



Nova White Papers – Accessibility Series  
**UNITED STATES**

# International Accessibility Standards:

## UNITED STATES

### Summary

The 2010 Standard for Accessible Design (SAD) became the American standard in March 2010, with all state and local codes having to be in compliance by March 2011. This civil rights legislation from the Justice Department is an update of the 1991 Americans with Disabilities Act Guidelines (ADAAG). The current standards are based on codes developed by the American National Standards Institute and the International Building Code and currently all are harmonized to be consistent with one another in most places. States and localities integrate the SAD into their own building codes which are enforced by local code officials or fire marshals. Some states including California have moved well beyond the national code with specific sign and enforcement requirements.

The 2010 guideline have three specific signage related areas: Section 216 which focuses on scope, section 703.2-703.4 which focuses on signs for the blind, and 703.5-703.7 which focuses on the needs of the visually impaired. The separation between the needs of the blind and those of the visually impaired is the leading innovation of the new standards.

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### 2010 Standard for Accessible Design (SAD)

#### Scope

- Tactile signs for the blind include all permanent identification signs (Rooms that cannot be changed in a 7 day period). For rooms with changing uses alphanumeric addresses can be used.
- Visual sign guidelines are required on all identification and wayfinding sign guidelines but are not required on directories, information signs, menu boards or maps. (This requirement is also for tactile signs)

#### Braille

- Grade 2 Braille is required on all signs with specific requirement for Braille spacing. California has more stringent requirements and this Braille is often used nationwide.
- Braille must be underneath tactile letters on the sign a minimum of 3/8" away from any raised surface.
- Braille dots must be domed or rounded and with a height between .025" and .037".

#### Tactile Characters

- Raised characters must be a minimum of 1/32" in height with a distance of a minimum 1/16" from the base of the characters and 1/8" from the top of the characters.
- Tactile characters must be a minimum of 3/8" from any tactile surface.
- Only upper case characters can be used.
- Characters must be sans serif with a stroke width where the uppercase letter "O" is 55 percent minimum and 110 percent maximum of the height of the uppercase letter "I". Characters cannot be italic, oblique, script, or highly decorative.
- Characters must have a width-to-height ratio between 3:5 and 1:1 and a stroke width-to-height ratio between 1:5 and 1:10.

- All tactile characters as well as the sign itself must be rounded or edged.
- Raised characters cannot be less than 5/8" minimum and 2" maximum.

### **Sign Height and Location**

- Signs should be installed on the wall adjacent to the latch side of the door. Where there is no wall space to the latch side of the door, including at double opening doors, signs should be sited on the nearest adjacent wall. Signs must be 2" from the door jamb with 18" clear floor space from the center of the sign.
- Signs cannot protrude more than 3" from the wall.
- Signs must be mounted a minimum of 48" off the ground to the bottom of the lowest raised letters and 60" to the top of the top raised letters.
- Signs protruding more than 3" must be a minimum of 80" in height.

### **Visual Characters**

- Characters and numbers on signs need to be sized according to the viewing distance and height above ground with a minimum 2" high for viewing conditions and additional character sized based on height and distance.
- Visual letters can be serif or sans serif and upper case or upper/lower case.
- Visual characters must be a minimum of 40" off the floor surface.

### **Color Contrast**

- All signs must have a light background on a dark surface or a dark background on a light surface.
- All sign characters must have a matte or a low gloss finish.

### **Dual Signs**

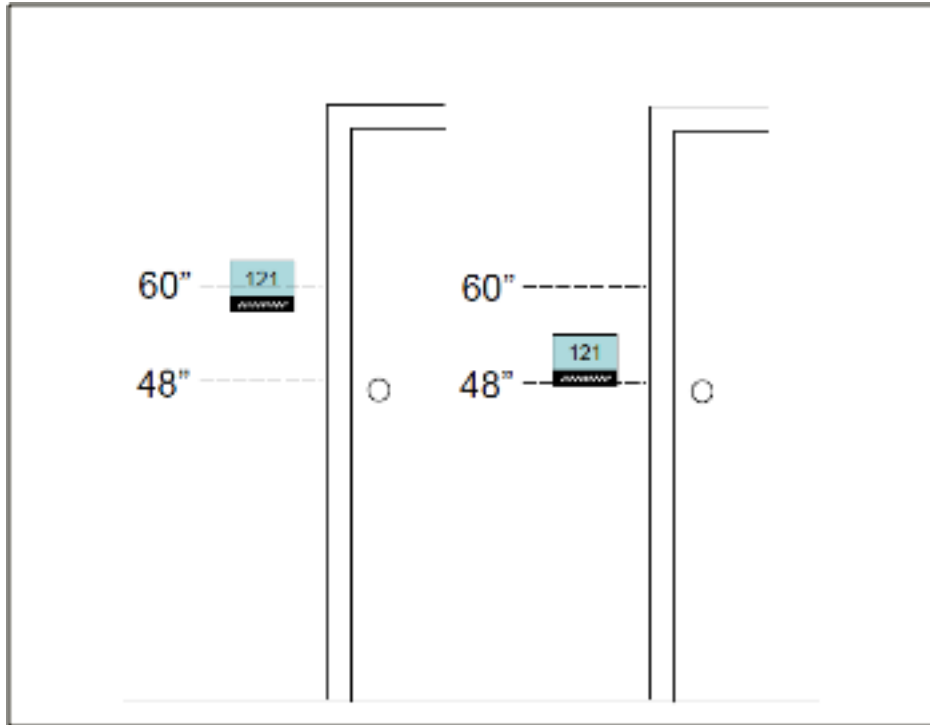
- Signs with both visual and tactile information are allowed. If both information is included tactile characters can be a minimum 1/2" and all characters and Braille can have no contrast.
- On dual signs visual characters can be any height above 40" but tactile characters must follow the 48-60" height standard referenced above.

### **Symbols and Pictograms**

- The international symbol of accessibility must be used to mark accessible areas.
- Symbols must be within a 6" field with text descriptors below.
- Symbols do not have to be tactile.

### **Design Recommendations**

- All states must be in compliance with the SAD but states and localities can add additional requirements.
- Permanent locations are often interpreted as places that are unable to change functions quickly like bathrooms, cafeterias, and auditorium rooms.
- The USACCESS Board is an organization that provides code interpretation and education on behalf of the justice department.
- Dual signs are allowed but not easily understood by code officials which may require greater education and interpretation.
- Character heights on visual signs beyond the minimum requirements are at the discretion and analysis of the designer based on the guidelines provided.
- Different methodologies are used for rounding or doming Braille.
- There is not contrast requirement for signs but a minimum LRV of 60% is recommended.
- Make sure to use the international symbol of accessibility with few changes in design.
- Additional innovations including tactile maps and detectable surface wayfinding are allowed but not included in the code.



Sign height and location



Sign details