02 Affordance

Task 1: concept of affordance

The concept of "affordances" describes not only what an object is like, but the relationship between the object and the user. It refers to the actions that seem possible when a user meets an object. In simple words, it answers: "What can I do with this?"(Interaction Design Foundation,2016)

A chair is an easy example. Its flat surface and stable legs suggest it can support weight, so most people understand they can sit on it or place items on it. This understanding comes from the chair's physical form and how it fits the human body. Importantly, affordances are not fixed: the same chair can offer different affordances to different users. For an adult it is mainly for resting, but for a child it might afford climbing. A door may afford "opening" for someone who can reach the handle, but not for a baby .The door itself hasn't changed, but the relationship between the user and the object has, changing the affordance. Therefore, affordances are possible actions arising from the relationship between the user and the object.To clearly show different affordances, designers must consider the user's characteristics and needs.

Designers therefore need to make the intended affordances easy to notice and hard to misunderstand. A classic example is the "Norman Door":if the designer wants the user to "push," they should convey and emphasize the "push" action. Installing a handle on the door makes users instinctively want to "pull." This creates a conflict in affordance—the door's structure allows "pushing," but the handle's design suggests "pulling." This confusion leads to user frustration, forcing them to stop and think or rely on "Push/Pull" signs. Thus, deeply understanding and respecting affordances is key to creating a natural, smooth, and intuitive user experience.

The following are the affordability of the three devices.

Device	Feature	Basic app Example	Affordance
iPhone (Smartphone)	Small size/easy to hold with one hand;Touchscreen; Location and mobile networks	Telephone; Messages;Videos;Photos;Maps	View information anytime, reply quickly, take notes easily, and use mobile navigation.
iPad (Tablet)	Compatible with stylus; larger screen	Notes;FaceTime	See more clearly, write more naturally (handwriting/ annotation)
MacBook (Laptop)	Keyboard; Touchpad; Large screen; Multiple windows	Finder;Pages;keynote	Writing and editing, project management, research and compilation, and output submission.

Task 2: Concept of Signifiers

Signifiers are cues in a design that help people "know what to do." They are not always words; they can also be arrows, icons, button shapes, sounds, lights, or even vibrations. Simply put, an affordance is what something "can do," while a signifier tells you "where to act and how to act," guiding you when you use a product.(Interaction Design Foundation,2016)

For example, a door may be meant to be opened by pushing, but if the door has a handle that looks like it should be pulled, people will naturally try to pull it. This handle can mislead users, so we often need extra signifiers such as "Push/Pull" to remind people how to use the door.

In today's web interfaces, the shape of a button, the word "Submit," a blue link, or a greyed-out input box can all signal to users what they can click, what they cannot click, and whether they should tap, swipe, or type. Without these signifiers, users might not know how to operate the interface at all.

So, in my understanding, the value of signifiers is that they make actions more intuitive and easier to discover, and they reduce mistakes and confusion.

Reference list:

Interaction Design Foundation (IxDF). "What Are Signifiers?" *Interaction Design Foundation*, 13 Sept. 2016, https://www.interaction-design.org/literature/topics/signifiers. Accessed 13 Oct. 2025.

Sketchbook: