

Process Documentation with SmartDraw



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SmartDraw’s powerful diagramming tool and smart templates revolutionize the way processes are documented and managed in many companies in the Fortune 500. Binders filled with documents on a shelf are now obsolete. In their place, SmartDraw offers a collection of hyperlinked flowcharts that anyone in the organization can easily navigate like a web site. This collection of flowcharts can serve as an electronic model of an organization. It breaks complex processes into smaller, more manageable chunks and links everything together. Documenting processes using SmartDraw is extraordinarily faster than traditional methods. It gives you a result that is complete and easy to access and update. Best of all, it is something that employees actually use.

Companies that document their processes using SmartDraw are discovering real, measurable return on both time and money invested. Here are some of the results:

- Productivity increases *companywide* by 25%
- Training time is reduced by as much as 80%
- Quality is more consistent and predictable
- Redundancies are found and eliminated

Employees at every level gain visibility into exactly how things are done. This is critical for effective management and implementation.

Why Documenting Processes is Essential

The advantages of documenting the processes in your organization are obvious:

- **Flexibility:** Both new and existing employees can immediately learn the right way to perform any job.
- **Quality:** If everyone on the team performs a job in the same way each time, the outcome is predictable and consistent.
- **Visibility:** Management can see exactly how each job is meant to be performed.
- **Process Improvement:** You can’t improve the way your organization gets its work done unless you know how it’s being done now.

In addition to these benefits there are many external pressures that require processes to be documented. For example:

- **BPM Automation:** Documenting processes is a prerequisite for automated BPM (Business Process Management).
- **ERP:** Documenting processes is required as part of an Enterprise Resource Planning implementation.
- **Company Sale:** Documenting processes is an important preparation when positioning a company for eventual sale.
- **Compliance:** Various legislation and regulatory bodies, like the Sarbanes–Oxley Act and The

“Documenting our processes with SmartDraw has benefited L+L through helping us to better understand roadblocks and inefficiencies in our processes.”

Bob Dixon President, Digital Division, L + L Printers

Joint Commission for example, often require extensive process documentation.

- **Customers:** Some customers may require ISO or other quality certifications as a prerequisite for doing business.

Despite the benefits or requirements, many organization resist documenting their processes. Why? Because of the pain that traditional methods inflict. Process documentation is often viewed as:

- **Time-consuming, disruptive, and expensive:** Traditional methods are slow and distract team members from normal productive activities.
- **Incomplete:** Not all processes are documented and those that are may be difficult to find (i.e., the big binder on a shelf somewhere). Team members are unaware that documentation for a process, or even the process itself, exists.
- **Ineffective:** The result is a binder of difficult-to-understand documentation that no one looks at and that soon becomes stale.

SmartDraw provides a revolutionary advance in the field of process documentation and management that eliminates the pains described above. SmartDraw lets you create a collection of hyperlinked visuals that functions like a web site.

This collection of linked flowcharts is a complete electronic model of an organization. It separates, complex processes into smaller components that are easy to manage and understand and then links the components to each other. Using SmartDraw, every employee in the organization can immediately identify all of the processes they are responsible for and view the documentation for each one.

SmartDraw makes process documentation painless because:

Building a flowchart in SmartDraw is fast.

By leveraging automated tools and shortcuts, SmartDraw captures final process documentation in one quick pass, reducing the time and cost involved by five-fold compared to traditional methods.

SmartDraw's electronic process documentation is effective and easy to share.

A collection of SmartDraw flowcharts is a live visual description of every process that is easy to understand, easy to access and easy to maintain so that it is always up to date. Even team members without SmartDraw can have access to it.

The Six Innovations of SmartDraw with Process Documentation

SmartDraw's version of process documetnation is built upon six major innovations.

1. Live Documentation

Process documentation using SmartDraw takes the form of an interactive collection of interlinked flowcharts stored on your own file server or on SmartDraw's web site. Everyone in the organization has access to the collection and can easily find the processes that they are responsible for. If updates need to be made, they are reflected immediately in the live collection.

2. Process Hierarchy

Instead of attempting to document a complex process with a single complex flowchart, SmartDraw lets you break it into a hierarchy of processes and sub-processes that are hyperlinked together like a web site.

3. Systematic Process Discovery

SmartDraw recommends you begin by identifying the small number of top-level *master* processes that are at the core of any organization. The remaining processes are then identified by systematically drilling down into the sub processes from each master process. As each new layer of detail is revealed, new processes are discovered until all processes are identified down to the desired level of detail.

4. One-Pass Process Capture

By using SmartDraw to document processes as flowcharts in real time, SmartDraw lets teams capture an entire tree of processes as finished flowcharts in one interview with the person who performs them. This is a radical improvement compared with traditional methods.

5. Visual Grammar

When visuals, like flowcharts, are used to communicate with many different people across an organization, standardized formatting is necessary. Using SmartDraw, the flowcharts and other visuals adhere to the rules of visual grammar to ensure a common format that leads to maximum comprehension by everyone in the organization.

6. Easy Sharing

One of the things every person involved in process documentation wants to do is share their process with other team members, compliance officers, agencies, supervisors and more. Until now the only way to do this was to email them a static image, or a PDF, or just print out the flowchart and hand it to them or worse, let it collect dust in a binder somewhere. Now with SmartDraw, anyone documenting a process can email anyone a link to their collection of flowcharts and let them see their diagrams in their web browser. They can scroll around, zoom in and out, change pages, and even click on any hyperlinks to dig down into sub-processes. They don't need to own SmartDraw and they won't need to sign up for an account to view the flowcharts. You can also control how much access you give them whether they can just read or edit the documentation. Now sharing and collaborating are as they should be: intuitive and hassle free.

Let's examine each of the six innovations in greater detail.

Live Documentation

SmartDraw's makes it easy for team members to do process documentation live by interviewing whoever is responsible for a process or set of processes and taking notes directly in a flowchart. The documentation also remains alive because it's easy to access and update at any time instead of collecting dust on a shelf.

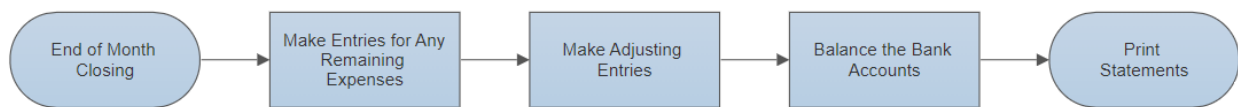
To document an organization's processes most efficiently, any team will want to start with the master process. This is the most high-level view of what the business does. From here, the team will want to branch off into specific processes and find the people responsible for that process. While interviewing, they can drill down into details by creating additional sub-processes as necessary. Once the documentation is complete, the master process chart provides links to all of the sub-processes for the organization. This hierarchy makes it easy for anyone to intuitively find the information they're looking for at any time.

Each member of the organization can use SmartDraw to browse through the documentation to quickly find the information they need. Users with the responsibility to update the documentation can modify it

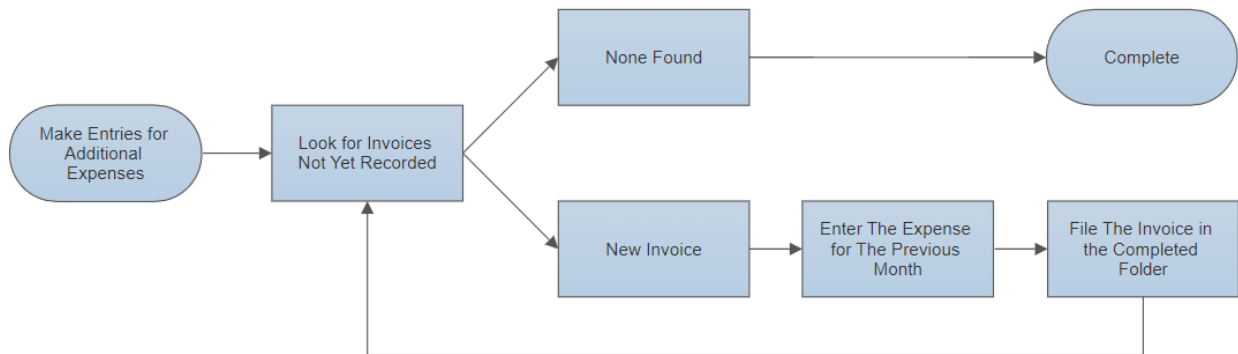
and everyone else will immediately see the updated results. The collection of visual document files is stored on a file server, with shared access. Read/write permission can be implemented using the operating system or a document management system such as SharePoint. This contrasts with traditional methods of publishing process documentation in printed form stored in a ring binder, where there is no easy way to find the processes unless you know their exact name and no easy way to update any processes as they change. Too often traditional process documentation is filed away, ignored and forgotten.

Process Hierarchy

Processes are naturally hierarchical. When most people describe a process they summarize multiple steps into one summary step. For example, when closing the end of the month the controller might describe his process as:

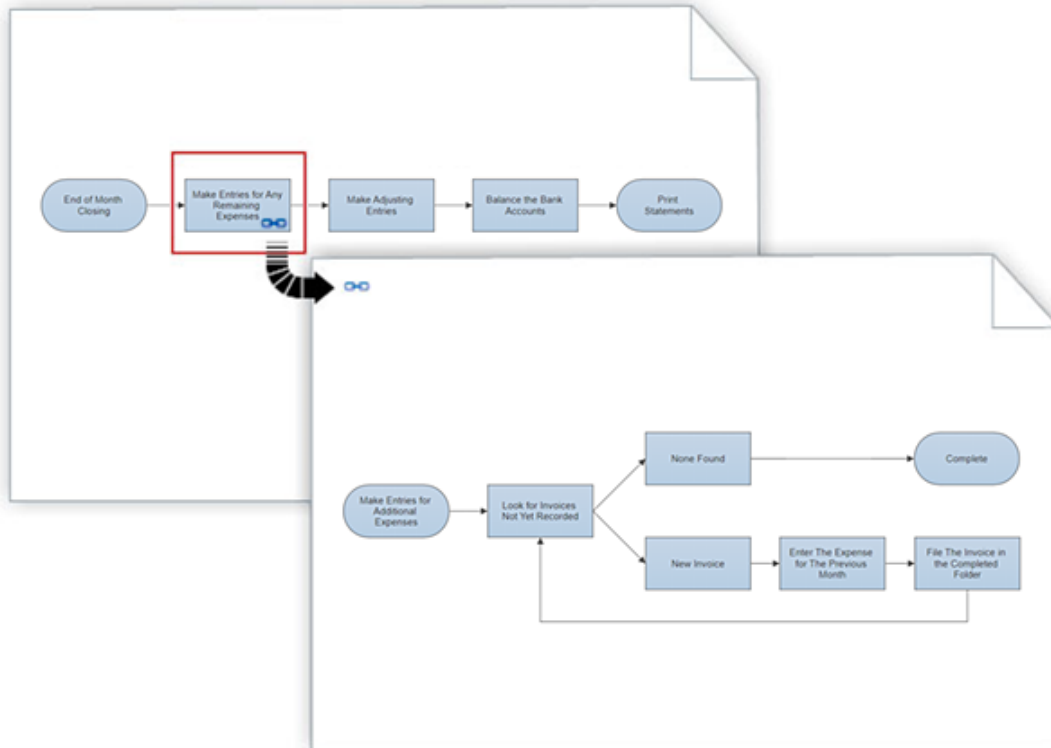


Each of these steps actually represents a whole additional process. For example, the “Make Entries for Remaining Expenses” step is itself a process:



Even in this sub process, the step of “Enter the Expense for the Previous Month” could be another process that describes the steps of making an entry into the accounting system and so on. You can drill down to the level of detail you desire.

SmartDraw’s flowcharts reflect this natural hierarchy and use hyperlinks to allow a viewer of the documents to click on a shape and drill down to the sub-process it represents, in much the same way as you’d navigate a web site.



The traditional way of documenting this process would be to combine all of the steps in all of the sub processes into one large flowchart with many steps. The result is something that needs to be printed on a poster-sized sheet of paper and is incomprehensible to 95% of the people that have the misfortune to look at it.

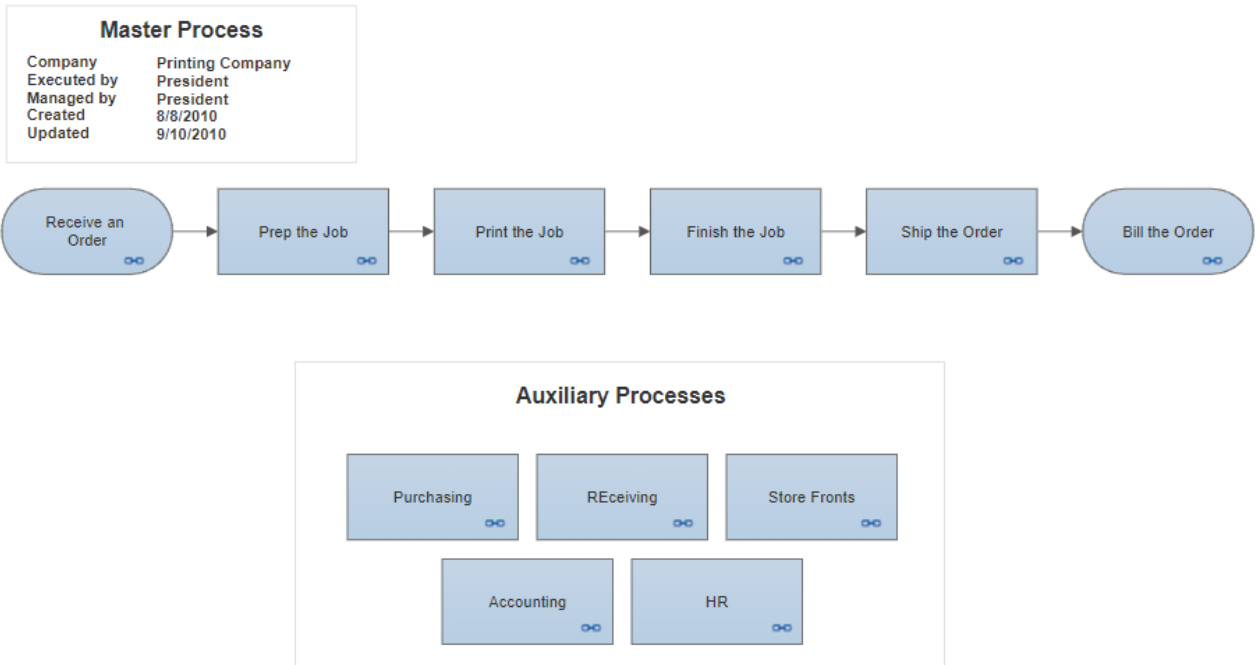
Using a hierarchy of linked charts allows people to focus on the key steps of the top-level process without being distracted by the details, while still being able to drill down to the details as needed.

Systematic Process Discovery

The natural hierarchy of processes provides a structured approach to systematically discover and document all of the processes in an organization. SmartDraw intuitively lets you systematically drill down from the master process to the finest level of granularity.

Most organizations have a relatively small number of master processes. A master process is one that stands alone and is not part of any other process hierarchy. It stands at the top of a hierarchy and is sometimes called a top-level process.

For example, a printing company has one master process for originating and fulfilling orders (the *production process*), plus other administrative master processes like HR and Accounting.

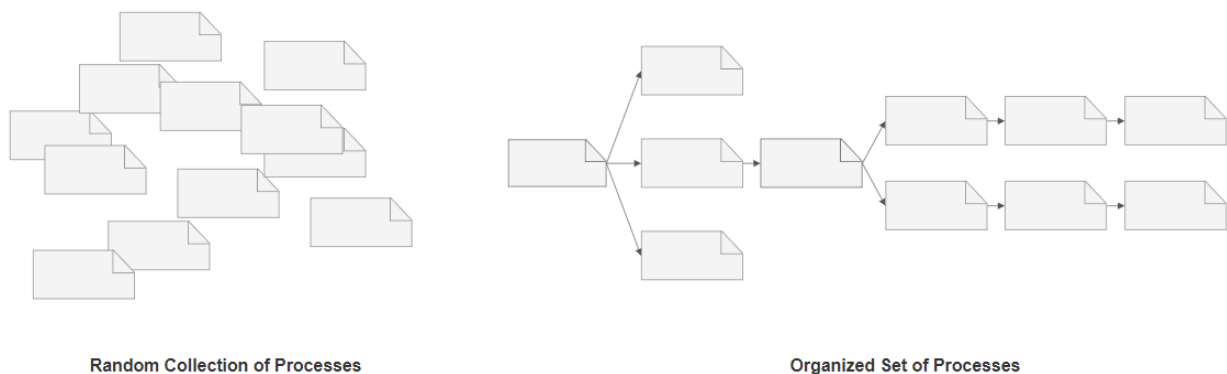


Process discovery begins by identifying the top-level master processes in an organization and then documenting them as a small number of summary steps.

Each summary step is then used a starting point to drill into the details of the sub processes that it represents. Processes are discovered and documented down to the level of detail desired, while building a flowchart for each one, and then linked together into a collection.

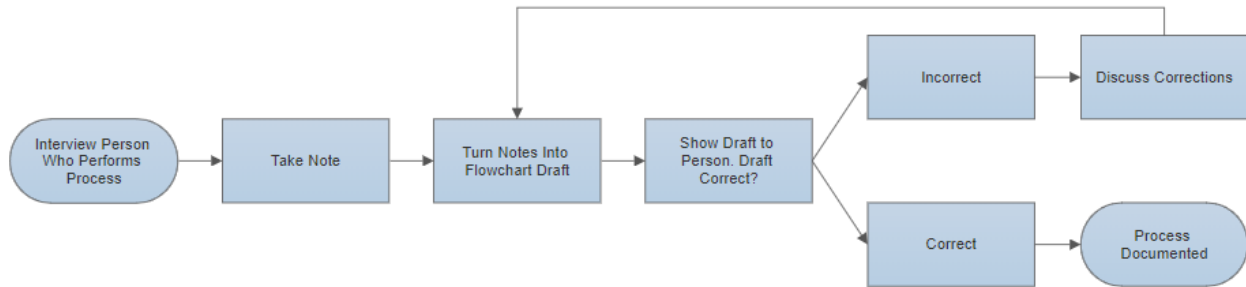
This is a comprehensive and systematic process unlike the traditional method that depends on individuals within an organization volunteering the processes they can recall.

This systematic approach not only ensures that nothing that is missed, but also provides context for every process in your organization. Instead of a random collection of isolated processes, you can instantly see how each process fits within the organization and how they interact.



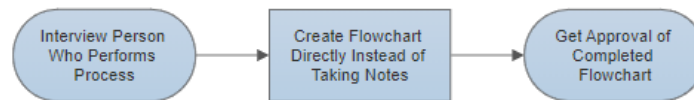
One-Pass Process Capture

SmartDraw makes it easy to capture processes in real time by interviewing the people who carry them out. Traditional diagramming software used to create process charts is too slow and hard to use to create flowcharts during an interview. In traditional process documentation, flowcharts are created later based on the written notes taken during an interview. This leads to an iterative process of presenting the flowchart at a later meeting, getting feedback, making changes, and so on.



Traditional Capture Method

SmartDraw is so easy to use it lets you capture a process in one pass. By allowing the interviewer to create a flowchart of the process during the interview, no notes are necessary. Instead the final flowchart can be created and approved in a single interview. Companies that use SmartDraw for process documentation show gains up to a five-fold increase in the rate of process capture compared to traditional methods.



One-Step Capture Method

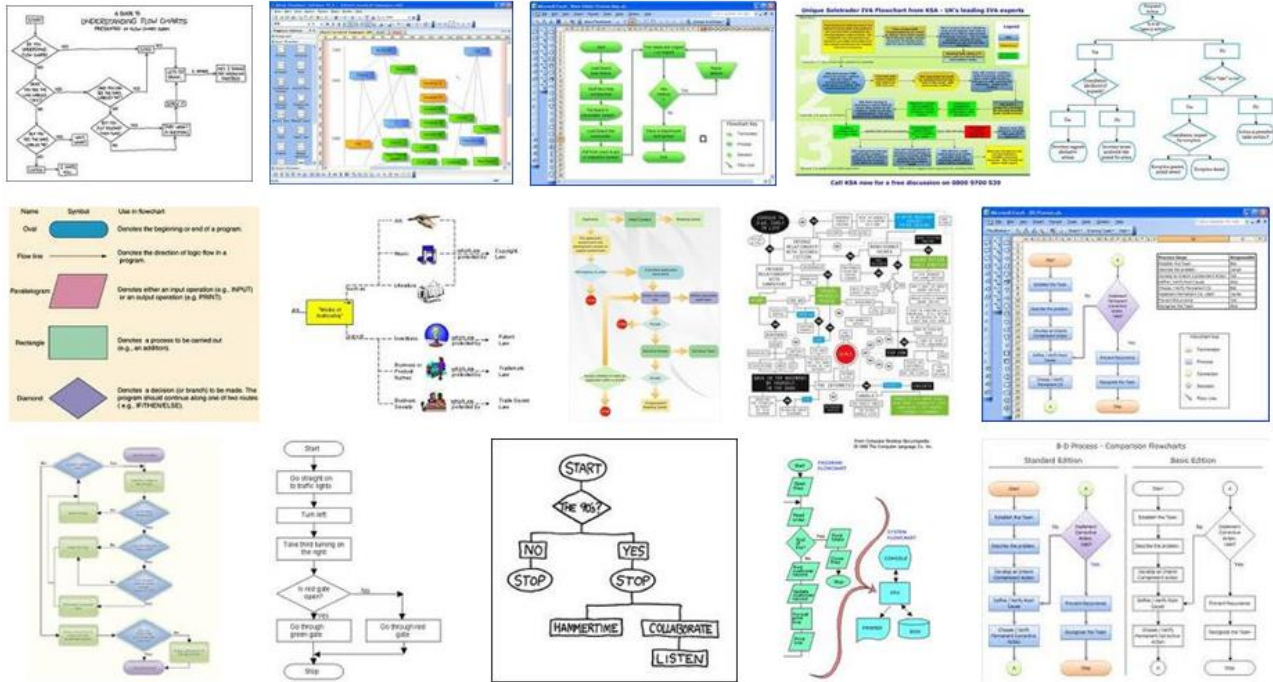
Visual Grammar

When we write we follow accepted rules:

- We spell words in a standard way
- We put a space between words
- We arrange the words in lines that read from left to right.
- We read lines on the page from top to bottom
- We use the same font, size, and color for the text unless we intend to show special *emphasis*.
- We use sentences and other punctuation
- We form paragraphs and arrange lines so that they line up on the left

Following these rules makes written communication universally accessible. We can pick up a document written by someone else and immediately read and comprehend it. We don't have to think about the way it's formatted. We can just focus on the content.

The same is not generally true of visual documents. Search for "flowchart" in Google image search and you get the following results:



There is nothing uniform about these charts. They flow from top to bottom, left to right and right to left all on the same chart! Colors and shape outlines are used indiscriminately. Most of these charts were probably created for either just the author, or a couple others to use. With a limited audience rules are not so important. However, if an entire organization is going to view hundreds of related flowcharts and other visuals, then a set of accepted design standards is necessary. Otherwise their effectiveness in communicating will be reduced considerably.

All visuals created using SmartDraw follow the same standards, or Visual Grammar. There are two rules that apply to all visuals:

1. The Consistency Rule
2. The One-Page Rule

And two more special rules for flowcharts:

3. The Left-to-Right Rule
4. The Split Path Rule

The Consistency Rule

The Consistency Rule says that the appearance of equivalent shapes, lines, and text in a visual should be consistent (i.e. the same).

For example, SmartDraw flowcharts use the same color, same font and same size for each equivalent shape. Only the start and end shapes have a different outline to indicate their status as starting and ending points. Shapes with hyperlinks to sub processes are blue. Shapes that represent a decision are dark gray.

The One-Page Rule

The One-Page Rule states that the visual should fit on one page and the text should remain readable.

To be effective, a visual must be viewed as a whole and so it should fit on a single page or a screen. Because of their interlinked nature, SmartDraw visuals are best viewed on screen.

However, there may be cases when printing is necessary. In these cases visuals can be scaled down to fit on a single page but not by so much that the text in the shapes is no longer readable, otherwise, the visual fails to communicate at all.

This rule is common sense but is also the rule most often violated. What happens when there is too much information to fit on one page? The answer is to create a hierarchy of multiple linked visuals, each of which does fit on a page.

The Left to Right Rule

In Western cultures, people read from left to right. Flowcharts that flow from left to right are also easier for the average person to read than flowcharts that flow from top to bottom.

The Split Path Rule

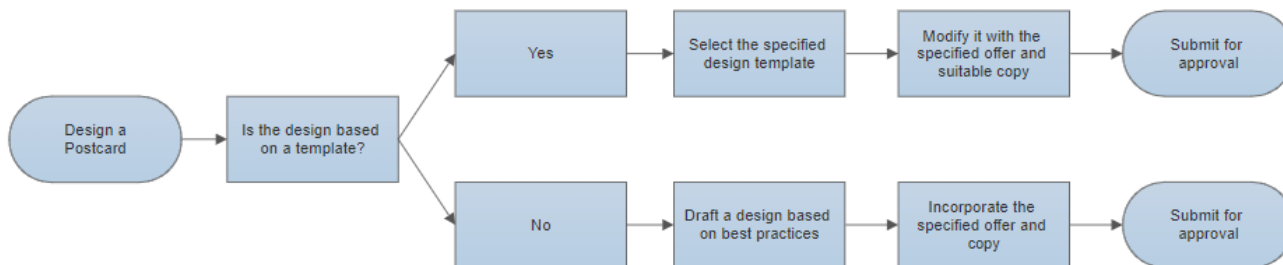
Traditionally, a step in a flowchart that represents question or decision has been represented as a diamond with lines coming out of two vertices, one for the path with one answer, the other for a second answer. There are several problems with this:

1. A decision symbol immediately introduces two directions of flow in the flowchart, breaking the left to right rule and making the chart harder to follow.
2. Most consumers of flowcharts don't know the convention of the diamond as a decision and the change in symbol outline is just a distraction for them.
3. Many creators of flowcharts don't know this convention either and so they use diamonds and other shapes inconsistently, resulting in confusion not information.

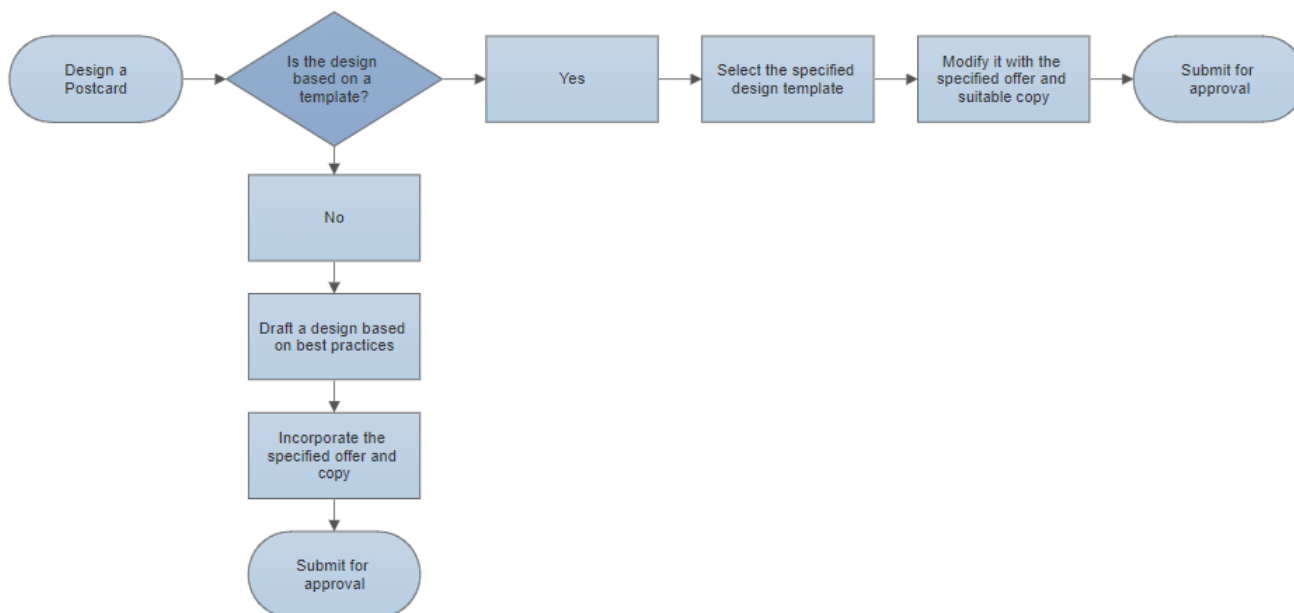
A split path is immediately understood without special training by virtually everyone. It is intuitive and does not have to be learned.

Compare these two flowcharts of the same process below.

Split Path



Decision Symbol



You can see how introducing the decision symbol causes the flow chart to immediately break the left to right rule as one path now flows vertically.

Sharing and Collaborating While Doing Process Documentation

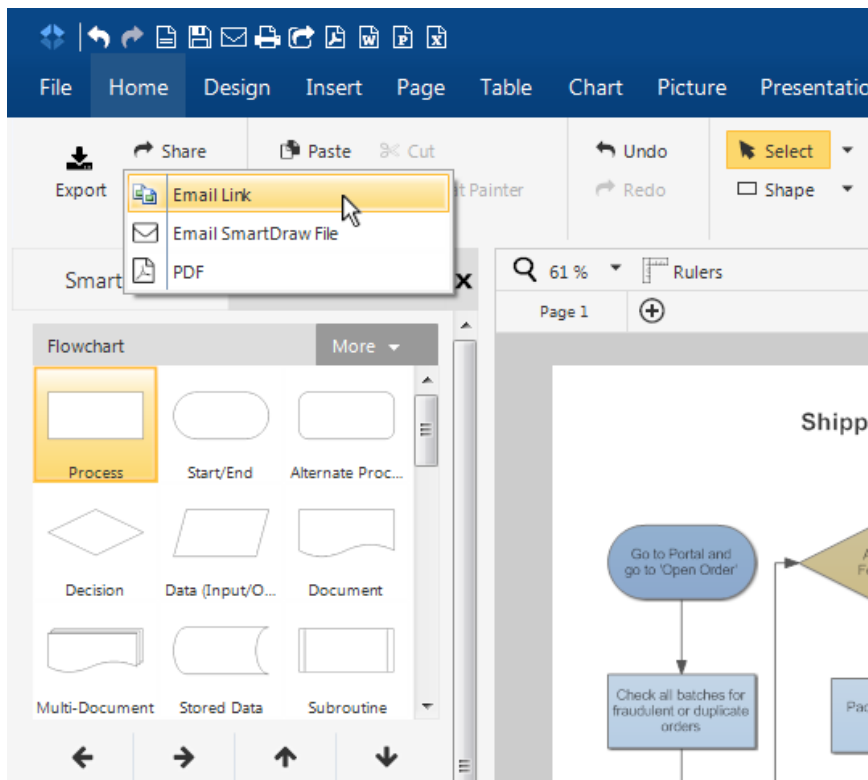
Sharing information and processes is essential. SmartDraw makes this easy by letting you share your collection of process charts in a number of different ways.

If you're working on SmartDraw for Windows Desktop, you can save your collection to a shared folder and upload it to SharePoint.

Access control can be managed using Windows groups or SharePoint. Users who manage processes should have read/write access to the documents that describe them, so that they can update the processes when changes occur. Other users should have read-only access.

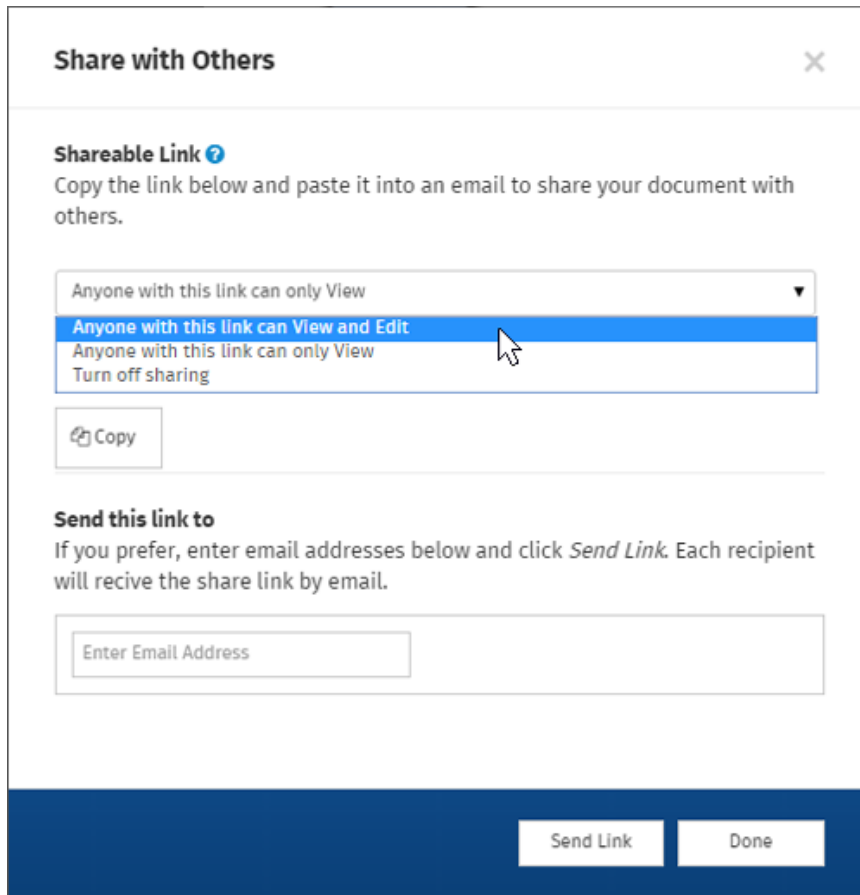
You can also save your charts in a shared DropBox, Google Drive, Box, or OneDrive account.

However, the easiest way to share a completed process documentation is to send your team a link to the master process chart. Simply email them a link to view your diagram using the share button in the Home ribbon.



Your file will be uploaded to SmartDraw's secure servers.

Then simply specify a level of access for each person you want to email and copy-paste the link provided or use SmartDraw to email someone on your behalf.



They won't need to download, install or sign up for an account to view the process.

Getting Started with SmartDraw and Process Documentation

You can use SmartDraw to document processes for an entire operation or for any unit within an operation. You can facilitate the process yourself or you can have SmartDraw's experts help you.

Installing SmartDraw also allows each user to realize the benefits of the software for other uses: project management, improved presentations, and more effective communication.