

MIND MAPPING

Other Handouts:

- Analysing an Essay Question
- Planning your Essay

Mind mapping is a non-linear, graphic way of organising information. It allows you to focus on the relationships between ideas. It may also be something you have never tried before.

Mind mapping can be useful to:

- Brainstorm ideas for essays or other assignments,
- Summarise a lecture, article or book chapter,
- Revise for exams – mind maps are more visually stimulating than traditional notes.

To make a mind map you will need:

1. Blank paper (the bigger the better. A4 will do, but try A3, two sheets joined together or even a whiteboard)
2. Pens – different coloured ones!

Let's assume you are developing ideas for an essay.

Step 1: Identify the Central Concept

Orientate the paper in 'landscape' (i.e. the longest edges on the top & bottom). Identify the central concept of the essay you are working on and either write this in capital letters in the centre of the page or draw an image that represents that concept. You want this central text or image to be between 2-5cm high – big enough to read or recognise with a single glance.

Step 2: Write down the main points

Identify ideas and issues that you think could be important to the central concept. Summarise these ideas using a few key words. Using a different coloured pen, each of these main ideas is written down around the central concept and joined to it with thick lines or arrows.

Step 3: Brainstorm other ideas and details

Start to add ideas and examples to the main ideas, once again, using a different colour once again, and connect them to one another using thinner lines. Work quickly – you are brainstorming possibilities at this stage. Don't stop to edit ideas during this initial process.

Step 4: Let your mind flow

Add more levels as your ideas develop. These will branch out away from the centre. You might already see relationships and connections between ideas, in which case you can indicate these with lines and arrows. Do not be concerned if the connections are not obvious at this point, just keep working from the central idea and organise the concepts later (in a second mind map).

Tip!

The further you move from the centre the more specific (or detailed) your notes will become.

Step 5: Do it a second time!

Yes – this is a serious suggestion 😊. You might not want to do it immediately, but don't leave it more than a day or two. The second mind map is an opportunity to reorganise your ideas, edit them if necessary, and develop the structure your essay will take. If you are using mind maps as a form of revision, then you should revisit these on a regular basis, refining the map each time.

Tips!

Use images as much as you can – this helps engage parts of your brain that writing on its own would not.

Use different colours to: follow a path of ideas, emphasise certain things, differentiate concepts from one another.

Use the handout on **Analysing an essay question** to assist you work out the central concept.

Use the handout on **Planning Your Essay** to work through the next stage in academic writing.

Using Mind Mapping to Summarise a Lecture, Article or Chapter of a Book

Follow the steps above, but aim to have the thesis statement in the centre of the mind map.

Hint:

The thesis statement is a general statement about the essay's topic. It may be a concise and general summary of the main points of the essay, or it may be the logical conclusion to the argument made in the essay. In other words, it is the author's main message. A thesis can appear in any part of the essay, but it is most often placed in the introductory paragraph and, next-most-often, in the conclusion.

Identify the author's main points and place these around the thesis statement. From there, map how the author has structured their argument and work outwards from the central idea.

Other Resources:

Buzan, Tony. 2002. *How to Mind Map*. London: Thorsons.

Landsberger, Joe. 1996. *Concept- or Mind-mapping for Learning*. <http://www.studygs.net/mapping/> (accessed May 2006)

Mind Map Examples. Illumne Training. <http://www.mind-mapping.co.uk/mind-maps-examples.htm> (accessed May 2006)