

Mind Mapping

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What is it good for?

Mind Mapping (not to be confused with [Mind Napping](#)) is a tool for organizing and communicating ideas. There are software tools (some of them free of charge) that can be used to “draw” mind maps, but you can also draw them with colored markers or colored pencil on plain paper. (I’m not convinced that I could do a great graphic mind-map without artistic ability).

Like traditional outlining, Mind Maps can be used to organize your thoughts about a topic. Unlike traditional outlining, a Mind Map can readily incorporate colors and graphics and spatial relationships of items in the map so your brain has more things to latch on to when trying to capture a memory of your understanding of the topic as represented in the Mind Map. The Mind Map is therefore said to be useful as a study aid, particularly when you need to retain a large body of new information in your head (e.g. for the mid-term exam).

Traditional outlining by its very structure, demands that the items be organized in a strict hierarchy. Mind Maps are primarily hierarchical too, but unlike outlines, you can bend the rules a bit to fit in things that are not strictly hierarchical in their relationships to each other. e.g. If you want to include a circle of arrows labeled with “intake, compression, power, exhaust” in your chart explaining an automobile engine, that would fit into a Mind-Map just fine. An outline would reduce it to a simple list, would not be as memorable a representation of the cycle each cylinder goes through.

The Mind-Map of a topic can be used as a visual aid in teaching or even in simply communicating your thoughts on the topic to other people. Your graphic representation of the organization of your thoughts on the topic are not necessarily the “final word” on the matter. By comparing your mind-map on the topic to mind-maps drawn by other people for the same topic and discussing the similarities and the differences, you might find ways to integrate the 2 maps to produce a better map. Collaboration on construction of a unified mind-map may be a good brain-storming technique, a way for a group to create new ideas and communicate among themselves to further the group’s thinking about a topic. Done right, the result of the collaboration will be a better collection and organization of thoughts about the topic than any member of the group would have been able to produce individually.

But what is a mind-map?

This 5.5 minute You-tube video introduces the idea of Mind Mapping:

[Maximise the Power of Your Brain - Tony Buzan MIND MAPPING](#)

This 4 minute YouTube video elaborates on where Mind Mapping gets its power:

[Buzan: mind maps make you smarter](#)

This 3 minute YouTube video explains how to make a Mind-Map.

[How To Make A Mind Map - Version 1](#)

This 4 minute YouTube video is very much like the above Version 1 video, but repetition can be the key to learning...

[How To Make A Mind Map - Version 2](#)

Examples:

In 2005, Steve Jobs gave a commencement address at Stanford U. The actual speech can be viewed in this 15 minute YouTube video:

[Steve Jobs' 2005 Stanford Commencement Address](#)

Someone who was very impressed with the talk put together a mind-map describing the talk. The guy walks you through the mind-map that he constructed from Jobs talk in this 5.5 minute You-tube video.

[Mind Map of Steve Jobs Stanford Commencement Address](#)

I was amused at how many Mind-Mapping rules from the earlier videos were bent or broken in this video. ("They aren't so much 'rules', but rather are merely 'guidelines'. There are times when it is appropriate to color outside the (guide)lines"). I also came away from this video convinced that there might actually be something in the idea of Mind Mapping (at least I was less skeptical).

Some of my concerns about the need for artistic ability were soothed by this next 7 minute video

by some other denizen of the Internet:

[How I Mind Map](#)

I still believe that crucial to coming up with a nicely polished mind-map has to be a willingness to set aside earlier drafts and re-draw the map to produce a next version.

Be careful with using software to do the drawing as the drawings may look more polished, but may still need large-scale re-organizing for you to benefit from the mind-mapping. The tools are no substitute for critical thinking and creative thinking. Sometimes you need to try out different ways of organizing things to actually see which organization makes the most sense.

Prezi

I enjoyed this next 17 minute video from Andrew Davis of Boston (no relation to me, so far as I know). I find my web-surfing goes something like his. Keep a scratch-pad handy while web surfing so you can keep notes about what else you want to look up and why.

[The Search for Meat Loaf](#)

His talk used the presentation tool Prezi, which is accessible at www.prezi.com. I have no experience with that tool, but it looks like it could be useful for presenting a mind-map. There's a short demo of prezzi at the top of the Prezi home page. That demo doesn't use mind-maps, but I hope you can see why the tool could be useful for presenting a mind-map (though you do have to get the mind-map into Prezi to start with, and I'm not exactly sure how to do that short of using Prezi to recreate the mind-map). There is a 1-minute tutorial on Youtube that uses Prezi as the tool to create a mind-map:

[Learn about Prezi Mindmap](#)

That tutorial doesn't point out specific shortcomings, but judging from what I see in the results, apparently Prezi lacks the tools to create the vine-like curves and tapered connectors that are such prominent features in the hand-drawn Mind Maps.

James Geary used Prezi in a terrific 9.5 minute talk at the TED conference in 2009.

TED originally was a conference to bring people together from the fields of Technology, Entertainment and Design fields to share ideas. More recently TED uses the tag line "ideas worth spreading". On their "About TED" page, they explain that the TED conferences "bring together the world's most fascinating thinkers and doers, who are challenged to give the talk of their lives (in 18 minutes). "

There's a link to a copy of the slides from Geary's TED talk on the Prezi home page, but the

audio of the talk itself isn't there with the slides. TED has a video of the talk, spoken words and all:

[James Geary. Metaphorically Speaking](#)

In my opinion, you should stick around for the 3-minute commercial (about getting girls interested in science and engineering careers) that is appended to the video of his talk. I confess to also having had a fun time following links from the page for that talk to look at other TED talks, getting further and further afield from the topic at hand, but enjoying it far more than time spent watching the usual shows on cable TV.

There are, of course, lots of other tools available for digitally cobbling together presentations. Google has a presentation tool as part of Google Docs on the web that competes with Microsoft Office PowerPoint. To see an extreme example of what Google Docs can do for a presentation, spend 1.5 minutes viewing this animation:

["The most awesome 450 page presentation ever!"](#)

Mind Maps for sale

It isn't my intention in this talk to sell you anything, but I'm including here pointers to places where "mind map" prints can be purchased. Even if you aren't thinking about buying a "mind map", you still might want to click through to the sites here to see more examples of mind maps produced by others.

There are many mind maps offered for sale, typically as posters. I used google.com to search for
mind map posters

Some of the posters I found seemed to be meant as simply "art", for example the ["Intention to Sustain Mind Map II"](#). Other posters apparently are meant to facilitate communication, such as the ["Peptic Ulcer Disease" poster](#), which looks suitable for a doctor to use as a visual aid as the doctor explains Peptic Ulcer Disease to a patient. Some of the Mind Map posters look to be intended as reference material, such as the ["Mastermind Matrix"](#), which is described as "a Life Coaching Self Improvement Chart that helps to unlock the hidden patterns of your mind". Some of the [mind map posters](#) have visually strong enough graphics that I think they are intended both as wall art and reference material.

Sources for additional information

Back on the Mind Mapping topic, there are a staggeringly large number (1700 hits from the search as of this writing) of additional videos on the topic of ["mind map"](#) on YouTube. For [Prezi](#), I

found more than 1000 tutorials and demonstrations available on YouTube. The [Wikipedia page about Mind-Map](#) is a reasonably balanced presentation with enough footnotes to enable you to dig as much further into the topic as you may be interested in doing.

An online search of the [NCC library catalog](#) turned up disappointingly little on this topic, but a search of the [SUNY library catalog](#) found many relevant titles available for inter-library loan. Books at Amazon are not for free, but a [search there](#) found hundreds of relevant titles available for purchase. Amazon even has a couple of dozen software titles for creating mind-maps. But I wouldn't rush out to buy such software when there are so many free packages available.

Of course, a simple [Google search](#) for

mind map

turns up an overwhelming number of web pages (24,200,000 at this writing). You'll either have to trust that the most relevant hits are within the first couple of pages of search results, or you'll have to add additional search words to narrow things down to what exactly you are seeking.

This "Pearl Tree":

http://www.pearltrees.com/#/N-fa=3502337&N-u=1_398590&N-p=27441476&N-s=1_3542800&N-f=1_3542800

by George Huba of NC is another collection of web pages about mind mapping.

I've created a Mind Map Pearl Tree that links to George's tree on the topic as well as to other Mind Map trees collected by other folks. And, of course, I threw in a link to this Google docs draft of mine.

http://www.pearltrees.com/#/N-p=35356008&N-u=1_391422&N-fa=3462050&N-s=1_4358979&N-f=1_4358979

If you have comments or suggestions for improving my Pearl Tree or this draft, please let me know. (r.drew.davis@gmail.com)

To Do:

I need to create an example mind-map of my own. I'm thinking "How to get a college degree" would be a suitable topic, but I have yet to sketch out the Mind Map for that. That should give me enough actual experience with specific tools that I can get rid of some of the disclaimers in

the text of this note (e.g. “I have no experience with that tool”...).

R. Drew Davis

