



◀ Have park signs convey a clear, simple meaning.

Designing, specifying signs for use in public parks

by Dr. Arthur H. Mittelstaedt, Jr.

Playground signs are most effective when they command attention and are easily understood.

■ To be effective, a sign is a control device and should meet five basic requirements:

- 1) fulfill a need;
- 2) command attention;
- 3) convey a clear, simple meaning;
- 4) command the respect of users; and
- 5) give adequate time for proper response.

To ensure that these requirements are met, the critical factors are design, location, operation/maintenance and standardization. The following recommendations should be considered in sign design:

Text—The statements on a sign should comply with the following guidelines:

- 1) Use simple, easily understood statements.
- 2) Bold print is a must.
- 3) Use short sentences.

- 4) Use short words.
- 5) Avoid excess words.
- 6) Limit fancy lettering.

Symbols—A pictograph is simply a symbol which is part of a recognized or accepted system of symbols, like handicapped and no smoking pictographs. Symbols are perceived faster than words and are especially effective with children, and where there are language, social and cultural barriers.

The following guidelines are important considerations:

- 1) The symbol should never be used alone where it might not communicate the full danger. Explanations are required.

Signage colors, three levels



- 2) The symbol should not be complex.
- 3) Each symbol should be so unique that it will not be confused with another symbol, particularly precaution or prohibition pictographs.
- 4) The symbol must be competently drawn and executed.
- 5) The symbol must be used in the proper sign shape and proper colors must be used.
- 6) The symbol and words should be in close proximity to one another.
- 7) The symbol should express the full nature of the precautions or prohibitions involved.
- 8) The symbol should accompany the proper word choice: "danger" has a greater effect than "warning" or "caution."
- 9) The symbol could be used in conjunction with the three precaution words. Effective warnings in level of seriousness would be:

Danger: high voltage

Warning: submerged obstacles

Caution: sharp edges

Colors—The universally-recognized colors on signage are:

- red = danger
- orange = warning
- yellow = caution

The suggested colors are within the color tolerance limits specified by the United States Department of Transportation Color Tolerance Charts and the ANSI Standard Z535.1 ("American National Safety Color Code").

On instruction signs, lettering can be black. If a safety notice message, it can be green. If it is an information message such as "hospital" or "doctor," it can be the color light blue. If it is emergency aid service or equipment, it can be red. The standards should be further consulted for other colors.

Shape—The universally-recognized shapes are the square for use of the permission or prohibition symbol; the diamond for caution; the octagon for stop, along with the square with the horizontal bar (do not enter). Other shapes have also been standardized.

The specification for signs should follow the CSI format. The adjacent specification is an example of park signage being used in Nassau County, New York.

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A sample signage spec sheet

■ Here is how the Nassau County Parks Department specifies its signage:

PLAY AREA ENTRY SIGN

1. Description—Under this item, the contractor shall furnish and install sign panels and sign supports in accordance with the plans and specifications.

2. Materials—All materials shall be of the best or top grade product for each particular item required herein.

Sign panels for both A & B signs shall be .125 (1/8) inch aluminum sheets cut to the dimensions specified.

Sign panels shall be painted with white ScotchCal on surfaces dry and cleaned free from all dirt, grit, grease and other foreign substances.

Sign panels shall have painted letters, Nazadar screen processing, #59-144, medium green synthetic gloss enamel available from (name of supplier, address, phone number), or approved equal, on a white background. Letter size shall be helvetica bold upper case or otherwise sized as per plans.

Posts

The posts shall be 4x4-inch 100 percent recycled plastic lumber as manufactured by (name of supplier, address, phone number), or approved equal. Color to be gray. Height and length shall be as shown on the drawings.

The posts in footings or on the ground shall be treated with an approved bitumasitic coating.

Footings

Footings shall have a minimum depth of three feet and a minimum diameter of 12 inches, or as shown on the footing schedule, or as directed by the engineer. All concrete shall conform to item #18 Class B Concrete for Structures, but shall be included in the price bid for each item.

Construction

The work shall be accomplished in a workmanlike manner.

All signs shall be level and plumb and withstand outdoor elements.

Hardware

Bolts, nuts, washers and all other hardware shall be hot-dipped galvanized, tamper-proof steel.

Text

1. PLAY STRUCTURES

- No climbing down if anyone is in the way
- No bumping another climber

- No jumping off play structure
- No one-handed climbing
- No pushing, shoving or crowding

2. SWINGS

- No standing on swings
- No swinging with more than one person at a time
- No swinging with one hand
- No swinging empty swings
- No jumping off or baling out
- No walking or sanding near to a moving swing
- No twisting chains

3. SLIDES

- No head first
- No two together
- No sliding on back
- No standing or climbing on side
- No kneeling on slide
- No jumping
- No dangling arms or legs
- No sliding backwards or spinning around
- No sliding askew
- No dragging feet

4. SPRAY/PLAY AREA

- No running
- No pushing or crowding
- No blocking spray
- No sitting or standing on or over spray nozzles
- No climbing
- Do not drink the water

5. SAND BOX/SPACES

- No glass or sharp objects
- No throwing
- No eating in area
- No removing sand

6. ROCKING SHOVELING/MOVING DEVICES

- No pulling or pushing
- No doubling up
- No standing near
- No placing feet or hands near moving parts
- No standing or sitting on handles or foot rests

3. Method of measurement—The quantity to be paid for under this item shall be per each unit or sign for Sign Type A and each unit or sign for Sign Type B and other designated sign types, including posts, hardware, excavation, grading, backfill, concrete footings and painting, furnished and installed in accordance with the plans, specifications and directions of the engineer.

4. Basis of payment—The unit price bid for each unit or sign shall include the cost of furnishing, lettering, installing concrete footings and all other work including labor materials, equipment and all incidentals necessary to complete the work.

— Dr. Millestaedt



Kids want to play, not read. Let the symbols do the talking.

Photo courtesy of Landscape Structures, Delano, Minn.