

MindTools

Mind Maps

A Powerful Approach to Note Taking

Related variants: Spray Diagrams, Spider Diagrams, Spidograms, Spidergrams and Mindmaps

Mind Map™ is a trade mark of the Buzan Organization

Mind Mapping is a useful technique that improves the way you take notes, and supports and enhances your creative problem solving.

By using Mind Maps, you can quickly identify and understand the structure of a subject, and the way that pieces of information fit together, as well as recording the raw facts contained in normal notes.

More than this, Mind Maps encourage [creative problem solving](#), and they hold information in a format that your mind finds easy to remember and quick to review.

Popularized by Tony Buzan, Mind Maps abandon the list format of conventional note taking. They do this in favor of a two-dimensional structure. As such, a good Mind Map shows the 'shape' of the subject, the relative importance of individual points, and the way in which facts relate to one another.

Mind Maps are more compact than conventional notes, often taking up one side of paper. This helps you to make associations easily. And if you find out more information after you have drawn the main Mind Map, then you can easily add it in.

Mind Maps are also useful for:

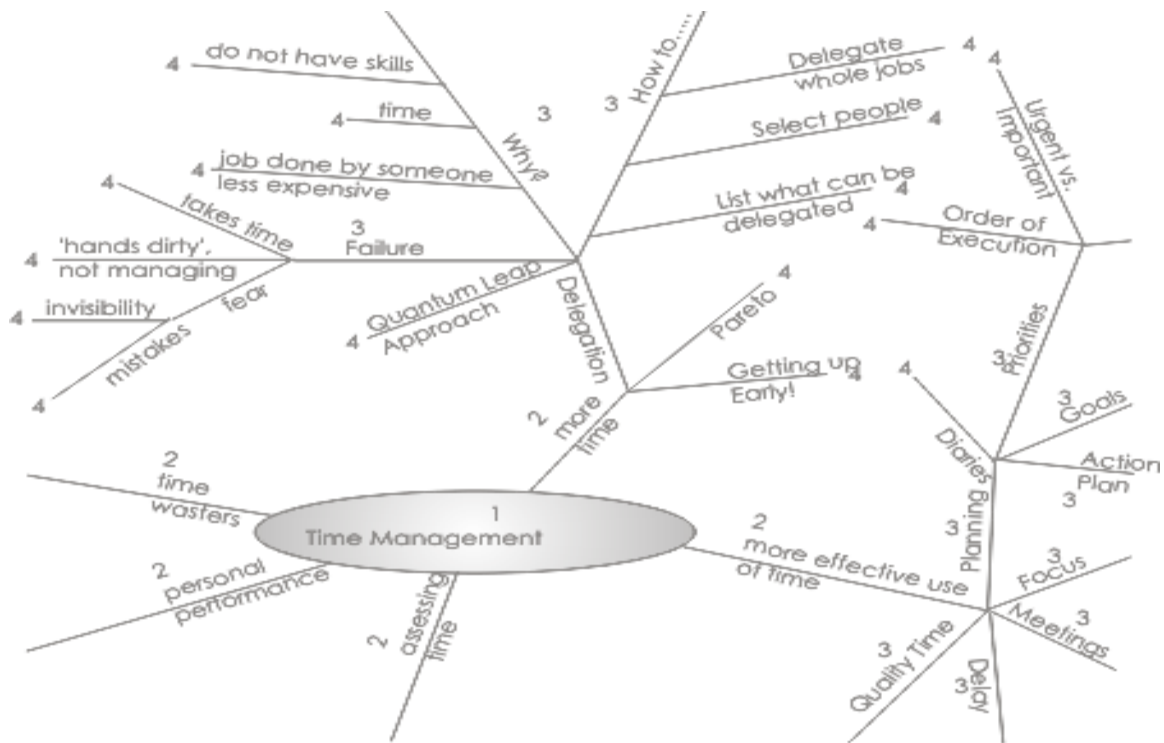
- Summarizing information.
- Consolidating information from different research sources.
- Thinking through complex problems.
- Presenting information in a format that shows the overall structure of your subject.

What's more, they are very quick to review as you can often refresh information in your mind just by glancing at one. In the same way, they can be effective mnemonics: Remembering the shape and structure of a Mind Map can give you the cues you need to remember the information within it. As such, they engage much more of your brain in the process of assimilating and connecting facts, compared with conventional notes.

Drawing Simple Mind Maps

The original Mind Tools site was planned and researched using Mind Maps. They are too large to publish here, however part of one is shown below. This shows research into [time management](#) skills:

Figure 1: An Example Mind Map



To make notes on a subject using a Mind Map, draw it in the following way:

1. Write the title of the subject you're exploring in the center of the page, and draw a circle around it. This is shown by the circle marked 1 in Figure 1, above.
2. As you come across major subdivisions or subheadings of the topic (or important facts that relate to the subject) draw lines out from this circle. Label these lines with these subdivisions or subheadings. These are shown by the lines marked 2 in Figure 1.
3. As you "burrow" into the subject and uncover another level of information (further subheadings, or individual facts) belonging to the subheadings above, draw these as lines linked to the subheading lines. These are shown by the lines marked 3 in Figure 1.

4. Finally, for individual facts or ideas, draw lines out from the appropriate heading line and label them. These are shown by the lines marked 4 in Figure 1.

As you come across new information, link it in to the Mind Map appropriately.

A complete Mind Map may have main topic lines radiating in all directions from the center. Sub-topics and facts will branch off these, like branches and twigs from the trunk of a tree. You do not need to worry about the structure produced, as this will evolve as you develop your mind map.

Note that the idea of numbered 'levels' in Figure 1 is only used to explain how the Mind Map was created. All we are showing is that major headings radiate from the center, with lower level headings and facts branching off from the higher level headings.

While drawing Mind Maps by hand is appropriate in many cases, software tools like [MindGenius](#) improve the process by helping to you to produce presentation quality Concept Maps, which can easily be edited, distributed and redrafted.

Improving your Mind Maps

Once you understand how to make notes in the Mind Map format, you can develop your own conventions to take them further. The following suggestions may help to increase their effectiveness:

- *Use single words or simple phrases for information:* Most words in normal writing are padding: They convey facts in the correct context, and in a format that is pleasant to read. In your own Mind Maps, single strong words and meaningful phrases can convey the same meaning more potently. Excess words just clutter the Mind Map.
- *Print words:* Joined up or indistinct writing can be more difficult to read.
- *Use color to separate different ideas:* This will help you to separate ideas where necessary. It also makes your Mind Map easier to remember. Color also helps to show the organization of the subject.
- *Use symbols and images:* Where a symbol or picture means something to you, use it. Pictures can help you to remember information more effectively than words.

- *Using cross-linkages:* Information in one part of the Mind Map may relate to another part. Here you can draw in lines to show the cross-linkages. This helps you to see how one part of the subject connects with another.

Click on the thumbnail below for a great example of a mind map that has extremely high visual impact.



Key points:

Mind Mapping is an extremely effective method of taking notes. Mind Maps show not only facts, but also the overall structure of a subject and the relative importance of individual parts of it. They help you to associate ideas and make connections that you might not otherwise make.

If you do any form of research or note taking, try experimenting with Mind Maps. You will find them incredibly useful