

Electrical Terms

for Homeowners

AFCI - Arc Fault Circuit Interrupter is a circuit breaker designed to detect an errant electrical arc and terminate power before starting a fire.

Dedicated Circuit - A circuit provided for the exclusive use of an appliance or component such as a sump pump or sprinkler system.

Double Tapping - Adding or "doubling" wires at fuse or breaker connections for the purpose of increasing the number of circuits available to the electrical system. Most breakers are designed for one wire attachment. Double tapping is not allowed by electrical code and can be a serious safety issue unless such breaker is intentionally designed for multiple wire connections.

Drip Loop - Overhead Electrical Service. Refers to the slack in the electrical wires as they arrive at the roof masthead, which if configured properly, will prevent water from running into the conduit.

Electrical Service Rating - Refers to the amperage rating supplied to the home, typically 100, 125, 150, or 200 amps.

GFCI or GFI - Ground Fault Circuit Interrupter is an electrical current monitoring device designed to detect a ground fault in as little as 1/40 of a second, subsequently stopping the flow of electricity. These are required in bathrooms, garages, kitchens, laundries, exteriors and more. GFI circuits are designed to prevent electrocution.

Grounding - The process of connecting electrically conductive items to the earth by various means, which then ensures excess or errant electrical current will be absorbed into the ground. We often refer to driven rod grounding or water service pipe grounding.

Grounded Outlet - An electrical outlet with a ground wire that is connected to the grounding system. Usually identified by the round hole beneath the two vertical holes in the outlet, though no guarantee grounding is present unless properly tested.

Junction Box - A box used to protect wire connections or "junctions" in an electrical circuit. The box can be metal or plastic, but must be covered to prevent electrocution.

Main Panel - A metal box holding overload protection devices and/or disconnects for the home's electrical branch circuits.

Main Disconnect - Fuse(s) or breaker(s) that alone or together stop the entire flow of electricity to the home. Usually located in a service box or main panel.

Reverse Polarity - A condition of reversed wiring. Remember the hot wire, usually black in residential wiring, should be wired to the small slot in an electrical outlet and the neutral wire, usually white, should be connected to the large slot. Another way to remember, black wire to brass connection, white wire to silver connection.

Some homeowners are not afraid to tackle any sort of electrical fix or upgrade in their homes. Others would rather not deal with their electrical systems at all. But one thing is certain, no matter how comfortable you are with electricity, *all* homeowners should have a basic understanding of electrical terms and components in their home, not only to serve as valuable knowledge when working with electricity, but to keep the home safe as well.

At the left are some basic electrical terms all homeowners should know. These terms may also come up on a home inspection or in a home inspection report, so if you are currently in the process of buying a home, be sure to keep this list handy!

