



Signs & Symbols



Signs & Symbols

Written language has evolved from literal and conceptual representations into sophisticated systems of symbols representing spoken sounds.

The first graphic images that evolved into our Western system of writing began with simple shapes that represented a basic vocabulary of objects and concepts. These were Pictograms.

Over time, symbols were developed to express more complex objects and concepts. These were Ideograms.

The third stage in the evolution of written language is the Phonogram. Phonograms represent either syllables (fa-mi-ly) or basic sounds (f-a-m-i-l-y).*



Vocabulary

Semiotics

Philosophy: A general theory of signs and symbols; especially the analysis of the nature and relationships of signs in language, usually including three branches, syntactics, semantics, and pragmatics.



Vocabulary

Sign

Any linguistic unit, as a word, letter, etc., that is the symbol of an idea, function, etc.

signifier

the form which the sign takes

signified

the concept it represents



Vocabulary - types of signs

Symbol

Something that stands for or represents another thing; especially an object used to represent something abstract. Symbols are written or printed marks, letters, abbreviations, etc. which stand for an object, quality, process, quantity, etc. For example the dove is a symbol of peace. The character "5" is a symbol representing a quantity or number of five.

A symbol can be arbitrary.

These symbolic relationships must be learned.



Vocabulary - types of signs

Icon

a mode in which the signifier is perceived as resembling or imitating the signified. It looks, sounds, feels, tastes or smells like it. It possesses similar qualities to the thing it signifies.

Examples:

a portrait, a cartoon, a scale-model, onomatopoeia, metaphors, sound effects in radio drama, a dubbed film sound track, imitative gestures.



Vocabulary - types of signs

Idexical Signs

a mode in which the signifier is not arbitrary. The image is directly connected either physically or causally to the signified. This link can be observed or inferred.

Note the causality of the examples that follow.



Vocabulary - types of signs

Idexical Sign Examples

natural signs smoke, thunder, footprints, echoes, non-synthetic odors and flavours.

medical symptoms pain, a rash, pulse-rate.

measuring instruments weathercock, thermometer, clock, spirit-level.

'signals' a knock on a door, a phone ringing

pointers a pointing 'index' finger, a directional signpost

recordings a photograph, a film, video or television shot, an audio-recorded voice

personal 'trademarks' handwriting, catchphrase

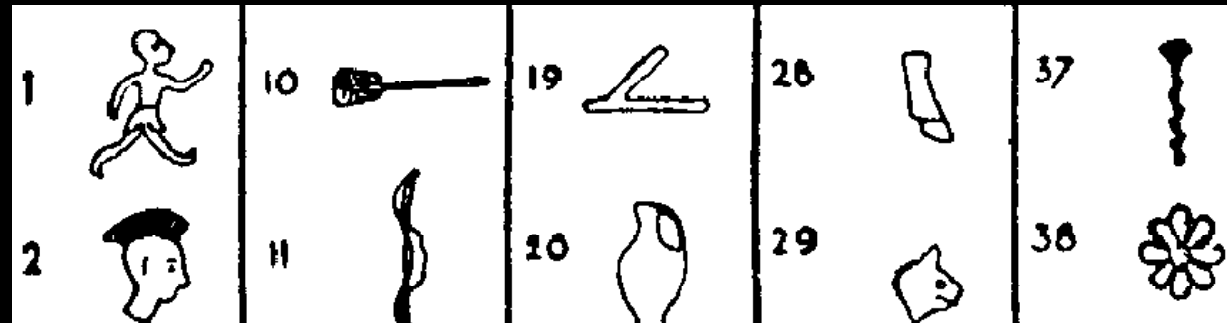
indexical words 'that', 'this', 'here', 'there'



Vocabulary

Pictograph or Pictogram

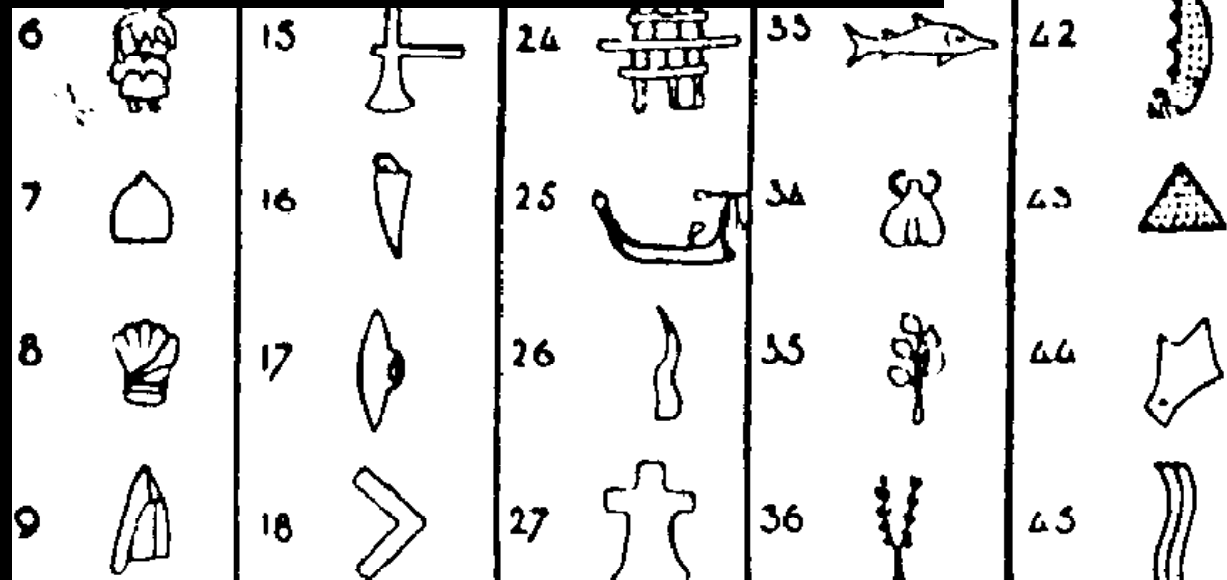
A picture or picture-like symbol representing an idea, as in primitive writing; hieroglyphics



Vocabulary

Pictograph or Pictogram

Pictograms are disconnected and fragmented drawings of fundamental objects and ideas such as man, woman, fire, food, tree, and shelter. In ancient history, these were combined to form stories, songs, and epics. There was no connection between the spoken word and the object pictured; a Pictogram recalled the object or concept itself to mind, not its name.





Vocabulary

Pictograph or Pictogram

The combination of these Pictograms tell the story of a hunter.



THE HUNTER LEAVES HOME, SLEEPS ONE NIGHT ON AN ISLAND.



GOES TO ANOTHER ISLAND, SLEEPS TWO NIGHTS,



HUNTS AND KILLS A SEA LION AND RETURNS HOME.



Vocabulary

Ideogram

A graphic symbol representing an object or idea without expressing the sounds that form its name (as in a phonetic system). The symbol represents an idea rather than a word. The other feature of ideograms is that they may be used by a plurality of languages which may pronounce them differently while using them in conformity to the same norms.



Vocabulary

Ideogram

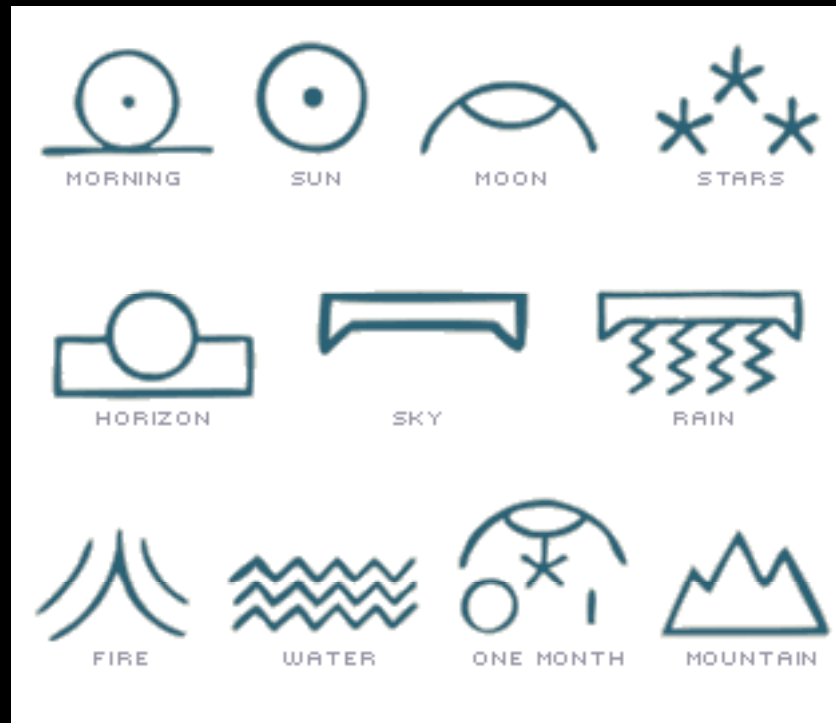
Ideograms are simplified pictures selected by agreement or custom to become fixed pictorial symbols of an object or concept. For example, a number of “tree” symbols were unified to make a “forest,” or the symbol for man, woman, and child were consolidated into a single “family” symbol. The name of the object (or its action) is closely identified with the picture. All written languages have passed through, or halted, at this stage.





Vocabulary

Ideogram





Vocabulary

Phonogram

A sign or symbol representing a word, syllable or sound, as in shorthand.



Vocabulary

Phonogram

Phonograms are syllabic signs and symbols representing primary oral sounds. As time has passed, they have diminished in resemblance to their original forms, but the letters in modern Western alphabets are the simplified renderings of their pictorial beginnings. The development of efficiency in writing was taking place in a number of countries at about the same time, and it appears that the complete system of alphabetical writing was not the achievement of one particular culture, but rather the work of several gifted cultures of the ancient world. Through trade and travel, alphabetic systems were passed to other societies who altered form and meaning to suit their requirements.





Vocabulary

Phonogram





Pictograms

Pictograms are found on products, in or on product packaging, on safety instructions supplied with a product and in or on publicity material provided with a product.

Pictograms are also used for information on signs and on equipment.

Pictograms can be used alone or alongside complementary textual information. It appears that current trends may be to rely on usage to solve the problems of the internationalization in marketing. If the pictograms are universally understood, it decreases the need to display information in several different languages on product packaging and signs.

Olympic Pictogram Examples



1972 Munich 1976 Montreal



1976 Innsbruck



1980 Moscow



1984 Los Angeles



1988 Seoul



1992 Albertville



1992 Barcelona



1994 Lillehammer



1996 Atlanta

Olympic Pictogram Examples



Athens 2004 have created 35 sports pictograms to illustrate the 28 Olympic sports and four collective disciplines. They each show the specific characteristics of the Olympic sports and disciplines, to enable spectators to recognise them immediately.

The Athens pictograms do not just give information about the sports they represent. With their references to ancient shapes, they emphasise the place of Athens 2004 in the context of thousands of years of history. The sports pictograms for the 2004 Games in Athens are inspired by Ancient Greece in three ways:



The vases with black figures on a red background. They illustrate the famous vases of the 6th century BC from Athens, where the black surfaces depict the contours of a human body and the scratched white lines show specific details.



The Cycladic marble figurines from the era between 3200 and 2000 BC with their simple, sober shapes forming elegant and dynamic human contours also inspired the creators of the pictograms.



The clear and gracious forms of the illustrations are surrounded by an irregular border, like the fragment of an ancient vase.



Notes on Pictograms

There are a number of recognised advantages of pictograms

- Pictograms can make textual content more noticeable or “attention grabbing”.
- They can serve as “instant reminders” for orientation such as “exit”, or hazards such as “do not take this medicine with alcohol”, etc. In general they can bring greater emphasis to an established message.
- They may improve warning comprehension for those with visual or literacy difficulties.
- They have the potential to be interpreted more accurately and more quickly than words.
- They can sometimes be recognised and recalled far better than words.
- Pictograms or brief textual information may be better when undertaking familiar or routine tasks (although the opposite will apply for novel or highly complex tasks).



Notes on Pictograms

However there are a number of disadvantages of relying on pictograms

- Very few pictograms are universally understood.
- Even well understood pictograms will not be interpreted correctly by all groups of consumers and across all cultures, and it always takes many years for any pictogram to reach maximum effectiveness.
- There is the potential for critical confusion (interpreting the opposite or often undesired meaning) which can create confusion or even a safety hazard.
- Any advantages in noticeability will be affected by size, positioning and clutter on the visual composition.



Notes on Pictograms

There are a number of guidelines to consider when developing or applying a pictogram or symbol to consumer safety information:

- There is evidence to suggest that it is more difficult to design pictograms to convey complex messages. Care should be taken particularly with the use of pictograms to describe complex prescriptive or proscriptive messages.
- There may be two possible functions for pictograms: as a reminder/attention grabber for an established message, or to stand alone to convey a message. These different functions require different treatment.
- No pictogram will be instantly effective. The longer a pictogram is in circulation the better known it will be.
- Needless differences in the design of pictograms will work only to undermine their effectiveness.
- Research and consumer testing is of utmost importance in the development of any pictogram.



Notes on Pictograms

Testing should be:

- Contextual (putting the pictogram in context with the product or environment in which it is to be used)
- carried out using qualitative and quantitative techniques based on a representative sample of consumers and performed across cultures if appropriate

