

5.2 Identifying Graffiti

Wikipedia: Graffiti (singular: graffito) is writing or drawings that have been scribbled, scratched, or sprayed illicitly on a wall or other surface in a public place. Graffiti ranges from simple written words to elaborate wall paintings, and it has existed since ancient times, with examples dating back to Ancient Egypt, Ancient Greece, and the Roman Empire.

If anything is done to a property without the owner's consent, it is considered vandalism. If the vandalism is in the form of stickers, paint, or ink, it is considered graffiti. The type of graffiti you will most likely encounter will be tags or amateur spray bombs.

Murals can often resemble graffiti because the style of graffiti has been mainstreamed by various cultures and it is wanted by some property owners. Murals will often have multiple colours and detail, which can be hard for people tagging at night to do when there is a threat of police or citizens in an area.

If you're unsure whether spray paint, or any other form of graffiti, is wanted on a property or not, it's probably worth contacting the building owner and finding out.

The smallest amount of graffiti can attract more graffiti, so a slap tag/sticker can and should be mentioned if you are providing a quote. If paint could be damaged from the glue residue a sticker leaves behind, it needs to be fixed, so don't ignore smaller items on a property.

Always walk around the entire property and look for more graffiti if you ever see one piece on a building. You'll be surprised at how much more you will find and how much larger the original quote is afterwards.

Types Of Graffiti

The following are brief descriptions of the various types of graffiti (found online through Caleb Neelon, aka SONIK, and his websites). These descriptions will help you have a common vocabulary with your staff, police, media, or with whoever else you are discussing graffiti and graffiti removal with.

Acid Etch: Can be found on any type of glass. It often will appear white and can be confused with a regular marker tag. When you attempt to clean it it may look as though it is being removed; however, once it dries it reappears. This is considered permanent damage and can be very costly for the property owner to replace the glass. The glass industry has machines that can grind down the glass to "buff" the etching. This is actually removing more glass to make everything appear smooth/clear.



Mural: This is a large-scale type of piece, done top to bottom on a wall; usually a large production involving one or two pieces and usually some form of characters. These take an extended period of time to produce and will often take multiple days to finish.



Piece: This is a graffiti painting, short for masterpiece. It's generally agreed that a painting must have at least three colours to be considered a piece. A piece takes much more time and effort to execute. The individual(s) who produce these often will plan it out and have a specific location chosen.



Poster: If a poster has been placed on a property without the consent of the property owner it is considered to be graffiti. Posters will often be put up with different types of tape such as masking, scotch, duct, or tuck tape. They may also be applied with glues or home-made pastes such as wheatpaste.



Scratchiti: This is when a person uses an object to scratch a design or signature into glass, or any other material that can be scratched. This is considered permanent damage and can be very costly for the property owner to replace the glass. Very similar to acid etching, but with different tools.



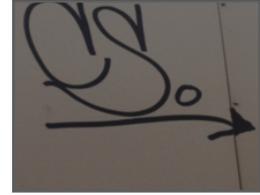
Spay Bomb: Graffiti that is usually larger than a tag and is executed with spray paint. These are usually done with one or two colours and may or may not be filled in. These take a little more time than a simple tag would, however they can still be executed fairly quickly.



Sticker or Slap Tag: A form of tagging that can be anything from computer-generated, clear, or generic blank stickers that have the tagger's name on them, to elaborate stickers with little pieces and characters. Some taggers consider stickers to be for people who are afraid to use markers/paint, while others use a combination of stickers with markers and paint.



Tag: The most basic and common form of graffiti, a person's graffiti signature with marker or spray-paint. These are found everywhere. They are very easy for the tagger to execute because they are often done within seconds. Due to how common they are, the title "Tagger" has become part of the name of people who do graffiti.



Styles

Within the different types of graffiti, there are slang words/vocabulary used by people who do graffiti. These aren't needed to be known in order to do anything with graffiti removal; however, it is good to know what they mean when talking to people about graffiti. Telling a coworker what a job-site is going to look like when they show up can help them prepare for time, tools needed, or what to look for.

The following are common words used in the graffiti world, but they evolve, change, and grow, in a cultural setting that doesn't have a playbook that needs to be followed.

Bite: Plagiarism

Bomb: Prolific painting or marking with ink. To cover an area with your tag, throw-ups, etc.

Bombing: To go out writing.

Bubble Letters: A type of graffiti letters, usually considered being an older (and sometimes outmoded) style. Often used for throw-up letters because of their rounded shape, which allows for quick formation.

Burner: A technically and stylistically wild style piece. Generally done in bright colours.

Character: A cartoon figure (usually, but not necessarily) taken from comic books, TV or pop culture to add humour or emphasis to a piece. In some pieces, the character takes the place of a letter in the word.

Crossing Out: To scribble or write on someone else's name. It is considered highly disrespectful.

Cutting Lines: A painting technique used on inside fills of letters and characters to get thin lines.

Design: Polka dots, checkers, stars, swirls, etc... are placed over the fill-in to enhance and compliment fill-in. Designs are limited only by a tagger's imagination or technical ability.

Drips: Stylized drips drawn onto letters to add effect. Although inept paint application causing unintentional drips is considered the mark of a toy (see Toy below). Stylized drips drawn on letters are acceptable and originated early on in New York subway graffiti.

Fade: Graduation of colours.

Hand Style: Handwriting or tagging style.

Mural: A large-scale type of piecing, done top to bottom on a wall. Usually a large production involving one or two pieces that takes more than a day to complete and involves some form of characters. They are often commissioned by building owners as a way to have graffiti on their building that they feel they have control over, or prevent more graffiti. This will most likely backfire on them as it appears to be graffiti and graffiti attracts more graffiti. Murals don't attract murals.

New School: Contemporary tagging culture within the past 10-15 years (approximately).

Old School: The writing culture prior to the past 10-15 years (approximately).

Outline: The skeleton or framework of a piece.

Final Outline: After fill-in and designs have been applied the outline is re-executed to define the letters.

Piece: A tagger's painting, short for masterpiece. It's generally acknowledged that a painting must have at least three colours to be considered a piece.

Roller Letters: Names rendered with tray of paint and a roller. Similar tools and techniques used to paint a house or any wall, but used to write a large tag.

Scratchiti: A media coined term for the scratchings rendered on windows, or any soft enough material that can be etched.

Scrub: A certain type of throw-up (usually two colours) that is filled very quickly with back-and-forth lines, rather than filled in solid.

Stickers: A form of tagging with stickers that have the writer's name or designs on them. Multiple pages of stickers can be pre-made, so they will often appear in a large volume when they are used.

Throw-Up: Over time, this term has been applied to many different types of graffiti. It can be a name painted quickly with one layer of spray paint, or bubble letters of any sort, not necessarily filled in. Throw-ups can be one or two letters, a whole word, or a roll call of names. They often incorporate an exclamation mark after the word or letter and are generally only one or two colours.

Top-To-Bottom or (T to B): A piece that extends from the top of the property to the bottom.

Wall Paper: Repetition of a tag with enough coverage that a pattern develops, much like wallpaper.

Wildstyle: A complicated construction of interlocking letters. A hard style that consists of lots of arrows and connections. Wildstyle is considered one of the hardest styles to master and pieces done in wildstyle are often completely undecipherable to non-writers.