

Mind Mapping

In a few words: A graphical way of showing ideas and how they are associated, with the core idea at the centre of the page and subsidiary ideas around it.

What is a mind map?

A mind map is a graphical creativity stimulation method that consists of a central word or concept, around which we draw the 5 to 10 main ideas that relate to that word. We then take each of those secondary words and draw the 5 to 10 main ideas that relate to each of those words.

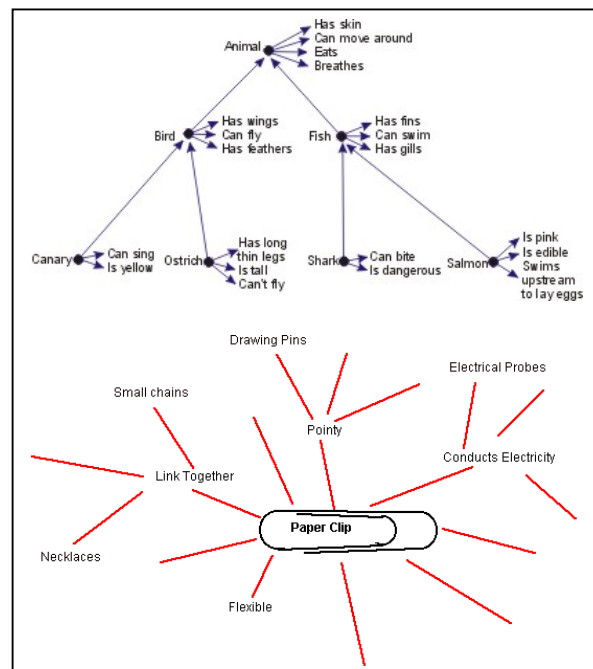
By following this method, a great number of related ideas can quickly be produced with very little effort.

Mind maps, first developed by Tony Buzan in the 1980s are an effective method of taking notes and useful for the generation of ideas by associations. To make a mind map, one starts in the centre of the page with the main idea, and works outward in all directions, producing a growing and organised structure composed of key words and key images.

The Brain and Mind-Mapping

For our brain to relate to information efficiently, the information must be structured in such a way as to integrate with existing knowledge as easily as possible. Main-stream cognitive theory views our long-term memory as a hierarchical database made up of nodes of information joined by links (Birch & Clegg, 1996, Collins & Quillian, 1969). Therefore, if our brain works primarily with key concepts in an interlinked and integrated manner, then it is logical to structure our notes and word relations in a similar manner.

Rather than starting from the top of a page and working down in sentences or lists, one should start at the *centre* of the page with the main idea and branch out as dictated by the individual ideas and general form of the theme.



A mind map has a number of advantages over the linear form of note-taking.

- The main idea in the centre is more clearly defined
- The relative importance of all ideas is easily understood. More important ideas are nearer the centre.
- The links between key concepts are clearly visible
- Recall and review is more effective and faster
- Addition of new information is easy
- Each map look is individual and different from other maps, aiding recall

Because of the large amount of association involved, mind maps can be very creative, as one idea will tend to generate new ideas and associations that have not been thought of before. Every item can become the centre of another map.

The creative potential of a mind map can be very useful in brainstorming sessions. You only need to start with a basic problem at the centre, and the team can then generate associations and ideas from it in order to arrive at a large number of different possible solutions. By representing your thoughts in a graphical and spatial manner and by using colour and pictures, a better overview is gained and new connections are often discovered.

Mind maps use pictures.

Pictures are worth a thousand words because they make use of a massive range of cortical skills: colour, form, line, dimension, texture, visual rhythm and imagination.

Images are therefore often more evocative than words, more precise and potent in triggering a wide range of associations, thereby enhancing creative thinking and memory.

Mind maps are a way of representing associated thoughts with symbols rather than with extraneous words. The mind forms associations almost instantaneously, and "mapping" allows you to write your ideas quicker than expressing them using only words or phrases.

Mind Map Tips and Techniques

1. Use emphasis

- Always use a central image
- If possible, Use images throughout your Mind Map
- Use three or more colours per central image
- Use dimension in images
- Use variations of size of printing, line and image
- Use organised spacing

2. Use Association

- Use arrows when you want to make connections within and across the branch pattern
- Use colours
- Use codes

3. Be Clear

- Use only one key word per line
- Print all words
- Print key words on lines
- Make line length equal to word length
- Connect lines to other lines
- Make the central lines thicker
- Make your images as clear as possible

References

Paul Birch & Brian Clegg, *Imagination Engineering, The toolkit for business creativity*, Pitman publishing, London, 1996, p3-25

Buzan, T., *Use Both Sides of your Brain*, Plume 1989

Collins, A.M., & Quillian, M.R., *Retrieval time from semantic memory*, Journal of verbal learning and verbal behaviour, 8, pp240-247, 1969