

## A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT (ADA)

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) prohibits discrimination against people with disabilities in several areas, including employment, transportation, public accommodations, communications, and access to state and local government programs and services.

In 1973 a federal agency was created to develop design standards and enforce compliance in Federal Buildings – the Access Board.

On July 26, 1990, the Access Board and the Department of Justice (DOJ) signed the American with Disabilities Act into law. Its overall purpose is to make American Society more accessible to people with disabilities. The Access Board's duties were then expanded to develop accessibility guidelines for the public as well as commercial facilities, provide technical assistance and training on these guidelines, and conduct research to support and maintain them. In 1991, the Access Board published the ADA Accessibility Guidelines for Buildings and Facilities (ADAAG). These guidelines were the basis for what we commonly refer to as the 1992 Federal ADA Law when we discuss signage regulations.

In 2008, the ADA Amendments Act (ADAAA) was passed. Its purpose is to broaden the definition of disability, which had been narrowed by U.S. Supreme Court decisions.

Over the years, the Access Board has worked with the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) to update and clarify the original guidelines.

In 2010, the Department of Justice published a revised and enforceable standard called the "2010 Standards for Accessible Design". Now, these standards are required for all new construction, alteration, and barrier removal projects. ADA guidelines are intended to remove barriers and make facilities more accessible to the blind, visually impaired, and mobility-impaired. All public facilities must take steps to comply with these.

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## SIGN STANDARDS

We have summarized the 2010 Standards for Accessible Design (Section 703), and included the guideline section numbers for easy reference to the full standards.

The most common interior room signs have the same style of tactile and visual information.

### Permanent room identification signs (using characters that are both tactile and visual)

Typical  
Room Sign:



If a room has an entry door, generally an ADA compliant sign should identify that space. This can also apply to rooms within rooms.

Some examples of rooms or spaces considered that could be considered permanent are:

- |                                 |                       |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------|
| offices or suites               | IT/Data Closets       |
| meeting/conference/huddle rooms | electrical Rooms      |
| classrooms                      | kitchens              |
| restrooms                       | dining areas          |
| exam or hospital rooms          | lounges               |
| laboratories                    | stairwells and stairs |
| storage rooms                   | elevators             |
| mechanical rooms                | exits                 |

### Finish and Contrast

Persons with low vision need legible signs with high contrast between characters and background

Material Finish (Section 703.5.1)  
The finish must be non-glare or matte. On the 60 degree glossometer, aim for between 11 and 19 degrees.

Color Contrast (Section 703.5.1)  
Light characters against dark backgrounds or dark characters against light backgrounds are ideal



## SIGN STANDARDS

### Tactile Characters

Tactile characters should not have sharp or abrasive edges

Depth (Section 703.2.1)  
1/32" or .8mm minimum distance needed above the background surface.

Style (Section 703.2.2 and 703.2.3)  
Tactile characters must be uppercase only and sans-serif typography. Characters that are italic, script, decorative, ultra bold, or any other unusual font type are not compliant. Some commonly use fonts that meet compliant sign standards are:

Arial

Avant Garde

Avenir

Frutiger

Futura Medium

Helvetica Medium

Height (Section 703.2.5)  
Characters must fall between 5/8" minimum and 2" maximum, based on the height of the uppercase "I". *One exception: 1/2" minimum is acceptable when separate raised and visual characters provide the same information.*

A

5/8" minimum – 2" maximum for tactile letters

Width (Section 703.2.4)  
Based on the width of the uppercase "O", and the height of the uppercase "I", character width must be 55-110% of the character height.

Stroke Thickness (Section 703.2.6)  
Based on the width of the uppercase "O", and the height of the uppercase "I", character width must be 55-110% of the character height.

O  
W

I  
H  
T

Width (W) = 55-110% of Height (H)

Thickness (T) = 15% maximum of Height (H)

When using beveled letters, the law allows for a decreased minimum space to 1/16".

Character Spacing (Section 703.2.7)  
Should be 1/8" or 3mm min. and 4x the tactile character stroke width max., measured from the top surface of the text, between the closest points of each letter.

LETTER  
CS

Character Spacing (CS) = 1/8" minimum

## SIGN STANDARDS

Line Spacing (703.2.8)

Must be 135% minimum and 170% maximum of character height

LINE  
LS [ SPACING ] H

Line Spacing (LS) = 135-170% of Height (H)

Raised Border and Decorative Elements (703.2.7)

Must be 3/8" minimum distance from tactile letters

3/8" [ BORDER ]

### Braille

Raster® braille  
meets the  
enforceable 2010  
ADA Standards  
that can be found  
in section 703.3.

Tactile Characters Must be Accompanied by Grade 2 Braille (703.2.3)  
Braille should have a rounded dome shape, and cannot be flat-topped.

Dot height requirement (DH): 0.025-0.037"

Dot Base Diameter requirement (DB): 0.059-0.063"



It also must be located below it's corresponding text and separated by a 3/8" minimum from tactile letters, borders, or other elements

3/8" [ BRAILLE ]

⠠

Braille is required to be lowercase. The indication of uppercase letters can only be used for proper nouns, names, initials, acronyms, and individual letters of the alphabet.

## SIGN STANDARDS

### Pictograms

Pictograms and Symbols (703.6)

Must be located on a field of at least 6" or 150mm in height. Braille and tactile text must be placed directly below not intrude into that field area.

Pictograms and their fields should have a non-glare finish. They also must contrast with their background, as described in the tactile letter section on page 2.

They are required to have a text descriptor located directly below the pictogram field.

Pictograms are NOT required to be tactile.



### Permanent room identification signs (using separate tactile and visual characters)

Signs that have both visual elements and ADA compliant identification follow a slightly different set of rules. In either case, all braille and ADA compliant sections or plaques must follow all of the rules previously outlined regarding tactile character style and spacing as well as grade 2 braille style and spacing regulations.

Visual characters (only) can be either uppercase or lowercase and typography style can be sans-serif OR serif. However, they still may not be decorative in any form.

## SIGN INSTALLATION

In most cases, a mounting template makes installation fast and easy for accurate sign height and width placement.

### Sign Mounting

All room signs should be mounted adjacent to the latch side of the door. They must be far enough away from the door swing so that the reader can approach the sign without risk of being hit by an opening door.

The most common door install scenario is for all interior wall-mounted signs are to be installed so that the tactile characters are located between 48" and 60" in height above the floor, measured from the baseline of characters.

Signs shall have a minimum 18" x 18" space on the floor, centered on the sign, beyond the arc of any door swing between the closed position and 45 degree open position. (applies to out-swinging doors)

Position signs a minimum of 9" from the edge of the door to the center of the sign.

