# 301 Academic Skills Resource:
Mind Mapping

Mind Mapping and Memory

Mind maps help your memory by using the following principles:

- ✓ 3 or 4 items linked together
- ✓ You are more likely to remember unusual items
- ✓ Using your left and right brain skills
- ✓ Having multiple places in the brain where the information is stored
- ✓ Using colour
- ✓ Using images
- ✓ Using spatial awareness
- ✓ Feeling the movement of your hand writing and drawing
- ✓ Organising the information yourself
- ✓ Making connections
- ✓ Makes it more fun!

Using your Left and Right Brain
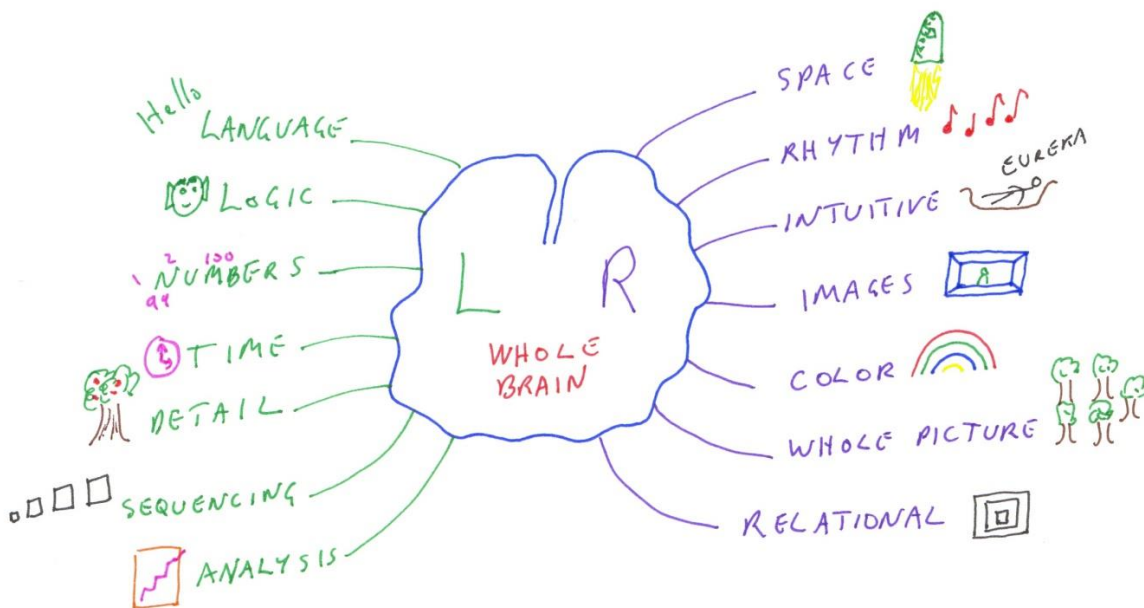
Most note-taking only engages the left brain as it is based largely on language. Mindmapping engages more of your skills and helps you use your whole brain.

Using language and logic

Mindmaps engage the left brain thinking as they have text and a logical series of connections between the ideas going from big ideas down to the tiny details.

Using colour and images

Colour and images are a very right-brained way of working and mind maps help you access this way to thinking. Asking your brain for a picture of even very abstract ideas can give you a completely different way of thinking about a topic and lead to new insights.

Rhythm and spatial awareness

Feeling the movement of your hand writing and drawing in the space of the mindmap helps you get into quite a relaxed frame of mind and this helps with creativity.

Overview and detail on one page

Thinking about details is a very left brained way of working with data and getting an overview of a whole set of data is a right brained way of working. Very few techniques give you both on one sheet of paper. With mindmaps you can see everything on one piece of paper yet you still have the detailed information there too.

Making connections

Using your whole brain helps you make new connections and see different ways of working with the data.

Makes it more fun!

If your mind is alert and you're in a good, relaxed mood you're far more likely to be creative than when you are bored or anxious.
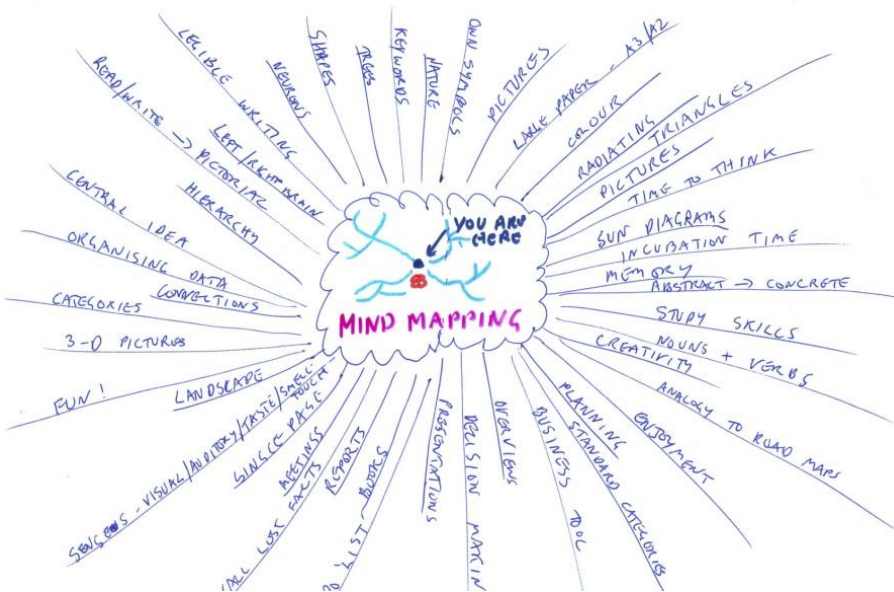

Sun Diagrams or Brain Writing

Mindmaps are great but you have to choose how the information connects to the mindmap and by doing so you have to involve the realist or citric evaluator modes. There will also be censorship as if an idea occurs that you can't categorise then your mind will tend to dismiss it.

Sun diagrams allow you to get into the dreamer mode of thinking – there is no censorship or organisation so both the realist and the critic are kept silent.

Many people when they are planning try to do everything as a one stage process - they write a series of lists about the topic or go straight to a mindmap. The trouble is that you are not allowing a proper creative flow as you are both asking your mind what the information is and how to categorise it. For complex information the first step should be a brain dump of what the information is, followed by organising it. This allow you to freely associate the content and then to make connections afterwards. You should also leave a bit of incubation time between the two steps - preferably overnight or within a few days.

Brain writing is a bit like a brain storm that you might do as a team but on your own. There are several techniques you can use but all involve the following basic principles:

- ✓ Any idea relating to the topic is written down (no censorship and dismissing of ideas at this stage).

- ✓ The ideas can be any level of importance so it can be a big idea or a small piece of detail.

- ✓ No organisation of the data can take place in this stage.

- ✓ There should be a gap in time between getting the data out of your brain and organising it. Preferably overnight but if that is not possible then at least take a break where you walk around.

How to Create Sun Diagrams

- ✓ Put a brief topic title in the centre circle it
- ✓ Draw about 8 lines around the centre
- ✓ Fill them in, writing along the lines with any idea whether big or small that can help with your topic
- ✓ Do not dismiss any ideas just write them down for now – you're going to evaluate them later.
- ✓ When you have filled the first set of lines draw another complete set all the way round.
- ✓ You have to fill all the blank lines. The blank lines help dust the corners of your brain they ask the question what else could I add?
- ✓ If you have so many ideas it gets too crowded start a second sun diagram.

Tips for Making an Effective Mind Map

✓ Spend a few minutes thinking about the central picture – even if the concepts of the map are abstract you should be able to come up with a unique image. This helps to make a mind map unique, so if you're in an exam it stands out in your mind.

✓ Make the line that you write on the same length as the words – this gives the map its own shape. Also by effectively underlining the text you will be re-reading it.

✓ Make sure it's legible so that you can quickly re-read it when you revise.

✓ Try to keep all of your lines as horizontal as possible to help with legibility.

✓ Put as many smaller pictures on the map as you can – they will help you remember what was on the map. Taking time to think about them and make a connection between a concept and an image will help you remember the main idea.

✓ Make your branches different shapes and also consider enclosing the braches in shapes.

✓ Put your mindmap up on your wall or fridge so you see it every day.

✓ Listen to the same music every time you revise that subject. Have a different set of music for each topic. The best sort is music without words.

✓ If you have numbers to add use a different colour for each digit; eg: 1783, 1671; or for the numbers 0 to 9 find a word that looks like or sounds like the number (eg: hero= zero, then make a symbol for the no. (eg; superman S could stand for zero).

Relevant Academic Skills Workshops

Book online here: http://www.sheffield.ac.uk/ssid/301/services/studyskills

- Note Taking in Lectures
- Speed Reading
- Reading for Memory