

Comprehensive Guide to UNE-EN 60617 Standards: Graphical Symbols for Electrical and Electronic Diagrams

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In the complex ecosystem of electrical engineering and industrial automation, communication is predicated upon a standardized visual language. This language is codified through graphical symbols used in technical diagrams, which ensure that engineers, technicians, and maintenance personnel across the globe can interpret a circuit's design with absolute precision. The **UNE-EN 60617** series, published by the Spanish Association for Standardization (AENOR), represents the regional adoption of the international IEC 60617 standards. These standards define the graphical symbols for use in diagrams, providing a common framework for representing electrical components, logic functions, and system topologies.

Understanding the UNE-EN 60617 series is not merely an academic exercise; it is a regulatory and safety necessity. For decades, standards like **UNE-EN 60617-2:1997** and **UNE-EN 60617-7:1997** served as the backbone for technical documentation in Spain and Europe. Although many of these paper-based standards were officially annulled in May 2015 to make way for a dynamic international database, their principles remain foundational to current engineering practices. This article provides an in-depth technical analysis of these standards, their historical context, and their practical application in modern electrical design.

The Architecture of Electrical Standardization: From UNE 20004 to UNE-EN 60617

The evolution of graphical symbols in Spain transitioned through several phases of harmonization. Initially, standards such as **UNE 20004-2:1968** provided the groundwork for representing the nature of current distribution systems and methods of connection. However, as global trade and engineering collaboration expanded, the need for a unified European (EN) and International (IEC) standard became paramount.

The 1997 edition of the UNE-EN 60617 series was a landmark integration. It categorized symbols into various parts, each focusing on specific functional domains. The **ICS (International Classification for Standards)** codes, such as **01.080.30** (Graphical symbols for use on mechanical engineering and construction drawings) and **01.080.40** (Graphical symbols for use on electrical and electronics engineering drawings), provided a systematic way to index these documents within the broader technical landscape.

The Transition to the IEC 60617 Database

On May 14, 2015, AENOR officially annulled several parts of the 1997 series, including Part 2, Part 4, and Part 6. This was not because the symbols became obsolete, but because the format of the standard evolved. The International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC) moved toward a **subscription-based database model** (IEC 60617 Database) to allow for real-time updates and easier integration into Computer-Aided Design (CAD) software. For engineers working with legacy systems, however, the 1997 standards remain the primary reference for interpreting older schematics.

Technical Analysis of Core Standards

UNE-EN 60617-2:1997 – Elements and Qualifying Symbols

Part 2 is perhaps the most fundamental volume in the series. It does not focus on specific devices but rather on the "alphabet" used to build complex symbols. It covers qualifying symbols that modify the meaning of a base symbol, such as the nature of current, variability, and direction of force.

- Nature of Current: Symbols for Direct Current (DC), Alternating Current (AC), and specific frequencies.
- Variability: Arrows and lines indicating whether a component (like a resistor or capacitor) is fixed, adjustable, or variable.
- Direction of Flow: Essential for representing energy or signal propagation.

UNE-EN 60617-7:1997 – Switchgear, Controlgear, and Protection

This part is critical for power distribution and motor control center (MCC) design. It defines how to represent the physical and logical state of switching devices. The complexity of **UNE-EN 60617-7** lies in its ability to represent both the mechanical link and the electrical function of a device simultaneously.

Key components defined in this section include:

- Circuit Breakers: Distinguished by their ability to make, carry, and break currents under normal and specified abnormal conditions (short circuits).
- Disconnectors (Isolators): Symbols emphasizing the physical gap required for safety isolation.
- Contactor Relays: Representation of the coil (actuator) and the associated auxiliary contacts (Normally Open/ Normally Closed).
- Protective Devices: Symbols for thermal overloads, fuses, and residual current devices (RCDs).

Comparative Framework: 1997 Standards vs. Modern Equivalents

To understand the technical shift, the following table compares the legacy UNE-EN standards with their functional areas and current status.

Standard Reference	Focus Area	Status (Post-2015)	Primary Application
UNE-EN 60617-2:1997	Qualifying Symbols	Anulada (Replaced by DB)	General application, nature of current, variability.
UNE-EN 60617-6:1997	Production/Conversion	Anulada (Replaced by DB)	Generators, motors, and transformers.
UNE-EN 60617-7:1997	Switchgear & Protection	Anulada (Replaced by DB)	Control panels, circuit protection, relays.
UNE-EN 60617-12:1999	Binary Logic Elements	Active / Database	Digital logic, gates (AND, OR, NOT), flip-flops.

Core Mechanics of Symbol Construction

The UNE-EN 60617 standard is based on a **modular grid system**. This ensures that when symbols are combined, they maintain visual proportionality. Technical writers and designers must adhere to specific geometric rules when creating or using these symbols in software like AutoCAD Electrical or EPLAN.

The Mathematical Logic of Representation

Graphical symbols are often built using a base module 'M'. The standard dictates the thickness of lines and the diameter of circles relative to this module. For example, a standard contactor coil is often represented as a rectangle with a 2:1 aspect ratio. Failure to maintain these proportions can lead to misinterpretation in high-density diagrams.

Functional Identification (Device Tags)

While UNE-EN 60617 defines the *shape* of the symbol, standard **EN 81346** (formerly IEC 750) defines the *alphanumeric tagging*. A symbol for a contactor in a UNE-EN 60617 diagram is meaningless without its tag (e.g., -KM1). The integration of these two standards allows for a complete technical description of a system.

Practical Implementation: A Step-by-Step Field Guide

When developing a technical drawing according to these standards, engineers should follow a structured workflow to ensure compliance and clarity.

1. Identify the Nature of the System: Use Part 2 symbols to define the voltage and current characteristics (e.g., 3/N/PE ~ 400V 50Hz).
2. Select Base Symbols: Choose the core symbol from the relevant part (e.g., Part 6 for a three-phase motor).
3. Apply Qualifying Symbols: If the motor is variable speed, add the variability arrow defined in Part 2.
4. Define Control Logic: Use Part 7 to draw the control circuit, ensuring that NO (Normally Open) and NC (Normally Closed) contacts are correctly oriented relative to the actuator.
5. Cross-Referencing: For complex diagrams, use the grid coordinates to link contacts with their parent coils, a practice mandated for readability in industrial panels.

Troubleshooting Legacy Diagrams and Common Errors

Working with standards that span from 1968 (UNE 20004) to the modern 60617 database presents several challenges. Engineering departments often encounter "hybrid" drawings that mix different eras of symbols.

Common Error 1: Confusion Between Standards

One frequent mistake is the use of ANSI (American National Standards Institute) symbols in a project requiring UNE-EN 60617 compliance. For example, a resistor is a zigzag line in ANSI but a rectangle in UNE-EN 60617. Mixing these can lead to significant errors during the assembly of electrical cabinets.

Common Error 2: Incorrect Representation of Protective Earth (PE)

In **UNE-EN 60617-2**, the symbol for ground vs. noiseless ground vs. protective earth are distinct. Using the generic "ground" symbol for a "protective earth" connection in a high-voltage environment is a safety violation that can lead to improper grounding practices.

Common Error 3: Misinterpreting Anulada (Annulled) Status

Many procurement departments mistakenly believe that an "annulled" standard means the information is incorrect. In the case of **UNE-EN 60617-7:1997**, the information remains technically sound; however, for new legal certifications, the engineer must reference the latest version in the IEC database. Documentation for existing machinery built between 1997 and 2015 must strictly use the 1997 reference.

Case Study: Modernizing a 1990s Industrial Control Panel

Consider a manufacturing plant seeking to upgrade its motor control system. The original blueprints from 1997 utilize **UNE-EN 60617-7**. The modernization process requires a "translation" of legacy symbols into current digital twin models.

Step 1: Audit. Technicians identify symbols for old thermal-magnetic breakers. They find that the 1997 symbol for a combined thermal/magnetic trip is identical in function to the current database version but may have different line weights in the old prints.

Step 2: Digital Conversion. Using modern CAD software, the symbols are mapped. The software recognizes the **ICS 01.080.40** classification, ensuring that the metadata associated with the symbol (part numbers, terminal markings) is preserved.

Step 3: Verification. The new diagram is checked against **UNE-EN 60617-12** for any new digital logic integrated into the PLC (Programmable Logic Controller) sections, ensuring a seamless bridge between analog power symbols and digital control logic.

The Role of AENOR in National Compliance

AENOR (Asociación Española de Normalización) plays a pivotal role in ensuring that international standards are accessible to the Spanish market. By providing Spanish translations and context for standards like **UNE-EN 60617-6:1997**, AENOR ensures that local contractors can compete on an international level. While the transition to the database model (which is primarily in English and French) has been a hurdle for some, AENOR's legacy documents provide the necessary linguistic and technical bridge.

The Significance of ICS Codes

The ICS (International Classification for Standards) is a hierarchical system. For electrical engineering, staying within 01.080.40 ensures that the documentation meets the rigorous requirements of technical product documentation (TPD). This classification is what allows a Spanish engineering firm to submit a project to a German or French client with the assurance that the graphical symbols will be understood without ambiguity.

Future Trends: AI and Automated Diagram Interpretation

As we move beyond the 2015 database transition, the next frontier is the automated interpretation of UNE-EN 60617 diagrams using Artificial Intelligence. Computer vision models are now being trained on the geometric patterns defined in **UNE-EN 60617-2**. This allows for the automated conversion of scanned paper drawings into intelligent, searchable digital formats. This technology relies heavily on the rigid standardization provided by the 1997 documents, demonstrating their enduring value in the age of Industry 4.0.

Standardization is the silent guardian of engineering safety and efficiency. The **UNE-EN 60617** series, through its various parts and revisions, has established a high-fidelity language for the electrical industry. From the basic qualifying symbols of Part 2 to the complex switchgear of Part 7, these standards ensure that a line or a circle is never "just a drawing" but a precise technical instruction. While the medium has shifted from paper to database, the logic remains the same: clarity through uniformity. For the modern engineer, mastery of these symbols is as essential as understanding the laws of physics that govern the circuits they represent.

Baca Juga (Artikel Terkait)

- [**A Comprehensive Technical Guide to AS/NZS 3010:2017 Electrical Installations and Generating Sets**](http://alaskawriters.com/comprehensive-guide-as-nzs-3010-generating-sets.pdf)

URL: <http://alaskawriters.com/comprehensive-guide-as-nzs-3010-generating-sets.pdf>

- [**Comprehensive Guide to AS/NZS 3000:2018 Wiring Rules: Technical Standards and Practical Implementation**](http://alaskawriters.com/as-nzs-3000-2018-wiring-rules-guide.pdf)

URL: <http://alaskawriters.com/as-nzs-3000-2018-wiring-rules-guide.pdf>

- [**ASTM D117-10 Guide: Comprehensive Analysis of Sampling and Testing Electrical Insulating Oils**](http://alaskawriters.com/astm-d117-sampling-testing-electrical-insulating-oils.pdf)

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