



## Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Furniture Considerations

Universal Design and ADA considerations require thoughtful planning to ensure educational spaces work for all types of students throughout the day. When designing educational spaces, it is essential to lead with Universal Design, ensuring environments are usable, accessible, and inclusive for all students, regardless of ability. By proactively incorporating ADA requirements, schools can create spaces that promote equity, flexibility, and full participation.

From classrooms to collaboration areas, furniture and layouts should support diverse learning needs, allowing every student to engage comfortably and independently. Accessibility should be considered from the start—creating welcoming, functional spaces where every student feels supported and able to participate with confidence.



### FAQ

#### **Q: What is ADA?**

**A:** The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a civil rights law, enacted in 1990, aimed at preventing discrimination against and providing equal opportunities for individuals with disabilities. Concepts related to workplace design are most comprehensively covered in Title II (Public Services) and Title III (Public Accommodations) of the ADA.



Universal Design helps make furniture usable for all—from early learners to older students, including those with disabilities—making spaces welcoming, functional, and supportive of every student’s learning experience.

### **Q: Can a product be ADA-certified?**

**A:** Though products can be designed to meet ADA guidelines, the federal government does not issue approvals or certify specific products as ADA-compliant, nor does any other body. The application, placement, and surroundings of the product within the space impact accessibility and usability. Any company “certifying” products to the ADA is providing information about the product only based on its own interpretations.

Buildings and workspaces can be determined to be compliant when assessed by the federal government, though this typically happens only if there is a complaint. Consultants and experts not associated with the federal government can be helpful interpreting and implementing ADA regulations and may show a “good faith effort” has been made to meet the regulations, however they do not have the ability to “certify” spaces.

### **Q: What things do designers need to consider for ADA?**

**A:** Universal Design and ADA considerations require attention to many aspects of use including, but not limited to clearance requirements (heights, depths, and widths), ease of approachability and maneuverability within the space, and the ease of manipulation of knobs, handles, or adjustments. The interior spaces should be considered, as well as the entrances, parking areas, and restrooms.

The 2010 ADA Standards for Accessible Design specifically state furniture that is not fixed to a floor or a wall is not subject to these standards.

This is the case because product dimensions are not the only consideration for accessibility. Holistic consideration of universal usability includes attention to where the product is placed, and consideration of clearances, maneuverability throughout the space, and approachability. ADA-related assessments are individualized and generally involve the employee, the employer, and the health care provider.

### **Q: What are the ADA requirements for classroom furniture?**

**A:** Classrooms must have accessible desks, seating, and pathways that accommodate students with disabilities, ensuring at least 5% of seating and tables are accessible.

### **Q: Are all classrooms required to have accessible seating?**

**A:** Yes, all classrooms must provide accessible seating options that allow students with disabilities to fully participate.

**Q: Does HON educational furniture meet the ADA design requirements?**

**A:** Many HON products include features allowing for adjustment to an individual's needs or comfort level—whether the individual is disabled or interested in using ergonomics to reduce the risk for development of a work-related musculoskeletal disorder. At HON we focus on designing products that are universal and inclusive for all.

**Q: What things are important to know when specifying workspaces, tables, or desks?**

**A:** Although table dimension considerations alone are not sufficient to comply with ADA standards, designers should be aware of standards including, but not limited to:

- Height of surface between 28" and 34" above the finished floor
- Depth clearance of 25" or more under the workspace
- Width clearance of 30" or more

Designers should consider how the furniture fits into the entire space, including approach, clearance, and maneuverability.

**Q: What is the proper desk height for wheelchair accessibility?**

**A:** The writing surface should be 28 to 34 inches high, with 27 inches of knee clearance underneath. Height-adjustable desks can support a wider range of student needs.

**Q: Should accessible desks be placed in a specific location in the classroom?**

**A:** They should be placed in a variety of locations, allowing students with disabilities to sit where they feel comfortable and fully engage in the class.

**Q: What are the ADA requirements for lab tables in STEM classrooms?**

**A:** At least one lab station per classroom must be accessible, with a counter height between 28-34 inches and 27 inches of knee clearance. Lab equipment should be within reach (maximum 48 inches high).

**Q: What are the accessibility requirements for library tables and study nooks?**

**A:** At least 5% of tables or study spaces must be accessible, with appropriate knee clearance and reachable bookshelves (maximum 48 inches high).

**Q: How can flexible seating be designed to be ADA-inclusive?**

**A:** Use a mix of seating options, including chairs with armrests, adjustable-height tables, and wheelchair-accessible spaces, ensuring all students can engage comfortably.

**Q: What furniture considerations should be made for students with sensory sensitivities?**

**A:** Use adjustable and flexible seating, tactile elements and fidgeting furniture allowing for movement, low-glare lighting, sound-dampening materials, and furniture with smooth edges to create a comfortable environment.

**Q: What are the ADA requirements for collaborative seating arrangements?**

**A:** At least 5% of seating must be accessible, including tables with knee clearance (27 inches min.), and pathways at least 36 inches wide for easy maneuverability.

**Q: What accessibility considerations should be made for technology-integrated collaboration areas?**

**A:** Interactive screens and whiteboards should be mounted at an accessible height (48 inches max.), with touchpoints reachable by students in wheelchairs. Cables and power outlets should be safely positioned to avoid tripping hazards.

**Q: How can makerspaces be designed to be accessible for all students?**

**A:** Workstations should include adjustable-height tables, accessible storage (15-48 inches high), and tools adapted for individuals with limited dexterity. Pathways should be wide enough (36-60 inches) for students using mobility aids.

**Q: Where can I go to find more information?**

**A:** The 2010 ADA Standards for Accessible Design and other information about the Americans with Disabilities Act can be found at [ADA.gov](https://www.ada.gov). There is also an information line which can provide answers to specific questions, found here: <https://www.ada.gov/infoline/>