

Electrical Glossary for Property Management

Common Electrical Terms—In Plain English

You don't need to speak "electrician" to manage electrical work. Here are a few terms you're likely to hear when handling service calls, repairs, and property improvements.

Need Help Evaluating an Electrical Concern?

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Important Notice

This guide is intended as a general reference to help make common electrical terminology easier to understand. The explanations have been simplified for everyday use and may not reflect every technical, code-related, or site-specific application of a term. When discussing an electrical concern, you don't need to diagnose the problem or use technical terminology. Describe what you're seeing, hearing, smelling, or experiencing and allow a qualified electrical professional to determine the cause.

Common Electrical Terms

- **Ballast** - A component used in many older fluorescent and HID lighting systems.
 - * Why you'll hear it: If your property still has older lighting, failed ballasts may be a recurring maintenance item, and frequent failures may be a reason to discuss LED upgrades.
- **Circuit Breaker** - The device in an electrical panel that shuts off power to a circuit when there is a problem.
 - * Good to know: If one keeps tripping, repeatedly resetting it isn't the solution. Have the cause evaluated.
- **Conduit** - The tubing you see carrying and protecting electrical wiring along walls, ceilings, garages, carports, and exterior areas.
 - * Good to know: Crushed, broken, separated, or hanging conduit should be reported.
- **Dedicated Circuit** - A circuit intended for one specific appliance or piece of equipment.
 - * You may hear this when: Adding appliances, EV chargers, HVAC equipment, or other equipment with significant electrical needs.
- **Disconnect** - A switch or device used to shut off electrical power to specific equipment.
 - * You'll commonly see them near: HVAC equipment, pool equipment, pumps, and other property equipment.
- **Electrical Panel** - The box containing the circuit breakers that distribute power throughout a unit, building, or area.
 - * Good to know: When reporting a problem, a photo of the panel label or directory can sometimes be helpful (even without removing the panel cover).
- **Electrical Service** - The main electrical power supply and associated equipment serving a building or property.
 - * You may hear: "Service upgrade," especially when a property needs additional electrical capacity.
- **GFCI** - The receptacle with the TEST and RESET buttons, commonly found in kitchens, bathrooms, garages, and exterior areas.
 - * Good to know: If it won't reset or repeatedly trips, include that information in your service request.
- **Junction Box** - A protective box where electrical wiring connections are contained.
 - * Good to know: If you see one with a missing cover or exposed wiring, report it.

- **LED Driver** - A component inside or connected to many LED fixtures that helps the light operate.
 - * Why you might hear it: A technician may determine that the fixture's driver failed rather than replacing the entire light fixture.
- **Light Pole Handhole** - The small access opening near the bottom of many parking-lot light poles, usually protected by a cover.
 - * Good to know: If you see a missing cover or exposed wiring, don't reach inside. Report it
- **Load / Electrical Load** - Simply put, how much electricity equipment is demanding from the electrical system.
 - * You may hear this when: Adding EV chargers, new HVAC equipment, appliances, or other major electrical equipment.
- **Meter Bank** - A group of electrical meters serving multiple units, commonly seen at apartment communities.
 - * Why you'll hear it: Damaged or aging meter banks can turn into larger repair or capital-improvement projects.
- **Partial Power** - When some lights, receptacles, rooms, units, or portions of a building have power while others don't.
 - * When reporting it: Tell your electrician exactly what has power and what doesn't.
- **Photocell** - A sensor commonly used to turn exterior lights on when it gets dark and off when it gets light.
 - * Helpful tip: Instead of reporting "bad photocell," tell your electrician, "These lights aren't coming on after dark."
- **Receptacle / Outlet** - Two words for essentially the same thing in everyday property conversations. Electricians typically call the device you plug something into a receptacle.
- **Timer** - A control that turns lighting or equipment on and off according to schedule.
 - * Common issue: Exterior lights coming on too early, too late, or staying on during the day.
- **Troubleshoot** - Finding out why something electrical isn't working.
 - * Good to know: Troubleshooting identifies the problem. The repair might be solved immediately. The repair may require additional labor or materials once the cause is known.

A Few Phrases Worth Knowing

“We need to troubleshoot it.” → We need to find out what's actually causing the problem.

“The breaker isn't holding.” → The circuit breaker keeps tripping.

“We need access to the electrical room.” → Please make sure someone has the key before the technician arrives.

“It's a utility issue.” → The problem may involve equipment or power supplied by the electric utility.

“We recommend replacement due to existing condition.” → The equipment is already deteriorated, damaged, or otherwise in a condition that makes replacement advisable.

“Parts are obsolete.” → Replacement parts may no longer be readily available, which can make future repairs difficult or expensive.

“We need to verify capacity.” → Before adding new equipment, we need to determine whether the existing electrical system can support it.

“We found additional work.” → Troubleshooting uncovered something that wasn't visible or known when the original work was requested.

The Most Useful Electrical Term

Specific.

You don't need technical terminology to submit a good electrical service request.

Instead of “An electrical issue at Building 3,” tell us: “Building 3, second-floor hallway, four lights are out. The rest of the hallway lights are working.”

Instead of “Breaker problem,” tell us: “The breaker trips every time the resident turns on the microwave.”

Instead of “Parking lot photocell is bad,” tell us: “The parking lot lights aren't coming on after dark.”

Tell us what you observe. Let the electrician determine why it's happening.