

## List of Microsoft Visio Common Shapes and their Usage

When you open the Basic Flowchart template in Visio, 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.

Visio shapes generally have names that suggest their most common uses such as:

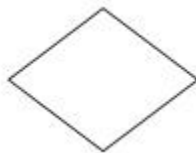
\* **Start/End:** Use this shape for the first and last step of your process. Also known as a terminator.



\* **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.



\* **Sub Process:** 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.



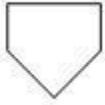
\* **Data:** This shape indicates that information is coming into the process from outside, or leaving the process. This shape can also be used to represent materials and is sometimes called an Input/Output shape.



\* **On-page reference:** This small circle (also known as Connector) 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.



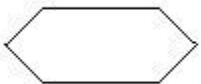
\* **Alternate Process:** As the shape name suggests, this flowchart symbol is used when the process flow step is an alternate to the normal process step. Flow lines into an alternate process flow step are typically dashed.



\* **Delay:** The Delay flowchart symbol depicts any waiting period that is part of a process. Delay shapes are common in process mapping.



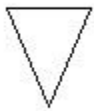
\* **Preparation:** As the names states, any process step that is a Preparation process flow step, such as a set-up operation.



\* **Document:** The Document flowchart symbol is for a process step that produces a document.



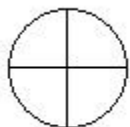
\* **Merge (Storage) Flowchart:** Shows the merging of multiple processes or information into one. Process Mapping: commonly indicates storage of raw materials.



\* **Extract (Measurement) Flowchart:** Shows when a process splits into parallel paths. Also commonly indicates a Measurement, with a capital 'M' inside the symbol. Process Mapping: commonly indicates storage of finished goods.



\* **Or:** The logical Or symbol shows when a process diverges – usually for more than 2 branches. When using this symbol, it is important to label the out-going flow lines to indicate the criteria to follow each branch.



\* **Summing Junction:** The logical Summing Junction flowchart shape is shown when multiple branches converge into a single process. The merge symbol is more common for this use, though. This symbol and the Or symbol are really more relevant in data processing flow diagrams than in process flowcharts.

