

## MIND MAPS

Mind mapping is a way for you to visually organize your ideas. Mind maps are useful for lots of different academic tasks, including:

- Organizing information
- Creative thinking
- Making notes
- Summarizing material (such as when you are studying)
- Making associations between ideas
- Structuring essays/assignments

Mind mapping involves starting with a central idea and coming up with related ideas that radiate out from the centre. New ideas can branch out from the central concept or they can be connected to peripheral ideas. By focusing on key concepts written down in your own words and then looking for connections between them, you are mapping ideas in a way that will help you understand and remember them. By personalizing your map with symbols or pictures, you will be making visual relationships that will further help you recall and understand important ideas.

### CREATING A MIND MAP

#### Just start writing

Draw quickly without judging, pausing, or editing; all of these things promote linear thinking and will slow you down. The point of mind mapping is to think creatively and in a non-linear manner. There will be plenty of time to edit your ideas later on; at this stage you just want to get every possibility onto your map. Sometimes, an obscure idea ends up becoming the basis of a good argument or creative assignment.

#### Look for relationships

Use lines, colours, arrows, branches, or some other way of showing connections between the ideas you've put on your mind map. Don't stop at connecting two ideas with a line; write out their relationship on the page. These relationships are important because they can help you understand the information. If you are making an essay plan, they can help you transition smoothly from one idea to the next.

#### Making your map

There are different ways to make mind maps. If you are writing yours out by hand, you should turn the paper sideways so you have more room, and use pencil so you can make changes to your work. Nowadays, though, there is a lot of mind-mapping software available for students. You can find a free mind-mapping program at [www.bubbl.us](http://www.bubbl.us). The university has mind-mapping software called 'Inspiration' already installed on the library computers. In addition to making mind maps, the program can also

convert them into linear, essay-type outlines, or into slideshow presentations like PowerPoint. Use this tutorial to learn how to use Inspiration: <http://www.inspiration.com/Inspiration>

## USING A MIND MAP TO STUDY

### What do you already know?

First, write out the facts and relationships you know from memory. This will help you establish what you already know about the subject. If you are working in a group or with a partner, have them add their ideas to your map. Working with a group will expand your map, and group mates can come up with connections that you might overlook.

### Check the facts

After you have written down what you remember/already know, it's time to hit the books. Review your notes or textbook in small chunks, adding to your map after each portion. You can go by the page or by the paragraph, but you want to focus on one concept at a time. Going through the readings, you might find that you've remembered something incorrectly. Erase and redraw mistakes you might have made on your first draft. Make sure you get down all of the important (testable) information before you move ahead.

### Map relationships and test your understanding

Draw new connections between the content of the text and your previous knowledge. Look at your map and make sure you understand the concepts you have written on it and how they are connected to each other. After you have reviewed your map, put it out of your sight. Now try recreating it from memory. It will be easier to remember the ideas if you think back to where they were placed on your page. Once you have finished, compare your new map to the original. Are they the same? If not, what did you miss in your recreation? You can repeat this as many times as you like, until you are comfortable that you know what you need to for your test.

When you start writing your test, take a minute to close your eyes and visualize your map. Think of it as your cheat sheet. If you get stuck and can't remember something, skip it and move on to the next thing. If there is time after you've finished the rest of the test, redrawing your map on a blank page might help you remember what you've forgotten.

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## USING A MIND MAP TO WRITE AN ESSAY

### **Pick a topic and familiarize yourself with it**

First things first: you need to decide what you want your essay to be about. You might find a better topic during your research, but at this point you need a direction to get started.

Once you've picked a topic you can start gathering facts. Look at your resources; these could be books, articles, course notes, internet research, etc. Write your topic in the middle of the page, and start adding related facts from your resources.

At this point you aren't thinking about your essay; you are familiarizing yourself with your topic and gathering the raw information that you will use to make your essay. Keep going until you have plenty of information on your map.

### **Sift through the information**

Now you have a mind map on your topic. It should show important concepts backed up with factual evidence and how they relate to your subject.

Look for important themes that support to your main idea and ask yourself which ones could make good body paragraphs. You want to look for an idea that is interesting, or does a good job of supporting your topic.

Once you pick arguments for each body paragraph, you might need to do a little more research to fully support each claim.

### **Write down key ideas**

Some students find that using capital letters encourages them to get down only the key points. Capitals are also easier to read in a diagram. You may wish to write down some explanatory notes in lower case. Some students do this when they revisit the mind map at a later date, while others write in such things as assessment criteria. Use words and pictures throughout your map, and wherever possible, use single, key words.

# ACADEMIC

