

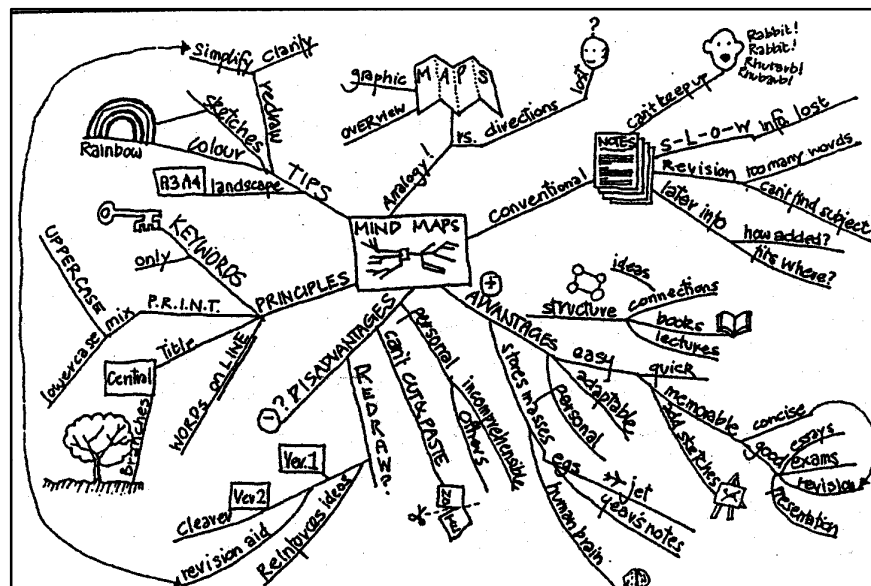
# TAKING NOTES WITH MIND MAPS

## Problems With Conventional Notes

- When you note a lecture, you can't keep up. Inevitably, information is left out and lost.
- If you write quickly, the lecture becomes an exercise in taking dictation, not making sense of what's said.
- If you do write masses of notes, you make a mountain of paper to revise afterwards.
- Later, how can you identify important ideas in this mass of paper?
- If something becomes clear later, how can you add information in the right place?
- If you have these problems, maybe you need Mind Maps.



Fig.1



## Analogy

We've all experienced not being able to follow directions to a place. We can see clearly around us but we're still lost. What we need is a map. Maps give us a picture of where to go - not "first left then third turning on the right". They show and explain the surroundings or context where we find ourselves.

We can only follow written directions when we're on the described route. We can use a map even when we're starting from somewhere else. This is because it shows us the whole geography, the relationship between places, not just the "one route to one destination" which directions describe. Conventional notes are like written directions. Like other maps, mind maps give an overall picture and show connections.

## What Is Mind Mapping?

1. Mind maps are a diagrammatic way of recording information that's easy to use, adapt and recall. It's effective because it works the way your brain does.
2. Mind mapping is good for both lecture and book notes.
3. It's also good for noting less structured sessions (e.g. films).
4. It's a helpful technique for exams, revision, essays and presentation planning.

### ADVANTAGES OF MIND MAPS

- It's quick: you can record more in the same amount of time.
- You can easily add ideas or links later.
- It helps you concentrate on information structure and relationships between ideas rather than disconnected facts.
- With your mind map you may see other connections and similarities in the information you receive.
- Add sketches to make your map more memorable than conventional notes.
- Mind maps can incorporate a mass of material. (For example, a jet's maintenance manual was reduced from 1000s of pages to a room-length mind map. A year's subject notes became an easily reviewed poster.)
- Mind mappings can help revision, even if your course notes are conventional. They condense material into a concise, memorable format.

### DISADVANTAGES OF MIND MAPS

- You can't cut "chunks of notes" to paste into an essay, but what information you do use from your mind map will sound like your own work and ideas.
- You may want to redraw the maps later - but that'll help you remember the material.
- Your map may be so personal it could be difficult for others to understand. Mind maps are a great help when preparing essays and presentations, but they may be inappropriate as the final piece of work.

## Principles

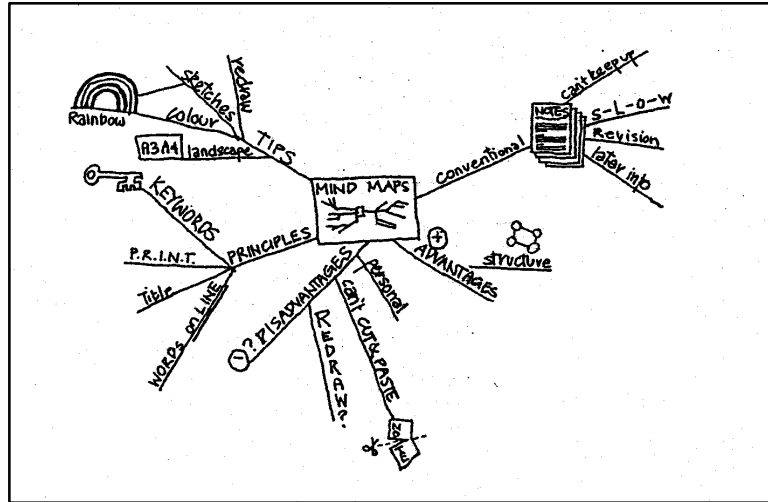
1. Start in the centre of the page with a clear title - preferably incorporating a strong image, anything to help jog your memory later.
2. Main ideas are written on the lines branching off the subject. Other ideas branch off these as twigs would grow from the boughs of a tree.
3. Write only *KEYWORDS*, not sentences. (To note a specific quote, map the quote's keyword and refer to the full quote on the edge of the map or on the next page.)
4. Write keywords *ON* the lines so text is always connected to the lines showing the whole idea structure. Draw additional lines connecting ideas where necessary.
5. *PRINT* words. Mix lower and upper case (capital) letters so the text is varied, clear and easily readable. Don't resort to your usual "joined up" writing.

## How To Make A Mind Map

Fig.1 (previous page) shows a sample mind map, based on the thinking for this paper. You can follow the growth the map and then see how it helped organise this paper.

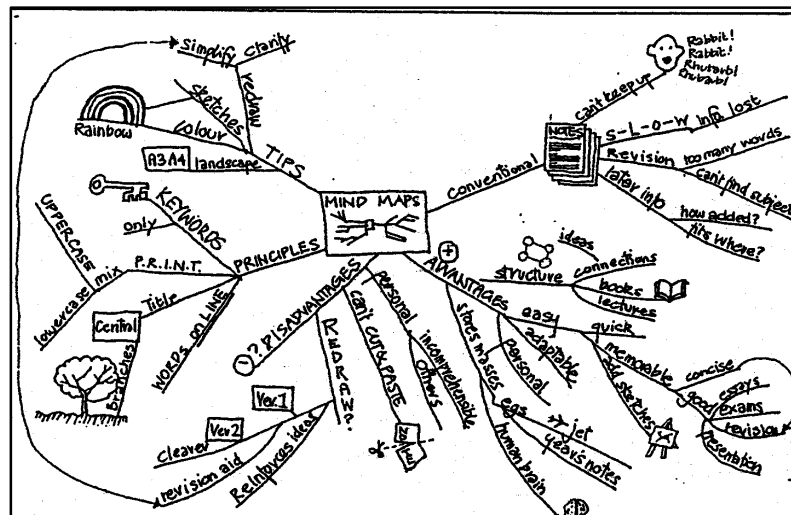
First I drew a simple mind map to reinforce the title. I then added topics (Fig 2) (next page).

Fig.2



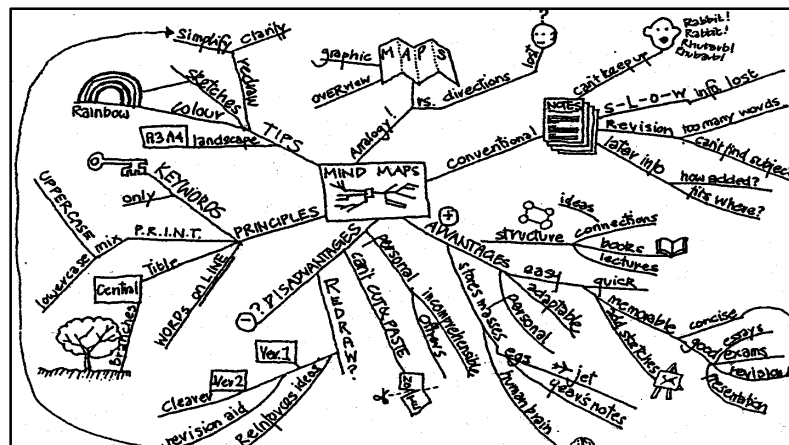
Then I added more ideas as keywords sitting on main branches, and other ideas linked to them. Over time I added ideas and sketches to the branches. Fig. 3 shows the map after this stage.

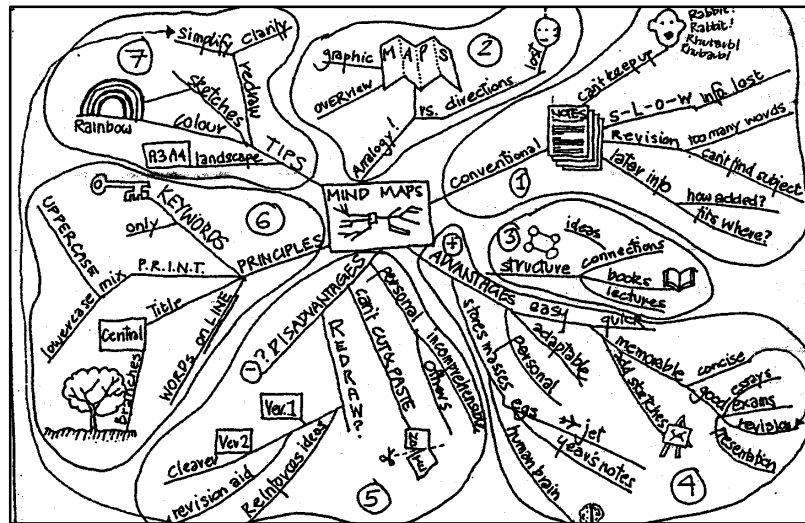
Fig.3



At this point I decided an analogy might clarify things: I added a new branch. Now I had Fig.4.

Fig. 4





Now the mind map was complete. I wanted to use it to help write this paper, so there was another step.

I reviewed the map and decided how to order the ideas. I grouped them with another colour and numbered them in the correct order for this paper. (Fig. 4)

### Tips

- Incorporate quick sketches. They make the map vivid, memorable and unique to the subject and you.
- Use upper and lower case lettering, not normal handwriting.
- Write keywords on the branches.
- Horizontal (landscape) page format is usually best for mind maps. Use plain A4 or faint squared paper.
- Larger sheets hold more information. A3 is the largest size that can be easily photocopied and filed in an A4 binder.
- Use colour (felt pens or multi-colour biro) to make the map memorable. Group ideas by circling them in colour. Important points might always be marked red. (These mind maps are in black and white due to printing restrictions.)
  - Don't be afraid to redraw the map to make it clearer or more memorable. This will remind you of the subject so redrawing will help revision.

### Sources

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### Author note

This section was produced by **Tony Cleford (Senior Lecturer, School of Architecture)**. Tony Cleford has used mind mapping techniques for the last twenty five years, ever since early involvement with Tony Buzan's College of Advanced Reading.