How to Document a Crack in a Wall, Slab or Foundation

Homeowner guide

If you find a crack or receive an inspection note about one, start by recording where it is and what you can see. A few labeled photos and a dated note help an engineer find the same spot, understand what may have changed and decide what to check on site.

Locate and describe the crack

Give the crack a short ID, such as **C1**, and mark it on a sketch. Write down the floor, room and side of the building. Use a landmark someone else can find, such as “north basement wall, below the window” or “garage slab, beside the door to the house.” Note whether you see the line in exposed concrete, brick or block, mortar, or a painted wall finish. If the surface is covered, describe the finish you can see.

Use words that describe the appearance. Is the line mostly vertical, diagonal or horizontal? Does it follow mortar joints in steps, branch or form a network of fine lines? Note its visible ends, any apparent step between the two sides, nearby staining or dampness, and any old patch. If part of the line disappears behind a finish or object, mark where it goes out of view. Leave loose material and finishes in place.

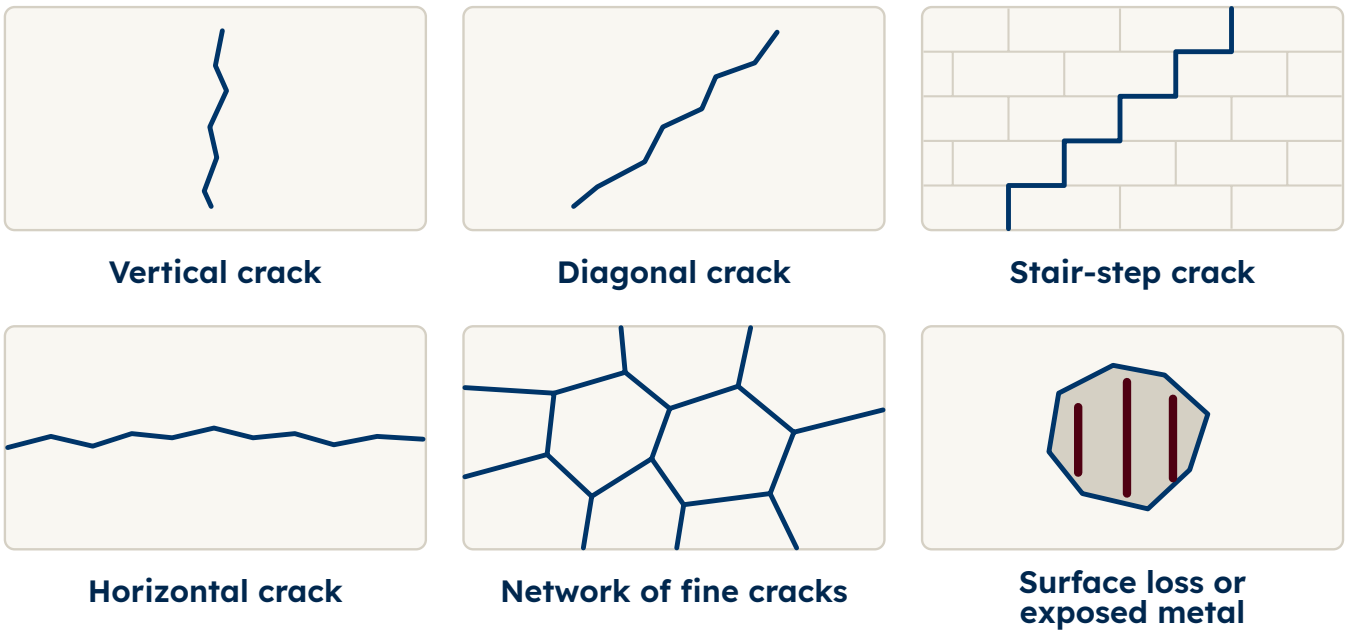
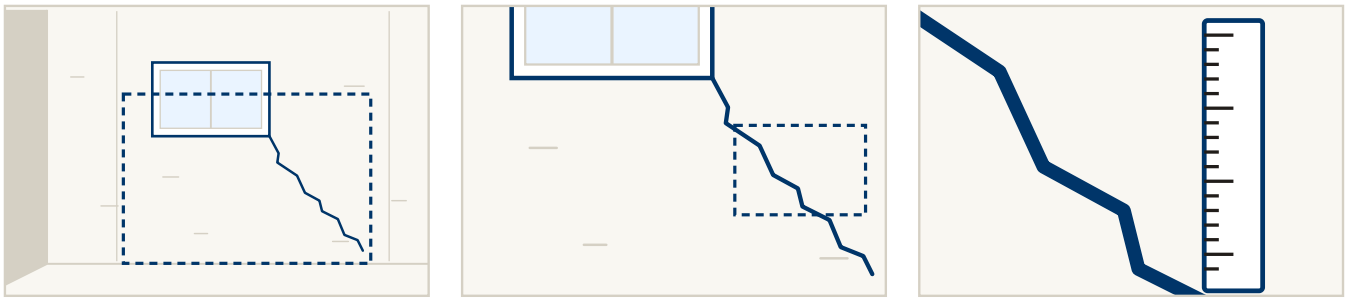


Figure 1. Six examples of surface appearance you can describe in your notes.

Take three useful photographs

1. **Overview.** Show the whole wall, slab area or room. Include a fixed feature such as a doorway, corner or window so the viewer can locate the crack.
2. **Mid-range.** Move closer and show the visible crack path, its ends where possible, and its relationship to the nearest opening, joint or wall-to-floor intersection.
3. **Detail.** Take a sharp close-up of a specific spot. If safely reachable, hold a ruler beside the crack in the same plane as the surface and keep the markings readable. Label where you placed it so you can return to that spot.

Take all three views from safely accessible positions. If a view is blocked or out of reach, record that in the notes. Keep the original files. Give the images the same crack ID and date, with a view label such as `C1_2026-11-27_overview`, `C1_2026-11-27_mid` or `C1_2026-11-27_detail`.



Overview
Whole wall and window

Mid-range
Crack below window corner

Detail
Ruler beside crack

Figure 2. Three views of the same illustrated crack show where it is, how it runs and where its width was recorded.

Separate examples from the RES gallery



Figure 3A. An inside corner helps locate a crack running across a concrete wall.

Photo credit — RES Media gallery, RES-M0198.



Figure 3B. The window corner provides a landmark for the cracks in the concrete wall below it.

Photo credit — RES Media gallery, RES-M0195.



Figure 3C. A detail view records crack lines and pale deposits near the base of a concrete wall.

Photo credit — RES Media gallery, RES-M0194.

Keep a dated record

Write down when you first noticed the crack, whether you know how long it had been there and when you photographed it. If you have an earlier inspection photo, record its date and viewpoint. At a later check, use the same angle, landmark and scale location when practical. Describe what you actually observed, including a longer visible line, an apparent change in width, dampness after rain, or a nearby door that recently began rubbing. Record a width as approximate and give the units and measurement location. Use “first noticed” when the date the crack formed is unknown.

Sample entry — C1 · November 27, 2026 · North basement wall below the window. First noticed November 22. The diagonal line runs from the lower window corner toward the slab. Saw a damp patch below it after rain on November 25. Photos show the full wall, the window corner and a close-up beside the lower end.

Share the record for an assessment

Send the sketch, labeled photos, dated notes, the relevant page of any inspection report and any earlier repair record. Include your decision and deadline, such as a home purchase or whether to proceed with a wall finish. An engineer uses the record to plan where to look and what to compare with the surrounding materials, supports, drainage and other visible conditions. The significance of a concrete crack depends on the element and its condition. A photo or width alone cannot establish its cause or whether the area is safe. American Concrete Institute, Do we always need to repair cracked concrete?

Ask for an assessment if you see a new or changing crack, apparent offset, recurring dampness or other changes nearby, or if the finding affects a purchase or planned work. Keep clear of an area where material may fall or the structure appears unstable. If there is immediate danger, contact emergency services. RES, Cracks & Common Concerns

Field notes

Date _____ Location / crack ID _____

Observation / photo filenames _____

Related resource — RES, Preparing for an engineering consultation

What to do next

Planning an assessment? Read
What Happens During a Foundation Inspection?

Also seeing uneven floors or sticking doors? Read
Uneven Floors, Sticking Doors and Cracks in the Same House