

Semiotics

by Sophia



WHAT'S COVERED

This lesson will focus on the study of semiotics and how it plays a role in your daily life. Specifically, you will learn about:

1. Semiotic Theory

Semiotics, or semiotic theory, is a study of how signs and symbols make meaning. This plays a huge role in a variety of areas, including linguistics, art, literature, cinema, politics, and religion.

There are two key figures in the history of semiotics that you should know: **Charles Sanders Peirce** and **Roland Barthes**.

Roland Barthes was a French literary critic who extended early semiotic theory to mass media and popular culture. He's considered to be the founder of contemporary semiotics.

Charles Sanders Peirce was an American philosopher and developer of the formal theory of semiotics, and he developed a precise system for describing signs that included terms like symbol, icon, and index.



TERMS TO KNOW

Semiotics

The study of how signs and symbols make meaning.

Charles Sanders Peirce

American philosopher and developer of the formal theory of semiotics; developed a precise system for describing signs, including the terms symbol, icon, and index.

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2. Sign

A **sign** is something that stands for something other than itself. In other words, it is a representation.

➞ **EXAMPLE** A stop sign tells you to stop, and a caution sign tells you to be careful. However, neither

one shows the actual action of stopping or being cautious.
Ads, such as the one below, can be signs as well.



This image doesn't mean "headlamp," and it doesn't mean "go turn the light on." It stands for something other than itself, so it's advertising a product or communicating that you should buy the product.



TERM TO KNOW

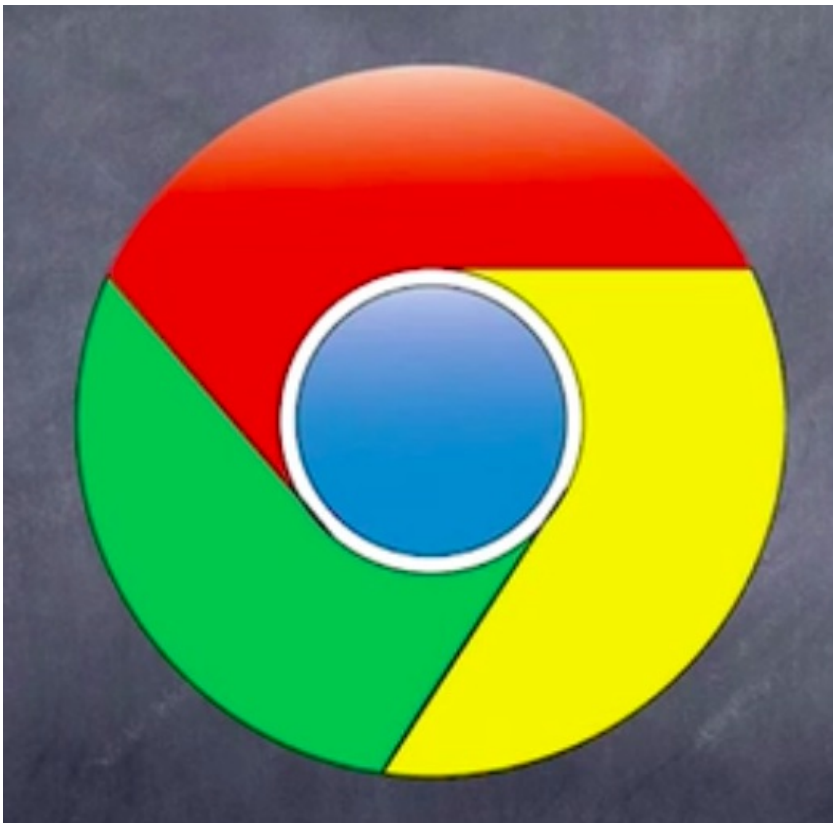
Sign

Something that stands for something other than itself.

3. Symbol

A **symbol** is a sign which has no logical connection to what it signifies. The viewer has to learn the connection between the sign and its meaning.

Look at the logo of the Google Chrome web browser below.



The viewer has to learn that this logo is associated with Chrome as a brand or product, and that it's tied to a service or application—in this case, the browser. It is up to the viewer to learn that connection.

➞ **EXAMPLE** A flag may symbolize a country or nation, but it does not depict the country or the nation; it's just an abstract symbol. An outsider has to learn the connection to the country from the symbol.



TERM TO KNOW

Symbol

A sign which has no logical connection to what it signifies; the viewer must learn the connection between the sign and its meaning.

4. Index

Index is a sign that can be understood because it's logically linked to or affected by what it stands for. To put it simply, an index has a direct link between the sign and the object.

The sign below shows a curvy road, and it's logically linked to its location—it communicates that there is a curvy road ahead.



TERM TO KNOW

Index

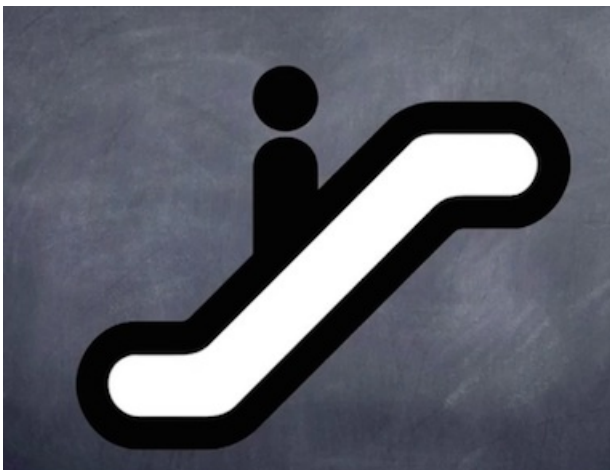
A sign that can be understood because it is logically linked to or affected by what it stands for.

5. Icon

An **icon** is a sign that physically resembles what it signifies. A crosswalk sign, for instance, pretty clearly resembles what it's trying to depict, which is, of course, the crosswalk.



Likewise, this icon of an escalator also very clearly resembles what it signifies.





TERM TO KNOW

Icon

A sign that physically resembles what it signifies.

6. Collective Use of Semiotics

Sometimes an image can be described by more than one of these terms, such as this sign with symbols of the highways and exits.



You could also think of a wedding ring as both a sign and symbol. It's a sign that the wearer is married and also a symbol for anything that person chooses to associate it with, such as love.



SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned that semiotics is the study of how signs and symbols make meaning. You also learned that **semiotic theory** demonstrates how images can be **signs, symbols, indexes, or icons**. When an image is more than one of these, it demonstrates the **collective use of semiotics**.

Keep up the learning and have a great day!

Source: THIS WORK IS ADAPTED FROM SOPHIA AUTHOR MARIO E. HERNANDEZ



TERMS TO KNOW

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