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**Use Mind Maps to Increase Your Creative Thinking**

**By Royane Real**

Do you want an easy method to boost your creative thinking ability?

It can be done with a simple change in the way you make notes when you are trying to organize your thoughts.

When you need to organize your thoughts, you probably make notes the old fashioned way, writing down everything you think is important. If you want to improve your ability to generate new creative ideas, try the technique of making mind maps to organize your thoughts.

There are several techniques that can help you boost your ability to think creatively. One of these is the technique which is sometimes called mind mapping, or making learning maps.

By using the mind map or learning map technique, you get to instantly see the relationship of all your ideas to each other at a glance. You get to see and make new connections you might otherwise miss.

When you try to organize your thoughts by writing them down the traditional way, it's a very passive process. Simply taking notes does not get the brain very involved in interacting with the information. If you can get your brain to get more actively involved in organizing the new material you will remember it better and be able to generate new ideas.

The following technique for note-making is particularly effective for people who are highly visual. This method of making notes is sometimes called  $\frac{1}{2}$ mind-mapping or making a  $\frac{1}{2}$ learning map $\frac{1}{2}$ .

Although it takes some practice to use mind-mapping effectively, most people who use it find they can retain and remember far more information with a lot less work. They can also become far more creative with the facts they are trying to organize.

The essence of the learning-map (also known as  $\frac{1}{2}$ memory-map $\frac{1}{2}$ , or  $\frac{1}{2}$ mind-map $\frac{1}{2}$ ) technique is quite simple. You will need a blank piece of paper, the larger the better. You will need at

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least one pen, more if you want to use a variety of colors.

You will be trying to fill the entire page with your notes, so it is important to keep the size of your writing quite small. With practice you should be better able to judge what size of writing will work effectively.

As you are trying to organize your thoughts about a subject, decide what you think the central theme is. For example, you might be listening to a lecture where you decide the central theme seems to be, "Conditions in Europe on the eve of World War II." Or you might be trying to decide, "What are all the ways I can generate a second income?"

Once you have decided what the central theme is, jot down the words in the center of the page, and draw a circle around the main theme. Don't try to write down a sentence or a paragraph—just get down enough of the key words that will bring the ideas back into your mind.

Keep listening or reading and thinking, and jot down your other ideas as they come to you. Watch for the first main sub-theme.

When you come across the first major sub-theme, pick a spot on the page to jot down a few key words that sum up the sub-theme. Draw a circle around the sub-theme words, and then join your sub-theme circle to the main theme circle with a line.

Each time you come across a new major sub-theme, write down a few key words to summarize the new idea, and draw a circle around those words. Then draw a line to join the sub-theme circle to the main idea circle in the center of the page. Eventually you will have a circle in the center with several spokes radiating from it.

The lines or spokes don't have to be straight, and they can be of any length required. The circles don't have to be circles; they can be squares, triangles, or oval squiggles if you prefer. You can use different colors to help you organize the ideas better.

When you generate a new idea, you will find that some of your ideas are additional supporting details that clarify or illustrate one of the sub-themes you have already identified. In this case you will write these sub-sub-themes down using just a few words, enclose them in a circle or squiggle, and link them to their sub-theme with a line.

Eventually your sub-theme circles may have many spokes radiating from them as the author or lecturer continues to present his ideas. At a glance you will be able to take in the dominant themes of the talk and the underlying organizational structure of the ideas.

When you make a mind map or a learning map of all your notes, you create a very visual document that differs a lot from traditional methods of making notes for class.

People who learn very well visually will particularly benefit from the way that learning maps clearly show the relationships between main themes, sub-themes and supporting facts and ideas. It can also help you understand connections between existing facts and possibilities, and that is the essence of

creative thinking!

Try this method and see if this is creativity enhancing technique works best for you!

This article was written by learning expert Royane Real. If you want to improve the way your brain works, get her new book "How You Can Be Smarter". Everything you need to know to learn faster, remember better and be more creative. Download it today at

<http://www.lulu.com/real>

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## **The Writer's Mind**

**By Jeff Heisler**

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#### The Writer's Mind

I've always felt that writers aren't smarter or more creative than non-writers. I think the difference between a writer and a non-writer is that a writer doesn't have enough sense to know this should be difficult. Writing and creativity are products of the mind— not extraordinary minds— every mind. You can also tap into this creative power by learning a few simple tricks.

Recognize that your brain is awesome, but it has limits. It has a difficult time changing gears from one mode of thinking to another. Remember trying to get through math class right after lunch? Your mind was focused on the social realm and until it completed the transition, math was unnaturally difficult. The same is true for creativity. Learn the creative modes and keep them away from each other. Never try to do two of these at the same time. Each has it's own place. Here are the modes:

- Creative Freestyle— If you've ever sat down and scribbled out a great poem without much thinking, this is the mode you were in. This is also the mode you're in when you're in "the zone." When you're actually entering the prose and your mind opens like a floodgate— that's the freestyle creative mode. In this mode there is no logic and no criticism. If you're thinking critically or in logical, sequential terms— then you'll and hamper your creativity.

- Logical Freestyle— This is the plotting and outlining mode. You should be thinking in practical terms here. Times, dates, events, orders, locations. This is the mode of structure and planning. It is creative, but only in the sense that you creatively organize. Criticism is still out, and if you find yourself immersed in creative thought that's not related to logical planning— you're in the wrong zone.

- Logical Formal— In this mode your creativity is turned off almost entirely. You're thinking like a mathematician now. Outline and plot your writing, but only to enhance the structure— no new ideas here— just organizing. Think of this as the final edit of your plan or outline. No major creative changes— just focus on the plot or outline itself.

- Critical Freestyle— Get out your red pen and mark up your manuscript. Be merciless— let all of that self criticism and doubt flood onto the page in red ink. When you feel yourself arguing against an edit— ignore it. This mode is for criticism only. Criticism can be general or specific. You could mark up your

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comma usage, or you could make a note that this portion of the story is weak. Don't think of solutions—not now. Just criticism.

· Critical Formal— Go over your marks and look for technical reasons why the writing is not working. Write some suggestions for improvement, but not in an originally creative sense. For example, instead of thinking of a million ways to make the reader more sympathetic to your character, you would write, "Writing in this passage is weak. Lack of reader sympathy for character. Find way to increase sympathy." If you were to go beyond that and start thinking of creative ways to do that— you're in trouble. Wait, be patient.

Always know what mode you need to be in. Keep each mode separate, and you'll find writing is easier and more enjoyable.

Jeff Heisler is a freelance writer and novelist. You can read more of his writing and visit his collection of writer's resources at <http://www.heislerink.com/writeaway.htm>



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