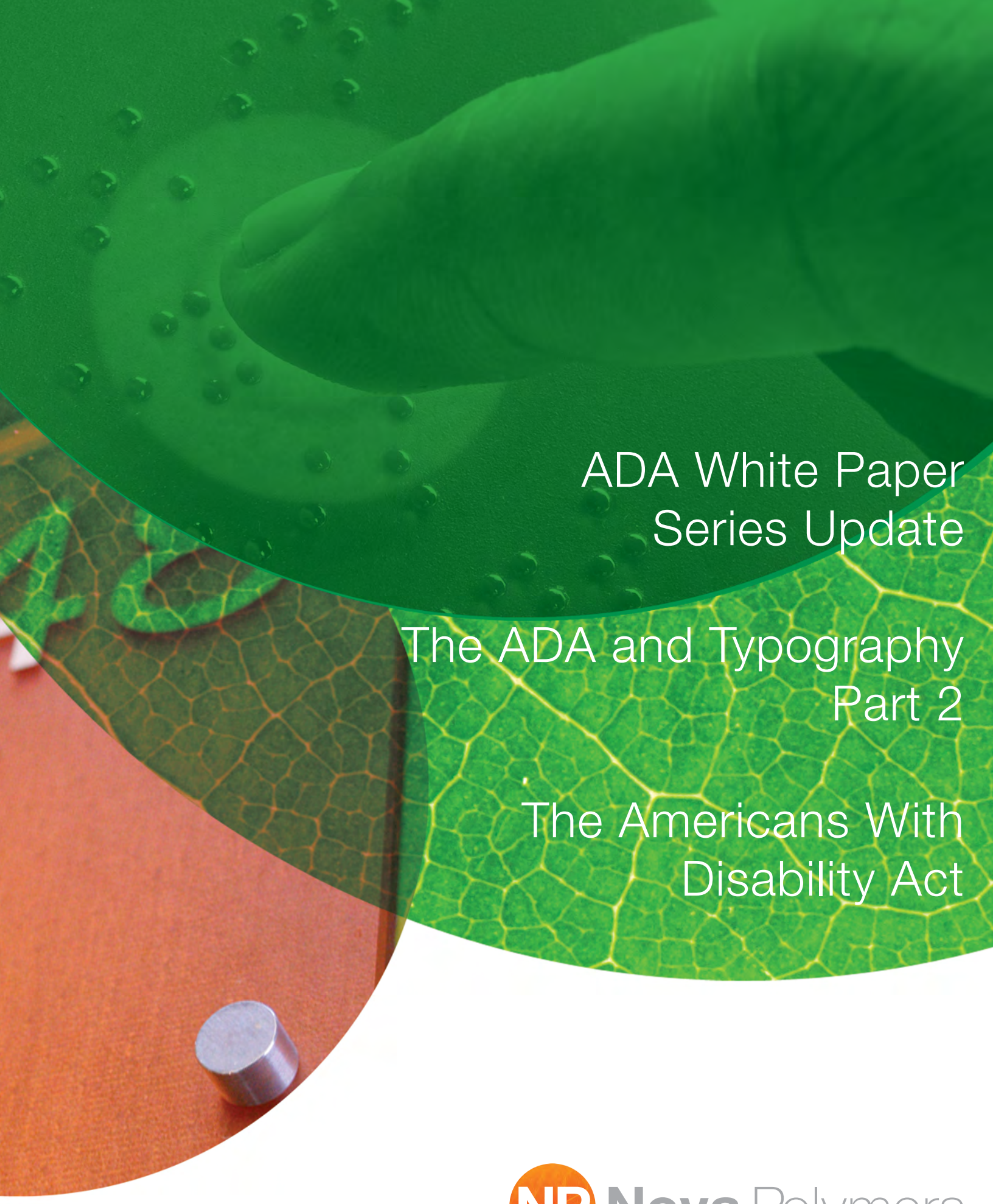


ADA White Paper Series Update

The ADA and Typography Part 2

The Americans With Disability Act

Nova Polymers

The ADA is designed for people that have a wide spectrum of visual impairments including blindness and visual impairments. In 2010 the ADA was updated to differentiate between the needs of the blind and the needs of the visually impaired. This was a substantial change, requiring different regulatory approaches for signs as well as delineating the specific places where signs for the blind need to be used. Type is the area where these differences are the most dramatic. This paper will focus on how type in the code was separated to handle the needs of distinct groups and how signs for these two groups can be brought together.

Placement and Hierarchy

ADA identification signs are not just meant to stand alone in the environment but be part of a hierarchy of visual cues that support navigation by the blind and visually impaired. The ADA has a series of specific rules that govern the placement of signs, as well as how information is meant to be displayed on signs. In this case it is important to understand when reading the ADA what the spirit of the guidelines are in addition to the letter of the standards. Like with visual and tactile characters the spirit of the ADA encompasses two mantras.

If You Do it Once You Do it Every Time

Although not explicit in the AD, consistency is good practice. If a sign message is a specific height or location, that height and location should be maintained for every sign. The blind require ruthless consistency to navigate.

The Blind and Visually Impaired Have Different Needs

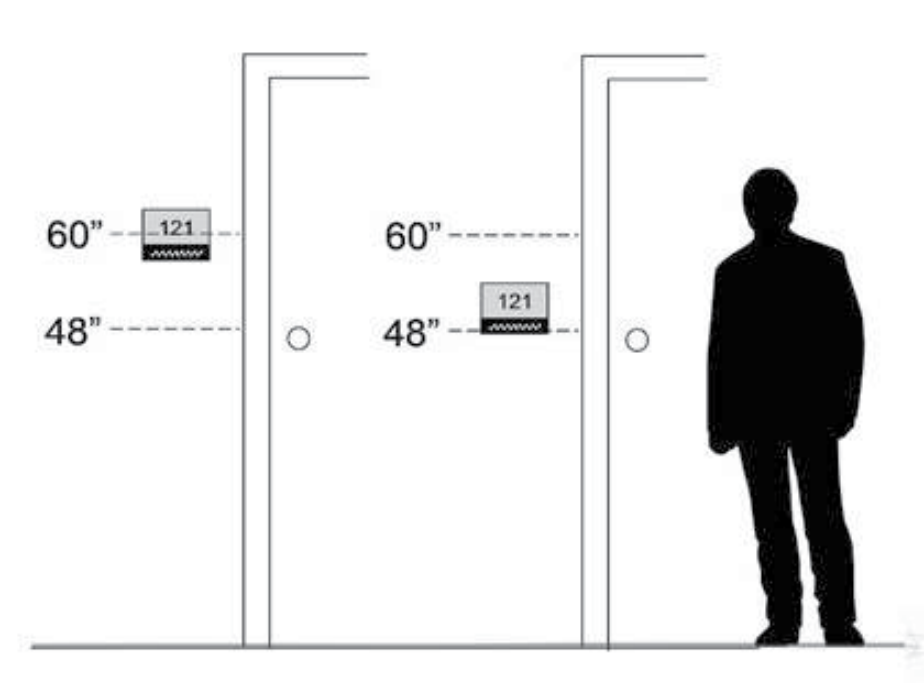
The blind read information through touch and need information to be attached to walls at consistent heights so they always know where the next sign in a series is. The visually impaired see signs best when perpendicular to their line of site and above their head. Particularly in large scale locations like airports and schools, multiple signs are often needed to make a more legible environment.

Sign Height

The height of signs are governed not by the sign itself but instead by the messages on the sign. This includes:

- Message heights can be between 48” from the bottom line of Braille to 60” to the bottom line of type. This means that there is only a 12-13” band to work inside of.
- In most public spaces used by adults, the top line of text should be as close to 60” as possible. For spaces used by children under 13, the bottom line of Braille should be close to 48”
- Braille must always be positioned directly below the tactile text with a minimum separation of 3/8”. There is no maximum separation, but most experts advise to keep the distance consistently between 3/8” and 1/2”.

- Though it is not mentioned directly in the ADA, it is implied that vertical text should not be used.
- Multiple lines of text is discouraged, but if used, there should be a 3/8” minimum separation between raised letters.



Message height is in a very narrow band.

Sign Height Recommendations

- Design signs with room numbers, messages, and Braille at consistent heights for every identity.
- Keep all sign messages in a corridor at a consistent height. This is especially true for room numbers.
- Keep room numbers separated from text on signs.

Specific Codes Governing Sign Message Height

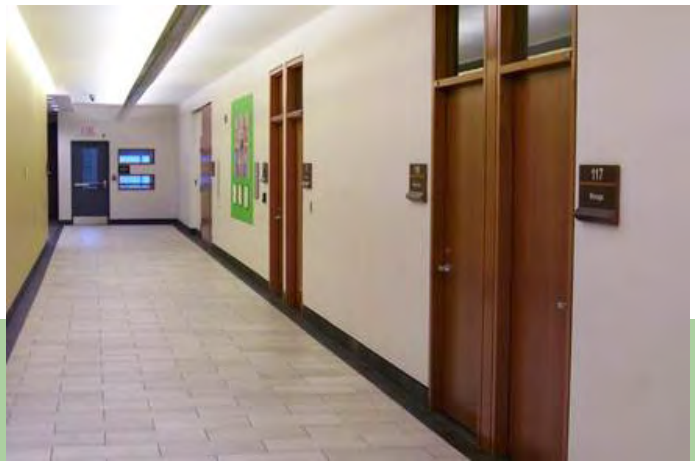
703.3.2 Position. Braille shall be positioned below the corresponding text. If text is multi-lined, braille shall be placed below the entire text. Braille shall be separated 3/8 inch (9.5 mm) minimum from any other tactile characters and 3/8 inch (9.5 mm) minimum from raised borders and decorative elements.

Consistent height and locations of information make signs easier to read

703.4 Installation Height and Location. Signs with tactile characters shall comply with 703.4.

703.4.1 Height Above Finish Floor or Ground. Tactile characters on signs shall be located 48 inches (1220 mm) minimum above the finish floor or ground surface, measured from the baseline of the lowest tactile character and 60 inches (1525 mm) maximum above the finish floor or ground surface, measured from the baseline of the highest tactile character.

Exception: Tactile characters for elevator car controls shall not be required to comply with 703.4.1.

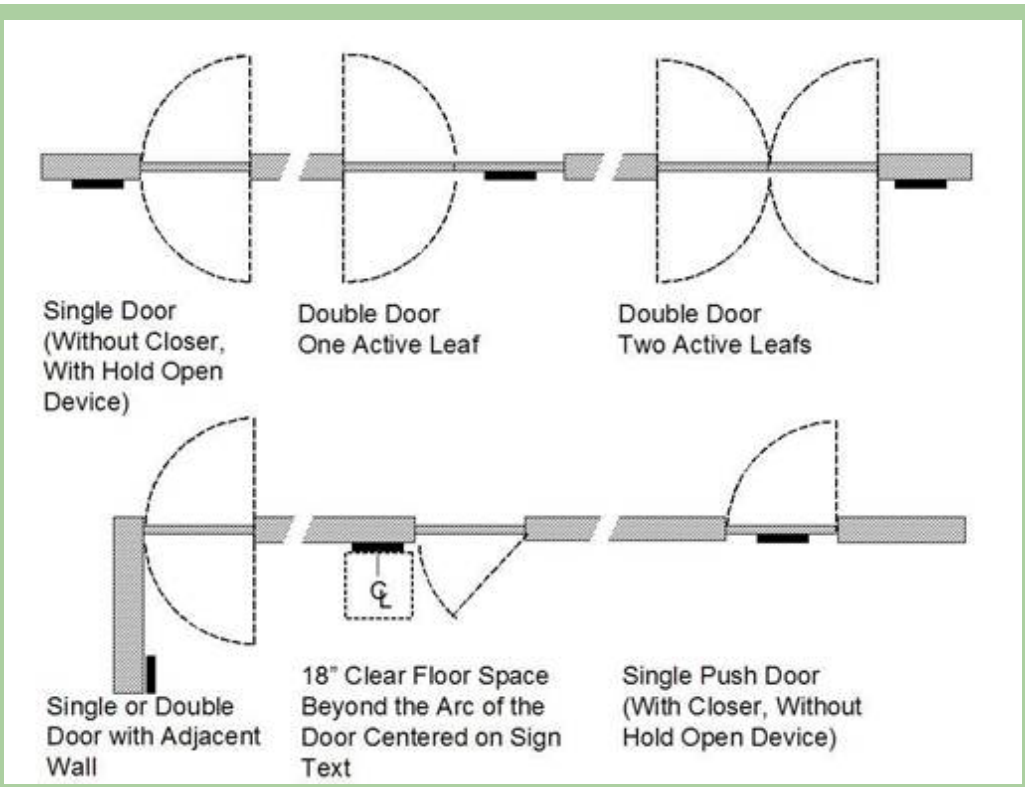


Signs in a hall should maintain consistent heights across all specific messages

Sign Location

Unlike sign heights, sign locations are based on the sign panel itself and not the information on the sign except in one or two conditions.

- Signs are always on the latch side of a single door.
- With two active double doors signs are always to the right of the right hand door.
- With double doors with one inactive door the sign is placed on the inactive door.
- With doors that open up from a wall the sign is mounted on the adjacent wall beyond the turning radius of the sign.
- Signs must behave 18” of clear floor space beyond the arc of an opening door centered on the text.
- Signs can be mounted directly on a push door without a hold open device.
- Signs must never project more than 4” off of a wall if they are between 27” and 80” in height.



Sign Location Recommendations

- Even though it is allowed in the code, it is wise to avoid mounting signs on any door that swings out, even if it is usually inactive.
- For restrooms, a sign on the door and an additional sign to the right of the latch supports identification at a higher level, particularly when it is very busy.
- For double active doors, signs on both sides creates a layer of redundancy that supports wayfinding.
- Even though the ADA code allows overhead identification and wayfinding signs to be 80" in height, 84" is more generally acceptable to avoid people hitting their heads.
- For locations with low ceilings, it is advisable to look at using wall mounted directional signs and directories instead of overhead signs.

For restrooms signs redundancy helps, particularly in busy locations

Specific Codes Governing Sign Location

4.4.1* General. Objects projecting from walls (for example, telephones) with their leading edges between 27 in and 80 in (685 mm and 2030 mm) above the finished floor shall protrude no more than 4 in (100 mm) into walks, halls, corridors, passageways, or aisles.

703.4.2 Location. Where a tactile sign is provided at a door, the sign shall be located alongside the door at the latch side. Where a tactile sign is provided at double doors with one active leaf, the sign shall be located on the inactive leaf. Where a tactile sign is provided at Wdouble doors with two active leafs, the sign shall be located to the right of the right hand door. Where there is no wall space at the latch side of a single door or at the right side of double doors, signs shall be located on the nearest adjacent wall. Signs containing tactile characters shall be located so that a clear floor space of 18 inches (455 mm) minimum by 18 inches (455 mm) minimum, centered on the tactile characters, is provided beyond the arc of any door swing between the closed position and 45 degree open position.

EXCEPTION: Signs with tactile characters shall be permitted on the push side of doors with closers and without hold-open devices.