

## Arrows

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Information provided by people directly and through a variety of technologies guides our individual actions. This provides the opportunity to influence the actions of others by supplying informative prompts.

An informative cue is not enough. Its uses must be familiar to the recipient. It is as though the information technology provides clues that we integrate with our habits. Habits and customs are ingrained and we are often unaware of the contribution we make in determining our response to an informative sign.

Arrow signs provide apparently simple examples that often appear on their own or with few accompanying elements. The use of arrow signs is seldom formally taught yet they are inescapable in urban settings and in transport systems. Arrow signs carry with them a folk history that implies swiftness, a target and an archer, or in the case of a sign an author or authority.

There is a huge variety of portrayals of arrows and they appear to be interchangeable though they subtly signal stylistic preferences, the age of the sign, the authority backing the sign and the sign's provenance. In many instances the arrow could be substituted by a manicule but today manicules seem dated and do not have the traction that arrows do as a sign. Arrows though appear to have more uses than manicules.

Arrow signs are primarily adverb-like. They indicate, for instance, actions of rotating, sliding or personal directional movement, or as pointers they indicate the location of things. There is, therefore, not a single type of use for arrow signs, and in some cases the authority attached to the sign makes it imperative and in some cases the sign is conditional.

The subject or the object of the arrow may be named explicitly but commonly, arrow signs are not grammatically complete and the subject or object is implied by the situation. Similarly the particular use of the sign, or expected reaction to the sign, is a product of the sign and its specific situation and the customs associated with it.

The arrow as an icon demonstrates that reactions to informative signs alone cannot guarantee a specific reaction. The reaction is dependent on the situation, the traditions of the observer and their respect for the sign. In the case of arrow signs this is readily apparent but it applies to all informative signs that our information technologies help us create and implies we reflexively contribute to the information we glean.