Staircase *anatomy* and terminology

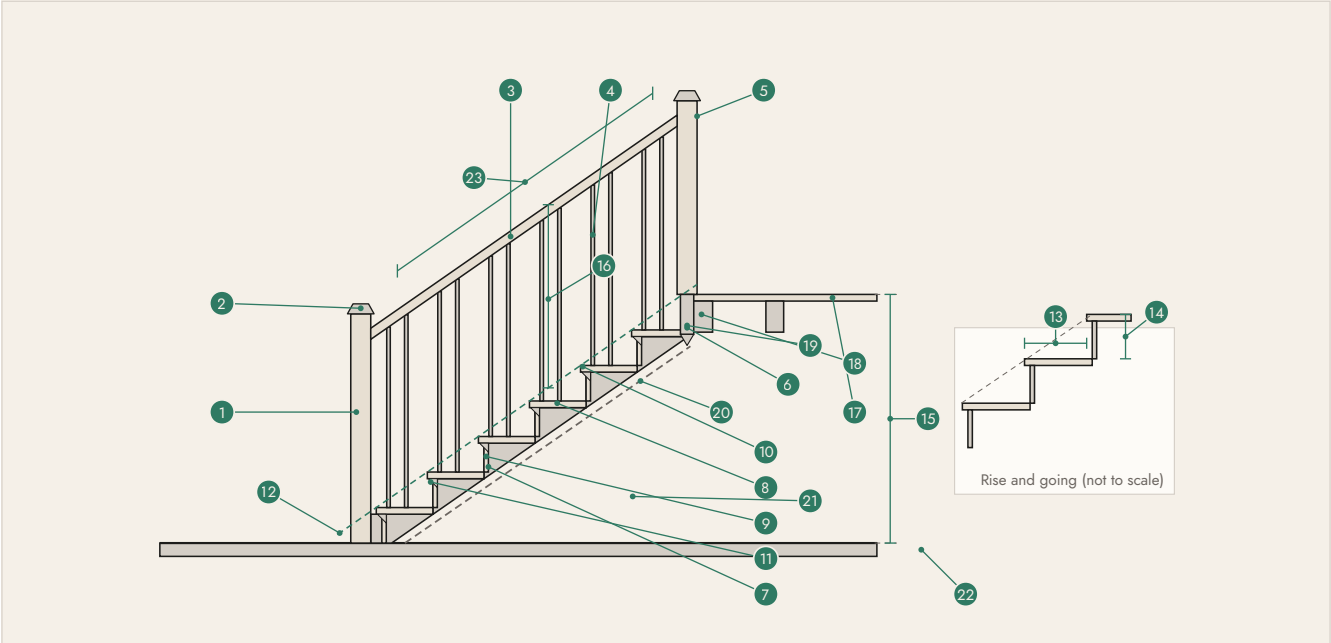
Every part of a timber stair named on one original drawing, with the words the sources disagree on and wording for a drawing or specification.

AT A GLANCE

Part	What it is	Also called, or defined in
Tread and riser	The tread is the surface you step on. The riser is the vertical closing piece, or the gap if the step is open.	Open risers are limited by ADK paragraphs 1.6 and 1.9.
Nosing	The leading edge of a tread, often projecting past the riser.	ADK Appendix A; paragraph 1.7 on contrast and projection.
Going and rise	Going: the horizontal distance from one nosing to the next. Rise: the height between consecutive treads.	BS 585-1, 2.5; ADK Appendix A. US: run, tread depth.
String	The sloping board that carries the treads: closed (housed) or cut (open).	Stringer in the US. Wall string, outer string.
Newel	The post at the start, turn or end of a flight that anchors the rail.	Newel post; a half newel sits against a wall.
Handrail, baluster, base rail	The rail you hold; the vertical infill below it; the rail on a closed string that carries the infill.	ADK Appendix A and 1.34 to 1.37. Spindle in UK trade use.
Bullnose, curtail, volute	Starting steps with a curved end, and the scroll at the end of a continuous handrail.	Sources use bullnose and curtail differently: see below.

Plain-words definitions. Approved Document K (2013, England) Appendix A and BS 585-1:1989 clause 2 were read; BS EN 14076 and BS 5395-1 in BSI's free preview only. No regulatory figure is quoted.

NUMBERED PARTS. GOING AND RISE ARE ON THE INSET; BULLNOSE AND CURTAIL ARE USED DIFFERENTLY BY DIFFERENT SOURCES, SO DRAW THE STARTING STEP



1 Newel post	2 Newel cap	3 Handrail	4 Baluster
5 Top newel	6 Newel drop	7 Cut string	8 Tread
9 Riser	10 Nosing	11 Scotia	12 Pitch line
13 Going	14 Rise	15 Total rise	16 Handrail height
17 Upper floor or landing	18 Trimmer joist	19 Apron lining	20 Soffit lining
21 Spandrel	22 Finished floor	23 Flight	

SPECIFICATION WORDING

STAIR PARTS SCHEDULE

Stair [S1], [straight / quarter turn with winders / half turn with half landing], [ ] risers at [ ] mm rise and [ ] mm going (nosing to nosing), total rise [ ] mm finished floor to finished floor, verified on site. String [closed (housed) / cut (open)], [species], [ ] mm thick. Treads [ ] mm, risers [ ] mm, [closed / open]. Nosing [profile ref]; scotia [ref / none]. Parts named as on key drawing [ref].

STARTING STEP AND NEWELS

First step [square / bullnose, one end / bullnose, both ends / curtail, left hand / right hand], drawn in plan at 1:[ ]. Newels [square / turned], [ ] mm, cap [profile ref], drop [profile ref / none]. Handrail ends in [volute / newel cap / easing].

BALUSTRADE PARTS

Handrail [profile ref], [ ] mm, [species], [newel to newel / continuous]. Balusters [profile ref], [ ] mm at [ ] mm centres, housed into [handrail and base rail / handrail and tread]. Heights, gaps and loads to the current Approved Document K and the engineer's design, which govern.

TERMS USED

Going

Horizontal distance between two consecutive nosings (BS 585-1, 2.5). Approved Document K measures tread depth, less overlap.

Rise

The height between consecutive treads (Approved Document K, Appendix A).

String

The sloping board that carries the treads. Closed (housed) hides the steps; cut (open) shows them.

Bullnose

A starting step with an end rounded in a quarter circle. Sources use the word differently.

Curtail and volute

A starting step whose end sweeps out and curls, below the scroll (volute) at the end of the handrail.

STANDARDS AND SOURCES

- BS EN 14076:2013 Timber stairs. Terminology: BSI: Current, 31 Jan 2014 (2004 edition withdrawn). Free preview only.
- BS 585-1:1989 Wood stairs, closed risers, domestic: BSI: Current, 30 Jun 1989. Preview only.
- BS 5395-1:2010 Stairs, straight flights and winders: BSI: Current, 28 Feb 2010. Free preview only.
- Approved Document K, 2013 edition (England): Appendix A read 6 Nov 2026.
- BWF Stair Scheme Design Guide 1 (2017): trade body guide.

Full guide: https://makebespoke.com/trade/technical/staircase-anatomy-and-terminology. Make Bespoke Studio coordinates manufacture through its partner workshops. Figures are guidance only and your specification governs; some may be superseded, so contact the studio to verify.