

# Sensory Trust information sheet

## Steps

Steps are not always considered as a common feature within a landscape. They can often be used to resolve safety issues when steep slopes can become dangerous in wet conditions. They are also often found on the approach to buildings and facilities.

It is important to keep in mind that whilst ramped or sloped access, in both formal and rural settings, is important for some people (for example wheelchair users), others such as some disabled people and older people, prefer steps. The ideal is to provide a choice of both.

Consider options for improving existing steps through the addition of handrails, repair of damaged fabric and, if appropriate, tactile indicators on approach and highlighting nosings to improve their visual contrast.

Steps should be maintained regularly; repairing surfaces and removing any potential trip or slip hazards. Overhanging foliage should also be kept trimmed back.

The design of steps and materials used can vary from site to site. However, there are key principles that are important to improving step access; they should be clearly visible, of accessible height and depth and have handrails for support. Details of the technical specifications required for accessible steps can be found on a number of websites. (See the links page on our website).

Lengthy flights of steps should be interspersed with level resting areas that should include seating or at the very least a resting perch. Use of steps can be very tiring for people with limited stamina so it is also helpful to provide seating nearby.

Careful design of steps is important to ensure that they are as accessible as possible. The following notes are intended as a basic guide and not as detailed specifications. In the UK, it is essential



that any design meets current Building Regulations.

### Dimensions

Step riser: Maximum 150mm, avoid open risers.

Step tread: Minimum 300mm.  
(Walking frame users: riser max. 100mm; tread min. 550mm).

Steps with shallow risers can cause problems and are best avoided, 100mm being the absolute minimum.

The nose of a step should ideally be rounded (6mm radius) without any overhang.

Resting platforms, or landings, of

approximately 1.8m should be provided for each 1.2m flight of steps.

## Step series

Steps should be uniform within a series, with consistent risers and treads. Maximum rise per flight of steps: 1.2m.

A flight of stairs should have a minimum of 3 steps, any less and it becomes unsafe.

## Step design

Steps should contrast visually with their background. Use paint or contrasting materials to highlight step nosings.

Highlights should be at least 55mm deep and extend the full width of the step on both the tread and riser.

## Hazards

Single outdoor steps are easily overlooked and should be avoided. If unavoidable ensure that visual contrast is strong.

Ramped steps, angled steps and spiral stairs are difficult for most people to use.

## Warnings

Use textured surfaces on the approaches to the top and bottom of steps to provide warnings for people with visual impairments.

## Handrails

A handrail should be provided on each side of the flight of steps. Notches towards the ends of the rail will alert visually impaired visitors that the steps are about to finish.

## Drainage

Steps should have a slight cross-fall to shed water.

## Materials

Use materials that give a non-slip, firm and level surface. Avoid materials that reflect light and give high glare.

## Maintenance

Regular safety checks and routine maintenance are essential.

### In brief

- 1 Provide a choice of steps and ramps
- 2 Keep steps regularly maintained
- 3 Materials for steps need to be non-slip and non-reflective
- 4 Break up lengthy flights with rest points or landings with seating
- 5 Provide handrails



## Sensory Trust

The Sensory Trust promotes and supports the creation and management of outdoor spaces that can be used and enjoyed by everyone, regardless of age or ability.

Visit [www.sensorytrust.org.uk](http://www.sensorytrust.org.uk) or contact:

Sensory Trust c/o Eden Project  
Bodelva, Cornwall.  
PL24 2SG

Tel: +44 (0)1726 222900

Fax: +44 (0)1726 222901

Email: [enquiries@sensorytrust.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@sensorytrust.org.uk)

The Sensory Trust is a registered charity (No. 1020670) and a company limited by guarantee (No. 02811046)

