

What the flowchart shapes represent

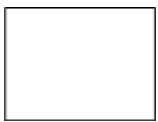
When you open the **Basic Flowchart** template, the **Basic Flowchart Shapes** stencil opens too. Each shape on the stencil represents a different kind of step in a process. However, there is no standard, universal meaning for the shapes – any shape can carry whatever meaning is agreed on by the people who will create and read the flowcharts. Most flowcharts tend to use only three or four of the shapes, unless there is a clear business reason to use more.

That said, Visio shapes have names that suggest their most common uses. Here are some of the most common shapes:

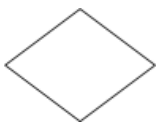
- **Start/End** Use this shape for the first and last step of your process.



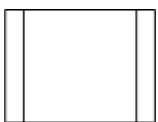
- **Process** This shape represents a typical step in your process. This is the most frequently used shape in almost every process.



- **Decision** This shape indicates a point where the outcome of a decision dictates the next step. There can be multiple outcomes, but often there are just two — yes and no.



- **Subprocess** Use this shape for a set of steps that combine to create a sub-process that is defined elsewhere, often on another page of the same document. This is useful if the diagram is very long and complex.

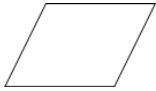


- **Document** This shape represents a step that results in a document.



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- **Data** This shape indicates that information is coming into the process from outside, or leaving the process. This shape can also be used to represent materials and is sometimes called an Input/Output shape.



- **On-page reference** This small circle indicates that the next (or previous) step is somewhere else on the drawing. This is particularly useful for large flowcharts where you would otherwise have to use a long connector, which can be hard to follow.



- **Off-page reference** When you drop this shape onto your drawing page, a dialog box opens where you can create a set of hyperlinks between two pages of a flowchart or between a sub-process shape and a separate flowchart page that shows the steps in that sub-process.

