Wayfinding

Wayfinding is the organization and communication of our dynamic relationship to space and the environment. Successful design to promote wayfinding allows people to: (1) determine their location within a setting, (2) determine their destination, and (3) develop a plan that will take them from their location to their destination. The design of wayfinding systems should include: (1) identifying and marking spaces, (2) grouping spaces, and (3) linking and organizing spaces through both architectural and graphic means.

Architectural Wayfinding

There are five primary architectural wayfinding elements: (1) paths/circulation, (2) markers, (3) nodes, (4) edges, and (5) zones/districts. These, along with visual accessibility, are the design criteria for highly legible and comprehensible urban environments.

Architectural wayfinding systems use the design and organization of landscaping, urban amenities, and buildings as spatial indicators.

Figure 4.1c.1. This interior courtyard reveals the interior circulation of the building on every floor. Passageways, stairs, ramps, and elevators are identifiable from multiple vantage points allowing people to understand where they are going and how to get there.
Paths/Circulation

The circulation system is the key organizing element of a site or building. People use circulation systems to develop a mental map.

Guidelines:

- Develop a focal point and a system of circulation paths to help people understand where they are in the system.
- Distinguish paths with width/height, material, and color differences to assist in the comprehension of the circulation system. If color is used to determine circulation, avoid using the same set of colors for other purposes such as decoration.
- Use a system that has a repetition or rhythm to help people to determine intuitively where they are going and be able to anticipate destinations.
- Use circulation systems that lead people from node to node.
- Clearly distinguish places where the public is welcome and where access is restricted.
- Communicate the circulation system to the users when they enter. In particular, vertical circulation devices such as stairs and elevators should be intuitive and perceptible.
- In multi-story buildings, organize elements such as restrooms, elevators, and exits in the same location on each floor.
- Remember that people often do not comprehend the overall plan of circulation paths. Whenever possible, design layouts that enable people to identify where they are going well before they arrive.

Figure 4.1c.2. The close proximity of the stairs, elevator and entrance provides visitors with self-evident choices for vertical movement.

Figure 4.1c.3. This metal sculpture not only adds visual interest but also is an obvious marker to the entrance.
Markers

In wayfinding, a marker is an object that marks a locality. Markers such as arches, monuments, building entrances, kiosks, banners, artwork and natural features give strong identities to various parts of a site or building. They act as mental landmarks in the wayfinding process and break a complex task into manageable parts.

Guidelines:

- If possible, set up markers at focal points and at places that correspond to intersections.
- Consider locating the marker so that it is detectable from as many positions as possible. However, do not position the marker so that it physically interrupts the path of travel. In interiors, consider hanging markers from the ceiling.
- Add cues such as recesses, overhangs, and/or landscaping to mark entrances.
- When designing building exit markers, equate light cues with exit conditions.
- Locate emergency exits in places that people pass on a daily basis.
- Whenever possible, set up primary markers to incorporate tactile, sound, and visual indicators.
- Develop marker systems to make different parts of the site or building as noticeable and memorable as possible. Locate and design windows to enable detection of markers from inside.
- Consider the information desk or kiosk to be a key wayfinding marker.

Figure 4.1c.4. The awnings mark the entrance and protect patrons from rain, snow, and glaring sun.

Figure 4.1c.5. Subway maps such as this eliminate unnecessary information and present travelers with only the essential information needed to navigate the system.
Nodes

A node is a point at which subsidiary parts originate. People make decision points at nodes in paths. As a result, nodes should contain graphic and architectural information to assist with those decisions.

Guidelines:

- Think of wayfinding as a “connect-the-dots” activity and use only the information that is necessary at each node. Cluttering intersection points with too much information can confuse the user.
- Consider easy-to-understand node systems such as grids to help people establish a mental map of the wayfinding system.
- Use maps and graphic information to communicate the form of circulation only at primary rather than secondary nodes.
- Whenever possible, use visual, tactile, and auditory indicators at major decision-making points.

Edges

Wayfinding edges determine where an area begins or ends.

Guidelines:

- Design specific boundary areas, such as pathways and subway platform edges, for both visual and tactile detection.
- Introduce contrasting building floor textures and hardness to establish wayfinding edge conditions and to alert users to changes in height conditions.
- Mark the tops and bottoms of ramps and stairs to emphasize transition points.
Use tactile marking systems on handrails to inform people of changes in conditions – particularly potentially hazardous conditions (e.g., top step of stairs).

Zones/Districts

Wayfinding zones and districts are regions (either outside or within buildings) with a distinguishing character that assists in the general identification of place.

Guidelines:
- Identify each zone to be unique and memorable in its context.
- If possible, reinforce the identifying characteristics of the zone with signage prior to arrival in the zone.
- Identify zones in buildings with a letter prefix such as “A” or with the cardinal points of the compass (e.g., N-101 for North wing, room 101).

Graphic Wayfinding

There are four main categories of graphic wayfinding elements: (1) orientation, (2) directional information, (3) destination identification, and (4) situation and object identification.

Graphic information is the most direct way for people to find their location. Typical graphic wayfinding information includes systems made up of text, pictograms, maps, photographs, models, and diagrams. Visitors are required to observe, read, learn and comprehend these systems as they make their way through a site or building.

Guidelines:
- Be consistent with text and graphic devices and the location of...
signage throughout the system.

Use upper and lower case letters for highest legibility except in the case of single word signage.

To increase legibility, avoid single line spacing.

For best legibility, the space between words in signage is typically the lower case “e” of the given font.

Group information on complex signs to increase comprehension.

Use flush left, ragged right to achieve ease of legibility.

Display common rather than obscure or technical names (e.g., use Ear, Nose, and Throat rather than Otorhinolaryngology).

Avoid abstract or difficult to learn pictograms.

Whenever possible, use pictograms and text together for reinforcement.

In signage, use colors that are easily recognizable by name such as blue, orange, gray. Reserve the colors red, yellow, and green for public safety uses.

Use color combinations that have at least a 70% brightness differential.

Design lighting, windows and surfaces to prevent glare on signage.

Place signs within the cone of vision to increase detection and legibility.

Repeat information displayed for longer distance detection in a format for close detection.

Avoid blocking signage with building elements such as lights and air vents.

Figure 4.1c.10. The brightly colored pole contains an information phone to supplement the maps. It also marks the location of this information display to make it easier to find.

Figure 4.1c.11. Building maps should be accessible to people of all statures. This tactile map is tilted to help both standing and seated users access the information.
Orientation

Orientation devices such as maps, site plans, floor plans, building and floor directories are used to help people to develop a mental map of a large complex. This is typically the first level of graphic information given for decision-making in an unfamiliar setting. These devices should help people to determine where they are, where their destination is, and what the best route is to their destination.

Guidelines:

- Site and building plans should be oriented in the direction corresponding with the setting and orientation of the viewer.
- Provide a "you are here" symbol to help in orientation.
- Include key landmarks in the site or building plan.
- Provide text labels on maps that correspond to directional and destination signage.
- Use familiar or easy-to-learn pictograms to reinforce text and to bypass language-based information.
- Tilt maps and plans displayed for pedestrian use so that people of all statures and those who are seated can access them.
- Place information desks near building maps and directories so that attendants can use them to explain directions to visitors.
- Place exterior map signage in locations that are legible from a parked vehicle. Require a pullover area out of the way of moving traffic to access the map.
- Provide a talking sign system in complex buildings where providing assistance is neither desirable nor feasible.
- For building directories, provide visitors with level and room numbers for all destinations, listed alphabetically.

Figure 4.1c.12. Talking signs are positioned at wayfinding decision-making points throughout this building. They communicate locations to users through hand-held receivers.
Avoid all upper case text in directories to increase legibility.

On each level, provide a map of that level with room numbers and tenants identified. Orient the map with the floor plan and include key markers for the level.

Display hours of service in a prominent area near or on the building entrance as well as in the vestibule area.

**Directional Information**

This type of signage guides people along a route to a destination, and is given after they have had the chance to orient themselves to the general setting. Most often this includes signs with arrows and elevator button panels.

**Guidelines:**

- Keep the font size consistent. Use font weight to determine the importance of information.
- Light letters on a dark background appear larger than dark letters on a light background and therefore are recommended for directional signage.
- Maintain consistency of arrow styles and use throughout the system. Consider the plain language option of “straight ahead” instead of an arrow pointing up or down to avoid confusion with “upstairs” and “downstairs.”
- Avoid more than five messages and five lines of text in a single directional sign.
- Use familiar or easy-to-learn pictograms to reinforce text and to bypass language-based information.
- Emphasize information offered in directional signage with architectural indicators such as wall graphics or landscaping that lead to the destination.

*Figure 4.1c.13.* Like subway maps, tactile maps abstract information to convey the major elements of the building, complex, or site.
Supplement directional information with maps at key decision points to reduce the amount of directional signage.

Place signs in transitional areas to reassure people that they are on the correct route.

Place call buttons at levels that can be reached by all people, seated or standing, and employ multi-sensory systems to indicate “up” and “down.”

Position elevator panels so that all people can easily reach them.

Include tactile and high contrast floor numbers.

Display easy to understand identifiers next to control buttons on elevator panels. For example, place a star symbol next to the number “1.”

Clearly identify floor levels and their uses (e.g., entrances to the complex, offices, concourse, parking) in elevator lobbies and at the tops of ramps, stairs, and escalators.

Design all routes to destinations so they are usable by all people.

In intersections, place signage to ensure that those coming from all directions can detect the information.

Use interactive multi-sensory systems at key decision-making points to provide more information and flexibility than is possible in a static signage system.

If there is more than one entrance to a building, provide directions to the information desk at all secondary entrances.

Figure 4.1.c.14. People of all statures should be able to reach even the top elevator buttons. These buttons are large with destinations and functions clearly indicated in several forms including raised letters and Braille.
Destination Identification

This graphic information is provided at the point of destination. Typically it includes building signage, floor numbers, and room identifiers.

Guidelines:

- Use outdoor signage to identify all buildings by name. Locate signs for legibility from both roadways and pathways.
- The numbering system used in buildings should be intuitive and simple. For example, in multi-story buildings, all room numbers should correspond to their floor number (e.g., B1 or -1 for the basement, 101, 102 for the first floor, 201, 202 for the second, etc.). Even numbered rooms should be on one side of double loaded corridors and odd numbered rooms should be on the other side. Avoid splitting even and odd numbers for different wings.
- Make floor numbers detectable at each entrance.
- Place room number signs beside doors so that they can be easily detected when the door is open.
- Public amenities (e.g., restrooms) and restaurants should be identified with pictograms, text, and Braille.

Situation and Object Identification

This graphic information informs visitors about situations such as local hazards, changes of status (e.g., train schedules) and identifies objects such as fire extinguishers.

Guidelines:

- Use a public address sound system with accompanying visual
information on dynamic signs to inform people of specific information and emergency conditions.

- Use dynamic signage (e.g., an LED display) in situations when information continually changes.
- In emergency situations, use repetition of cues (e.g., connect audible alarms to visual signs).
- Use pictograms, text, and color-coding to label all emergency equipment.
- Use standard signage shapes for specific purposes (e.g., circles for regulation, squares and rectangles for identification, and triangles for warning).
- Use standard signage colors for specific purposes (e.g., yellow for warning signs, red for emergency signs or devices, and green for life protection equipment or facilities signs).
- All information desks and kiosks should be identified with signage.

Figure 4.1c.17. Large text, pictograms, lights, alarm identifiers and color coding are effective ways to help everyone find emergency devices and directions.