

# Improving Tech Comm Using Road Signs & Everyday Experiences

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# Agenda

- Introduction
- Review principles in *The Design of Everyday Things*
- Practice Norman's principles in real life
- Apply life experiences to technical communication and usability
- Discussion

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Smart TV Photo by [Nubelson Fernandes](#) on [Unsplash](#)

# Introduction

We're all overwhelmed  
sometimes; we can still  
observe our surrounding.

*"Two of the most important  
characteristics of good design are  
**discoverability** and **understanding**,"*  
- Donald Norman

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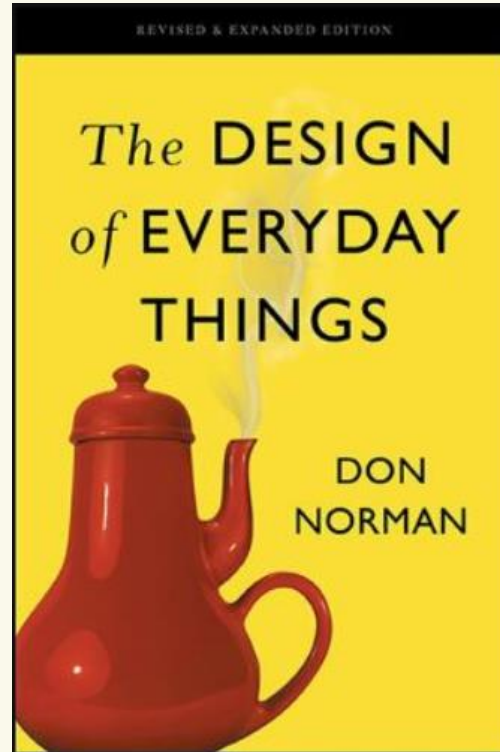
JHU Photo by [Colin Lloyd](#) on [Unsplash](#)



# Norman's principles

- Affordance
- Signifiers
- Mapping
- Constraints
- Force Functions

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# Affordance

- Affordance
- Signifiers
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The relationship between a physical object and a person.

- It's a relationship, not a property.
- Think "needs to" or "is for"

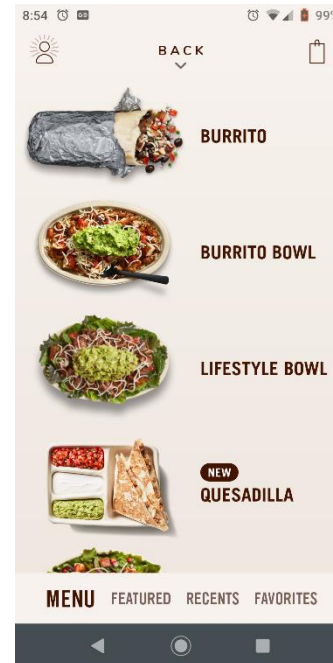


Photo by [Sam Moqadam](#) on [Unsplash](#)

# Signifiers

- Affordance
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Signifiers communicate where the action should take place.

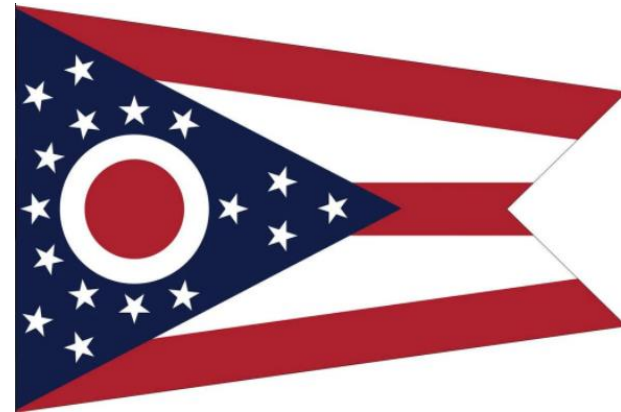


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# Flags & More Semiotics

- Affordance
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- A child should be able to draw them from memory
- Provide meaningful symbolism
- Only use 2 or 3 basic colors
- Be distinctive
- No letters, no writing



# More Semiotics

- Affordance
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- Mapping
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# Signifiers

- Affordance
- Signifiers
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Some signifiers are meant to be ignored.



- Affordance
- Signifiers
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# Hint Text & Error Messages

- Affordance
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Hint text can subconsciously help users prevent errors.

## Password



Include at least 8 characters, one upper-case letter, one lower-case and a number.

# Mapping

The relationship between the elements of two sets of things.

- Affordance
- Signifiers
- Mapping
- Constraints
- Force Functions

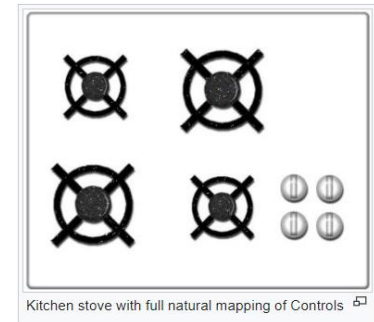


# Constraints

- Affordance
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Guide actions and ease interpretation

- **Physical** – actual barriers
- **Logical** – spatial layouts that guide behavior
- **Cultural** – culturally allowable actions
- **Semantic** – actions that rely on the meaning of the situation (and the world)

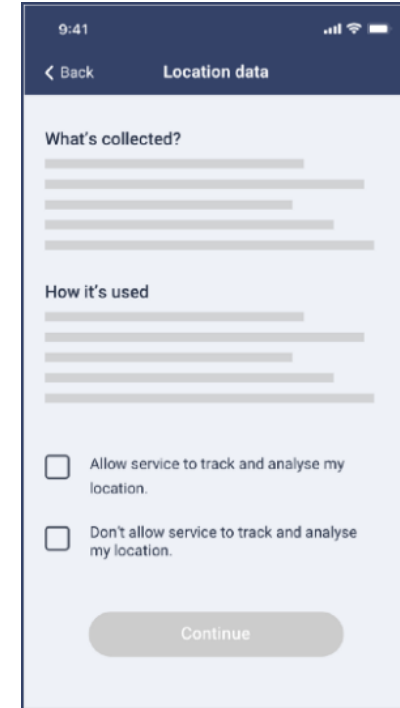


Source: [Wikipedia.org/wiki/Natural\\_mapping](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Natural_mapping)

# Force functions

A situation in which the actions are constrained so that failure at one stage prevents the next step from happening

- Affordance
- Signifiers
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Source: <https://medium.com/@AbtaPay/https://www.stcpmc.org>

*"Much of our everyday knowledge resides in the world, not in the head"*  
— Donald Norman

# APPLYING LIFE TO OUR WORK

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[illegible]

Form 3

Form 1

Form 2

Form 3

Form 4

Form 5

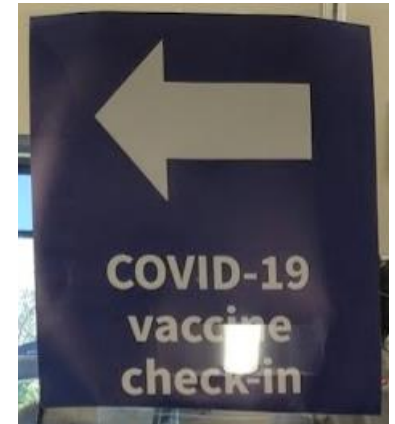
Form 6

[//www.stcpmc.org](http://www.stcpmc.org)



# Examples

- Affordance
- Signifiers
- Mapping
- Constraints
- Force Functions



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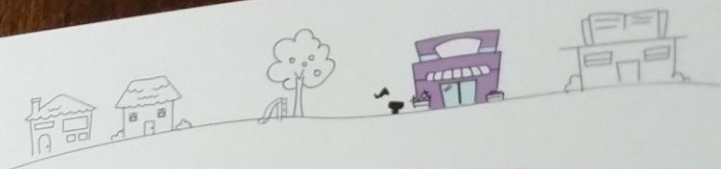
## playground.



"Found it!"  
called Kellan.



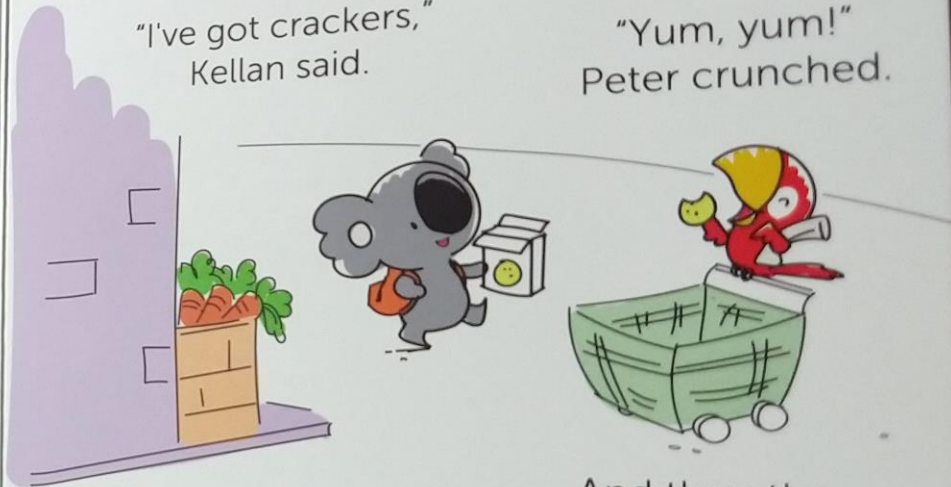
And then they  
went to the ...



## grocery store.

"I've got crackers,"  
Kellan said.

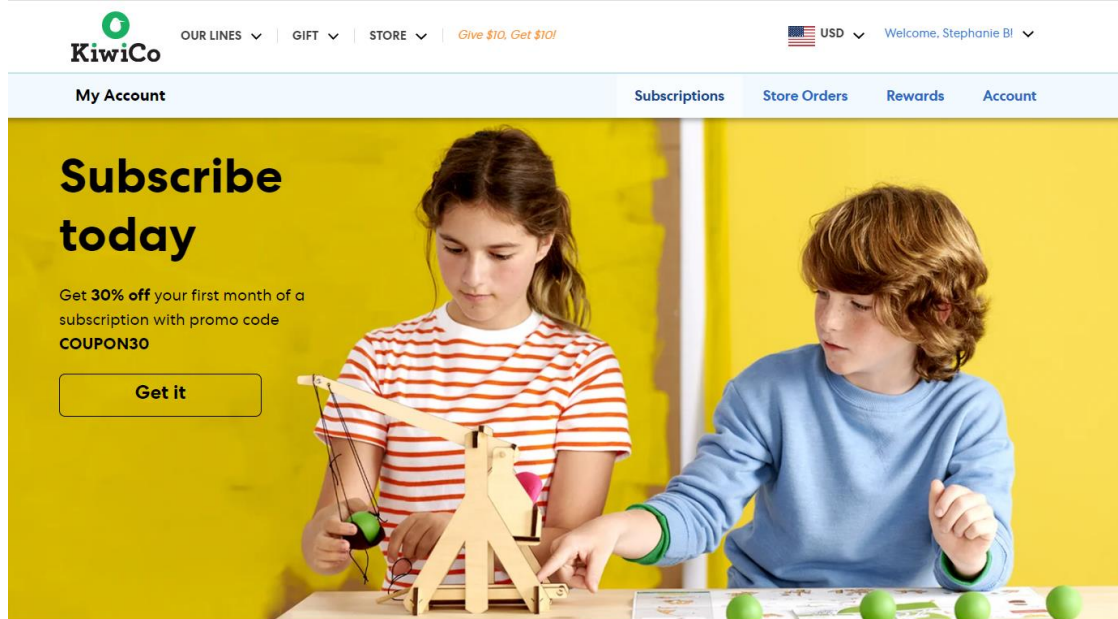
"Yum, yum!"  
Peter crunched.



And then they  
went to the ...

# Examples

- Affordance
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The screenshot shows the KiwiCo website. At the top, there's a navigation bar with the KiwiCo logo, links for 'OUR LINES', 'GIFT', and 'STORE', and a promotional banner 'Give \$10, Get \$10!'. On the right, there's a currency selector set to 'USD' and a welcome message 'Welcome, Stephanie B!'. Below the navigation bar, there's a horizontal menu with 'My Account', 'Subscriptions', 'Store Orders', 'Rewards', and 'Account'. The main content area features a large yellow background with the text 'Subscribe today' and a promotional offer: 'Get 30% off your first month of a subscription with promo code COUPON30'. A 'Get it' button is visible. The background image shows two children, a girl and a boy, working on a wooden mechanical project on a table.

## My subscriptions

# Examples



Source: ["Star Wars: The Old Republic Comic #2, Threat of Peace"](#)

- Affordance
- Signifiers
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- Use plain language
- Vary sentence length
- Leave ample spacing between topics
- Divide information into useful sections



- Affordance
- Signifiers
- Mapping
- Constraints
- Force Functions



## Remember to help users

- Think about translation
- Use bullets and lists
- Headings help chunk information

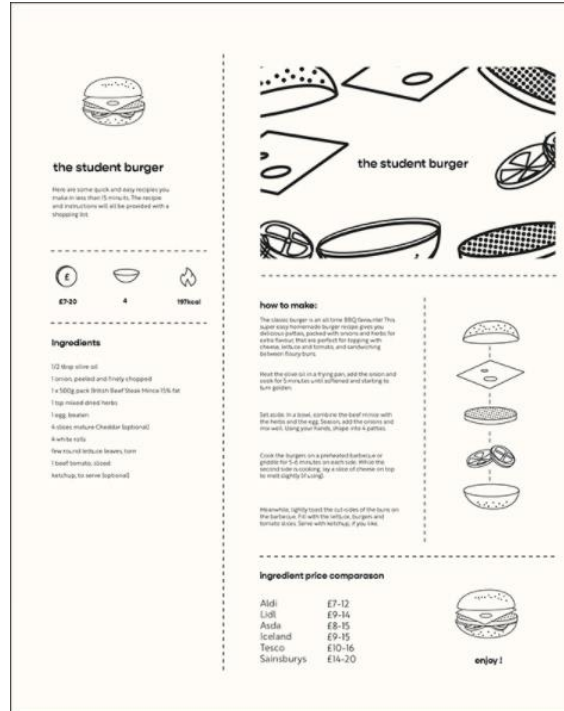
# Examples

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# Cookbooks are great how to guides

- Affordance
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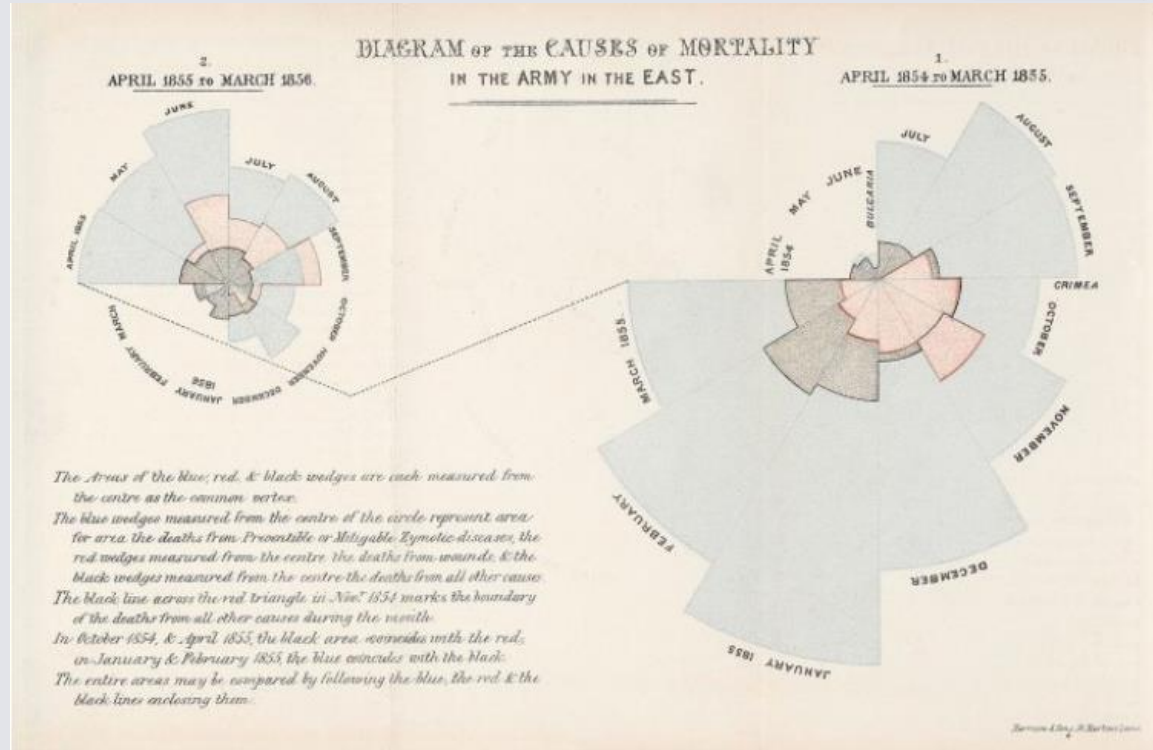
Source: [The Student Cookbook by Harry Wright](#)

Well-designed recipes follow many of the practices we strive for in technical communication.

- Plain language
- Listing prerequisites
- Illustrations of what to expect

# Infographics

- Affordance
- Signifiers
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Source: <https://99percentinvisible.org/episode/florence-nightingale-data-viz-pioneer/>

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# Infographics

Visual representations of information.

- Affordance
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- Use illustrated characters and bold colors to grab attention
- Make them simple, not overloaded with graphics or content
- Enforce active voice (as much as possible)



*"Enjoy yourself. Walk around the world examining the details of design. Learn how to observe. Take pride in the little things that help: think kindly of the person who so thoughtfully put them in."*

– Donald Norman

# CONCLUSION

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