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## How to Draw a Flowchart

### How to Draw a Flowchart

Are you confused about how to draw a flow chart? Here are some guidelines which can be used to ease the process of understanding the system and its flow.

Most of us don't know how to deal with flow charts when we are novice users, but with the passage of time and experience we gain expertise. A good flow chart helps to understand the systematic flow of information in the system. If a flow chart is not created properly, then it may mislead the designer of the system or may result in fatigue consequences. Therefore, it is very important that you create flow charts with caution and expertise. I would always suggest you to use flow chart to ease the process of understanding the system and its flow.

Although there are many symbols that can be used in flowcharts to represent different kinds of steps, accurate flowcharts can be created using very few of them (e.g. Process, Decision, Start, delay, cloud).

The basic element of a flowchart is a simple action, which can be anything from striking an anvil to make a cash payment, and is represented by a box containing a description of the action. The mapping of "what follows what" is shown with arrows between sequential action boxes, as shown in the illustration. This also shows the boxes for flowchart's start and end points in which there are normally one for each.

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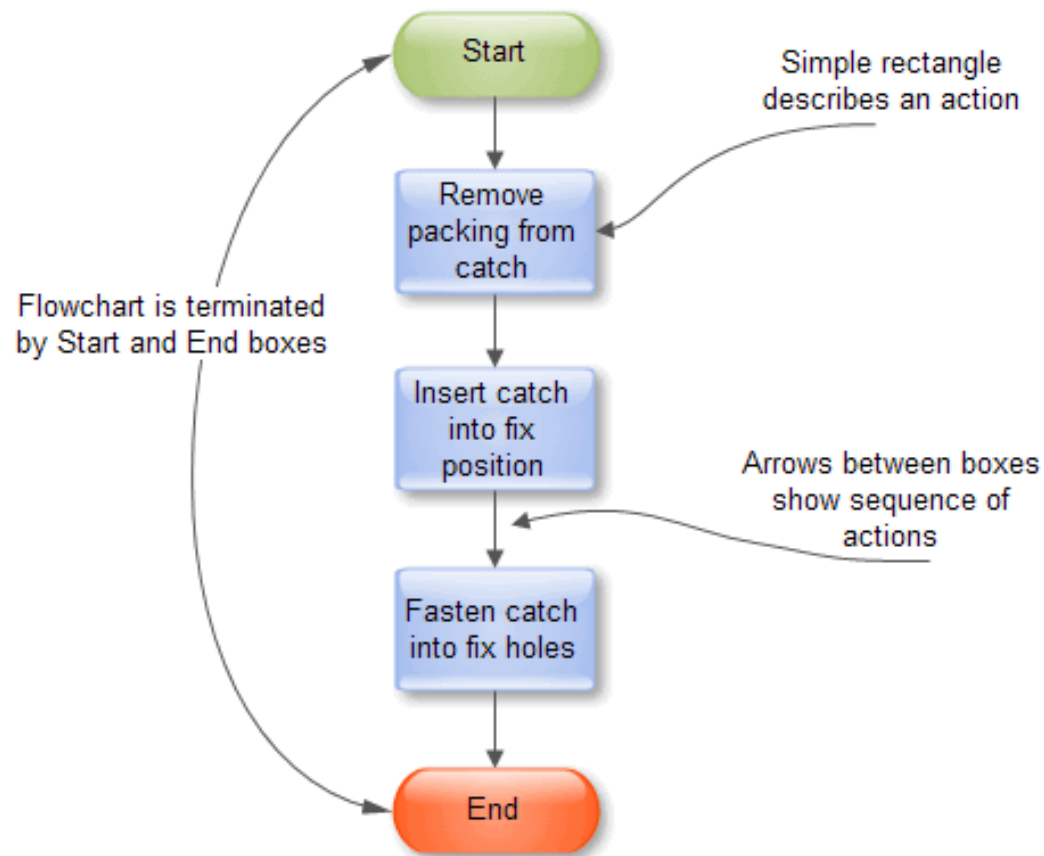
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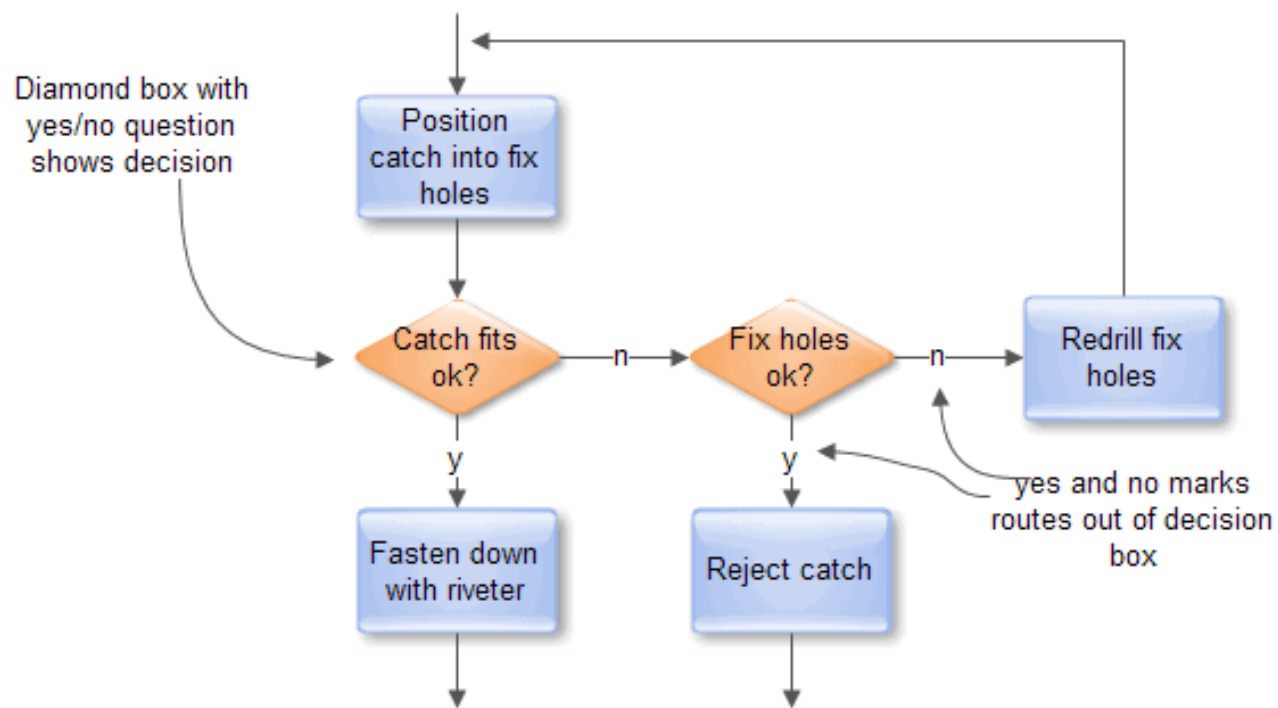
**Fig. 1. Basic Flowchart Elements**

Processes become more complex when decisions must be made, on which an alternative set of actions must be taken. The decision is shown in a Flowchart like a diamond-shaped box containing a simple question to which the answer is "yes" or "no" as shown in Fig. 2. More complex decisions are made up of combinations of simple decision boxes.

- » Cycle Diagram
- » Hierarchy Diagram
- » Marketing Chart and Diagram
- » Matrix Diagram
- » Value Stream Mapping

#### Flowchart Knowledge Base

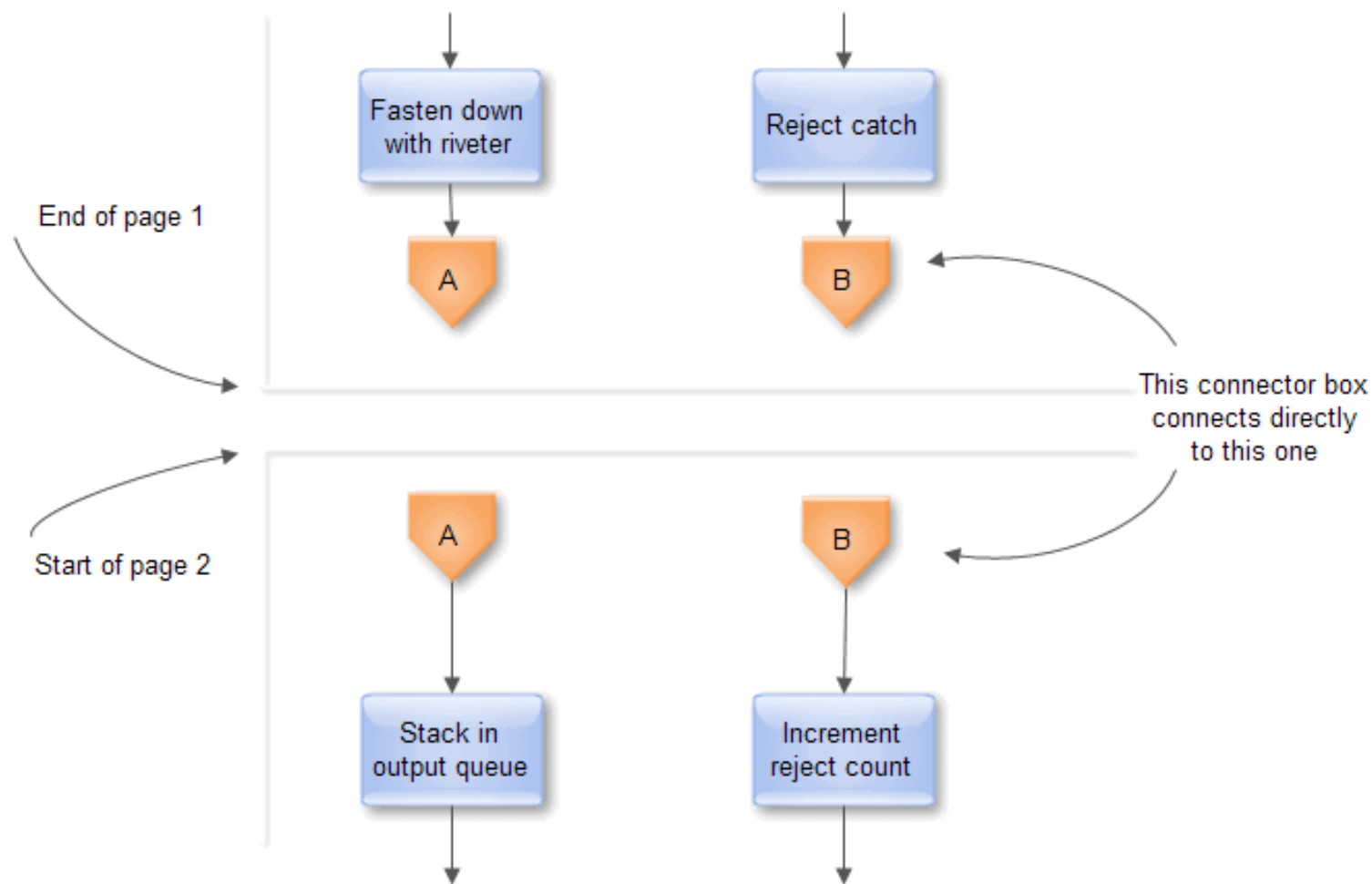
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**Fig. 2. Decisions in Flowcharts**

Processes often go wrong around decisions, as either the wrong question is being asked or the wrong answer is being given.

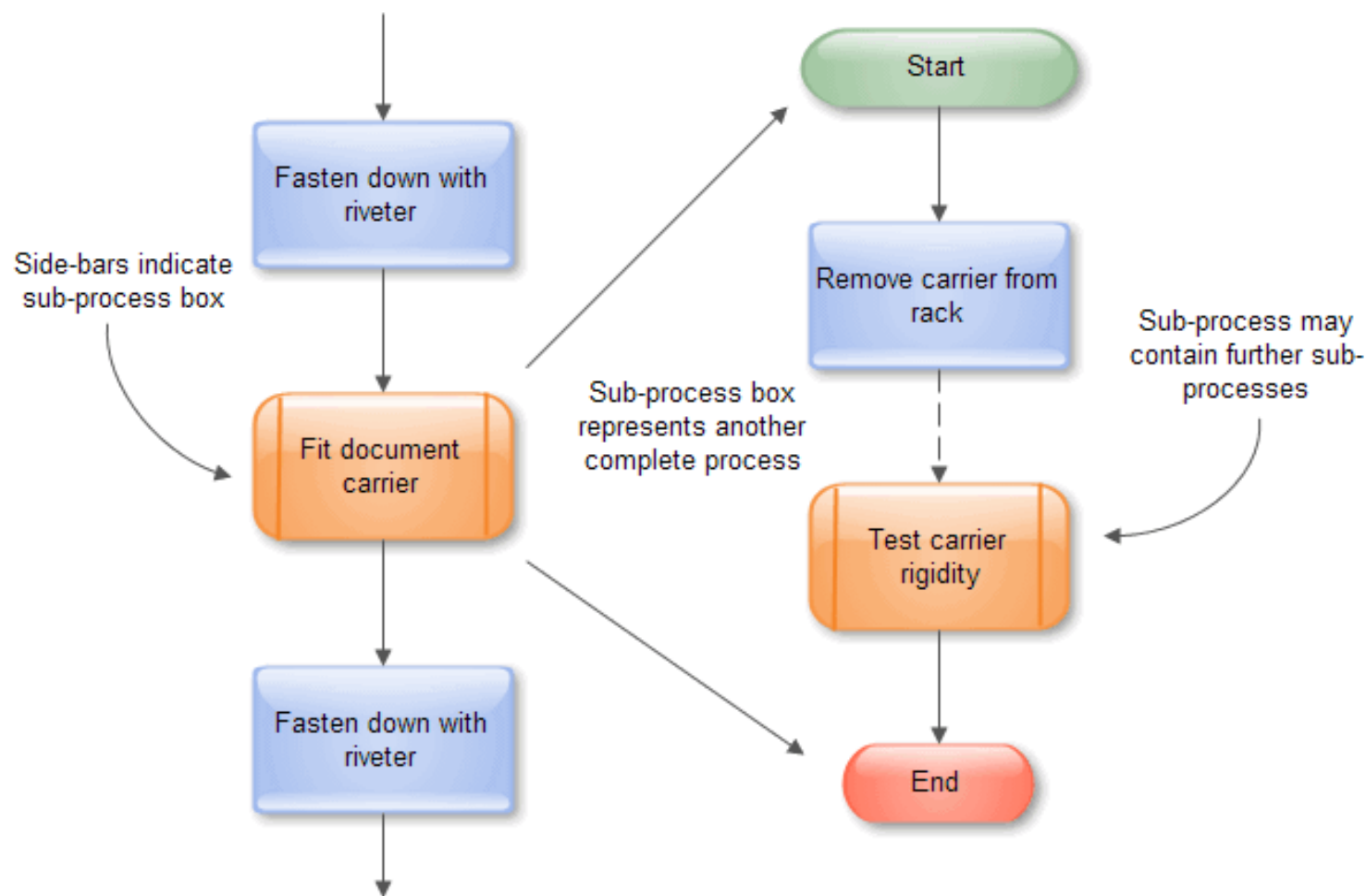
Where boxes cannot be directly connected with lines, the separated lines are coordinated with connector boxes containing matching names. This typically occurs where lines cross onto another page as shown in the illustration.



**Fig. 3. Continuing Flowcharts across pages**

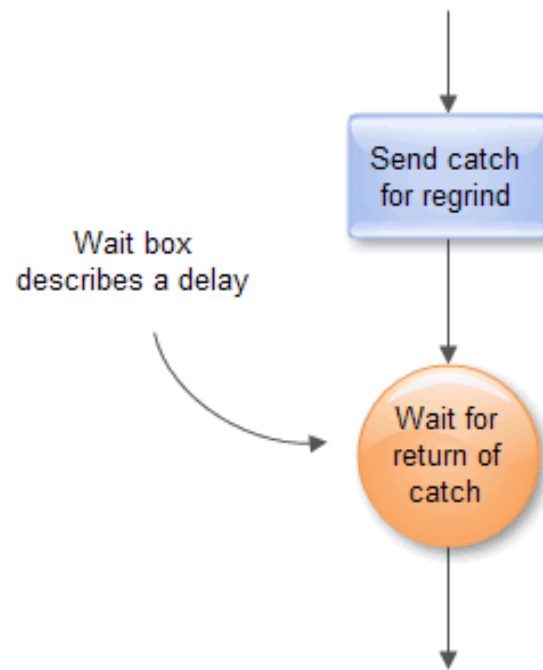
By using multiple connector boxes, it is very easy for flowcharts to become very large, although this is usually self-defeating, as the Flowchart then becomes difficult to understand. The ideal size for a Flowchart is one page, as this gives a single visual "chunk" that is reasonably easy to understand as a single item.

Large processes can be broken down into a hierarchical set of smaller Flowcharts by representing a lower level process as a single sub-process box. This behaves like a normal action box at the higher level, but can be "zoomed into" to expose another Flowchart, as shown in Fig. 4.



**Fig. 4. Sub processes**

An additional "action" box that can be useful when analyzing processes is the wait box, which highlights a delay (i.e. *no* action) like the illustration. This is a typical point where the overall cost of a process may be improved by acting, possibly on other processes, to reduce the delay.



**Fig. 5. Delay flowchart symbol**

## How to Draw an Effective Flowchart

You need to consider a few things when drawing an effective flowchart. Check out a [simple flowchart guide](#) before you start.

1. Define the process boundaries with starting and ending points.
2. Complete the big picture before filling in the details.
3. Clearly define each step in the process. Be accurate and honest.
4. Identify time lags and non-value-adding steps.
5. Circulate the flowchart to other people involved in the process to get their comments.

Flowcharts don't work if they're not accurate or if the team is too far removed from the process itself. Team members should be true participants in the process and feel free to describe what really happens. A thorough flowchart should provide a clear view of how a process works. With a completed flowchart, you can:

- Identify time lags and non-value-adding steps.
- Identify responsibility for each step.

- Brainstorm for problems in the process.
- Determine major and minor inputs into the process with a cause & effect diagram.
- Choose the most likely trouble spots with the consensus builder.

## Guidelines for Drawing a Flowchart

There are no hard and fast rules for constructing flowcharts, but there are guidelines which are useful to bear in mind. Here are six steps which can be used as a guide for completing flowcharts.

1. Agree on a [standard flowchart symbol](#) set to use. Alternatively, a company standard may be available. It is important to agree a standard as there are several conflicting common uses.
  2. Draw a 'start' terminator box at the top of the work area.
  3. Add the first box below the start box, identifying the first action simply by asking, "What happens first?". Add an appropriate box around it.
  4. Add subsequent boxes below the previous box, identifying each action by asking, 'What happens next?'. Draw an arrow from the previous box to this one.
  5. Describe the process to be charted.
  6. Start with a "trigger" event.
  7. Note each successive action concisely and clearly.
  8. Go with the main flow (put extra details in other charts).
  9. Make cross references to supporting information
  0. Gather the team who are to work on describing the process. These should include people who are intimately involved in all parts of the process, to ensure that it gets described as it actually happens, rather than an idealized view.
1. Follow the process through to a useful conclusion (end at a "target" point).
  2. If the final diagram is to be used as a part of a formal system, make sure that it is uniquely identified

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