠠⠠⠠⠠⠠⠠

KLMNOPQR

⠠⠠⠠⠠⠠⠠⠠⠠

RSTUVWXYZ

⠠⠠⠠⠠⠠⠠⠠⠠

Example Contractions

WITH

⠠⠠

BUT

⠠

FROM

⠠

Types of Braille

There are three types of braille. Tactile ADA signs are required to use Grade 2, also known as contracted braille. In the U.S., Grade 2 is by far the most widely used braille system.

The three braille grades are described below.

Grade 1 braille consists of the twenty-six standard letters of the English alphabet, along with numbers and punctuation. With Grade 1 braille, words are spelled out letter for letter. It is most commonly used by individuals just learning to read braille.

Grade 2 is similar to Grade 1 braille in that both contain symbols for letters, numbers, and punctuation. What differentiates Grade 2 braille is use of contractions, as seen on the prior page. The shortened, concise Grade 2 system is preferred in signage because contractions save space and allow for faster reading. For these reasons, Grade 2 contracted braille is the industry choice for printing books and other materials in the U.S. and other English-speaking countries.

Grade 3 braille is an unstandardized system of braille shorthand that is often used by individuals for their convenience. It is similar to a stenographer's use of shorthand. This writing method allows rapid transcribing of speech, but the text is not usable by the general public until it has been translated. For this reason, Since Grade 3 is not easily understood by all who read braille, it is not used in publications or signs.

Braille Requirements

Braille requirements are defined in SAD §703.3. The six requirements for ADA sign braille are:

1. **Type** – Braille shall be Grade 2.
2. **Shape** – Braille shape must be domed or rounded.
3. **Capitalization** – Uppercase braille shall only be used before the first word of sentences, proper nouns and names, individual letters of the alphabet, initials, and acronyms.
4. **Position** – Braille shall be positioned below the corresponding text. For multi-line text, place braille below the entire text (elevator car control braille positioning is detailed on pages 22, 23 & 24).
5. **Spacing** – To ensure readability, braille must be separated at least 3/8 inch from any other tactile characters, raised borders, or decorative elements. By convention, this includes the sign edge.
6. **Dimensions** – Braille dimension requirements are described in the illustration on the next page.



Green Dot Sign® 3D prints tactile characters to natural materials such as wood. This 99% less plastic and no risk of adhesive failure.

ADA Sign Braille Requirements

ALL GRAPHICS TO SCALE

Braille Dot Size

0.059 - 0.063" (Full Dot)
0.025 - 0.037" (Partial Dot)

Relative Cell Spacing Requirements

0.395 - 0.400" Between Rows
0.241 - 0.300" Between Cells

Six Braille Dots Per Cell, 3 x 2

0.090 - 0.100" (Vertical Spacing)
0.090 - 0.100" (Horizontal Spacing)

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Note that for California, the distance between two dots in the same braille cell and between corresponding dots in adjacent braille cells must be at the maximum listed in the federal Accessible Design Standards. This California guideline is in the 2019 Edition of the California Building Code (CBC) Part 2, Chapter 11B.

Elevator cars receive special consideration because they have reduced space for signage yet are critical for accessibility. Elevator ADA sign requirements are discussed starting on page 22.

Pictograms in ADA Signage



Pictograms are easily understood images conveying meaning. They are most often found on signs for bathrooms, means of egress, and accessible spaces. Only in special instances are ADA signs required to contain pictograms. However, several other pictograms are considered best practice in sign system design or widely recommended.

Just like other tactile signage, signs with pictograms must meet SAD §703.6 guidelines. Signs with pictograms identifying or labeling a permanent room or space must also contain raised text descriptors and braille. Pictogram signs providing information about a space, such as those prohibiting tobacco use, are not required to have raised text.

Raised pictograms increase cost and we encourage modern designers to consider various flat pictogram manufacturing methods.



ADA pictogram requirements are as follows:

1. **Field** - Pictogram fields must have a height of six inches minimum, free of all other sign content. The pictogram itself can be smaller, and four inches is a typical height.
2. **Text Descriptors** - Pictograms shall have text matching the pictogram, located directly below the pictogram field.
3. **Braille** - Braille shall be placed below its corresponding tactile character text, just like other tactile signage.
4. **Flat** - Pictograms are not required to be raised. Due to traditional sign manufacturing methods, raised pictograms became widespread to insure pictogram color was consistent with lettering color. However, raised pictograms are not mandatory.

ADA Sign Pictogram Requirements

Required Pictograms are Few & Can be Flat



6" Min
Vertical Field
With No Other
Content

Pro Tip:
9" x 6" is the
most common
restroom sign size

All other sign
content, including decorative elements,
must be outside the 6" field

Required Pictograms



There are four required pictograms, all relating to the defined symbols of accessibility. These required symbols, shown below, identify and provide direction to accessible spaces or tools.

International Symbol of Accessibility



ISA Pictogram

To the left is the original International Symbol of Accessibility (ISA). It was designed in 1968 by Susanne Koefoed and copyrighted by Rehabilitation International. It is free for use as long as it is not modified. This style of the ISA is federally required.



Modified ISA Pictogram

In 2010, the alternative Modified ISA was developed. Promoted through the Accessible Icon Project, it is free for use in the public domain. Many prefer the modified ISA as it depicts the person in a wheelchair moving themselves forward, whereas the figure in the original ISA appears passive. However, others prefer the original, fearing that the newer ISA perpetuates ableism (the belief that active independence is inherently good and the opposite is inherently bad). The Modified ISA, shown on the left, is required in New York and Connecticut and is gaining popularity in other states and regions.

The ISA is required on signs identifying:

1. Accessible restrooms or bathing rooms
 - a. Including accessible rooms where multiple single-user toilets or bathing rooms are clustered at a single location
 - b. Including family or assisted-use toilet and bathing rooms
2. Accessible dressing, fitting, and locker rooms where not all such rooms are accessible
3. Areas of refuge or rescue assistance
4. Accessible amusement ride entries
5. Accessible check-out aisles where not all aisles are accessible
6. Accessible parking spaces
7. Accessible passenger loading zones

Best practices dictate that any feature that is accessible, as defined by the ADA, be identified with the ISA.



If not all restrooms, bathing facilities, entrances, exits, or elevators are accessible, a sign with the ISA must be placed at accessible locations and a sign must be placed at each inaccessible location directing to the nearest accessible one.

Best practices also dictate including the ISA for wayfinding signage at each turn point along the route to the accessible feature, but this is not required.

Required Pictograms, Continued



TTY Pictogram

Text Telephone

This pictogram identifies a public teletypewriter (TTY), also known as a text telephone. These machines employ interactive text-based communication through the transmission of coded signals across the telephone network. TTYs may include telecommunication display devices (TDD), or computers with special modems.



Volume Control Telephone Pictogram

Volume Control Telephone

A volume control or amplified telephone is identified via this pictogram. The hearing impaired may use this type of phone to adjust call volume for clearer phone conversation.

Access for Hearing Loss and Assistive Listening System



ALS Pictogram

The International Symbol of Access for Hearing Loss is used to identify or direct to an Assistive Listening System (ALS), sometimes called Assistive Listening Devices (ALD). These systems are most common in assembly halls and museums. By improving the speech to noise ratio, ALS empower the hearing impaired.

Recommended Pictograms

Many pictograms are considered best practice for specific room signs because they are quickly recognizable. Common pictograms are easily identified by people with a shorter range or other vision impairment. An added benefit is that pictograms can allow non-English speakers to understand the function of a room or resource.

Recommended circumstances for pictograms:

1. Restrooms, to indicate gender(s)
2. Stairs: Normal, fire or accessible alternatives
3. Exits and exit routes
4. Biohazard
5. AED (automated external defibrillators)
6. Fire extinguishers
7. Other warning or informational pictograms essential to safety or a facilities' function



Optional Pictograms

Signs with pictograms may be used at the designer's discretion for other visual communication purposes. However, it is important to keep in mind that whenever a pictogram is used to identify a place or room, the sign must comply with the applicable ADA standards for character type and spacing. For unregulated signs, braille is not required, pictograms do not have a field height requirement, and text does not have size or spacing requirements. This means the format of signs, such as one marking a fire extinguisher or prohibiting smoking, can include either text, pictogram, or both.

Elevator Signage

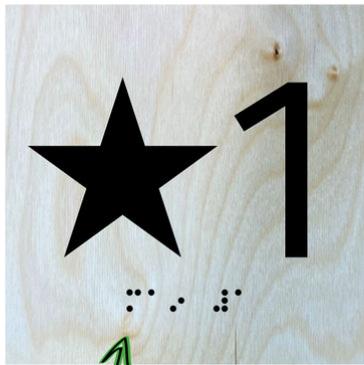
Elevators play a critical role in accessibility and SAD §407.2.3 addresses hoistway signs. In this Guide, we detail ADA required elevator signage up to the elevator door. Visit the SAD for in-depth coverage of elevator call and control buttons, position indicators, and rule exceptions. In addition to the ADA, elevator signage is regulated through building and safety codes such as National Fire Protection Association (NFPA).



Elevator hoist way signage must meet the following criteria:

1. **Character Height** - Tactile symbols shall be two inches (51 mm) high minimum.

Elevator Floor Sign Requirements
Content and Location Follows Tactile Sign Requirements



Star Braille Must Read "MAIN"

Minimum 2" Tall Tactile Characters



2. **Installation Position** - Tactile symbols on signs shall be located forty-eight inches minimum above the finish floor or ground surface, measured from the baseline of the lowest tactile character.

Maximum sign height is 60 inches above the finish floor or ground surface, measured from the baseline of the highest tactile character.

Tactile characters inside elevator cars are exempt from these requirements.

3. **Depth** - Raised symbols must be at least 1/32 inch (0.8 mm) above sign base, just like standard raised character signs.

Mounting height guidelines in SAD §703.4.1 do not apply to elevator car controls, but do apply to identification signage.

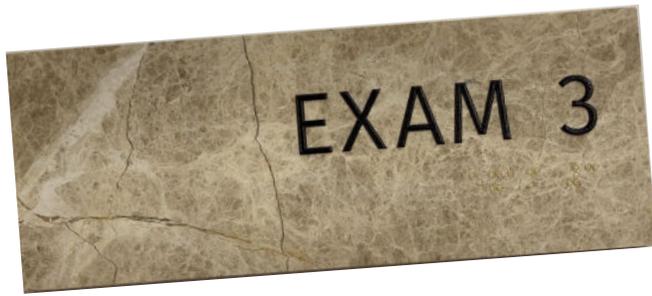


In addition to sign content and location requirements, alterations made to existing elevator car signage or controls must also be made to all other cars that respond to the same call buttons.

Finally, destination oriented cars, such as those going to a small set of floors, must have additional hoistway signage indicating the car designation in addition the floor. This means these elevator banks will have two tactile signs on the same hoist way.

ADA signs identifying or directing to elevators must meet standard SAD requirements.





Alphanumeric Characters

ADA requirements specify attributes for signage letters, numbers, and punctuation. Depending on sign location and function, these characters may be required to be raised, visual, or both. The table below determines when visual, raised, ISA or no ADA requirements apply.

Which ADA Sign Requirements Apply	
Whether Sign is Required Detailed Elsewhere	
Raised Character Requirements	Visual Character Requirements
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Signs identifying a permanent room or space ● Signs identifying exit passages, including doors, stairs and routes ● Signs identifying an area of refuge 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Signs providing direction or information about permanent building spaces ● Signs containing instructions for those in the area of refuge
The ISA Must be Used at the Accessible Feature	No Requirements
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● In a facility where not all entrances, exits, elevators or restrooms are accessible; signs identifying accessible features ● Signs marking an accessible check out aisle or amusement park ride 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Signs used less than seven days ● Menus, directories or signage solely for branding
ELEVATOR, PARKING & MASS TRANSIT EXCLUDED	
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Raised Alphanumeric Character Requirements

Raised character requirements are detailed in SAD §703.2. The eight requirements for this ADA sign content component are as follows:

- Depth** - Raised characters must be at least 1/32 inch (0.8 mm) above sign base.
- Case** - Characters shall be uppercase.
- Style** - Characters shall be sans serif, and not of decorative or unusual form.
- Proportions** - Characters shall be in a font in which the width of the uppercase letter "O" is at least 55 percent and at most 110 percent of the height of the uppercase "I".
- Character Height** - Character height measured from the baseline of the character shall be at least 5/8 inch and at most two inches based on the height of the uppercase letter "I".

Raised Character Requirements

Character & Line Spacing Requirements Also Apply

<p style="text-align: center;">Character Height <small>(of font capital "I")</small></p> <p style="text-align: center; font-size: 1.5em;">Min 0.625" Max 2"</p> <hr/> <p style="text-align: center;">Character Depth</p> <p style="text-align: center;">0.03125" Min Above Sign Surface</p>  <hr/> <p style="text-align: center;">Font Style</p> <div style="border: 2px solid green; border-radius: 50%; padding: 10px; text-align: center;"> <p style="margin: 0;">UNUSUAL</p> <p style="margin: 0;">Serif DECORATIVE</p> <p style="margin: 0;">Script Italics</p> </div>	<p style="text-align: center;">Stroke Thickness & Font Proportions <small>(relative to font capital "I")</small></p> <p style="text-align: center;"> $\leq X^{*0.15}$ $\geq X^{*0.55}$ </p> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; align-items: center;"> <div style="text-align: center;"> <p style="font-size: 2em; margin: 0;">X</p>  </div> <div style="text-align: center;"> <p style="font-size: 2em; margin: 0;">O</p>  </div> </div> <p style="text-align: right; margin-right: 20px;">$\leq X^{*1.1}$</p> <hr/> <p style="text-align: center;">Type Case</p> <p style="text-align: center;">UPPER CASE <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p> <div style="border: 2px solid green; border-radius: 50%; padding: 10px; text-align: center; margin: 10px auto; width: 80%;"> <p style="margin: 0;">Mixed or lower case</p> </div>
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Raised Character Height Exception: If a sign has raised and visual characters with the same information, minimum raised character height is 1/2 inch.

6. **Stroke Thickness** - Stroke thickness of the uppercase letter “I” shall be no more than 15 percent of the height of the character.

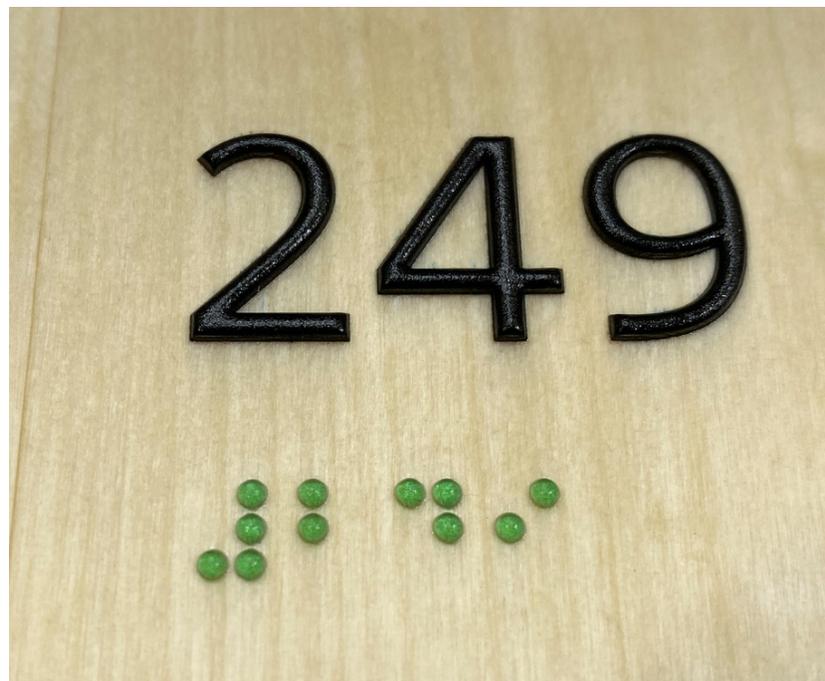
7. **Character Spacing** - Character spacing is measured between the two closest points of adjacent raised characters within a message, excluding word spaces.

According to SAD §703.2.7, where characters have rectangular cross sections (i.e., non-curved sides), spacing between individual raised characters shall be 1/8 inch minimum and four times the raised character stroke width maximum. Where characters have other cross sections (i.e., curved), spacing between individual raised characters shall be 1/16 inch minimum and four times the raised character stroke width maximum at the base of the cross sections, and 1/8 inch minimum and four times the raised character stroke width maximum at the top of the cross sections. Characters shall be separated from raised borders and decorative elements 3/8 inch minimum.

8. **Line Spacing** - Spacing between the baselines of separate lines of raised characters within a message shall be 135 percent minimum and 170 percent maximum of the raised character height.

At Green Dot Sign® we routinely utilize the following ADA compliant fonts for raised characters: Arial, Corbel, Corbel Light, Fira Sans Light, Fira Sans Thin, Fira Sans Condensed Book, Fira Sans Condensed Light, Leelawadee UI, Leelawadee UI Semilight, Lucida Sans Unicode, Malgun Gothic, Malgun Gothic Semilight, Segoe UI, Trebuchet MS, Yu Gothic, Yu Gothic Light, and Yu Gothic Medium.

In 2020, over 50% of the sign system packages we received to bid had at least one non-compliant element! The most common ADA sign design compliance failure was use of fonts with strokes exceeding the allowed thickness.



Visual Alphanumeric Character Requirements

Visual character lettering requirements are defined in the ADA Standards §703.5. In addition to identification and informational signage, visual character requirements also apply to overhead and directional signage. Visual character requirements are similar to raised character requirements but allow greater design flexibility.

- Case** - Characters shall be uppercase, lowercase, or a combination of both cases.
- Style** - Characters shall be conventional in form, and not in italic, oblique, script, highly decorative, or other unusual forms.

3. Character Proportions - Characters shall be selected from fonts where the width of the uppercase letter "O" is at least 55 percent and at most 110 percent of the height of the uppercase letter "I".

4. Character Height - Minimum character height shall comply with the table to the right. Viewing distance is measured as the horizontal distance between the character and an obstruction preventing further approach towards the sign.

Visual Character Height Requirements		
Horizontal Viewing Distance is Measured From Visual Character to Obstruction, such as a Wall or Corner		
H	+	D = Min Character Height
Character Baseline Height Above Grade		Horizontal Viewing Distance (of font capital "I")
40" - 70"	≤ 72"	0.625"
	≥ 72"	0.625" + 1/8" per 1' viewing distance above 72"
70" - 120"	≤ 180"	2"
	≥ 180"	2" + 1/8" per 1' viewing distance above 180"
≥ 120"	≤ 21'	3"
	≥ 21'	3" + 1/8" per 1' viewing distance above 21'

5. Stroke Thickness -

Stroke thickness of the uppercase letter "I" shall be at least 10 percent and at most 30 percent of the height of the character.

6. Character Spacing -

Character spacing shall be measured between the two closest points of adjacent characters, excluding word spaces. Spacing between individual characters shall be at least 10 percent and at most 35 at most percent of the character height.

7. Line Spacing - Spacing between the baselines of separate lines of characters within a message shall be at least 135 percent and at most 170 percent maximum of the character height.

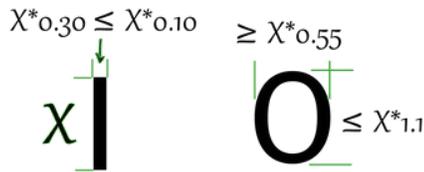
Visual Character Requirements

Character & Line Spacing Requirements Also Apply

<p>Type Case</p> <p>UPPER CASE <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Mixed or lower case <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p>	<p>Font Style</p> <p>UNUSUAL DECORATIVE Script Italics</p>
--	--

Stroke Thickness & Font Proportions

(relative to font capital "I")



In many new construction projects, signs with visual characters are required less frequently. For instance, if all restrooms, exits, and entrances are accessible then there is no need for signs with visual characters directing to accessible features.



In cases where visual characters are required, we recommend the same font family as the sign systems' raised characters.

SECTION 2: ADA SIGN MOUNTING

§703.4 of the U.S. Department of Justice 2010 Standards for Accessible Design explains the height and location at which ADA signs must be mounted. While tactile signs are required to be near doorways, there are several nuances to this requirement. In addition, general signage must conform to installation restrictions detailed in the ADA, and being aware of these specifications for wayfinding and directories is critical.

It is important for building managers to properly mount ADA signs to ensure compliance with regulations and avoid fines. Hanging signs according to federal regulations increases the ease and efficiency by which building users access the building's resources. For example, if someone with a visual disability is confined to a wheelchair, they need to be able to reach braille signage from a lower and more confined reach than ambulatory people. Additionally, when signs are positioned consistently, they are easier for everyone to find, identify, and read.



Sign Positioning

Tactile Sign Positioning

Tactile ADA signs are usually positioned at doorways. This is because doors often are the point of entry into a permanent building space or room.

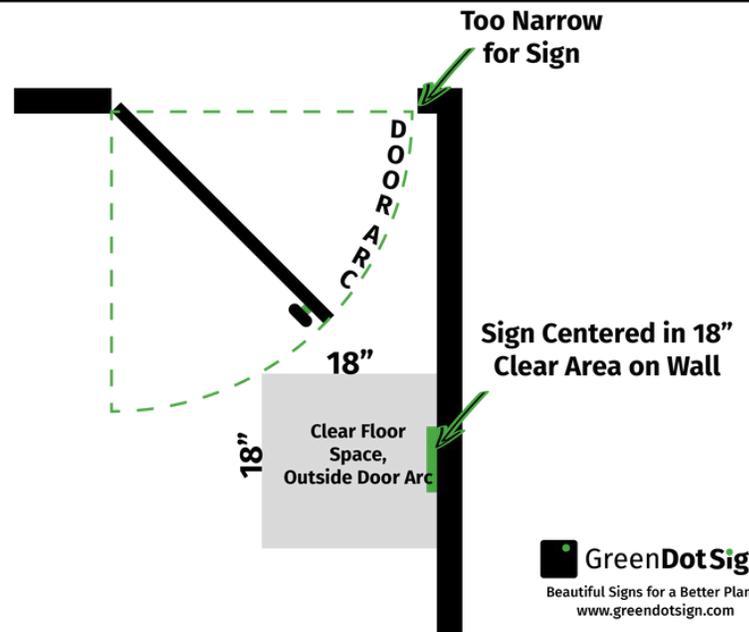
The SAD has three location components that apply to most signs:

1. **Side** - When a tactile sign is at a door, the sign shall be located alongside the door at the latch side.

2. **Space** - Signs containing tactile characters shall be centered on a clear floor space of eighteen inches minimum by eighteen inches adjacent to the doorway. The clear space must extend beyond the arc of any door swing between the closed position and 45-degree open position. Signage tactile characters are centered in the eighteen inch space when installed.

3. **Height** - Tactile characters on signs shall be located forty-eight inches minimum to sixty inches maximum above the floor finish or ground surface, as measured from the baseline of the lowest tactile character.

ADA Sign Location Requirement with Insufficient Wall Space on Door Latch Side

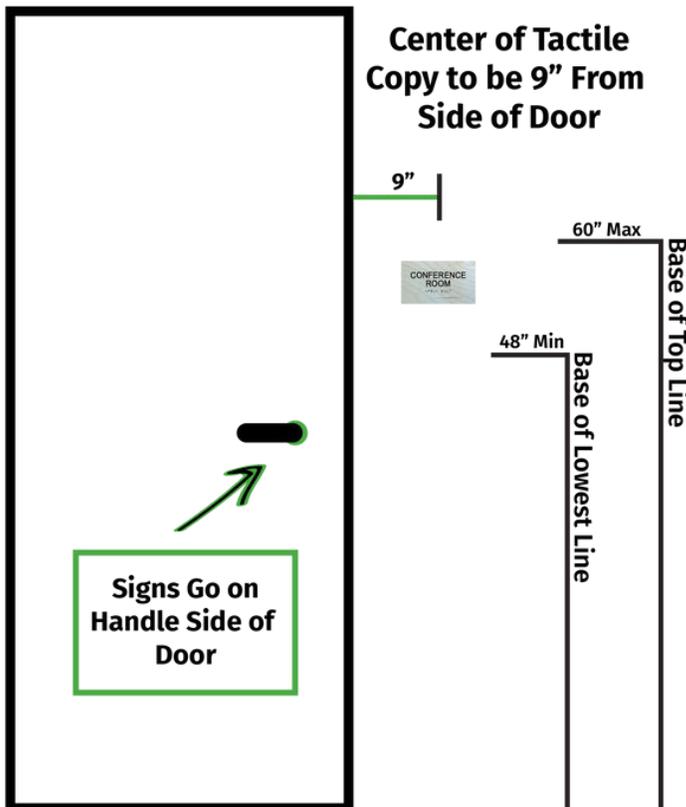


For aesthetic and functional purposes, hanging all tactile signs 54 inches from sign base to floor is common.

The twelve inch range of allowable hanging height, between forty-eight inches and sixty inches, accommodates signs of varied sizes to be consistently hung on the same visual line along a wall. Signs for child-oriented rooms, such as restrooms in elementary schools, are often hung at the lowest allowable height. The graphic below illustrates the most common ADA sign mounting position.

Where to Hang an ADA Sign

Tactile Signs are Required for Every Permanent Room or Space



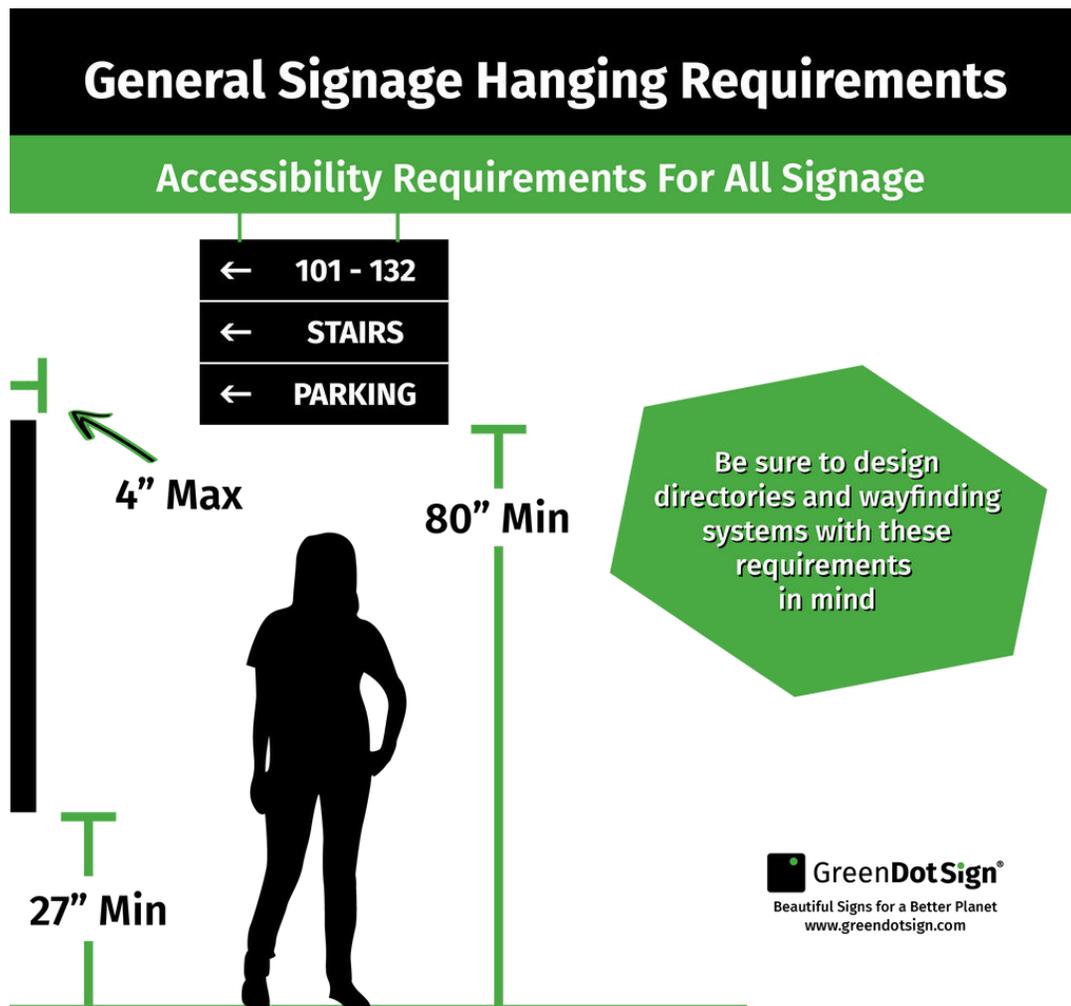
Pro Tip:
54" to bottom of the sign often works for all signage

General Sign Positioning

General signage tends to be directional, such as signs indicating where to find the lobby and restrooms, or signs directing toward a group of rooms. Other examples include directories and signs only intended for branding. General signs must comply with fewer regulations than tactile signs. However, these requirements apply to both tactile and general signs.

General sign positioning requirements are as follows:

1. When hanging a sign from the ceiling, the sign bottom must be at least eighty inches above the floor.
2. Signs projecting from the wall must be at least twenty-seven inches above the floor and protrude a maximum of four inches.
3. Signs must not block doors or emergency equipment.

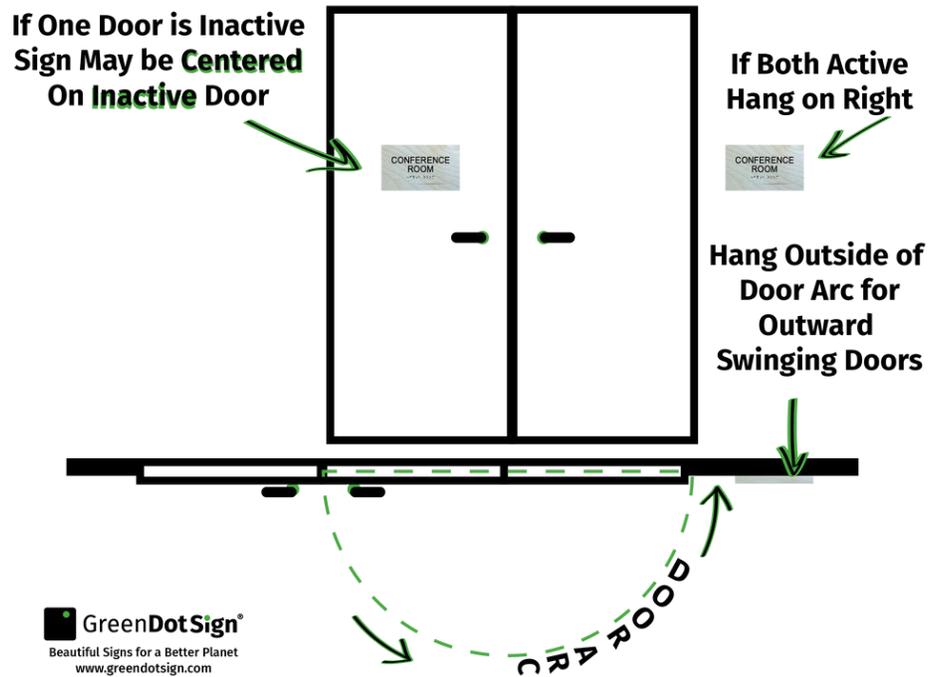


Positioning Exceptions

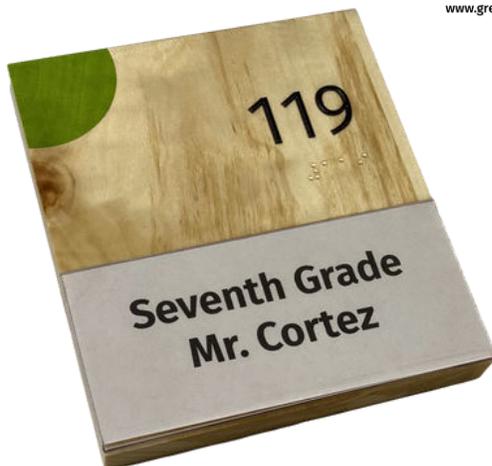
SAD §703.4.2 accounts for unique signage circumstances. Most commonly, this section alleviates signage confusion when a sign is needed on a door with limited space on the latch side, or when a sign is needed on double doors. Below are four considerations:

1. Where there is no wall space at the latch side of a single door or at the right side of double doors, mount sign on nearest adjacent wall (see diagram on page 31).
2. On double doors with only one active door, mount sign on the inactive door.
3. On double doors that are both active, mount sign on the right side of the right door.
4. On outward swinging doors, mount sign outside fully opened door arc.

Double Door ADA Sign Allowances and Requirements



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In exceptional cases, the ADA may allow signs to be mounted on the push side of a door. All three of the below criteria must be met:

1. The sign is located on the push side of the door opening into the room.
2. The door closes automatically via spring, electro-mechanical device, or other autonomous closing device.
3. The door does not have a hold open device.

ADA Sign Allowances and Requirements for Hanging on a Door

No Change to Sign Elevation Requirements

Many Eatery Restroom Doors Meet These Requirements



All Three Conditions Must be Met to Hang Directly on Any Door

- 1 Sign is on Push of Side of Door
- 2 Door Must Have a Power Closer
- 3 Door May Not Have a Hold Open Device

Parking Space Signage Regulations

SAD §502.6 also regulates exterior signs identifying accessible parking spaces. Handicapped parking spaces must contain the ISA and be mounted at least sixty inches from the ground to sign bottom. Additionally, if a spot is van accessible, parking signage must also include the text “Van Accessible”. These parking sign guidelines ensure that accessible spaces are clearly marked and visible from inside vehicles.

U.S. parking signs are often accompanied by smaller signs stating fine amounts placed directly below the handicapped parking space signs. Fine amount varies significantly by jurisdiction. Parking sign enforcement happens on an ongoing basis by local law enforcement as well as occupancy permit inspections.

It is especially important to contact your local code inspector to confirm jurisdictional expectations when working with parking space signage.



APPENDIX

Appendix Introduction

This appendix provides a condensed version of additional facility sign requirements. These requirements are not part of the ADA; information is intended for reference only.

Fire Safety Signage

Fire safety signage is described throughout the International Code Council (ICC) 2018 International Building Code. Key components include:

1. Where there is an accessible concealed floor, attic space, fire partition, or any other wall required to have protected openings or penetrations, a sign or stenciling must identify the concealed space. The signage should be located within fifteen feet of each wall and spaced apart no more than thirty feet measured horizontally. The lettering must be taller than three inches, with a minimum 3/8 inch stroke in a contrasting color. The suggested wording is “FIRE AND/OR SMOKE BARRIER--PROTECT ALL OPENINGS” though similar phrasing is acceptable (§703.7)
2. Furnishings or decorative materials of an explosive or highly flammable character shall not be used. Several other material types should be avoided in most cases including foam plastics: imitation leather or any other material coated with pyroxylin or similarly hazardous base (§806.1).
3. Furnishings or other objects must not obstruct exits or reduce their visibility and identification. There is no limit to decorative vegetation and noncombustible decorative materials used in buildings (§806.1).

Exit Signage

Six regulations for exit signs are discussed in ICC §1013:

1. All exit and exit access doors must be marked by an ICC compliant sign that is readily visible from all sides.
2. Paths leading to and from exit doors must be marked clearly to indicate the direction of travel if the path is not immediately visible to occupants.
3. Exit directions should be placed one-hundred feet apart or less, depending on visibility.
4. Exit signs must be internally or externally illuminated. The face of an externally-lit exit sign must have an intensity less than five foot-candles (54 lux). Signs must be illuminated at all times and connected to an emergency power system such as storage batteries, unit equipment, or an on-site generator. The emergency power should be sufficient to light for ninety minutes.

Every exit sign and directional exit sign must have plainly legible letters taller than six inches and with the principle strokes of letters not less than $\frac{3}{4}$ inch wide. The word "EXIT" shall have letters two inches or wider, except the letter "I". The minimum spacing between letters shall be no less than $\frac{3}{8}$ inch.

The word "EXIT" shall be in high contrast with the background and shall be easily discernible even if the sign illumination is off. Any chevron indicators or arrows on exit signs must also be in high contrast and resistant to tampering.

Exit Signage Exceptions

Exceptions to exit signage regulations occur in the following situations:

1. Rooms or areas with only one exit do not need an exit sign.
2. Main exterior exits that are clearly and obviously marked as exits do not need an exit sign if approved by building officials.
3. Individual sleeping and dwelling units do not need an exit sign, as well as institutional day rooms, sleeping rooms, or dormitories.
4. In an auditorium or stadium, exit sign spacing can be disregarded if the exits are clearly visible and egress lighting is provided to direct occupants.
5. Tactile signs (those stating EXIT in visual characters, raised characters, and braille) do not need to be illuminated. However, they must be provided adjacent to each door to an area of refuge, providing direct access to a stairway, an exterior area for assisted rescue, an exit stairway or ramp, or other means of accessible exit.
6. For buildings with multiple dwelling and sleeping units such as hotels or apartments, additional low-level exit signs must be provided in all areas serving guest rooms. These signs must be internally illuminated, and the bottom of the sign shall not be less than ten inches nor more than eighteen inches above the floor level, flush mounted to the wall, and within four inches of the door frame on the latch side.



ADA Signage Diagrams

The following pages contain all diagrams used in this document.

Did you know? In 2020, over 50% of sign system packages received for bid by Green Dot Sign® had at least one non-compliant element.



We appreciate suggestions for how we can improve The Complete ADA Sign Requirements Guide. Send a message to Info@GreenDotSign.com.



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GreenDotSign®	ADA SIGN TYPE	
	IDENTIFICATION	DIRECTIONAL & INFORMATIONAL
PURPOSE	Identifies a permanent room, space or feature	Provides information about a permanent room, space or feature
FINISH REQUIREMENTS	Non-glare	
CONTRAST REQUIREMENTS	High contrast required between background and all content except braille	
VISUAL CHARACTER REQUIREMENTS	Font, size and contrast requirements apply	
TACTILE CHARACTERS REQUIRED	Yes	No
PICTOGRAMS REQUIRED	Sometimes	No
MOUNTING REQUIREMENTS	Yes	Yes
MOST COMMON MISTAKE	Missing signs	Wrong font or contrast



Grade 2 Braille Alphabet

Grade 2 Braille Alphabet

At Scale with ADA Sign Requirements, 5/8" Letters

ABCDEFGHIJ

⠠⠃⠠⠋⠠⠇⠠⠊⠠⠋⠠⠊⠠⠊

KLMNOPQR

⠠⠏⠠⠏⠠⠏⠠⠏⠠⠏⠠⠏⠠⠏

RSTUVWXYZ

⠠⠗⠠⠗⠠⠗⠠⠗⠠⠗⠠⠗⠠⠗

Example Contractions

WITH

⠠⠠

BUT

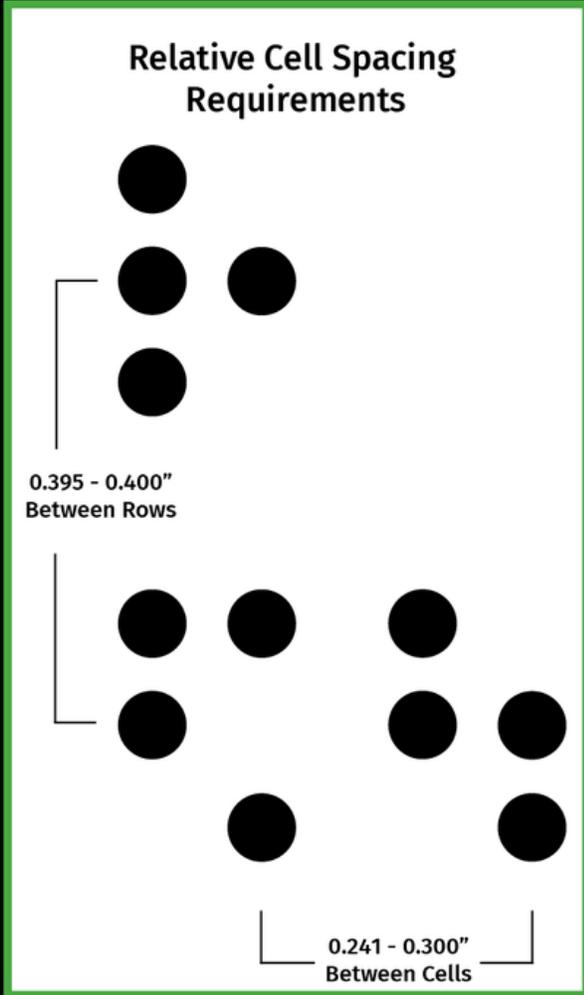
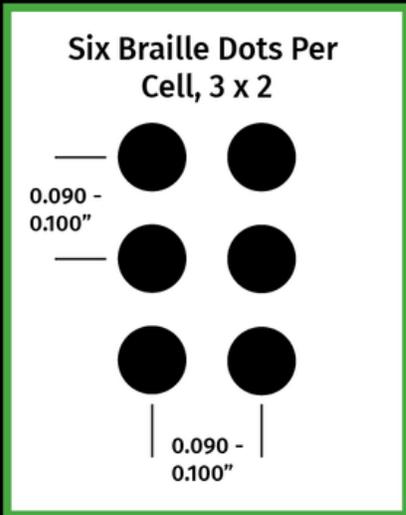
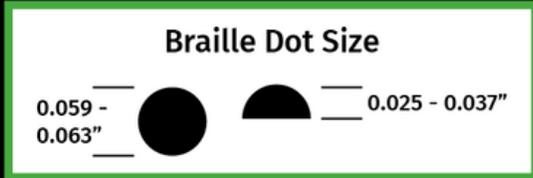
⠠⠠

FROM

⠠⠠

ADA Sign Braille Requirements

ALL GRAPHICS TO SCALE



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ADA Sign Pictogram Requirements

Required Pictograms are Few & Can be Flat



6" Min
Vertical Field
With No Other
Content

Pro Tip:
9" x 6" is the
most common
restroom sign size

All other sign
content, including decorative elements,
must be outside the 6" field

Elevator Floor Sign Requirements

Content and Location Follows Tactile Sign Requirements



Star Braille Must Read
"MAIN"

Minimum 2"
Tall Tactile
Characters

Which ADA Sign Requirements Apply

Whether Sign is Required Detailed Elsewhere

Raised Character Requirements

- Signs identifying a permanent room or space
- Signs identifying exit passages, including doors, stairs and routes
- Signs identifying an area of refuge

Visual Character Requirements

- Signs providing direction or information about permanent building spaces
- Signs containing instructions for those in the area of refuge

The ISA Must be Used at the Accessible Feature

- In a facility where not all entrances, exits, elevators or restrooms are accessible; signs identifying accessible features
- Signs marking an accessible check out aisle or amusement park ride

No Requirements

- Signs used less than seven days
- Menus, directories or signage solely for branding

ELEVATOR, PARKING & MASS TRANSIT EXCLUDED

Raised Character Requirements

Character & Line Spacing Requirements Also Apply

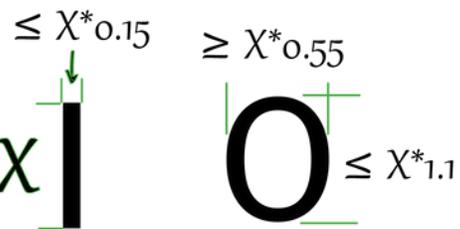
Character Height

(of font capital "I")

Min 0.625" Max 2"

Stroke Thickness & Font Proportions

(relative to font capital "I")



Character Depth

0.03125" Min
Above Sign
Surface



Type Case

UPPER CASE

~~Mixed or lower case~~

Font Style



Visual Character Height Requirements

Horizontal Viewing Distance is Measured From Visual Character to Obstruction, such as a Wall or Corner

H Character Baseline Height Above Grade	+ Horizontal Viewing Distance	= Min Character Height (of font capital "I")
40" - 70"	≤ 72"	0.625"
	≥ 72"	0.625" + 1/8" per 1' viewing distance above 72"
70" - 120"	≤ 180"	2"
	≥ 180"	2" + 1/8" per 1' viewing distance above 180"
≥ 120"	≤ 21'	3"
	≥ 21'	3" + 1/8" per 1' viewing distance above 21'

Visual Character Requirements

Character & Line Spacing Requirements Also Apply

Type Case

UPPER CASE

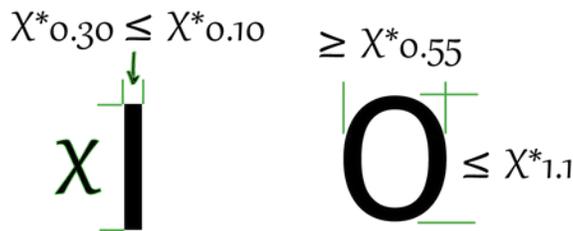
Mixed or lower case

Font Style

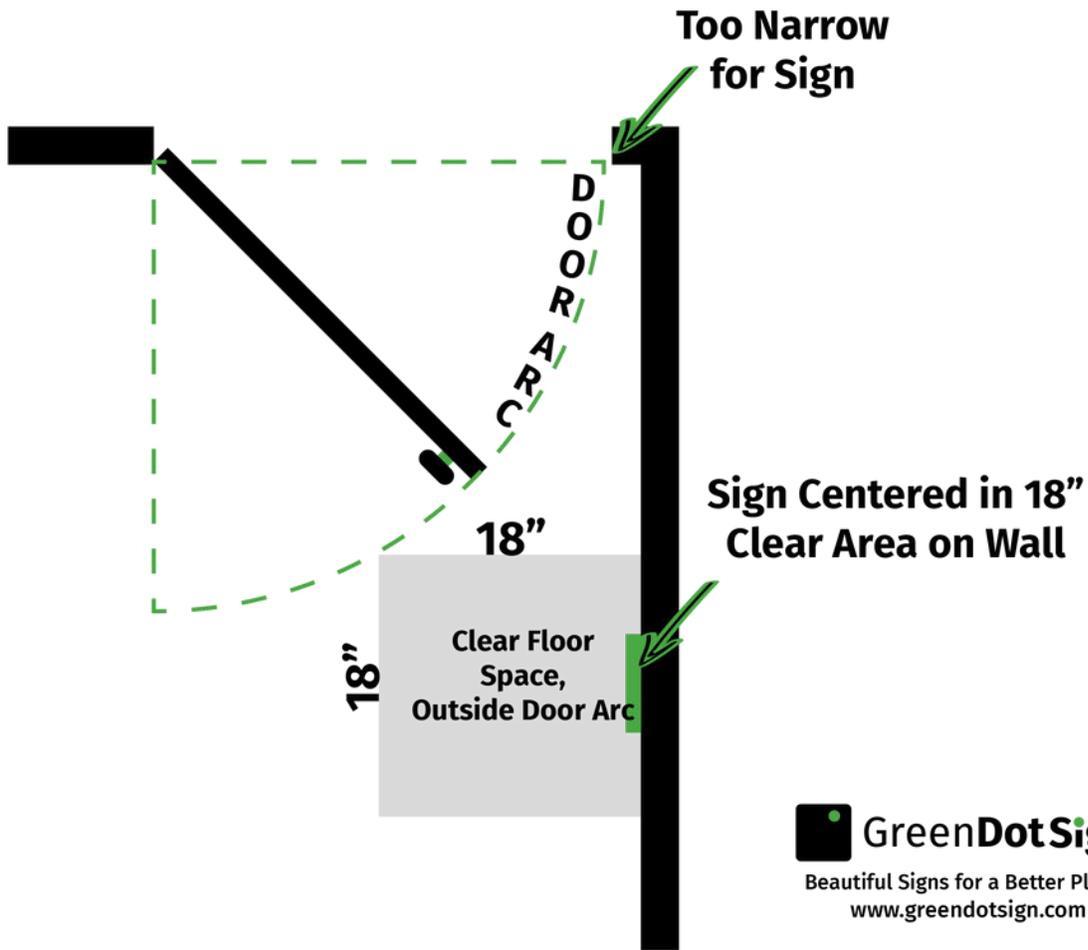


Stroke Thickness & Font Proportions

(relative to font capital "I")

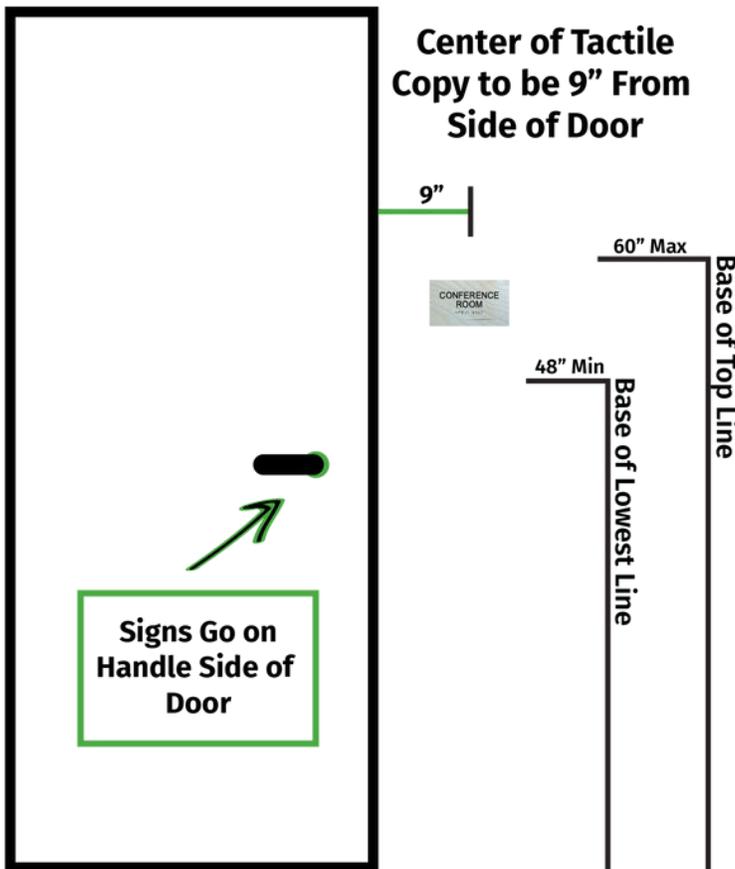


ADA Sign Location Requirement with Insufficient Wall Space on Door Latch Side



Where to Hang an ADA Sign

Tactile Signs are Required for Every Permanent Room or Space



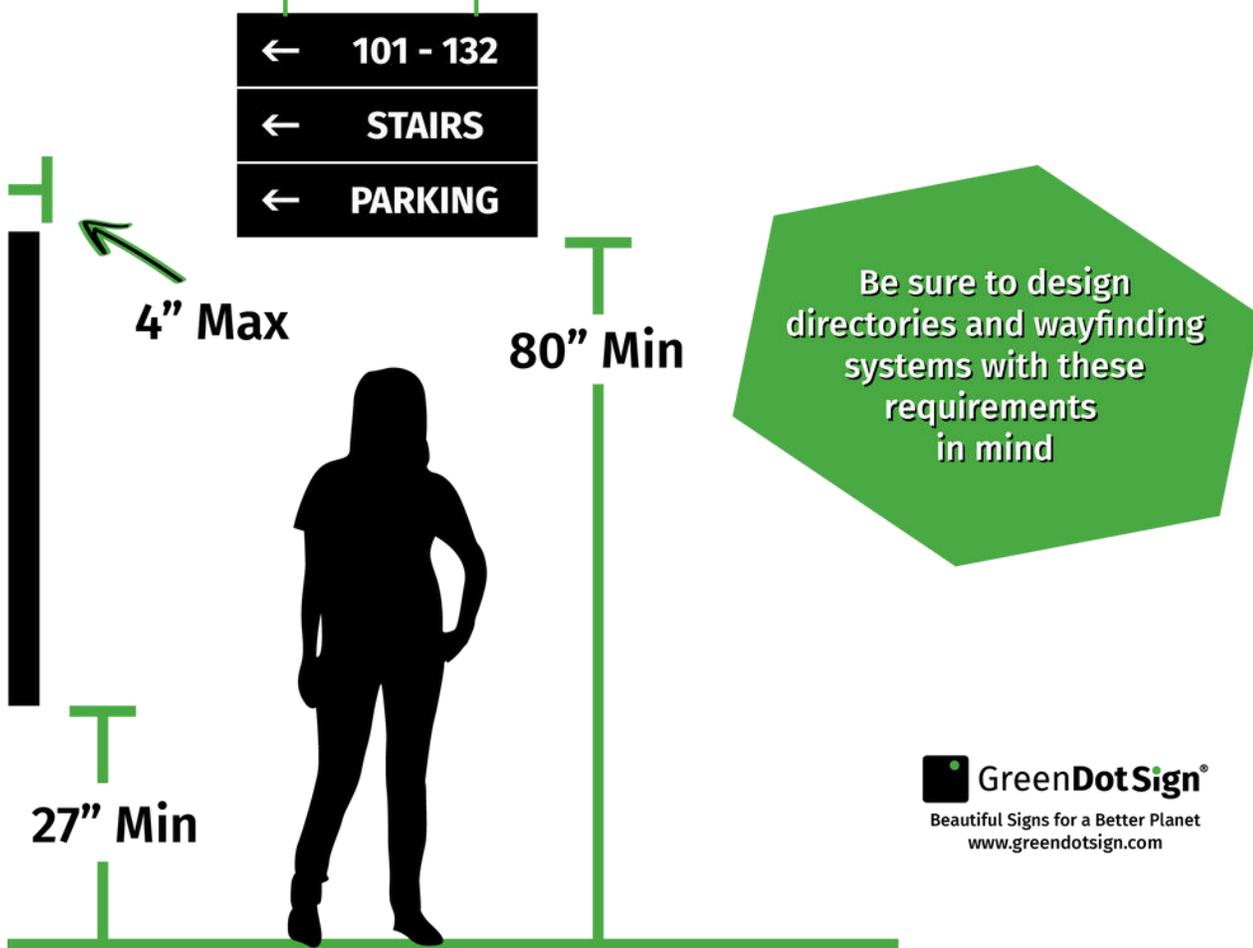
Pro Tip:
54" to bottom of the sign often works for all signage

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In California the requirement is 48" to the bottom of braille.

General Signage Hanging Requirements

Accessibility Requirements For All Signage



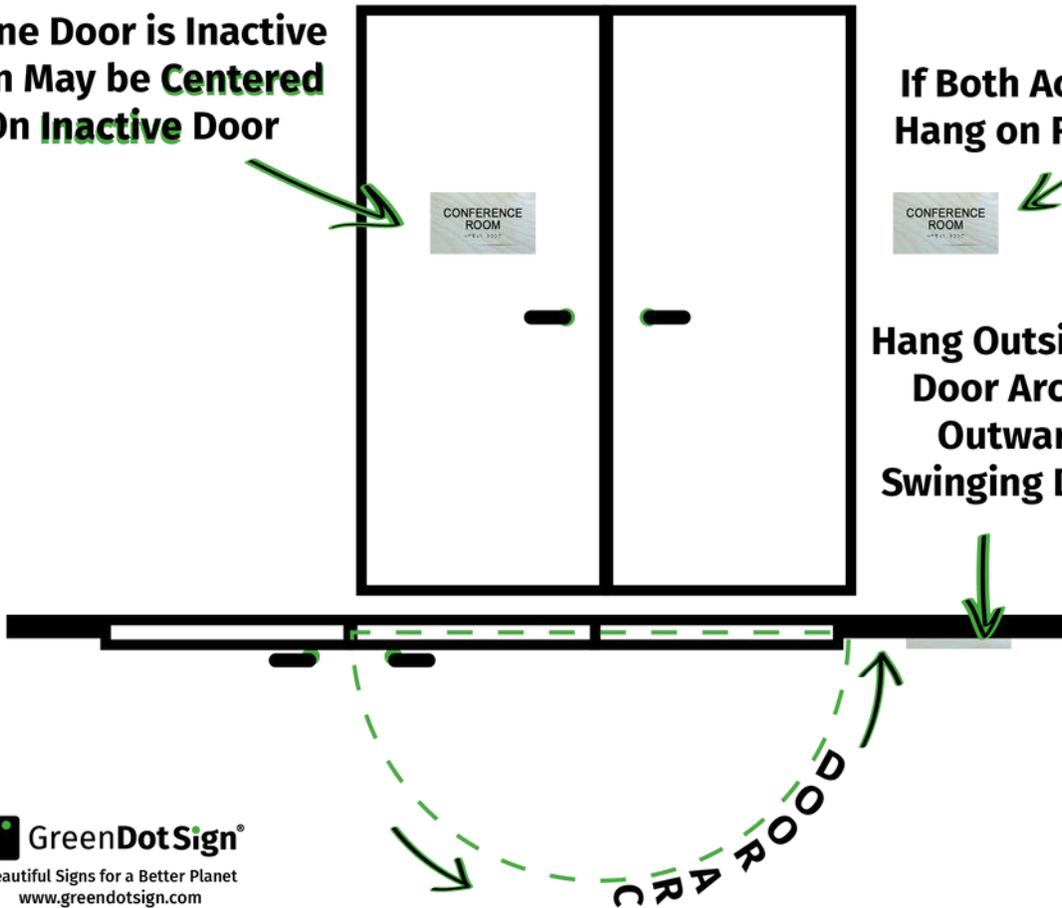
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Double Door ADA Sign Allowances and Requirements

If One Door is Inactive
Sign May be **Centered**
On **Inactive** Door

If Both Active
Hang on **Right**

Hang Outside of
Door Arc for
Outward
Swinging Doors



ADA Sign Allowances and Requirements for Hanging on a Door

Sign Elevation Requirements Remain 48" min. to Bottom Line 60" max to Top Line

Many Eatery Restroom Doors Meet These Requirements



- All Three Conditions Must be Met to Hang Directly on any Door**
- 1 Sign is on Push of Side of Door**
 - 2 Door Must Have a Power Closer**
 - 3 Door May Not Have a Hold Open Device**

Using Green Dot Sign® Braille to Read

What Sign Style do the Blind Prefer?

Three surveys.

Tested by dozens of the blind.

100% Approval

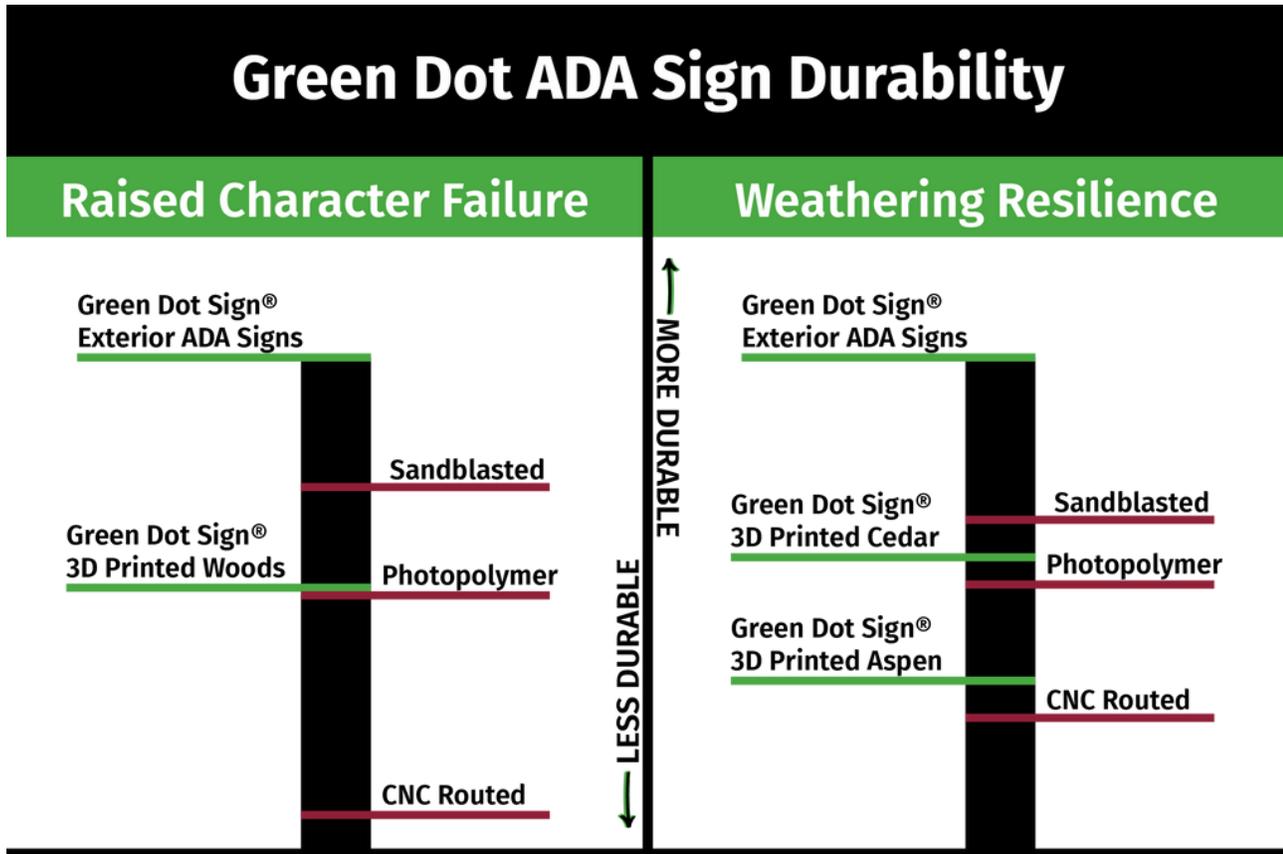
Respondents Say:

“Easier to read”

“Excellent braille”

“Better than other signs”

Results based on all tests performed through 4/1/2020



- For exterior or extreme environments, such as surgery or manufacturing areas, Green Dot Sign® exterior grade ADA signs are the most resilient by a wide margin
- For interior applications Green Dot Sign® 3D printed ADA signs using wood have a stronger raised character bond than most traditional ADA signs
- The most common ADA sign manufacturing method, CNC routed, is the least durable due to reliance on adhesive for raised letters and tension for braille

ABOUT GREEN DOT SIGN®

Green Dot Sign® is a nationwide provider of sustainable signage. We focus on ADA sign and wayfinding sign systems for projects of all sizes. Each Green Dot ADA sign utilizes a special printing process, directly bonding and 3D building tactile content to natural materials without adhesive or machining. The result is beautiful signage that brings nature inside and reduces plastic by 99% compared to traditional ADA signage.

Green Dot Signs® can contribute to U.S. Green Building Council LEED® v4 and v4.1 building certification credits. We use Forestry Sustainability Council (FSC®) wood, have a published Health Product Declaration (HDP®) for a primary product line, and offer an Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) recycling program for all of our signs.

Green Dot Sign® is committed to continuously improving manufacturing methods and expanding product lines. Our goal is to make it easy to maximize visual impact while minimizing environmental impact for every brand and building.

We offer over 10,000 SKUs of the most common ADA and office signs on our eCommerce website. All online orders include free shipping.

Our sign specialists work closely with brands, designers, qualified wholesalers and AECO professionals to design, manufacture and install signage tailor fit to buildings and thoughtful environments.

GreenDot
Sign®

