

EXCAVATION GLOSSARY

Common Terms You'll See in Quotes and Contracts

Understanding excavation terminology helps you make informed decisions and communicate clearly with your contractor. Here are the most common terms you'll encounter.

SITE WORK & PREPARATION

Backfill

Material used to refill an excavated area after construction is complete. Can be the original soil or imported fill dirt.

Clearing

Removing trees, brush, stumps, and vegetation from a site before excavation begins.

Cut

Removing soil or rock to lower the ground level. The opposite of fill.

Fill

Adding material to raise the ground level. Used to build up low areas or create proper grades.

Grading

Shaping the land to create a specific slope or level surface. Essential for drainage and foundation prep.

Grubbing

Removing roots, stumps, and buried organic material from below the surface after clearing.

Rough Grade

Initial shaping of the land to approximate final elevations. Fine grading follows.

Final Grade

Precise finishing of soil surfaces to exact specifications, typically done before landscaping or concrete work.

Site Prep

All work needed to prepare land for construction, including clearing, grading, and utility installation.

EXCAVATION TYPES

Basement Excavation

Digging below ground level to create space for a basement or underground structure.

Bulk Excavation

Large-scale removal of earth, typically for commercial sites or major land development.

Trenching

Digging narrow, deep channels for utilities like water, sewer, electrical, or drainage lines.

Footing Excavation

Precise digging for foundation footings that support building structures.

Pool Excavation

Digging the hole for an in-ground swimming pool, typically requiring precise dimensions.

MATERIALS

Fill Dirt

Subsoil with minimal organic matter. Compacts well for structural support but won't support plant growth.

Topsoil

Nutrient-rich surface soil with organic matter. Used for lawns, gardens, and landscaping.

Select Fill

Tested, high-quality fill material that meets specific engineering requirements.

Spoils

Excavated material removed from the site. May be hauled away or reused on-site.

Base Material

Crushed stone or gravel used as a foundation layer under concrete, pavers, or asphalt.

Crusher Run

Crushed stone mixed with stone dust that compacts tightly. Common for driveways and base layers.

EQUIPMENT & PROCESSES**Compaction**

Mechanically compressing soil or fill material to increase density and stability.

Haul-Off

Removing and transporting excavated material from the job site to a disposal location.

Import

Bringing fill material, topsoil, or gravel to the job site from an outside source.

Benching

Creating step-like cuts in a slope to prevent cave-ins during deep excavation.

Shoring

Temporary support structures used to prevent soil collapse in deep trenches or excavations.

Dewatering

Removing groundwater from an excavation site, typically with pumps.

MEASUREMENTS & SPECS**Cubic Yard**

Standard unit for measuring excavation and fill. One cubic yard = 27 cubic feet (3ft × 3ft × 3ft).

Elevation

Height of a point relative to a reference point, usually sea level or a site benchmark.

Grade

The slope or angle of the ground, typically expressed as a percentage or ratio (e.g., 2% slope).

Setback

Required distance between construction and property lines, easements, or other structures.

Swale

A shallow channel designed to direct water drainage away from structures.

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