Flowcharts

Designing a flowchart

The 'designer's toolbox' for creating a flowchart consists of a number of basic symbols. These symbols are represented as ovals, rectangles and diamonds. Each symbol represents a different stage in the flowchart. These symbols are linked together by lines indicating the direction a process must or could alternatively take. These lines or connectors connect one specific event or process, to the next step in the sequence of the work or the production flow.

Oval symbols or 'blocks' are used to show the start and the end of a particular process. Therefore an oval symbol would be used at the beginning of every flowchart. Within the start block one would write a very brief description of the process carried out by the flowchart to follow. The 'end' block represents the end of a process. It usually will only contain the word END.

A rectangle referred to as a 'process block' is used to show each individual event or process that has to be done in a specific sequence. In the process block one would write a brief descriptive label describing the process being carried out. It may itself be further broken down into simpler steps by another complete flowchart representing that process.

A diamond shape called a 'decision block' is used when a particular decision must be made at a specific point in the process. The label in a decision block should be a question that clearly has only two possible answers.
Small Business Management Toolbox

Monitor and manage business operations

Flow charts

Operation

Drive nail, apply cement, type letter.

Transportation

Move material by truck, conveyor or hand.

Storage

Raw material by truck, conveyor or hand.

Delay

Wait for elevator, papers waiting, material waiting

Inspection/measurement

Read gauges, read papers for information or quality of goods.

Operation and inspection

Any combination of two or more of these symbols show an understanding for a joint.
Consider the flowchart used in describing how a printing factory may supply and deliver an order from a publishing company. They may put in a decision block in the flowchart at a point where the question needs to be asked, ‘Is the order for more than 2000 standard sized copies?’ This is the input question. The two outputs are either YES or NO.

The reason this question is asked is to know what the next process will be i.e. if the answer is YES then the next step will be to use an external delivery source as the printer’s van cannot deliver more than 2000 standard copies of a book.

If the answer is NO, the delivery to the destination can be made using the businesses van. So the connectors leading from the YES decision will lead to the next process, which may say OUTSOURCE DELIVERY. The follow-on connector could then lead to the END block. Alternatively the NO answer could lead to ARRANGE DISPATCH TIME, and then lead onto the END block.