

RRR02 Affordance

Part 1 - explanation of 'affordances' (250 words):

The video "Bad doors are everywhere" uses "confusing doors" as an example to show a common design problem. Many doors look normal, but people still push when they should pull, or pull when they should push. Design expert Don Norman calls these confusing doors Norman doors. The problem is simple: the door's design doesn't tell people how to use it.

First, the video explains two things good design should have: discoverability and feedback. A key idea behind discoverability is affordances: the way an object's shape and materials naturally suggest how it should be used. For example, a flat plate makes people think "push," while a handle makes people think "pull." When a door's appearance doesn't match how it actually works, people get confused and must rely on signs or trial and error. As Norman says, "if a door needs a 'push' or 'pull' label, the design has already failed."

And the second is that this problem isn't just about doors. Many daily products and digital interfaces are hard to use because they don't make their actions clear. However, the solution is 'human-centered design': watching how people behave, understanding their needs, and improving the design through testing.

In a word, Norman doors remind us that good design doesn't need extra instructions. Instead, the right action should be obvious the moment someone sees the object.

Part 2 - What is the Signifiers?

Signifiers are clues that indicate to people where they can take action. They can be shapes, icons, sounds, or small details one can notice. A signifier tells you how to use something.

Don Norman states that affordances demonstrate what you can do, and signifiers show how you know you can do it. They collaborate but are not identical. For example, a door handle can be pulled. That is the affordance. The shape and position of the handle inform you to pull. That is the signifier.

Another example is a button on a screen. The button can be tapped. That is the affordance. The outline, shadow, or color of the button indicates that it can be tapped gently. That is the signifier.

Signifiers are important because people do not read instructions initially. They search for clues to comprehend how to use something. If the signifiers are weak or confusing, people will make errors, just as with a "Norman door."

Good signifiers assist users in avoiding confusion. They make a product easy to learn and operate. For designers, the objective is not to add more labels. The goal is to enable the object to convey the message about how to use it through its appearance to any user.