A flow chart is a visual means of portraying **steps in a process**. A flow chart may use symbols, pictures, text, or a combination of these elements. Flow charts may be generalized or they may be very detailed and illustrate each specific step in a process. As with any other illustrations, flow charts should have a title and appropriate labels and explanations. Furthermore, flow charts should be clear, simple, and precise to help the reader understand the process being illustrated. In a classroom setting it would be wise for the teacher to present students with models of flow charts before expecting students to create their own.

Flow charts can be used to portray an **existing process** (manufacturing a product, decision-making procedure, action plan) or a **theoretical process** for planning and performance improvement purposes. In either case, the flow chart must have specific start and end points with appropriate steps and flow lines connecting the two. Flow charts may be created by hand, by using computer software, or by a combination of the two methods. The use of meaningful pictorial symbols is appropriate in the construction of charts representing the flow of objects or materials. Conventional symbols (shown below) can be used to illustrate non-material items such as ideas, actions, and decisions, as well as for the flow of material items.
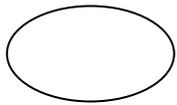
Input and output: materials, information or action to begin the process (may start with several items) and the finished product or result at the end (one item only)

An activity or task performed: may have multiple arrows coming in but should have only one arrow going out
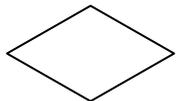
Indicates a choice or decision that is required: will have one arrow coming in but should have two or more going out
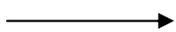
Direction of flow in the process: may be labelled to indicate type or method of movement

Creating a Flow Chart:

- Clearly define the process to be illustrated.
- Identify the start and end points.
- Make a list of the steps in the process and clarify sequence.
- Consult with colleagues to verify steps and sequence.
- Determine layout format (vertical or horizontal).
- Create or determine appropriate pictorial or conventional symbols to be used.
- Make a sketch of the flowchart and review.
- Create flow chart.
- Provide title, labels, and explanations as required.