



QI Essentials Toolkit: Flowchart

A flowchart — also known as a “process map” — is a visual representation of the sequence of steps in a process. Understanding the process as it currently operates is an important step in developing ideas about how to improve it. This makes flowcharts especially useful in the early phases of improvement work.

To create a flowchart, teams brainstorm all the steps in the process as it currently exists. Teams write each process step in a box (or on a sticky note). In addition to the steps themselves, they use a diamond shape (or sticky note turned on its corner) to indicate points in the process where a decision needs to be made. For decision steps, the team writes a yes/no question. Then they use lines to show the connections between the boxes and diamonds.

Having a shared understanding of the current process helps teams identify problems or bottlenecks, focus discussions, and identify resources. For example, teams can identify steps in the process that do not add value, such as delays; unnecessary work, duplication, or expense; and breakdowns in communication. It is at these points where the improvement work can start.

IHI's QI Essentials Toolkit includes the tools and templates you need to launch and manage a successful improvement project. Each of the nine tools in the toolkit includes a short description, instructions, an example, and a blank template. NOTE: Before filling out the template, first save the file on your computer. Then open and use that version of the tool. Otherwise, your changes will not be saved.

- Cause and Effect Diagram
- Driver Diagram
- Failure Modes and Effects Analysis (FMEA)
- **Flowchart**
- Histogram
- Pareto Chart
- PDSA Worksheet
- Project Planning Form
- Run Chart & Control Chart
- Scatter Diagram

Instructions

- 1) Get the “right” people in the room — those who know the process best.
- 2) Start by defining the first and the last step in the process — so that everyone has a shared understanding of where the process you’re working on begins and ends.
- 3) Using the shapes below, fill in all the steps in the process from first to last. Show the process as it actually works (not as it should work).
 - o Tip: Use sticky notes (one for each step) to create a flowchart. This allows you to add steps and move steps around as you depict the process.
 - o Tip: Note that some steps are parallel — that is, they happen at the same time.
- 4) Review the flowchart to check for accuracy and completeness.
- 5) Assign action items to team members to fill in unfamiliar steps and verify accuracy.
- 6) When the flowchart is complete and accurate, analyze it, use it, revisit it, and keep it up to date.



Start and end of a process



Activity or task

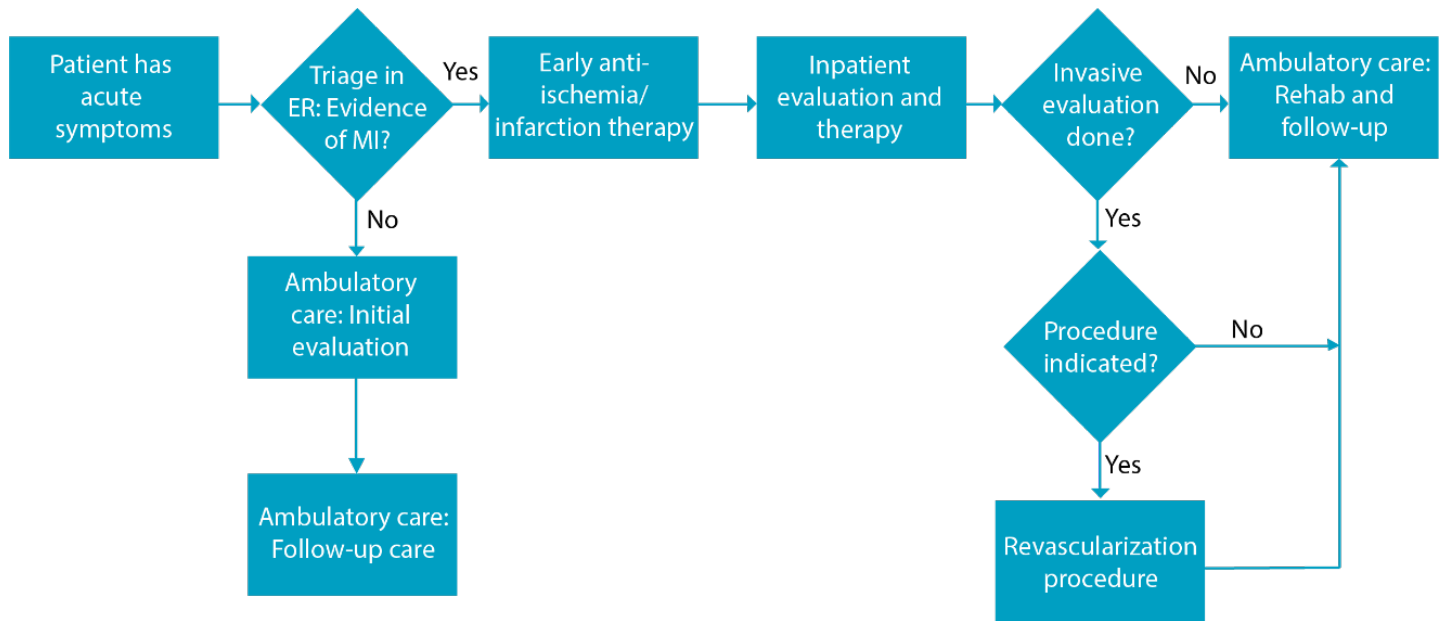


Decision point (yes/no question)



Flow line

Example: Flowchart



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Template: Flowchart

Use the symbols on the previous page to map out your system.

