

Signage Design — Workbook

This workbook turns the course into a real signage project you can hand to a fabricator. You will pick an actual building or floor plan, inventory its decision points, build a sign-type kit, size type for legibility, check every room sign against the ADA 2010 Standards, and assemble a biddable package of drawings, a message schedule, and a location plan. Work through one section per course module, and keep your three core documents reconciled as you go.

Wayfinding Foundations and the Sign Family

Choose a real space, map its circulation and decision points, and define a coded sign-type kit.

Exercise: Decision-point walkthrough

Pick a real building or floor plan you can access (your workplace, a clinic, a campus building). Walk it from the parking lot or street to one specific destination as a first-time visitor, narrating aloud or in notes every moment you hesitate. Drop a numbered dot on a plan at each entrance, lobby, elevator, stair landing, and corridor intersection.

- List every point where you had to choose a direction or guess where to go.

- Which of these decision points currently has NO sign, the wrong sign, or a confusing sign?

- Where are the long unsigned stretches that need a reassurance or confirmation cue?

- How many total decision points did you find, and roughly how many signs will that generate?

Worksheet: Sign-type kit definition

Define the small reusable kit of sign types for your project. For each type, fill in the row. Aim for 8 to 15 types total. Assign each a function-letter code (I, D, F, R) plus a sequence number.

Sign type name (e.g., Primary Directional)

Function letter (I / D / F / R)

Type code (e.g., D1)

Purpose / where it is used

Tactile + Braille required? (Yes/No)

Interior or Exterior

Estimated quantity

Checklist: Path hierarchy and coverage check

- I have classified every route as primary, secondary, or tertiary
- Primary paths get the largest and most frequent signs
- Each corridor intersection on a primary path has a directional sign
- Reassurance cues are planned roughly every 100 to 150 feet on long corridors
- Back-of-house and staff routes carry only minimal or regulatory signage
- Every sign type has a unique code that appears on my plan and schedule

Legibility, Type, and Colour at Distance

Size type from real viewing distances, choose a legible typeface, and verify contrast in greyscale.

Exercise: Letter-height calculation for your signs

For each of your most important sign types, physically measure (or estimate from the plan) the longest distance the sign must be read from. Apply the one-inch-per-25-feet comfortable-reading rule and verify with the 30x rule. Record your results in the legibility template provided with this workbook.

- What is the longest viewing distance for your primary directional sign, in feet?

- Dividing that distance by 25, what minimum letter height (inches) do you get?

- Does that height pass the 30x check (height times 30 should exceed the viewing distance)?

- Will any of these signs be read by someone moving (driving or walking fast), and how does that change your size and word count?

Worksheet: Typeface and hierarchy decisions

Lock in your type choices. Fill in each field with your decision and a one-line reason. Test your chosen face for ambiguous characters (capital I vs lowercase l vs numeral 1).

Chosen typeface and why (legibility traits)

Primary message cap height

Secondary message cap height

Primary-to-secondary size ratio

Tracking adjustment for large display text

Line spacing (leading) as % of cap height

Case used for long messages (sentence / title / caps) and why

Checklist: Contrast and colour verification

- Copy and background pair light-on-dark or dark-on-light
- Luminance contrast is at least 70 percent
- I converted the design to greyscale and the message still reads clearly
- No meaning is carried by colour alone
- Finish is matte or satin, never high gloss

- I checked the design under the actual installed lighting, not just a bright monitor
- Functional colours (e.g., green for exits) are used consistently, not decoratively

Accessibility and ADA Compliance

Identify which signs must be tactile, apply the dimensional rules, and verify mounting geometry.

Exercise: Permanent-space audit

Go through your message schedule and decide, for every sign, whether it names a permanent room or space. Mark each as Tactile+Braille required, Visual-only, or Regulatory/code-governed. Confirm which jurisdiction's accessibility code governs your project (federal ADA only, or a state code such as California Title 24).

- Which of your signs name permanent spaces and therefore require tactile copy and Grade 2 Braille?
- Which designations could change (tenant names, occupants) and therefore may be visual-only?
- Which signs are life-safety or regulatory and may be governed by the building code as well as the ADA?
- What state or local accessibility code applies on top of the federal ADA for your project location?

Worksheet: Tactile room-sign spec

For one representative room-identification sign, fill in every ADA-driven value. Use the ADA 2010 ranges: raise at least 1/32 inch, uppercase sans-serif, 5/8 to 2 inch character height, Grade 2 Braille at least 3/8 inch below, baselines mounted 48 to 60 inches above floor, latch-side placement.

Sign text (exact)

Tactile character height (5/8 to 2 in)

Raise height (min 1/32 in)

Font (uppercase sans-serif name)

Braille type (must be Grade 2 contracted)

Braille position (distance below tactile copy, min 3/8 in)

Lowest baseline mounting height above floor (min 48 in)

Highest baseline mounting height above floor (max 60 in)

Door-side placement (latch side / adjacent wall)

Clear floor space in front (min 18 in wide)

Checklist: ADA compliance walkthrough

- [] Every permanent-space sign has raised tactile copy at least 1/32 inch high
- [] Tactile copy is uppercase, sans-serif, 5/8 to 2 inches tall, not italic or decorative
- [] Grade 2 (contracted) Braille is included and positioned at least 3/8 inch below the copy
- [] Braille dots are domed/rounded, not flat raster dots
- [] Tactile baselines are mounted between 48 and 60 inches above the finished floor
- [] Room signs are on the latch side of the door with 18 inches of clear floor space
- [] Pictograms sit in a field at least 6 inches high with text and Braille below the field
- [] Visual characters meet the 70-percent contrast and non-glare finish requirements

Materials, Fabrication, and the Spec Package

Specify substrates and mounting, draw a spec sheet, and assemble a biddable fabrication package.

Exercise: Substrate and mounting selection

For each sign type in your kit, choose a substrate and mounting method matched to its exposure (interior climate-controlled vs exterior UV/weather) and weight. Justify exterior choices against UV, rain, freeze-thaw, and wind. Capture decisions in the material schedule template.

- Which of your signs are exterior, and what weather-rated substrate and fasteners will they need?

- Which interior signs can use acrylic or PVC and printed vinyl, and which need durable HPL/phenolic for high traffic?

- What mounting method does each type use (adhesive/VHB, standoffs, mechanical fasteners, post-and-panel, suspended)?

- Which exterior graphics need UV-stable ink or an over-laminate to avoid fading?

Worksheet: Mounting spec sheet fields

Draft the spec sheet content for one sign type. Fill every field, because anything left blank is something the fabricator will guess. Include both a front-elevation description and a side-section detail.

Sign type code

Overall dimensions (W x H x depth)

Substrate and thickness

Finish (matte / satin)

Colour callouts with exact references (Pantone / paint / vinyl numbers)

Typeface(s) and cap heights

Graphics application method (direct print / vinyl / subsurface / screen)

Mounting method

Fastener and wall-anchor type

Mounting height to a defined datum (e.g., baseline at 54 in AFF)

Side-section note (projection from wall, standoff/fastener placement)

Checklist: Fabrication package readiness

- Cover sheet states the code basis (ADA 2010 plus any state code) and a finishes legend
- One mounting spec sheet exists per sign type with elevation and section details
- The message schedule lists every sign by code with exact text and quantity
- The sign location plan places and codes every sign, keyed to the schedule
- All three documents reconcile (codes, counts, and text match across them)
- Editable artwork or a clear art-supply note is provided to the fabricator
- A prototype of one tactile room sign is requested before the full production run
- A site survey, proof approval, and punch-list walkthrough are built into the schedule

Your Action Plan

1. Select a real building or floor plan and walk it as a first-time visitor to build a numbered decision-point inventory.
2. Classify routes into primary, secondary, and tertiary paths and define an 8-to-15-type coded sign kit.
3. Measure the longest viewing distance for each key sign and calculate minimum letter heights using the 25-foot and 30x rules.
4. Choose a legible wayfinding typeface, set hierarchy ratios, and verify the design survives a greyscale contrast test.
5. Audit every sign for permanent-space status and confirm which jurisdiction's accessibility code governs the project.
6. Specify tactile copy, Grade 2 Braille, and 48-to-60-inch latch-side mounting for every permanent-space sign.
7. Select substrates, finishes, and mounting methods matched to each sign's interior or exterior exposure.
8. Draft a mounting spec sheet per sign type with dimensions, materials, colours, and a side-section detail.
9. Assemble the cover sheet, sign-type drawings, message schedule, and location plan into one reconciled package.
10. Send the package for a fabricator quote, request a tactile-sign prototype, and schedule survey, proof, and punch-list reviews.

