

Thought Mapping

This guide gives you a step by step introduction to a note making technique called thought mapping. This non-linear technique provides you with a note making tool that encourages active thinking and creativity. It can help you to create plans, increase recall and save time in a wide range of study tasks.

Other useful guides: *Improving your reading skills, Note-making*

What is a non-linear technique?

Written information is most commonly presented to us in a linear format, i.e. sentences and phrases going left to right down a page. A non-linear format breaks away from this norm, making freer use of space and symbols. Varieties of this format include flow charts, spider diagrams and thought maps.

Why use a non-linear technique?

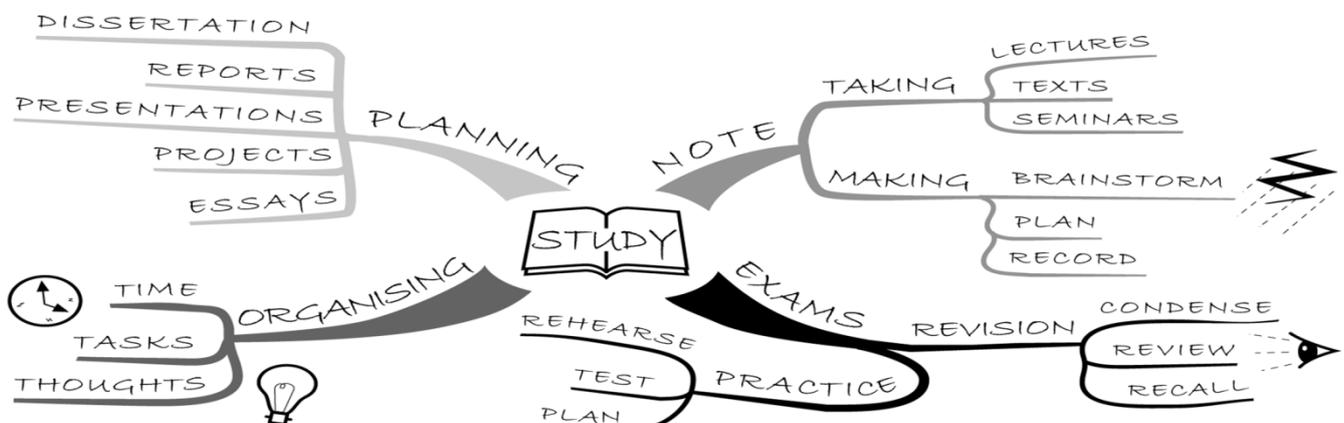
Non-linear techniques can provide a powerful graphic tool which uses word, image, number, logic, colour and spatial awareness.

- It can give you an overview of a large subject or topic area.
- It can gather and hold large amounts of data.
- It encourages active planning techniques by allowing you to see links and make connections.
- It is a useful memory aid.
- It is visually stimulating and aids concentration.

Introducing thought maps

This guide will show you a style of non-linear note taking called thought mapping. This particular technique uses keywords grouped around a central topic in a hierarchical structure. You will be shown how to:

- read a thought map
- make a thought map
- apply thought mapping to your own studies.



Reading a thought map

The diagram on the previous page shows the different applications of thought mapping in study. A thought map uses keywords to represent points. This enables you to make the best use of space and to record a lot of information on just one page. To read this thought map:

- start in the centre where the subject is shown, in this case "STUDY";
- read the keywords that connect to the centre. These are the topic headings or main themes of the subject, in this case "PLANNING", "NOTES", "EXAMS", "ORGANISE";
- read each branch from the centre outwards. Each branch lists the points under each heading or theme. "ORGANISE" for example applies to "TIME", "TASKS" and "THOUGHTS";
- notice that some main headings divide into subheadings, for example: "EXAMS" divides into "REVISION" and "PRACTICE", with three different points under each subheading.

The same information is presented below in a linear format. The keywords used in the thought map have been highlighted for easy comparison.

Thought mapping can be applied to a variety of **study** tasks including **planning**, **note making**, **organising** and **exams**. Plans for **dissertations**, **reports**, **presentations**, **projects** and **essays** can be made with a thought map. It can be applied to **note taking** tasks in **lectures**, **seminars** and with **texts**, as well as with **note making** tasks such as **brainstorming** ideas, making initial **plans** for work or **recording** your own thoughts and ideas. When tackling **exams** this technique can be made use of in **revision** for **condensing**, **reviewing** and **recalling** material. It provides a quick way of **practising** exam answers, allowing you to **rehearse** ideas, try out **plans** and **test** your recall. Finally thought mapping can help with **organisation** skills, enabling you to overview your **thoughts**, manage your **time** and order everyday **tasks**.

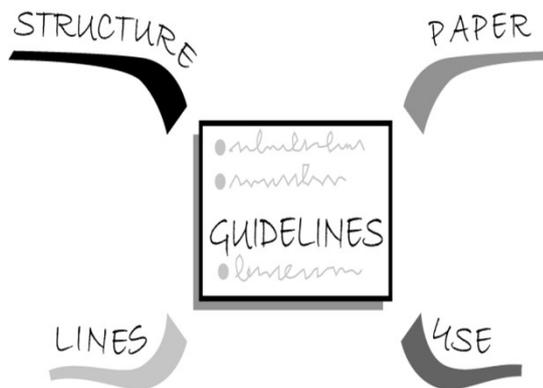
By comparing this paragraph with the thought map, you can see that a thought map presents the key aspects of information in an ordered format that provides a clear overview of the material.

Making a thought map

The following guidelines show you the three steps to making a thought map that is well organised and easy to read.

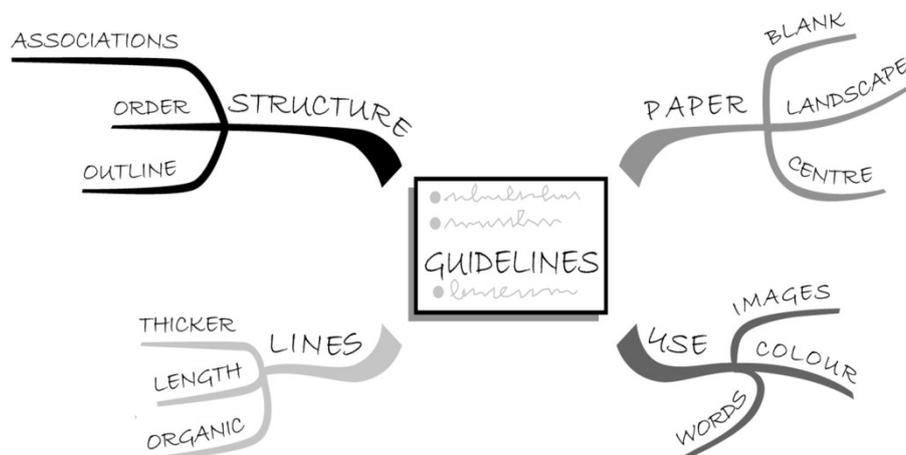
STEP ONE

- Use blank paper, turned sideways (landscape).
- Start in the centre with an image and/or word that represents the topic of your thought map.
- Choose the keywords or images that will represent your main themes and put each one on a line that is connected to your topic in the centre.
- The best keywords are the ones that use your own personal associations to link the keyword to the point it represents.



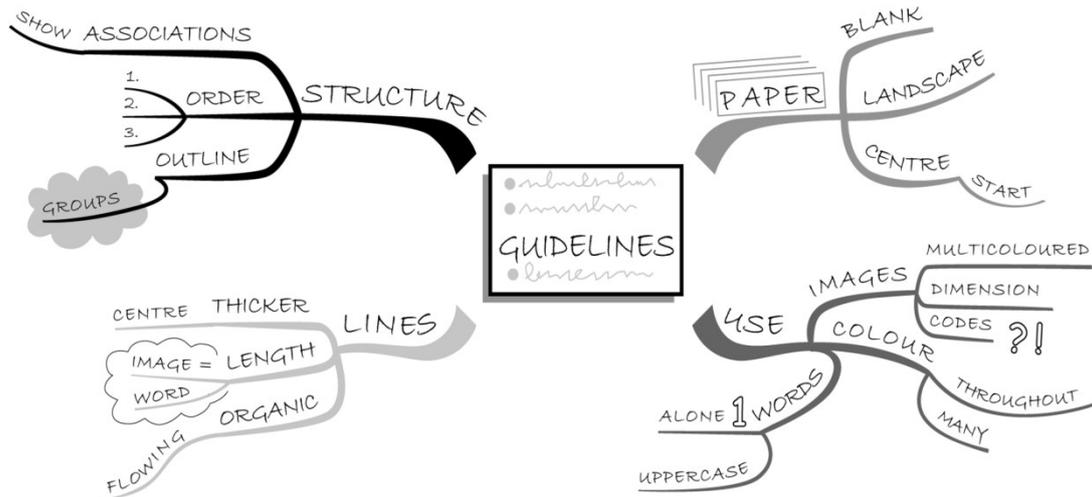
STEP TWO

- Branch off from the main themes with points represented by keywords or images.
- Put each word or image on its own line.
- Make each line the same length as the word or image.
- Words and images are larger in the centre and smaller further out.
- Keep the lines thicker in the centre, thinning out towards the edges of your thought map. This helps to show the order of your material.



STEP THREE

- Add more levels of thought as necessary.
- Use colour to categorise your information and make the thought map visually stimulating. Use three or more colours for the central image and then use a different colour for each branch.
- Use symbols and images in place of keywords to represent a point concisely, or in addition to keywords to reinforce a point and aid recall.
- Keep your thought map clear and add levels of order by enclosing grouped branches, using numbers and showing links with arrows.



Once you are familiar with these guidelines, you can adapt the technique to your own particular needs. Develop your own personal style of thought mapping to make the best use of your own personal associations and thought processes.

Using thought maps

Use thought maps to plan essays, reports and presentations:

- label points in your linear notes with a keyword for each point in the margin;
- try out structures for your essay or report by using the keywords to create thought maps;
- try out a variety of structures in thought map form until you find the plan which shows the best order for your material.

Use a thought map in all note making tasks:

- it can be used to brainstorm your initial ideas on a topic, essay or presentation;
- it is a quick and efficient technique for making notes from texts and other written sources;
- it can be incorporated into your lecture notes to make your note taking an active process and to help you remember information;
- it can be used in seminars and tutorials to quickly record ideas and points that may arise.

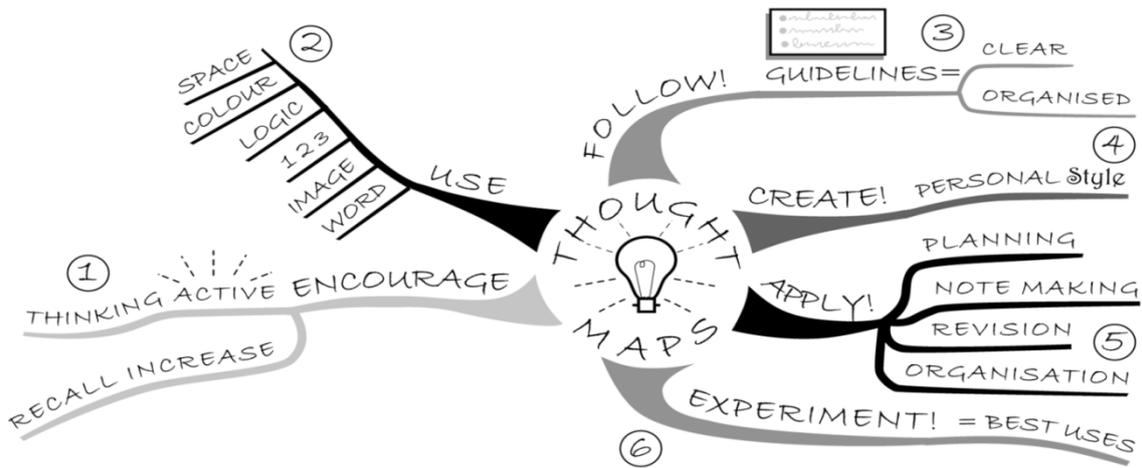
Use thought maps in revision:

- create an overview of a topic or subject area using a thought map;
- condense notes into a form that is easier to remember;
- test your recall by recreating from memory a thought map of your notes. The visual image of the thought map will help you remember the information;
- practise planning exam answers by using a thought map. It will help you to order your ideas and make links and connections.

Use thought maps to organise your time:

- thought maps make effective 'to do' lists. They provide an overview which enables you to see what is a priority. Use colour to highlight or numbers to order important tasks;
- before beginning a task use a thought map to make an action plan of what needs to be done;
- organise your thoughts or ideas by making a thought map on a particular topic or issue. The structure of a thought map enables you to add new thoughts and ideas as they occur whilst the connecting nature of the map encourages active thinking processes.

Summary



This study guide is one of a series produced by Student Learning Development at the University of Leicester. As part of our services we provide a range of resources for students wishing to develop their academic and transferable skills.

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