Shapes

Visio shapes are ready-made images that you drag onto your drawing page — they are the building blocks of your drawing.

When you drag a shape from a stencil onto your drawing page, the original shape remains on the stencil. That original is called a master shape. The shape that you put on your drawing is a copy — also called an instance — of that master. From most Visio stencils, you can drag as many instances of the same shape onto your drawing as you want.

There are many ways to use and customize Visio shapes, but you can accomplish a lot with only the most popular methods and a few special features.

Customize shapes on the spot

There are thousands of Visio shapes and countless ways to use and customize them. The most common things that people do with shapes involve features that are built right into the shapes. Visual cues help you find and use those features quickly.

1. **Rotation handles**
   - The bright green dots located above shapes are called rotation handles. Drag a rotation handle right or left to rotate the shape.

2. **Blue connection arrows for AutoConnect**
   - The light blue connection arrows help you easily connect shapes to one another.

3. **Selection handles for resizing shapes**
   - You can use the bright green selection handles to change the height and width of your shape. Click and drag a selection handle on the corner of a shape to enlarge the shape without changing its proportions, or click and drag a selection handle on the side of a shape to make the shape taller or wider.
Visio 2007 – Shapes, Stencils, and Templates

Special features of Visio shapes

Shapes can hold data

Each shape can be associated with data. There are a number of ways you can add data to shapes.

After data is added to a shape, it isn't displayed in the drawing by default. The easiest way to see the data is to select the shape and then open the Shape Data window, as shown in the illustration below.

If you want to display the data for lots of shapes at once, you can use a feature called Data Graphics. The following illustration shows the data for two trees at once.

NOTE Data Graphics is only available in Microsoft Office Visio Professional 2007.
Shapes with special behavior

Too many Visio shapes have special behavior to list them all, but here are a couple of examples.

For example, you can stretch a People shape to show more people, or stretch the Growing flower shape to indicate growth.

The next illustration shows how you can measure the size of a shape on your page by using a special dimension shape that is designed for measuring other shapes. (The dimension shapes are only available in Office Visio Professional 2007.)

And below is a Pie chart shape from the Charting Shapes stencil. You can right-click the shape to set the number of slices and what percent each slice represents.

**TIP** A great way to find out what a shape can do is to right-click it to see if there are any special commands on its shortcut menu.
Stencils

Visio stencils hold collections of shapes. The shapes in each stencil have something in common. The shapes can be a collection of shapes that you need to create a particular kind of diagram, or several different versions of the same shape.

In the following illustration, the **Basic Flowchart Shapes** stencil contains common flowchart shapes, and the **Backgrounds** stencil contains a variety of backgrounds. You can even create your own stencil of favorite shapes.

1. Stencils appear in the **Shapes** window.
2. When stencils open, they automatically dock themselves in the **Shapes** window, one on top of another.
3. Click the title bar of a stencil to bring it to the top of the stack.
4. The stencil that was previously on top of the stack moves to the bottom of the **Shapes** window.
Open any Visio stencil

Each template opens with the stencils that you need to create a particular kind of drawing, but it's nice to know that you can open other stencils any time you want.

1. On the File menu, point to Shapes, point to the category that you want, and then click the name of the stencil that you want to use.

2. Repeat step 1 for any other stencils that you want to open.
Templates

Visio templates are a little harder to describe because they aren't a single thing — they are more like a collection of settings. A Visio template combines a blank drawing page with any combination of the following:

Stencils full of the shapes that are needed to create a particular kind of drawing. The Charts and Graphs template, for example, opens with a stencil full of quick, easy shapes for creating charts and graphs.

**Appropriate grid size and ruler measurements.** Some drawings require a special scale. For example, the Site Plan template opens with an engineering scale, where 1 inch equals 1 foot.

**Special menus** Some templates have unique features that you can find on special menus. For example, when you open the Calendar template, a Calendar menu appears on the main menu bar. You can use the Calendar menu to configure your calendar or to import data from Microsoft Office Outlook into your calendar.
Wizards to help you with special types of drawings In some cases when you open a Visio template, a wizard helps you get the drawing off to a good start. For example, the Space Plan template opens with a wizard that helps you set up your space and room information.
What's next?

Get help creating a more complex drawing


2. In the Help window, click the Show Table of Contents button.

3. In the Table of Contents window, click the category for the drawing that you want to create.
Discover the variety of Visio templates

Depending on the edition of Visio you use, you have between 25 (for Microsoft Office Visio Standard 2007) and 64 (for Office Visio Professional 2007) different templates to work with. To find out more about these templates, browse through the Getting Started screen, which opens automatically when you start Visio. Click the various categories, and then click the template thumbnails to see larger versions of the thumbnails and short descriptions of the templates.

Browse through the stencils

Taking a moment to open the list of stencils is a great way to get to know more about the huge variety of shapes available, but exploring a few of the stencils themselves is even better.

You don't even have to open a diagram — just click Shapes on the File menu, and then navigate down to the stencil that you want to open.
Browse through the menus

Opening menus is another quick way to get a sense of what you can do in Visio. The View, Data, and Shape menus are three of the most popular menus.

1 The View menu lists all the special windows for Visio drawings as well as the commands for turning on and off the visual guides, like the drawing grid.

2 The Data menu lists the commands for advanced features, like importing and displaying data. These are some of the most powerful features available in Visio.

3 The Shape menu lists the commands that orient your shapes and connectors the way that you want them in your drawing.