

CS Peirce's sign categories

The simple version

Indexical



Indexical

- **direct connection** between the sign and its meaning
- the connection is **motivated** - that is, the sign is a result of what it stands for
- you may be able to decode the sign at a basic level
- footprints, smoke, a bruise are all indexical
- index means **pointing** - the sign points to what it means



Symbolic

Symbolic

- Connection between sign and meaning is **learned**, or **conventional**
- **Linguistic signs** are always symbolic (well, almost)
- It's **unlikely** you will be able to **decode** a symbolic sign you have never seen
- The connection between a symbolic sign and its meaning is **arbitrary**

Iconic



Iconic

- A likeness or similarity
- You **may** be able to decode a sign you have never seen
- Drawings are iconic - they resemble what they mean
- There is some kind of **connection** between the sign and what it means, but not the same kind of connection that indexical signs have

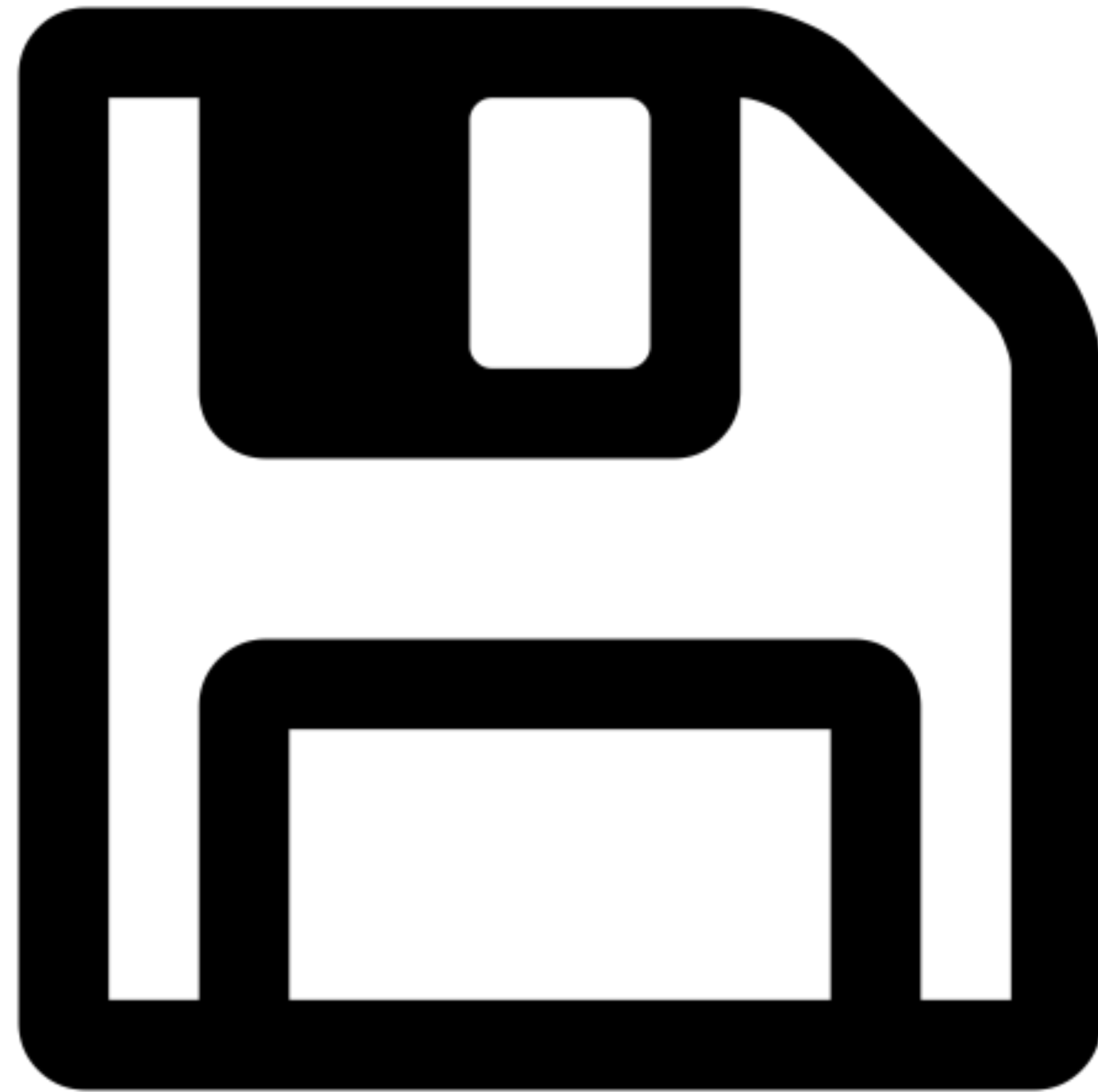


How many signs?

In reality...

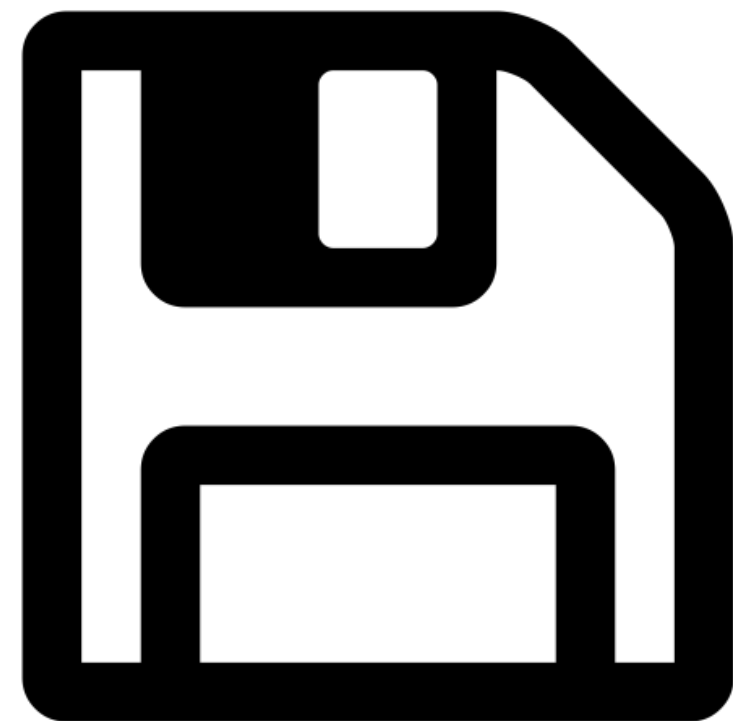
- Many signs are made up of **multiple signs**
- Context is vital - what accompanies the sign? Where is it?
- The categories may overlap. The line between categories is not always clear.

What's this?



If you think it looks like a *floppy disk*, then it is **iconic**.

If you think it means *save* and you don't know what it is, it's **symbolic**.



Understanding these three basic modes of signification is critical.