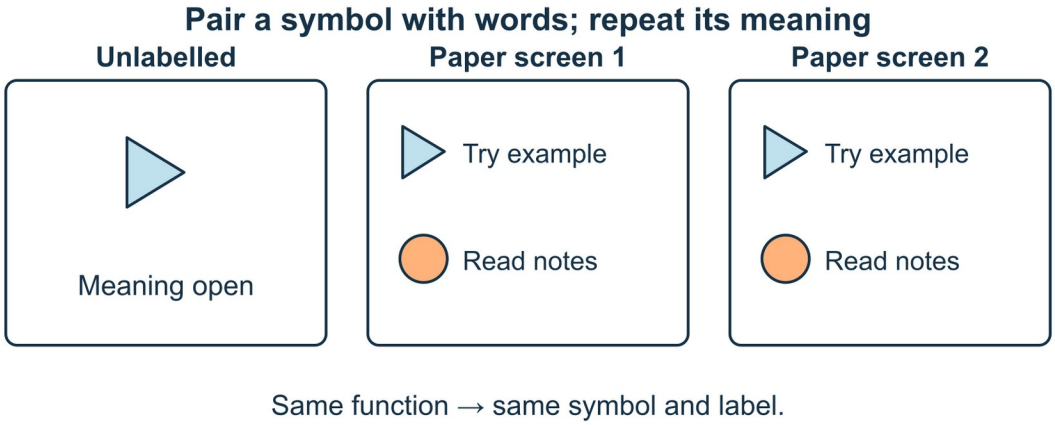
A symbol that explains itself

What instructions help an unfamiliar icon communicate its meaning?

Give an original symbol one clear function, pair it with words and use the same meaning consistently.

Make | 10-20 minutes, or one label | The supplied example, read or heard, Optional scrap paper and a pen or pencil

Start here Look at an unlabelled triangle. It might suggest several actions. In this invented interface, the chosen action is 'Try example'.



A symbol gets its meaning from a clear label

1 Choose one function

Write what the control is meant to do. Here, triangle means Try example; a circle means Read notes. The meaning comes from the declared legend, not the shape alone.

2 Pair the symbol with text

Draw the triangle beside the words Try example. Place the words close enough to belong to the same control. Keep the circle's different label separate.

3 Repeat consistently

On a second paper screen, use the same triangle and label for the same action. Do not change it to mean Back without changing the design and explanation.

4 Check the instruction

Ask what information an unfamiliar reader would need. You can identify an ambiguity yourself; no other person or user study is required.

Constructed interface two functions

The symbols belong to an invented interface. The model chooses meanings and labels; it does not assume every reader already knows them.

• Triangle + Try example is one control.

• Circle + Read notes is a different control.

• On the next paper screen, triangle still means Try example.

What this example can show A clear legend and consistent labels can help, but this drawing is not a usability trial, a universal symbol set or accessibility certification.

A different way

Choose a supplied label for the triangle or explain which of two controls does the stated action. Drawing is optional.

If you want to go further

Design a third control for a different function and give it a distinct label. Explain how it avoids colliding with the first two meanings.

Something to notice

Did the symbol keep one meaning, and could the words explain it without the symbol?

Read or explore more

Horizon topic Icons Symbols

https://launchhorizonhq.com/learn/icons-symbols/

Horizon topic Wayfinding Signs

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Horizon topic Accessible Design

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W3C Web Accessibility Initiative Use Icons that Help the User

https://www.w3.org/WAI/WCAG2/supplemental/patterns/o1p07-icons-used/

W3C Web Accessibility Initiative Understanding SC 3.2.4: Consistent Identification

https://www.w3.org/WAI/WCAG22/Understanding/consistent-identification.html