

Self Study Programs: Mind Mapping



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This module covers:

- Constructing mind maps
- Using mind maps to prepare for essays
- Using mind maps to prepare for notetaking



The Learning Centre

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Mind Mapping

Mind maps are tools which help you think and learn. This workshop describes how to do a mind map and in what contexts you might use them, such as when preparing for an essay, taking notes or preparing for exams.

The information in this module has been adapted from the work of Tony Buzan and others who have promoted mind mapping as a learning and thinking tool. For a full explanation of the mind mapping technique see Buzan, T. (1991). *The Mind Map Book*. New York: Penguin.

How to do a Mind Map

Mind mapping (or concept mapping) involves writing down a central idea and thinking up new and related ideas which radiate out from the centre. By focussing on key ideas written down in your own words, and then looking for branches out and connections between the ideas, you are mapping knowledge in a manner which will help you understand and remember new information.

1. Look for relationships

Use lines, colours, arrows, branches or some other way of showing connections between the ideas generated on your mind map. These relationships may be important in your understanding new information or in constructing a structured essay plan. By personalising the map with your own symbols and designs you will be constructing visual and meaningful relationships between ideas which will assist in your recall and understanding.

2. Draw quickly on unlined paper without pausing, judging or editing

All of these things promote non-linear thinking and the idea of mind mapping is to think

creatively and in a non-linear manner. There will be plenty of time for modifying the information later on but at this stage it is important to get every possibility into the mind map. Sometimes it is one of those obscure possibilities that may become the key to your knowledge of a topic.

3. 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, however, 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 in this way.

4. Put the main idea in the centre

Most students find it useful to turn their page on the side and do a mind map in "landscape" style. With the main idea or topic in the middle of the page this gives the maximum space for other ideas to radiate out from the centre.

5. Leave lots of space

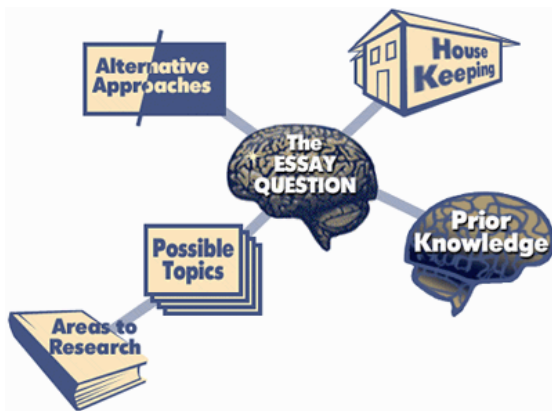
Some of the most useful mind maps are those which are added to over a period of time. After the initial drawing of the mind map you may wish to highlight things, add information or add questions for the duration of a subject right up until exam time. For this reason it is a good idea to leave lots of space.

Try Activity 1 ✓

Imagine you have the task of trying to explain to someone how to do a mind map. Your task in this activity is to construct a mind map about how to do a mind map! After you have finished your mind map, you may like to search "how to do a mind map image" online and see how others have completed this task.

Essay Preparation

Mind maps can help you in the early stages of your essay by summarising your research and providing you with a picture of all aspects of the question. You can then move from your non-linear mind map to a more structured essay plan.



Housekeeping

It is often useful to put down on the mind map various "housekeeping" details such as:

- assessment criteria and weighting
- due date
- timeline
- any other requirements

Prior knowledge

You should always put down on your mind map all that you already know about the essay question. This knowledge may have come from personal experience, lectures, readings or other sources. You may be surprised as to how this part of the mind map branches out in lots of directions!

Possible topics to be covered

Most essays will involve the possibility of tackling a number of topics within the question. Put all of these possible topics down. You may not have the time or length of essay to tackle all of them but getting them down and looking for connections, relevance and priorities is a good start.

Areas to research

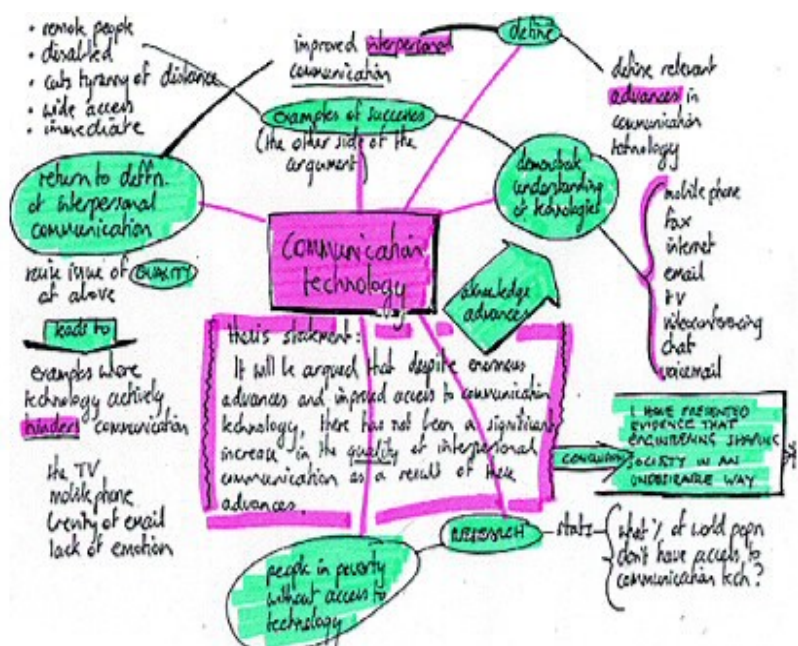
The areas to research will be suggested by the possible topics and from here your mind map may lead you on to various sources of information you will need to pursue. Often you will have to choose carefully which areas will be the most productive and relevant to research.

Alternative approaches

One of the powerful things about mind mapping is that it is a tool which encourages creative thinking and often creative solutions to problems. Always look at alternative ways of approaching essay questions and always be prepared to be a critical researcher and writer who is prepared to go outside the normal boundaries!

Sample Essay Mind Map

This mind map was used to plan a critical essay in engineering. It doesn't use capitals or include items such as assessment criteria but it does show a thorough outline of possible approaches the student could take.



Summarising Readings



Mind mapping can help you understand and remember the important issues in your readings.

We suggest you follow 5 steps in creating mind maps which summarise your readings.

1. Skim

Firstly, read the abstract, introduction, conclusion, key headings or chapter headings. When skimming through the text observe any diagrams, pictures or graphs. This gives you an overview of what you are about to read, puts it in context and may already give you some clues as to where the most relevant parts are located.

2. Read

Read the article in one sitting (or chunk it into sections/chapters if it is a whole book) and go over any parts of which you are not quite sure.

3. Mind Map

It is important to do the mind map from memory at this stage so don't consult the article or any other source of information.

4. Study

The mind map you have just done (in steps 1-3) is very valuable as it will show the areas you have understood and also areas about which you are unsure. Study your mind map to discover the gaps in your knowledge and refer back to the source material to fill in any of these gaps.

5. Personalise

Using different colours or symbols, add your own comments and questions to the mind map. Questions relating to relationships, implications, alternative approaches, usefulness, clarity and personal experience could all be considered at this stage. It is in this personalising stage where your mind map really starts to help you with your learning. The trick now is to address all those questions you have raised and to keep returning to your mind map with the answers!



Sample Reading Mind Map

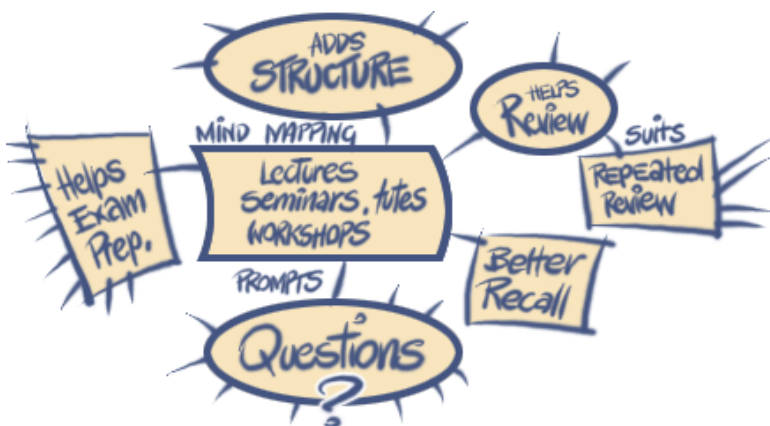
This mind map contains only the essential points a student picked up from the first reading of a text and was produced from memory alone. The student who produced this mind map then went on to add details and questions and then consult the text again. Notice how space has been left for this purpose.

Try Activity 2

Some people use mind maps to manage their time. Construct a mind map of how you intend to use your time over the next seven days.

Lectures, Seminars, Workshops and Tutorials

Some students find it useful to create mind maps for various sessions where new information is presented. Mind mapping can be a helpful note-taking and summarising tool.



Adds structure

Mind mapping can help you record information in a structure that suits your learning style and means something to you. The content may be coming at you thick and fast but a mind map allows you to put information where you want it and make the necessary connections.

Helps review

The open space of a mind map can allow you to revisit it in that first vital review after the session. It is in this first review that you can highlight key areas, gaps in your understanding and list questions that need to be addressed. Some students find it hard to consult a mind map during a lecture so they take standard notes in the lecture but construct a mind map afterwards in their first review of the lecture notes.

Suits repeated reviews

By continually returning to your mind maps of these sessions you can use the empty space to add new information and to expand on your understanding of the work covered in the session.

Better recall

By having all of the information covered in a session incorporated into a single mind map, many students find this an aid to them remembering what was covered.

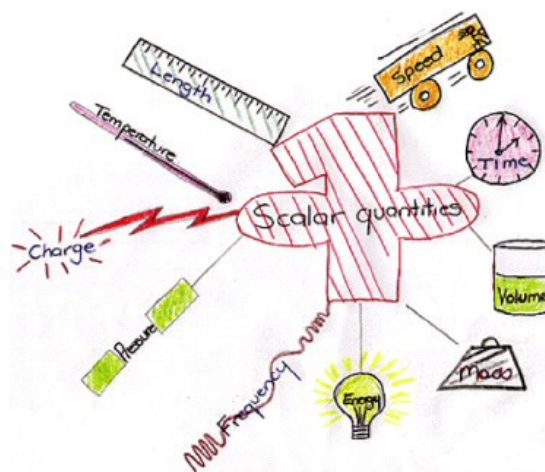
Prompts questions

Your mind map should raise some questions about the information you have received. These questions will need to be followed up on so it is important to develop your own set of symbols which will prompt further action by you.

Helps exam preparation

Imagine how useful it would be if you had a set of mind maps for each of your lectures! These mind maps would show you the areas where you had difficulty and include the follow-up information you added in order to resolve these problems. You would also be able to construct a mind map of the entire subject prior to the exam and this would help you identify the key themes and likely exam questions.

Sample Lecture Mind Map



This mind map was produced from standard lecture notes so that a student could clarify the key points of the lecture. The mind map was produced in the first review after the lecture and was added to throughout the semester. It was then used for exam preparation.

