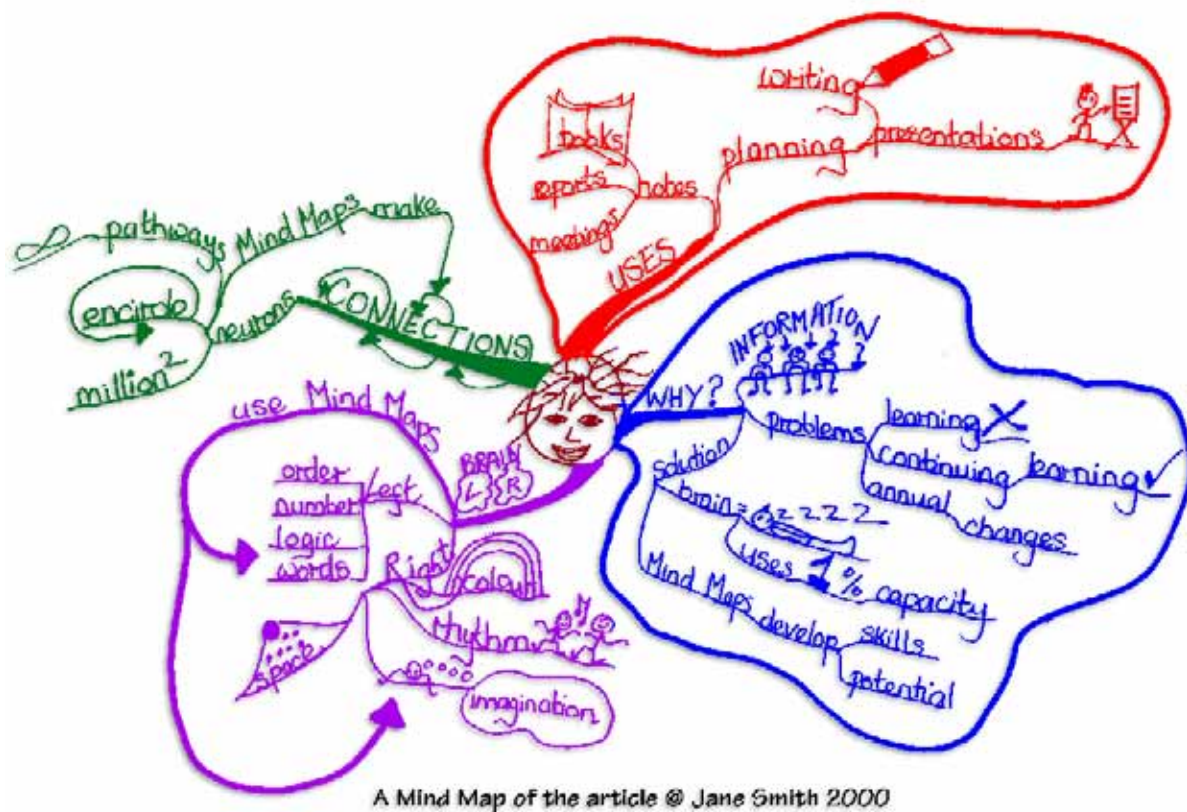




# Making the most of your mind

## Why we need Mind Maps

It often seems that, both at work and at home, the human brain is in danger of being overwhelmed by a tidal wave of knowledge. But this isn't just a one-off problem – the requirement to acquire new knowledge and skills will be a continuous and dominating aspect of our future lives. The rate at which we need to learn is already daunting: on average, the information people need to stay effective in their jobs in the year 2002 remains valid for about one year.



Fortunately, we have the potential to cope with these seemingly intimidating demands. In recent decades the consensus of expert opinion has come to recognise that the human brain is a sleeping giant, and that most of us only use about one percent of its full capacity. Researcher and writer Tony Buzan originated The Mind Map in 1970 as a powerful graphic technique that can help to harness the full range of brain skills. Now, more than 30 years later, millions of people around the world rely on Mind Maps to trigger the vital spark between the creative and analytical aspects of our brains.

## Using both sides of the brain

Neurological research shows that the right and left parts of the upper brain perform different functions, and that the brain works best when both sides are used. The left side of the brain deals with logic, numbers, language, analysis, and sequencing; the right side with imagination, colour, rhythm, daydreaming, and spatial awareness.

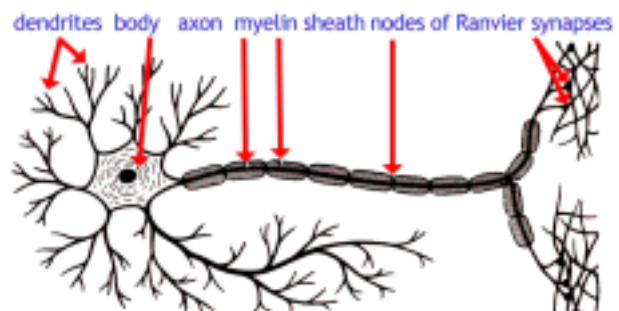


The Mind Mapping technique was designed as a tool to help the brain work in a balanced and powerful way. Unlike the logical, sequenced, notes that most of us took as students, the Mind Map allows the right brain to make a full contribution with colour, imagination and perspective. This makes it easier to fully develop ideas and memorise its contents.

Look at the Mind Map on the previous page. You can see how creating it has involved using both sides of the brain – the logical left side and the imaginative right side.

## Making connections

In the human brain, there are something like ten billion brain cells. Crammed together inside the brain, these neurons encircle each other with tentacles called axons and dendrites.



When an electrical impulse travels from one brain cell to another, a chemical is transferred between the two. This chemical creates another impulse that transfers the message on to the next brain cell – and so on.

Every time you have a thought or an idea, a message is sent along a pathway that connects hundreds, thousands or hundreds of thousands of neurons. This means that the patterns or maps of the mind that your brain is capable of making would stretch to the moon and back 14 times! So it is simply not true that a brain can become 'filled up to the top' and unable to learn anything new. In fact, the brain can make an infinite number of memory traces – and the more connections it makes, the more connections it is able to make in the future.

One of the great benefits of Mind Maps is that they help you to see how ideas link to one another, as well as how they relate to the central theme. Mind Maps help you to harness the brain's powers of association so that you will be able to think, plan and remember more effectively.

## Mind Map rules

It may seem a contradiction to say that you have to obey rules when you are producing Mind Maps. But the whole point of these guidelines is to provide a structure within which you will have the confidence to explore and develop your ideas and your creativity.

These are the ten basic Mind Mapping rules.

- 1 **Place the paper in a landscape position.** You will find that you can fit more information on the page when the paper is in this position.
- 2 **Start with a coloured image in the centre.** This central image represents the idea or question that you are going to explore or answer so it's worth spending a few minutes clarifying it and getting it right before moving on.
- 3 **Draw the main themes of the Mind Map on thick branches radiating out from the central image.** If you are using words rather than pictures to express these themes, print them along the branches in CAPITAL LETTERS.
- 4 **Use lines to link second and third levels of pictures or words to the main branches.** Each idea or image is further broken down into further levels which flow or radiate from the previous ones.
- 5 **Use images throughout your Mind Map.** Use images either instead of or as well as words to stimulate your right brain and help you to remember the Mind Map. You can use patterns, shapes, symbols as well as stick figures and tiny pictures.
- 6 **Print key words.** For reading-back purposes a printed word is clearer, more legible and easier to remember than ordinary handwriting.

- 7 **Put the printed words on lines.** You must write or draw words or pictures on the lines and each line should be connected to other lines.
- 8 **Put only one word on each line.** This leaves each word more free hooks and gives note taking more freedom and flexibility.
- 9 **Make your lines curved and organic.** The Mind Map is a growing structure that mirrors the way that many living things develop. Curved lines are more attractive and more pleasant to draw than straight ones.
- 10 **Use colours throughout the Mind Map.** Colours enhance memory, delight the eye and stimulate the right brain processes.



## Uses of Mind Maps

You can use Mind Maps in almost every set of circumstances in which you would normally write linear notes or jot down lists of words. These are some common examples.

### ■ Taking notes during meetings, presentations or speeches

Mind Maps allow you to listen attentively and to make a record of what is being said in a way that will make it easy to remember

### ■ Taking notes from written material

You can either use the chapter headings or sub-headings of a report or book for your main branches or you can look for particular points of your own

### ■ **Planning written material**

Mind Maps allow you to do all your thinking before you actually start writing, rather than during the process of writing. As a result, you can develop all your ideas and see where they relate to each other before committing them to paper

### ■ **Planning presentations**

The main advantage of this method of preparation for presentations or training sessions, is that that you do not have to keep referring to lengthy notes on paper or cards. This means that you can be flexible and informal while at the same time maintain the required structure and clarity.

## **And finally...**

Many people have found that Mind Mapping has revitalised their whole approach to thinking and note taking. This simple technique has enabled them to record, organise, and analyse large volumes of information and to see clearly how different pieces of data relate to each other. But more than that, Mind Mapping is a tool for boosting personal growth and self esteem. Discovering hitherto undreamed of talents, becoming more confident in meetings and presentations, being able to recall vast amounts of information easily – these are just a few of the benefits that you may discover if you take the time to develop the skills of Mind Mapping.

## **Jane Smith**

Jane Smith's company, Word Smiths, specialises in producing open learning materials and provides writing, editing, design and publishing services to a variety of public and private sector clients. Jane was trained by Buzan Centres Ltd and runs courses in Mind Mapping, Memory Techniques, Speed Reading and Study Skills. Her book on Mind Maps, *Understanding Mind Maps in a Week*, published by Hodder & Stoughton, is now in its second edition (ISBN 0-340-84952-5).



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