



U.S. Department  
of Veterans Affairs

# Glossary

- **Definitions of Terms**

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This glossary includes some words which have established meanings in conversational English, but which have very specific meanings in the sign industry and sign fabrication.

## A

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<b>A.B.A.</b>	Architectural Barriers Act. Legislation (Public Law 90-480) enacted by the federal government in 1968 requiring that all buildings designed, constructed, renovated or leased with federal funds meet the Uniform Federal Accessibility Standards (UFAS), and be accessible to the public. Some departments have, as a matter of privacy, also required compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act Accessibility Guidelines, which otherwise DO NOT apply to the federal sector, in addition to the UFAS. VA now follows GSA and other standard-setting agencies in replacing UFAS with the Architectural Barriers Act Accessibility Standards (ABAAS) for Federal Facilities. In addition, VA uses the Barrier Free Design Guide (PG-18-13) to meet the needs of the Department of Veterans Affairs in its Healthcare Facilities.
<b>A.B.A.A.S.</b>	Architectural Barriers Act Accessibility Standards. National standards enacted in 2006-07 to insure accessibility to federally funded facilities for all persons in America.
<b>Access Panel</b>	A door or panel that provides access to concealed equipment for inspection, maintenance and repair.
<b>Acetate</b>	A thin flexible plastic sheet that is durable and stretch-resistant. This clear material can be used as a substrate for inserts in pocket signs.
<b>Acid Etching</b>	A method similar to sandblasting, used primarily for marking glass and metal. A stencil of the artwork is applied to the material, which is then brushed with an acid mixture. After a length of time, the surface is washed and the stencil removed.
<b>Acrylic</b>	A generic term for plastics used in sign making. Acrylic is a specific type of plastic characterized by clarity, as well as transparent and opaque color ranges. It also has excellent machinability. Cast and extruded acrylics have different qualities and tolerances.
<b>A.D.A.</b>	<b>Americans with Disabilities Act:</b> Legislation enacted by the federal government in 1990 to remove barriers that limit any individual's ability to function in the physical environment. ADA standards govern the construction and alteration of places of public accommodation, commercial facilities, and state and local government facilities. The Department of Justice (DOJ) maintains ADA standards that apply to all ADA facilities except transportation facilities, which are subject to similar standards issued by the Department of Transportation (DOT). Federal facilities are covered by standards consistent with those of the ADA issued under a different law, the Architectural Barriers Act (ABA). Within the five titles of the ADA, Title III pertains to signs.
<b>A.D.A.A.G.</b>	<b>Americans with Disabilities Act Accessibility Guidelines:</b> National standards put into place in 1990 to ensure equal access for all persons in America. The Access Board's ADA Accessibility Guidelines (ADAAG) serve as the minimum baseline for the ADA standards. The guidelines and standards are very similar, but only the standards have legal authority. However, the guidance provided is relevant to the standards. ADAAG specifies legible letter forms, letter heights, Braille, and tactile lettering, as well as materials and finishes.

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<b>Advance Notice Sign</b>	A sign used to provide an advance notice prior to a roadway, street, or building entrance. Similar to a directional sign, however, this sign usually announces a single destination. Also called an “approach sign”.
<b>Aluminum Alloy</b>	A combination of the soft metal aluminum with one or more metals such copper, manganese, silicon magnesium, or zinc to make aluminum harder. Aluminum alloys are graded by number from softest, 1100, to hardest, 7075. Alloy numbers 6061 and 6063 are typically used in general construction.
<b>Ambient Light</b>	The general level of light, direct and indirect, or background light, in a given environment emitted by natural and/or man made sources at a given time. Ambient light can affect the legibility of signs.
<b>Anchor</b>	Any device that firmly secures an object in position, or firmly secures one object to another.
<b>Anodized Finish</b>	An electrochemical coating applied to the surface of aluminum, to harden, protect, and enhance the beauty and durability of a metal surface. The finish may be clear or include tints and colors.
<b>Approach</b>	The area from where a sign first becomes visible until the sign is no long readable as the viewer passes by.
<b>Architectural Signage</b>	A term that was developed in the 1960's to identify signs, visual communications, and wayfinding information in the built environment.
<b>Area of Rescue</b>	A safe location where physically challenged individuals are to wait for assistance in case of emergency.
<b>Art or Artwork</b>	Copy, images, graphics, and logos used in preparing a job. See also COPY, also ELECTRONIC ART.
<b>Ascender</b>	In a typeface, the portions of the lower case letters b, d, f, h, k, and l that extend above the height of the lower case x. See also DESCENDER
<b>Aspect Ratio</b>	The relationship between an image's horizontal length and vertical height.
<b>B</b>	
<b>Back Lit Sign</b>	A sign consisting of a cabinet containing a light source and one or more translucent faces, which are illuminated for night visibility.
<b>Baked Enamel</b>	A type of paint with a special finish. Special enamel paint is sprayed or screen-printed on a surface, dried, and then cured with heat or light resulting in an extremely durable surface.
<b>Ballast</b>	A device designed to provide sufficient starting voltage for fluorescent lighting. The ballast may also heat the lamp electrodes and, once the tube is in operation, limit the amount of electrical energy passing through the lamp.
<b>Bead Braille</b>	Small beads that are inserted into sign faces to create Braille text, as required by ABA/ADA. These beads can be clear, plastic or metal depending on the material into which they are inserted.
<b>Banding</b>	In a color gradation, visibly distinct differences, or sequential patterns between color levels, instead of a smooth transition of colors or other effects. Applies to an imperfect printed, screened, airbrushed or painted gradation.

<b>Banner</b>	A sign made of fabric, plastic, or other flexible material which has no enclosing framework. It may be painted, screen-printed, digitally printed, or decorated with vinyl appliques. Typically used as a temporary sign.
<b>Base</b>	<sup>1</sup> The trim beneath the bottom molding of a sign. <sup>2</sup> The foundation or support of a freestanding sign. See also FOOTING.
<b>Blade Sign / Flag Sign</b>	A type of projecting sign mounted perpendicular to the sign's surface and the normal flow of traffic. These signs are typically double sided and mounted to a building wall, façade, storefront, or pole.
<b>Blank</b>	<sup>1</sup> A painted sign face without copy or graphics applied. <sup>2</sup> An undecorated sign face with no cabinet. <sup>3</sup> An undecorated insert.
<b>Blind Fasteners/ Concealed Fasteners</b>	Mechanical attachment devices hidden from view that are used to assemble a sign, attach letters, attach a sign's face or mount a sign. Can be tamper-proof, removable, or permanent.
<b>Blistering</b>	The end result of poor adhesion by either paint or vinyl to a substrate, leaving the surface covered with bumps of various sizes and indeterminate shapes similar to blisters on human skin.
<b>Border</b>	Commonly a line or repetitive design used to emphasize or set apart all or portions of a sign's art. In electric signs, illuminated tubes or decorative molding may serve as borders.
<b>Braille</b>	A form of written language for the blind, in which characters are represented by patterns of raised dots that are felt with the fingertips. Grade 2 Braille is a type of Braille and is required by ABA/ADA, on interior signs that identify (label) a room.
<b>Break Away Sign Mount</b>	A type of sign post or footing designed to give way on impact. Used on along roadways to reduce damage to automobiles in accidents.
<b>Bronze</b>	An alloy of copper and tin with traces of other metals (zinc, nickel, and lead), used for sculpture, sign plaques, and dimensional letters. Letters or plaques can be cut out of solid material, can be cast and even be fabricated from thin sheets to create dimensional letters (fabricated and soldered). Bronze plaques and letters may be lacquered to prevent oxidation, pre-oxidized, or left to oxidize naturally. Finishes can be painted, oil-rubbed, clear-lacquer, polished, brushed, etc.
<b>Brushed Finish</b>	A non-reflective, abraded finish applied to metal surfaces for decorative purposes. This process can be produced mechanically or chemically, resulting in a texture consisting of tiny scratches which form a visible directional pattern.
<b>Burning In</b>	The process to bring a neon tube to its proper brilliance. This is done by connecting the completed tube to the type of transformer which will be used in the installation, and allowing it to remain illuminated until proper brightness, color, and electrical properties are achieved. Also called aging.
<b>Burnish</b>	To polish or shine by rubbing.
<b>Butt Joint</b>	A type of seam.
<b>Camera Ready Art</b>	Artwork that was once prepared for production via a photographic process. This term is still used however it now refers to scanned and digital imagery.



<b>Can</b>	An informal term for a cabinet sign.
<b>Carved Letters</b>	V-carved, U-carved, or squared-carved into wood or stone. Created by hand-carving with chisel and mallet, sandblasting technique, or by a computer-controlled router or engraver. Bas-relief and incised carved letters are usually done by hand.
<b>Carved Signs</b>	Letters or shapes incised or relieved into sign substrate surface. Can refer to routing process.
<b>Cast Acrylic</b>	A type of plastic sheeting formed by spreading a molten acrylic mixture on a carrier sheet or web, then baking at high temperatures to remove solvents and to fuse the material into a film/sheet.
<b>Cast Dimensional Letter or Number</b>	Typically cast in aluminum, bronze, acrylic, or resin.
<b>Cast Metal Plaque</b>	A solid metal plaque or sculptural element. Aluminum or bronze are typical metals used for casting.
<b>Changeable Copy (message) Sign</b>	A sign in which the copy can be changed, either manually through the use of attachable letters, mechanically using rotating panel elements, or electronically using computer-controlled incandescent bulbs, light-emitting diodes (LEDs), liquid crystal displays (LCDs), or plasma screens.
<b>Channel</b>	An extruded length of material, typically plastic, aluminum, or steel, in the shape of a squared-off U.
<b>Channel Letter</b>	A fabricated letter, with metal returns, into which a neon tube or LEDs is placed. The depth of the channel may vary, depending on the size of the letter, viewing angle, and type of illumination. The channel letter may be open-faced, translucent plastic-faced, or a reverse channel letter with halo (indirect) illumination.
<b>Character</b>	A symbol or mark used in a writing system.
<b>Chrome Plate</b>	An electrochemical process to plate steel, brass, or aluminum, most commonly with a mirror chrome finish- such as automobile trim. It can also be brushed or dulled down to create a less reflective surface.
<b>Cladding</b>	A facade or decorative cover added to an existing sign pole or base after it is installed.
<b>Clearance</b>	The distance between the lowest portion of a sign and the finished grade level.
<b>Component</b>	One of the parts or pieces that together make a complete sign, system or design.
<b>Concrete Sign</b>	A poured-in-place, precast sign made of concrete. It is the substrate to which plaques, letters, or panels are attached, painted on, cast into, incised into, or sandblasted into, to create an identifying device.
<b>Condensed Font</b>	A font which has been altered by reducing the width of the letters, numbers, and symbols to bring them closer together, thereby shortening the line.
<b>Conduit</b>	A tube of various materials for protecting electrical wiring.

<b>Construction Site Sign</b>	Announces a construction project credits and information regarding the type of project, architect, consultants, contractor, and others associated with the project. Typically painted, vinyl, or digital print mounted onto exterior-grade plywood substrate.
<b>Contrast</b>	The use of opposing elements such as colors, forms, or the like, in proximity to one another to produce an intensified effect. See LIGHT REFLECTIVE VALUE (LRV)
<b>Contract Documents</b>	Written specifications and design drawings used to establish a contract and to define the deliverable sign products between two parties.
<b>Copy</b>	Most commonly, the words or message to be displayed on a sign.
<b>Craze</b>	Thin cracks or breaks in paint, plastic, or vinyl. The main cause of crazing is weathering, but it may also be caused by the incompatibility of paint layers or solvents.
<b>Curing</b>	The process of effecting a chemical change in some inks and paints by the application of heat or ultraviolet light.
<b>Current</b>	The rate of flow, of electrical charge in a conductor. A unit of current is typically referred to in amperes or milliamps.
<b>Cut-Off Switch</b>	See KILL SWITCH.
<b>Cut-Out Copy</b>	Letters that have been removed out of a sign panel via routing, laser or water-jet methods leaving a hole in the shape of the letter form, generally to allow light to show through.
<b>D</b> <b>Deboss</b>	The process of producing depressed letters in a surface, particularly those produced by engraving dies or plates.
<b>Decal</b>	An applique of words, graphics, or a combination of the two, printed on the non-adhesive side of a film, then cut to a specified shape using a plotter or die. Decals are created when a large number of identical pieces are required.
<b>Delamination</b>	The separation of layers in a laminated substrate. This is usually the result of adhesive failure.
<b>Descender</b>	In a given typeface, the portions of the lowercase g, j, p, q, y, and in some fonts f as well as uppercase J that extend below the baseline of the letter. See also ASCENDER.
<b>Design Intent Drawings</b>	Drawings that show only the size, profile, and basic relationship of parts, but no specific details of material or construction.
<b>Directional Sign</b>	An interior or exterior sign intended to provide directional information.
<b>Directory</b>	A sign that contains a list of names of people, offices, or destinations at a specific building, facility, or public venue. May provide text listings or include maps, site plans, or diagrams.
<b>Double Sided</b>	Two or more sign faces mounted on a common structure but facing in opposite directions.
<b>Dynamic Sign</b>	General term for any sign where the message or graphic is adjustable automatically through electronic or mechanical means.
<b>E</b> <b>Edge</b>	The frame, or part of the sign that encloses the back and face/faces.

<b>Edge Lighting</b>	A technique used to illuminate (by internal refraction) carved, incised, or sandblasted lettering and images, by lighting the edge of the transparent material. This technique is typically used with glass or acrylic.
<b>Egg Crate</b>	A patterned piece of plastic installed below a light source in illuminated awnings or light fixtures to protect the light source from damage or direct visibility. Also used to soften and evenly distribute the transmitted light.
<b>Electric Sign</b>	A sign that contains electrical fixtures or connections and has some method of illumination.
<b>Electrode</b>	A terminal that conducts an electrical current between two conducting substances. Electrodes are found at both of the ends of a neon unit.
<b>Electronic Art</b>	Computer software generated artwork files (sometimes called "camera-ready art") used in production of signs and graphic elements.
<b>Electronic Sign or Message Center</b>	A sign that utilizes computer-generated messages or other electric means of changing text. Changeable message displays or signs may use incandescent lamps, LEDs, LCDs, and other technologies.
<b>Electrostatic Film</b>	Polyvinyl chloride (PVC) sheet treated with a small charge of static electricity enabling the sheet to temporarily, but firmly, adhere to glass and similar smooth substrates.
<b>Embellishments</b>	Any addition to a sign face that provides a three-dimensional effect. Cut-outs, push-through shapes/letters, lighting strips, and clocks are all examples of embellishments.
<b>Embossing</b>	The process of producing raised letters, particularly those produced by engraving dies or plates.
<b>Engraving</b>	A method of cutting shallow, negative relief graphics or lettering into metal, plastic, or glass utilizing a bit or graver. Engraving may be achieved using a pantograph, or by computer-driven equipment. The engraved area may be filled to create greater contrast.
<b>Environmental Graphics</b>	The planning, design, and execution of graphic elements in the built and natural environment. Environmental graphics includes communication systems that identify, direct, inform, interpret, and visually enhance the environment.
<b>Etched or Engraved and Paint Filled</b>	Etched (chemically) or engraved/incised (mechanically) and then filled with color to create a desired contrast and appearance.
<b>Etching</b>	See ACID-ETCHING.
<b>Extended Font</b>	A font in which the proportion of the letters, numbers, and symbols, has been altered by increasing their width.
<b>Extrusion</b>	General term for pre-manufactured bars, rods, tubes and channels created by forcing raw material through a die to create a desired shape. Extruded stock typically made from aluminum or plastic is often used in sign fabrication.
<b>Fabricate</b>	The manufacturing of a sign from components, raw materials or parts.
<b>Fabricated Letter / Numeral</b>	A dimensional letter usually fabricated from thin metal, which is joined and soldered to appear solid.

## F



<b>Facade</b>	The front or principal entrance of a building.
<b>Face</b>	See SIGN FACE.
<b>Fascia Mounted Sign</b>	A wall mounted sign in which the sign face is parallel to the wall. Also see WALL SIGN.
<b>Fasteners</b>	Mechanical items, including rivets, screws, nuts, and bolts, that are used to assemble a sign or attach a sign to a surface.
<b>Fiber Optic Display</b>	A type of sign that transmits the message utilizing light directed through thread like fibers of glass or plastic.
<b>Flag</b>	A piece of plastic or cloth suspended from one side. The cloth may or may not be decorated.
<b>Flag Sign / Blade Sign</b>	A type of projecting sign mounted perpendicular to the sign's surface and the normal flow of traffic. These signs are typically double sided and mounted to a building wall, façade, storefront, or pole.
<b>Flasher</b>	A mechanical device designed to interrupt the electrical current in a sign at regular intervals, thus turning the light source on and off to create a flashing image.
<b>Flush</b>	Text aligned at a right margin (flush right) or left margin (flush left). When copy is flushed both right and left, it is referred to as justified.
<b>Foam Board</b>	A type of lightweight, rigid board used for interior signs. Foam board consists of plastic foam sheet laminated on both sides with paper or plastic substrates.
<b>Foam Tape</b>	Double-sided adhesive tape used for mounting sign plaques, letters, or other sign materials to smooth surfaces. It is available in various thicknesses, widths, and adhesives. Foam tape with a special adhesive is necessary for mounting signs to vinyl wall covering.
<b>Font</b>	A specific style and group of letterforms consisting of one complete set of letters, numerals, symbols, and punctuation used for composing written communications in a given typeface. Fonts come in various weights, italic formats, condensed or extended.
<b>Footing</b>	The projecting base of a sign pole or pylon, including the portion buried in the ground. The footing bears all the weight of the sign, while anchoring it against overturning momentum. Also called FOUNDATION.
<b>Form</b>	A mold or shape into which concrete is poured to harden. When referring to signage, the term typically is associated with the making of an exterior sign footing.
<b>Formed</b>	A material such as metal or plastic that has been shaped into a dimensional object or letter.
<b>Foundation</b>	See FOOTING.
<b>Frangible Sign Mount</b>	See BREAK-AWAY SIGN.
<b>Frisket</b>	An adhesive masking of paper or plastic used for (stencil-like methods of) painting, sandblasting, silkscreening, and other processes. Friskets may be hand or digitally cut.

## G

<b>Galvanize</b>	A process by which steel or iron is protected by a zinc coating or plating. This process is achieved by hot-dipping the metal into molten zinc utilizing electrolysis. The galvanized coating protects the underlying metal from corrosion.
<b>Gateway Sign</b>	A sign announcing the entrance to a neighborhood or large facility.
<b>Gauge</b>	A measurement indicating the thickness of sheet metal. Also used to denote size of wire.
<b>Gilding/Gilt</b>	The application of thin metal sheets such as gold, silver, and copper to glass, signs, and vehicles. A protective clear coat is sometimes applied when used in an outdoor application.
<b>Glass Signs</b>	Signs fabricated from glass. Painting, carving, sandblasting and/or etching are the most popular ways to decorate glass for signage.
<b>Gold Leaf</b>	Gold processed into very thin sheets. The gold is used in gilding and is available in a variety of colors and karats. Fourteen to eighteen karat leaf is used for interior applications, such as glass. Twenty three karat leaf is used for outdoor applications, such as vehicles and exterior signs, and architectural elements.
<b>Goose Neck</b>	The curved support for a light fixture. This element is normally constructed out of steel conduit and typically used on billboard and storefront signs.
<b>Gradation / Gradient</b>	Steps of transition between two colors or two values, created by mixing varying percentages of each of those two colors and/or values.
<b>Grade</b>	The contour of the ground surface, whether in its natural state or after development. Signs are often measured in height above grade.
<b>Grade 2 Braille</b>	Grade 2 Braille is similar to Grade 1 Braille, however, it includes additional characters and character combinations representing contractions of certain words and word components such as “the” and “-ation”. Considerable care must be taken to translate Grade 2 Braille correctly, using a computer-based, or other, translation program. All Braille should be proofread by a Braille proofreader, prior to approval of all final artwork.
<b>Grayscale</b>	A series of neutral colors, ranging from black to white, or the other way around. Each step’s color value is usually shifted by constant amounts. A grayscale color can be determined by a value of a one-dimensional color space: On a white surface (e.g., paper) the grayscale’s color value equals to the relative intensity of black (ink) applied to the medium. On a black surface (e.g., monitor) the grayscale color’s value equals to the relative intensity of white (light) applied to the medium.
<b>Grommet</b>	In banners, a reinforced metal eyelet used to receive cords or other fasteners.
<b>Halo Lighting</b>	Typically used for back-lit letters (reverse-pan channel letters) to create a glow of light around the letter by illuminating the wall surface, behind the letter, via a light source located within the letterform.
<b>Hanging Sign</b>	A sign that hangs from a bracket or support and projects from a wall, building, or pole. See also PROJECTING SIGN.
<b>Header</b>	A separate panel, often containing a block of headline text, placed above the supporting sign copy.

## H

<b>Height Above Grade</b>	The vertical distance from the grade to the highest point of the sign (face).
<b>Hinged Side</b>	The face on a double-face sign that swings open for service.
<b>Hue</b>	Pure color in terms of “red,” “green” or “magenta. Also defines mixtures of two pure colors like “red-yellow”(~”orange”) or “yellow-green.”
<b>Identification Sign</b>	A sign providing the name of the business, building or service for purposes of identification.
<b>Illuminated Sign</b>	A sign which is illuminated by either an internal or indirect, external light source.
<b>Incidental Sign</b>	Signs, usually smaller in size and of a noncommercial nature, which appear in almost every location where the public may be found. Examples of incidental signs include hours of operation, location of rest rooms, as well as entrance and exit signs.
<b>Incised</b>	Cutting into or indenting the surface of a material. Incised letters are carved or engraved into the surface of stone, wood, plastic, or sandblasted into glass or stone.
<b>Indirect Illumination</b>	Illumination that is provided from a light source separate from the sign itself, such as a floodlight.
<b>Insert</b>	A paper sign message intended to be inserted into a pocket on a manufactured sign. Inserts can be easily removed or changed as necessary.
<b>International Symbol of Accessibility (ISA)</b>	Symbol used to communicate disabled-accessible routes and entrances consisting of a stylised figure seated in a wheelchair.
<b>International Symbol of TTY</b>	Symbol used to communicate hook up location or availability of a TTY device of a representation of a typewriter keyboard with a telephone headset above.
<b>Internally Illuminated</b>	A sign that is illuminated through the use of internal lighting. See also BACK-LIGHTED SIGN.
<b>Interactive</b>	Two-way electronic or communications system in which response is direct and continual. Interactive displays incorporate a touch screen, buttons or switches, or a keyboard to generate a signal that activates an information display.
<b>Interpretive Sign or Kiosk</b>	A free-standing sign that provides cultural or historic information.
<b>J-bolt</b>	An angled rod, usually steel, embedded in a concrete footing, or anchor, and threaded at the exposed top end for attachment to a freestanding sign.
<b>Job Site Sign</b>	See CONSTRUCTION SITE SIGN.
<b>Justified</b>	Describes copy that is set with even margins on the left and right (often resulting in irregular word and letter spacing).
<b>Kerning</b>	The process of moving pairs of letters farther apart or closer together to make words in a line or block of text appear more evenly spaced.
<b>Kick Plate</b>	A plate or strip that runs along the bottom edge of a sign structure or kiosk to protect it from being marred.



<b>Kill Switch</b>	A switch found on or next to an electrical sign that can be used to turn off a sign.
<b>Kiosk</b>	A portable or permanent freestanding structure onto (and into) which messages and pertinent information can be housed and displayed. Kiosks can also have interactive elements such as touch screen monitors.
<b>Lamp Bank</b>	Typically refers to the lighting on the inside of a sign used to illuminate the sign face.
<b>Laser Cutting</b>	Use of a laser to cut letters and shapes out of various flat materials, such as acrylic, glass and metal.
<b>Layout</b>	The total arrangement of a sign's graphic elements. Indicates the overall plan of how copy, and possible imagery, will be arranged on the face.
<b>Leading</b>	A typographic term referring to the space between lines of text. Typically measured from baseline to baseline. Also see LINE SPACING.
<b>LCD Sign Liquid crystal display</b>	A type of changeable copy sign utilizing liquid crystals.
<b>LED Light-emitting diode</b>	A semiconductor diode that emits light when voltage is applied.
<b>LED sign</b>	Electronic "message" sign using light-emitting diodes.
<b>Legibility</b>	The clarity of a typeface, used on a sign, which allows it to be easily read and deciphered. See also READABILITY.
<b>Letterspacing</b>	The amount of space between a group of letters to affect the visual density in a line or block of text. Also see TRACKING and KERNING.
<b>Letter Form</b>	The development or design of the shape of an alphabet letter.
<b>Letter Styles</b>	Variations of a font, such as: serif, sans serif, slab serif, italic, light, Roman, medium, demi-bold, bold, extra bold.
<b>Letter Visibility Chart</b>	An established set of numbers representing approximate visibility of letters over a range of distances. Readable distances vary with various color combinations and typefaces as well as with surrounding visual busyness and whether the observer is still or in motion.
<b>Letter Void</b>	The enclosed areas within letterforms or symbols, such as those found in the letters a, b, d, e, g, o, p and q.
<b>Life Safety Signs</b>	Signs for fire, security, evacuation, and other life safety information, subject to code enforcement and review. Sign locations are defined by code.
<b>Light Reflective Value (LRV)</b>	The degree of contrast expressed as a percentage between sign text and background colors. VA requires a minimum LRV of 70% for signage. This value is an industry "rule of thumb" and is not a requirement of ABA/ADA codes.
<b>Lightness</b>	A range from dark (0%) to fully illuminated (100%). Any original hue has the average lightness level of 50%. A painter may say lightness is the range from fully shaded to fully tinted.

## M

<b>Line Spacing</b>	A typographic term referring to the space between lines of text. Typically measured from baseline to baseline. Also see LEADING.
<b>Logo</b>	An often stylized group of letters, words, symbols or shapes used to represent a business or product.
<b>Lumen</b>	The SI derived unit of luminous flux, a measure of the total “amount” of visible light emitted by a source.
<b>Magnesium Plate</b>	A metal sign material which can be acid-etched with fine detail for use in interior and exterior signs. Good for exterior-grade ABA/ADA signs and more durable than photopolymer.
<b>Magnetic Sheeting</b>	Magnetized sheet material laminated to a flexible plastic sheet and available in rolls.
<b>Marquee</b>	A type of canopy, sign, or architectural element protruding from a building face that projects over the public street or sidewalk.
<b>Masonite®</b>	A brand of hardboard made from wood chips that have been pressed into sheets of varying thickness.
<b>Matrix</b>	A term used in lighting to refer to a regular array of lighting units in the display area of an electronic changeable message sign.
<b>Matte / Matte Finish</b>	A dull surface that is not shiny or reflective.
<b>Medex®</b>	A chemically treated, exterior-grade particle board used in sign manufacturing as a substrate.
<b>Medium-Density Fiberboard (MDF)</b>	A type of particle board made from wood dust mixed with a binder and heat pressed into a panel. MDF has a smooth finish which paints well. Typically produced in 4' x 8' sheets of varying thickness.
<b>Medium-Density Overlay (MDO)</b>	A type of plywood overlaid with a paper face. MDO is designed to have a smooth, paint receptive surface. Typically produced in 4' x 8' sheets.
<b>Memorial Sign</b>	A building sign or plaque noting such information as the name of the building or structure, when it was built, and by whom or who it honors.
<b>Menu Board</b>	A changeable point-of-purchase advertising display which accommodates a listing of products and prices.
<b>Message Center</b>	Any sign that displays changeable copy through electronic or mechanical means.
<b>Message Controller</b>	In an electronic sign, the device that stores messages entered by the operator and conveys them to the display area of the sign in the proper order.
<b>Message Schedule</b>	A list of signs programmed for a given facility providing location, sign type, message (text), and notations regarding installation, location conditions, or other information. This document is used with the sign location plan and sign type drawings.
<b>Metal Finishes</b>	Typically include: mill, polished, brushed, satin, matte, painted, anodized, antique, oxidized, galvanized, chrome-plated, nickel-plated, engine-turned, and many others. Also refers to the levels of finishes relating to gloss and reflectance including: matte, satin, grained, abraded, brushed, and mirror.

<b>Metals</b>	Metals used in sign making include: aluminum, brass, bronze, cast iron, copper, gold, iridium, lead, magnesium, mild steel, Muntz metal, nickel, pewter, platinum, silver, stainless steel, tin, titanium, weathering steel, zinc.
<b>Mild Steel</b>	Steel containing less than three-tenths of one percent (0.003) carbon. Not used in structural applications due to its relatively low strength.
<b>Mill Finish</b>	The natural finish of a material resulting from the manufacturing process.
<b>Mirror</b>	<sup>1</sup> Function of reversing type or an image in design. Used mainly for cutting copy or images to be installed on the inside surface of a transparent substrate such as a window. <sup>2</sup> Highly polished, virtually specular finish on a surface or material.
<b>Mock-Up</b>	Typically a full-size model used to test scale, color, appearance, legibility and/or aesthetic aspects; and made to simulate final construction materials and finishes.
<b>Model</b>	Typically a smaller-scale, proportionally reduced version of a larger element.
<b>Moire</b>	An interference pattern created by the overlay of two regular patterns. In screen-printing, the undesirable pattern on halftones caused by incorrect screen angles.
<b>Moulding</b>	A trim, commonly of wood or metal, used as detail on different types of signs. Molding is available in a variety of shapes and profiles.
<b>Monument Sign</b>	A freestanding sign which sits directly on the ground or is mounted on a low base. This type of sign typically identifies a facility, building, or entrance.
<b>Muntz Metal</b>	An alloy of copper and zinc with a very small amount of lead. This metal has a “brass” appearance and is highly malleable. It is used for sign plaques and letters.
<b>Mural</b>	A wall surface that has been treated with a paint, tile, or vinyl graphic pattern, image, or shape. Murals can be achieved using large-format digital prints that can emulate any material or finish desired.
<b>M.U.T.C.D.</b>	Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices from the US Department of Transportation. Defines highway sign standards and traffic control graphics.
<b>Name Plate</b>	A sign that identifies only the name, occupation, and/or professional title of the occupant of a desk, office, or building.
<b>National Electrical Code (NEC)</b>	Electrical safety code adopted by many, but not all states, counties, and cities in the United States. Published by the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) as NFPA 70.
<b>Negative Space</b>	The background of a sign. The area around and within the art and copy. Also called “white space” or “positive space”
<b>Neon Tubing</b>	Glass tubing filled with various gases and charged with electricity to create an illuminated tubular sign or decorative element. Different gases and coatings create different colors. Neon itself is an inert gas which produces a reddish-orange glow when an electric current is discharged through it. This term is also often used to describe a type of luminous tube sign, which may contain other gasses.

## N

## O

**Nickel Plate** A thin layer of nickel that has been electroplated onto another metal. See also METAL FINISHES.

**Numeral** A symbol or mark used to represent a number.

**Oil-Canning** Typically used to refer to a metal surface that shows uneven deflection from unsuitable inner structure, poor attachment, or insufficient thickness of face material.

**Outline / Inline** In computer graphics, a closed-loop path that copies an original's shape. Following outside the shape is an outline, inside the original shape is an inline.

## P

**Paint Finish** In descending order of reflectance: gloss, semigloss, 20 percent gloss (preferred by the ABA/ADA), eggshell, and matte (dead flat finish).

**Pantone Matching System® (PMS)** A standardized color reproducing system, primarily used in the printing industry. Colors are assigned identification numbers which correspond with specific color formulations.

**Patina** A finish applied, or achieved by age, to metal surfaces called "verdigris"- the blue green patina that forms on metals, especially copper, brasses, and bronze.

**Pavement Graphics** Typically white or yellow graphics applied to asphalt or concrete roadways and parking areas to supplement traffic markings.

**Pennant** A piece of plastic or cloth, pointed at the bottom and suspended by its top. Often undecorated, it is a temporary attention-getting device.

**Photopolymer** A specialized plastic with light sensitive coating which is masked and photo etched to create tactile graphics. Used primarily for ABA/ADA signage requiring tactile copy and Braille.

**Pictogram** A pictorial representation or graphic symbol identifying a location, action, activity, or a warning.

**Pin Mount** Letters have "pins" or "studs" on their back and these protrude into the surface of the wall on which the letters are mounted. Used to keep letters aligned on a rough surface or used to stand letters off (float) on a wall surface.

**Plastic Faced Letters** Channel letters in which the front of the channel is covered by a translucent plastic face, diffusing the lighting within.

**Plexiglas®** The trade name for a brand of acrylic sheeting, which is often used as a generic term.

**Pole Sign** A freestanding sign, mounted on a round or square tube, or other fabricated member without any type of secondary support. Pole signs are typically double-faced.

**Polycarbonate** A specific thermosetting resin characterized by its durability, flexibility, machinability, and endurance under UV exposure. Lexan® is a polycarbonate.

**Polypropylene** A type of plastic sheet used in banners, noted for its flexibility at low temperatures and its resistance to chemicals.

**Polyurethane** A type of hard thermoset plastic foam used in sign production. It has the density and characteristics of wood, with only one-third of the weight. It can be used for carving and sandblasting signs.

<b>Polyvinyl Chloride (PVC)</b>	A specific thermoset plastic which is weather and chemical resistant. It can be extruded into many forms or cast as sheets in a variety of colors and thicknesses.
<b>Porcelain Enamel / Porcelain Sign</b>	A process to coat metal with a ceramic slip, which is fired at extremely high heat, to create a durable, glass like surface impervious to degradation from environmental conditions.
<b>Portable Sign</b>	A freestanding sign not intended to be permanently affixed in place.
<b>Poster</b>	A sign typically printed on paper and intended for indoor use.
<b>Poured in Place</b>	Refers to concrete footings for signs.
<b>Powder Coating</b>	A process for applying paint to a surface to creates a durable protective surface without the use of solvents.
<b>Precast Concrete</b>	A concrete product produced by casting concrete into a reusable mold. After the concrete has cured, the cast product is transported to the site where it is lifted into place.
<b>Prime</b>	To coat a substrate prior to the application of paint or adhesive.
<b>Projecting Sign</b>	A type of projecting sign mounted perpendicular to the sign's surface and normal flow of traffic. These signs are typically double sided and mounted to a building wall, façade, storefront or pole. See BLADE SIGN.
<b>Prototype</b>	Typically, a full-sized sample using intended materials, fasteners, and finishes, as well as methods of construction, to test assembly, design, construction, and appearance issues. See MOCK-UP.
<b>Push Through</b>	A letter or graphic which has been cut out, then pushed through a corresponding space that has been removed from a sign substrate. Typically used with a sign cabinet which has an opaque sign face and internal lighting. "Push-thru letters" are most often translucent acrylic and flush with, or slightly protruding through, the front surface of the sign face.
<b>Pylon</b>	A free standing sign monolithic in shape. Does not refer to a pole sign or a low profile monument sign.
<b>Quarter Round</b>	Wood or metal molding, and trim, with a profile in the shape of a quarter circle.
<b>Raceway</b>	A metal structure enclosing the electrical wiring and sign components.
<b>Raster Graphics</b>	The representation of images generally as an array of pixels or points of color. Typically used for the representation of photographic images. See BITMAP
<b>Readability</b>	The quality of a sign's overall design which allows the viewer to correctly interpret the presented information within an optimum time and distance.
<b>Reflective Vinyl</b>	Film with very small glass or glasslike bead material encapsulated below the surface, creating the ability to reflect light back to its source, such as from a car headlight back to the driver.
<b>Regulatory Signs</b>	Signs required by various government bodies to inform the public of traffic laws and other regulations.

## Q R



<b>Relief</b>	The projection of art from a flat surface. The shortened form of “bas-relief.”
<b>Rendering</b>	An artistic sketch or representation of a design concept.
<b>Resolution</b>	The number of pixels per inch designated to a digital image. A higher pixel ratio, i.e., the greater the density of pixels, will yield a more precise and detailed image.
<b>Retainer</b>	The projecting rim or trim around the sign face which holds the sign face in place.
<b>Reverse Channel Letter</b>	An illuminated backless channel letter, with opaque face and sides, pin mounted on a background surface. The interior of the letter form contains a light source (LED, neon) which when illuminated, will produce a halo effect of reflected light around the letter.
<b>Revolving Sign</b>	A sign which has the ability to turn 360 degrees via an electric motor which drives its movable parts.
<b>Roof Sign</b>	A sign structure which is erected on or above a roof, or installed directly on a roof’s surface.
<b>Router Cut Sign</b>	Describing a sign cut with a hand or computerized router, using various shaped cutting bits.
<b>Sandblasting</b>	A method for creating an etched image on a material. Typically used on glass, wood, and stone.
<b>Sans Serif</b>	Any typeface that lacks serifs. Helvetica is a familiar sans serif font.
<b>Saturation</b>	A range from pure color (100%) to gray (0%) at a constant lightness level. A pure color is fully saturated. From a perceptual point of view, saturation influences the grade of purity or vividness of a color/image. A desaturated image is said to be dull, less colorful, or washed out but can also make the impression of being softer.
<b>Schematic Design</b>	A conceptual design developed at the beginning of a project which demonstrates a design approach or strategy.
<b>Screen Printing</b>	A print made using a squeegee to force ink through a stencil or emulsion that is supported by fabric which has been stretched over a frame to create a screen. A photographic process can be used to create and control the resist for more precise imaging.
<b>Seam</b>	A line formed by the joining together of two separate pieces of the same or different materials along their edges.
<b>Second Surface</b>	Refers to a sign made of a clear substrate, such as acrylic, where the graphics and background color are applied on the reverse (or inside) side of a sign face to provide extra protection from environmental conditions and tampering. Some exterior signs are painted in this manner, as are many interior signs.
<b>Serif</b>	A small line or embellishment finishing off the strokes of letters in some fonts. Times New Roman is a familiar serif font.
<b>Service</b>	The general maintenance of a sign which may include: cleaning, repainting, replacement of bulbs or lamps, and repairs on a regular basis, and sometimes covered under a contract.
<b>Service Cover</b>	A panel in an electric sign cabinet which allows access to electrical components and fixtures for maintenance, repair and replacement of bulbs and lamps.

## S

<b>Setback</b>	The distance between the sign and the property line or right of way.
<b>Shadow</b>	Duplication of an image which is slightly offset. Also referred to as a “drop shadow.”
<b>Shade</b>	A color made darker than the original by adding black.
<b>Shop Drawings</b>	In signage, this refers to fabricator prepared drawings which describe intended methods of construction as well as sequence of assembly. Shop drawings are to be reviewed by the designer and owner for approval prior to construction or fabrication to ensure that the intended design concepts are accurately implemented throughout the construction process.
<b>Sign</b>	Any device, structure, display, or placard, on, in, or near a building, to attract the attention of the public for the purposes of advertising, identifying, or communicating information about goods and services.
<b>Signage / Signing</b>	Interchangeable terms used to describe signs.
<b>Sign Cabinet</b>	The enclosure of an electric sign, not including the components and mounting structure.
<b>Sign Can</b>	An informal term for SIGN CABINET.
<b>Sign Categories</b>	Signs are typically used for the following purposes: life safety or fire code, directional, identification, informational, orientation, ornamentation, regulatory, wayfinding.
<b>Sign Face</b>	The front surface of a sign (in elevation), onto which graphics are applied.
<b>Sign Location Plan</b>	Usually a site plan, or floor plan, indicating where signs will be placed (called “sign locations”).
<b>Sign Schedule / Sign Message Schedule</b>	A list of signs programmed for a given facility to include information regarding: location, sign type, and message (text) as well as notations regarding: installation, location conditions, and/or other information. This document is used in conjunction with the sign location plan and sign type drawings to implement a sign program.
<b>Sign Type</b>	Defines the design, use or style of each unique sign in a system. Sign types are individually determined in each sign project to meet the specific need(s) or function at a particular location.
<b>Sign-Foam®</b>	A brand of specialized polymer foam cell products designed for three-dimensional signage applications, available in different densities and strengths.
<b>Silastic</b>	See SILICONE ADHESIVE. A combination of “Silicone” and “Plastic” for flexible, inert silicone elastomer.
<b>Silicone Adhesive</b>	General term for an adhesive used in the installation of letters and signs. Silicone is a popular product due to its elasticity, strength, reasonable curing time, and its impermeable nature.
<b>Silkscreening</b>	See SCREEN PRINTING.
<b>Single Face</b>	A sign consisting of one face, rather than back-to-back faces on a common frame or back-to-back messages on the same piece of material.
<b>Skeleton</b>	The frame onto which a sign is installed.

<b>Spacer</b>	Any device used in mounting letters or signs which separates those components from the surface to which they are applied.
<b>Spinner Sign</b>	A sign, either freestanding or wall-mounted, with messages that rotate in the wind. A spinner sign is not considered an animated sign.
<b>Spotlight</b>	A source of illumination for an externally illuminated sign; a lamp with a strong focused beam directed toward a sign.
<b>Star</b>	The five pointed star symbol indicating the main EXIT level in a building. Required next to floor level indication on elevator control panels and on elevator door jambs.
<b>Stone Signs</b>	Typically sandstone, granite, marble, limestone, or other common decorative stone material. Letters can be stud-mounted to stone or carved/incised into the face.
<b>Stroke</b>	A single movement of a hand, arm, or marking tool. Stroke can also refer to: a pass of the squeegee in screen-printing, a pass of the brush in painting, as well as a line making up a letter. See also STROKE WIDTH.
<b>Stroke Width</b>	The width of the major lines comprising a letterform. Wide strokes are used to create a bold letter whereas narrow strokes are used to create a light letter.
<b>Structure</b>	In the sign industry, a fabrication designed for, and capable of, supporting a sign. Can refer to internal or external skeleton (exoskeleton) of sign as well as support pole or mechanism.
<b>Subsurface</b>	See SECOND SURFACE.
<b>Substrate</b>	The material out of which the face is made. Wood, metal sheeting, paper, and acrylic are some examples of sign substrates.
<b>Symbol</b>	A letter, number, or other character or mark, or a combination of letters or the like, used to designate something, e.g.: the algebraic symbol $\chi$ ; the chemical symbol Au.
<b>Tactile Sign</b>	A sign, or an area within a larger sign, where a message is conveyed through raised or engraved artwork, thus creating accessibility for the visually impaired. Required by ABA/ADA for all permanently identified rooms.
<b>Tamper Resistant Hardware</b>	Any screw, bolt, nut and fastener that require specialized tooling to install and remove. Used to discourage theft, vandalism and tampering.
<b>TDD</b>	Telecommunications Device for the Deaf. An electronic device, for text communicating over a telephone line that is designed for use by persons with hearing or speech difficulties. Also known as a teleprinter or teletypewriter. See TTY.
<b>Template</b>	A full-sized pattern, layout, or computerized printout showing the exact size and placement of letters. Typically used for installing dimensional letters, signs, or architectural elements.
<b>Temporary Sign</b>	Any sign that is not intended to be permanently installed.
<b>Thermoforming</b>	A process by which a dimensional object is created from a flat sheet of material which has been heated to a pliable temperature and formed into shape through a mold. This process can be achieved either mechanically or pneumatically. See also VACUUM-FORMING.



<b>Thumbnail</b>	A type of rough sketch of a design made prior to developing more finalized presentations.
<b>Time Switch</b>	A switch which utilizes a clock or timer to automatically turn an electric sign on and off at set times each day.
<b>Tint</b>	A color made lighter than the original by adding white.
<b>Tone</b>	1) A result of mixing a pure color with any neutral/grayscale color including the two extremes white and black. By this definition all tints and shades are also to be considered tones. 2) A result of mixing a pure color with any grayscale color excluding white and black. By this definition a certain amount of white and black must have been added to the original color. Furthermore, the following is true: If changing the tonal value of a color, gray has been added (any ratio of mixture) to the original color.
<b>Touch Screen</b>	Computerized CRT or LCD screen directory, or information station, activated by touching the screen.
<b>Tracking</b>	The ability of a computer to add or subtract minute increments of space between letters throughout a single word or block of text. Should not be confused with kerning. See also LETTERSPACING.
<b>Transformer</b>	In electric signs, the mechanical or electronic component that changes voltage supplied to the sign into a higher or lower voltage necessary to run the sign.
<b>Translucence</b>	The property of a material such as glass, vinyl, paint, or ink that allows the passage of some light through it without being transparent.
<b>Triple Message Sign</b>	A type of sign consisting of rotating triangular louvers. The louvers turn in unison displaying three successive messages as each of the three faces are exposed, thus tripling the static communication power at one location.
<b>TTY</b>	Teletypewriter (originally), or a text display device, as used by the hearing or speech impaired to read voice communication converted to text by a Communication Assistant Device (CAD). Digital TTYS have largely replaced analog TDDs.
<b>Typeface</b>	The design of a given set of letters, numbers, symbols, and punctuation, without reference to its size or width. See also FONT.
<b>Typographic Terms</b>	Terminology associated with typesetting, as utilized in the sign industry: ascender, condensed, counter, descender, extended, flush, font, kerning, leading, letterspacing, line spacing, sans serif, serif, stroke width, tracking, typeface, word spacing, etc.
<b>Ultraviolet light (UV)</b>	That part of the light spectrum ranging from 185 to 450 nanometers. UV has several influences on the sign industry. When UV strikes certain surfaces, such as the phosphors in neon and fluorescent tubes, it is transformed into visible light. UV is used for curing some screen-printing inks and paints. UV light is the prime cause of pigment failure in some paints and vinyls, especially red colors.
<b>Underwriters Laboratory (UL)</b>	A nationally recognized private organization responsible for safety testing, and certification of, electrical devices, for fire rating materials and assemblies, and other related activities.

## U

## V

**Vacuum Forming** A process, for constructing a sign face, by which dimensional imagery and letters are created from a flat sheet of material. The material is heated to a pliable temperature and formed into shape through a mold from which air is drawn out of. The force from the vacuum presses the material against the contours of the mold, thus forming the desired dimensional shape(s).

**Value Engineering** Designing and developing a desired product or sign to be as inexpensive to produce as possible without sacrificing the quality or visual integrity of the final item.

**VHB  
(Very High Bond)** High strength double sided tape. The tape can be applied between parts to eliminate the need for mechanical fasteners or welds. This tape is available in many grades and thicknesses.

**Vinyl** Polyvinyl chloride (PVC) film that, in sign making, is backed with an adhesive that creates a strong bond to a surface when pressure is applied. Different integral colors are available with adhesives having varying levels of aggressiveness (adhesion) for various applications from permanent to semi-permanent to temporary.

**Vinyl letters** Letters cut from an adhesive-backed material, available in dozens of opaque, translucent, metallic, and transparent colors and patterns.

## W

**Wall Mount** A sign mounted on a wall. Another name for a WALL SIGN.

**Wall Sign** A interior or exterior sign painted on a wall or attached to the wall of a building.

**Water Resistant** Describing a sign, or sign face, that has been chemically treated to make it impervious to any damage or deterioration caused by water

**Waterjet Cutting** Computerized high-pressure stream of water used to cut stone and metal up to 2" thick. Also called "hydro-cutting."

**Wayfinding** The ability of a person to find their way to a given destination in a built, or planned, environment, using information provided through out that environment. This process can involve signs, colors, objects, materials, and architecture. The term can also be used to describe the process to establish or improve the function of a particular environment. Wayfinding is not a separate or different activity from traditional signage design, but rather a broader, more inclusive way of assessing all the environmental issues which affect our ability to find our way.

**Weathering Steel** A steel alloy that forms a tenacious, self-protecting rust layer when exposed to the atmosphere.

**Weed** The process of peeling extraneous file (vinyl or matrix) away from a plotter cut, leaving only the sections representing the final image or letter.

**Weep Hole** A small, water drainage hole, placed at the lowest point in the bottom of a fabricated letter or a sign cabinet.

**Wet Location Fixture** A watertight electrical or light fixture which is sealed to protect against moisture.

**Window Sign** A sign mounted for display in or on a window and viewed from the outside.

## X

**x-height** In any typeface, the height of the lowercase letters which do not have ascenders or descenders. Normally referring to the lower case x.

**Y**

**Yield**

<sup>1</sup> In vehicular traffic, a regulatory sign pertaining to traffic flow, conceding right of way. <sup>2</sup> In manufacturing, the amount of material utilized versus what is waste or discarded.

**Z**

**Zinc**

A malleable metal which has a gray appearance and can be used raw, or painted, in exterior applications.