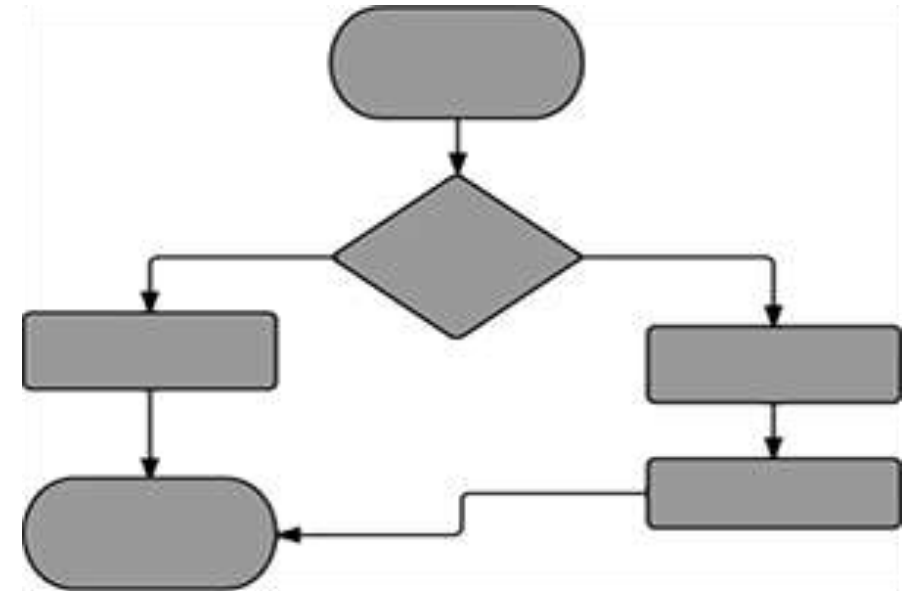# Flowchart Symbols' Meaning Explained

Flowchart Symbols

Don't be intimidated by the wide array of flowchart shapes. Each symbol has a specific meaning and context where its use is appropriate.

If you get confused while drawing your flow chart, remember that most charts can be drawn with just a few common symbols, which are listed below.
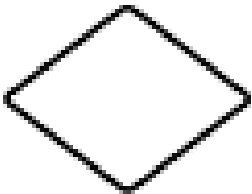
Common Flowchart Symbols

- **The process symbol** represents a process, action, or function. It's the most widely-used symbol in flowcharting.
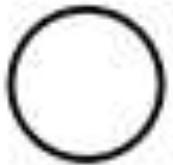
- **The document symbol** represents the input or output of a document. Examples of input are receiving a report, email, or order. Examples of output are generating a presentation, memo, or letter.
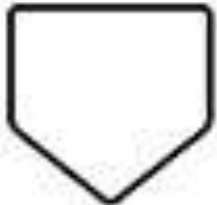
- **The decision symbol** indicates a question to be answered—usually yes/no or true/false. The flowchart path may splinter into different branches depending on the answer.

Common Flowchart Symbols

- **The connector symbol** connects separate elements across one page. It's usually used within complex charts.

- **The off-page connector** (also known as the off-page link) symbol connects separate elements across multiple pages. It is frequently used within complex charts. The page number is sometimes placed on the shape for easy reference.

- **The data symbol** (also called the input/output symbol) represents data that is available for input or output. It may also represent resources used or generated. Another symbol used to represent data is the circle shape.
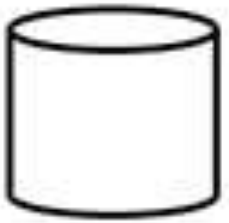
Common Flowchart Symbols

- **The comment symbol, or note symbol,** adds needed explanation or comment. It may be connected by a dashed line to the relevant section of the flowchart.

This concludes the list of common flowchart symbols. Read on for less-frequently used symbols.

Other Flowchart Symbols

- **The stored data symbol** represents data housed on a storage device.

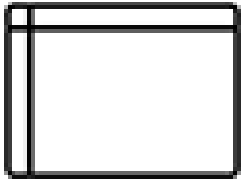- **The summing junction symbol** sums the input of several converging paths.

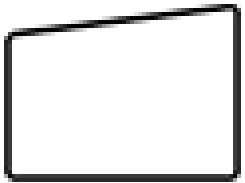- **The terminator symbol** represents the start points, end points, and potential outcomes of a path.

- **The predefined process symbol** indicates a complicated process or operation that is well-known or defined elsewhere.
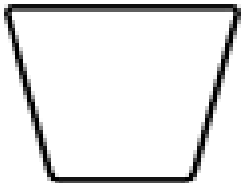
Other Flowchart Symbols

- **The internal storage symbol** represents data stored in random-access memory (RAM).
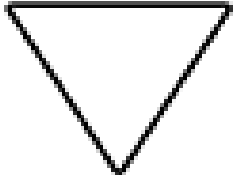
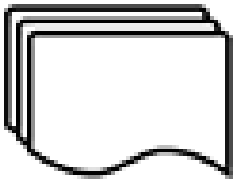- **The manual input symbol** represents the manual input of data into a computer, usually through a keyboard.

- **The manual operation symbol** indicates a step that must be done manually, not automatically.
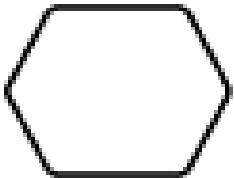
Other Flowchart Symbols

- **The merge symbol** combines multiple paths.

- **The multiple documents symbol** represents multiple documents or reports.

- **The preparation symbol** differentiates between steps that prepare for work and steps that actually do work.
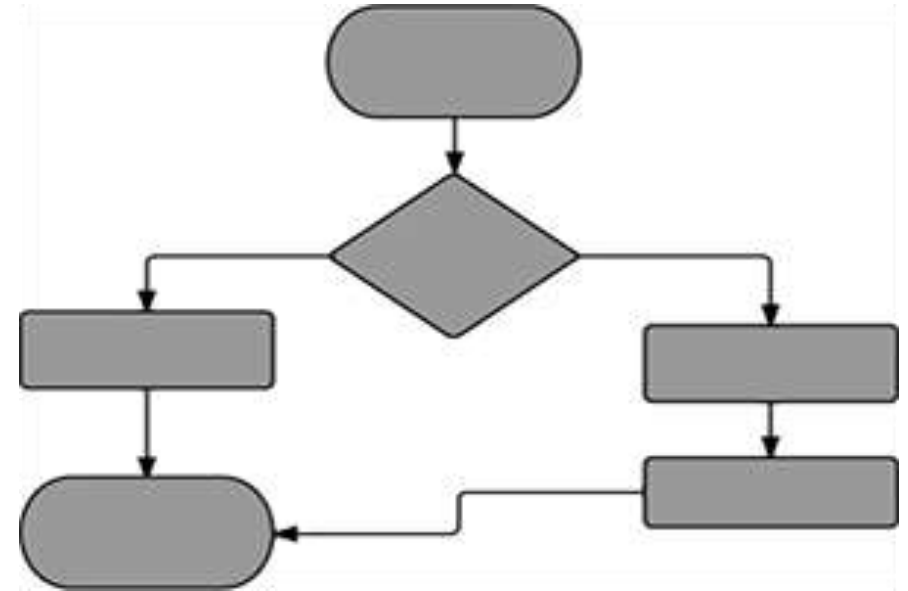
Standard vs. Nonstandard Flowchart Symbols

While various standards for symbol usage and flowchart creation have been established, it's okay to ignore the rules. Use the symbols in a way that makes sense to your audience.

But if you use symbols in a non-standard fashion, be sure to do it consistently so your readers understand your meaning for that symbol each time they see it.

Resources

- See [Lucid U](#) for examples and tutorials on flowcharts and other diagram types.

- Try the [Lucidchart demo](#) for free!

To experiment with these symbols, just click the links above. Drawing a flowchart in Lucidchart is fast, easy, and completely free.