

# Clue 4: Circulation

## What Circulation *Is* (and Isn't)

### Circulation is:

- The **pathways** people use to move through and within a space
- The **connections** between zones, rooms, and functions
- The **flow** that supports comfort, safety, and intuitive navigation

### Circulation is *not*:

- “Empty space”
- “Whatever space is left over after placing furniture”
- “Just hallways”
- “Aesthetic preference”

Circulation is **planned**, not accidental.

## Three Types of Circulation

### A. Primary Circulation

#### Definition:

Primary circulation is the **main movement route** through a space — the “highway” people use to get from one major area to another.

#### What makes it primary:

- Highest traffic volume
- Widest and most obvious path
- Connects major zones (entry → living room, lobby → elevators, classroom door → main aisle)
- Sets the overall flow and logic of the plan

#### Why it matters:

If the primary path is confusing or blocked, the entire space feels dysfunctional and can be unsafe.

#### Characteristics:

- Widest pathways
- Highest traffic
- Must feel intuitive and unobstructed

- Often define the *spine* of the plan

## B. Secondary Circulation

### Definition:

Secondary circulation consists of the **smaller, supporting pathways** that branch off the primary route and allow movement *within* a zone.

### What makes it secondary:

- Moderate traffic
- Connects sub-areas (sofa → reading chair, kitchen island → pantry, desks → whiteboard)
- Often shaped by furniture placement
- Must be efficient but not dominant

### Why it matters:

Secondary circulation determines whether a room feels comfortable, cramped, or intuitive to use.

### Other Examples:

- Between furniture groupings
- Around kitchen islands
- Between desks in a classroom
- From living room → hallway

### Characteristics:

- Moderate width
- Supports everyday movement
- Must be efficient but not dominant

## B. Tertiary / Functional Circulation

### Definition:

Tertiary circulation is the **micro-movement space** required for use of furniture, fixtures, and storage — the “task-level” clearances.

### What makes it tertiary:

- Very short, localized movement
- Includes door swings, drawer pull-outs, chair pull-backs, appliance clearances
- Supports ergonomics and safety

- Often overlooked by beginners

**Why it matters:**

Even if primary and secondary circulation are perfect, poor tertiary circulation makes the space frustrating or unsafe.

**Other Examples:**

- Reaching into a closet
- Opening appliance doors
- Pulling out chairs
- Accessing storage

**Characteristics:**

- Often overlooked by beginners
- Critical for ergonomics
- Must consider clearances, reach, and safety

## Why Circulation Matters

**Circulation is foundational because it affects:**

- Functionality
- Safety
- Accessibility
- Comfort
- User experience
- Efficiency of space
- Professional credibility

**A space with poor circulation:**

- feels cramped
- confuses users
- wastes square footage
- creates safety hazards
- undermines the design's purpose

**A space with excellent circulation:**

- feels intuitive
- supports the activities it houses
- enhances comfort and usability

- looks and feels “designed”

### **Mystery File**

Witness accounts report:

"To reach the dining room, guests crossed service traffic."

"Staff pushed carts through the lobby."

"The shortest route was never the route anyone took."

### **Student Task**

Draw **both** current primary paths and corrected paths:

#### **1. Guest Path**

Example: Lobby → Reception → Dining/Conference → Restrooms

#### **2. Staff Path**

Example: Kitchen → Storage → Laundry → Employee Area

\*Use arrows to show the current conflicts in circulation and then redesign the paths. Use different colors to indicate current vs. redesigned paths.

\*Rethink doorways (or lack thereof) and room locations as well-can draw a path through a wall if a doorway needs to be added.