

Mind Mapping

A Powerful Tool to Unlock Your Creative Genius

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The audience was filling the room. There was a sense of excitement and anticipation in the air as the motivational evening was about to begin. A few minutes before the start time, the master of ceremonies received a message that one of the speakers would not be able to attend the event. When he anxiously asked me whether I would fill that fifteen-minute speaking slot, the answer was simple. Yes! I had a topic and related knowledge that I felt was ideal for the audience. Just as important, I had a powerful tool that I could use to immediately generate and organize ideas for my speech during the short time that I had to prepare. That tool is called a mind map.

This process was developed by Tony Buzan as a roadmap to help us tap our minds in a new and powerful way. His system enhances creativity, increases our ability to generate and organize ideas. He named this non-linear mind-tapping system "mind map". He and his brother, Professor Barry Buzan, wrote the definitive text on the subject. *The Mind Map Book* (Dutton, Penguin Books, 1994).

A mind map is a way of organizing information that is both rational and artistic, both logically ordered and spontaneously expressive. It is typically an organic multi-colored chart laid out on a large sheet of paper, containing words and drawings that are connected in various ways. A mind map gives a structure for the mind's images and associations by centering them around a central theme. It utilizes analytical left brain functions such as key words, sequencing, and associative links combined with spatial right brain functions like symbols, color, dimension, and connective lines. The act of forming a mind map makes you practice harmonious whole brain thinking that brings together left brain thinking and right brain thinking. Those who mind map discover that whole brain thinking is greater than the sum of the left and right brain thinking parts. A basic mind map can be started in the following way:

1. While the main idea in the center of the page, and circle it.
2. For primary components of the main idea, draw a line out from the circle in various directions, and write the headings above or below the lines.
3. For secondary components, draw lines radiating from each of the primary headings, and label these.

A complete mind map may have main topic lines radiating in all directions, with sub-topics and facts branching out from them, like branches and twigs off the trunk of tree. In this way, the mind map describes the "shape" of the subject, the relative importance of ideas, and the way the information relates to other information. Because of the degree of free association involved, mind maps can be very creative, tending to generate new ideas and associations that have not been thought of before.

Once you understand how to assemble the basic structure of a mind map, you can develop your own coding and conventions to take things further and show connections between ideas. Use the following suggestions to enhance the effectiveness of your mind maps.

- **Use single words or simple phrases.** Strong words and evocative phrases can be more powerful than long sentences.
- **Use color to separate different ideas.** This will help your mind to separate ideas when necessary, organize information, and will help in remembering information in the future.
- **Use symbols and images.** When a symbol speaks more strongly to you than words, use it. Images help with the recall of information.
- **Use shapes, circles, and frames to connect information.** They are additional tools to help show the groupings and relationships of information.
- **Use arrows to show cause and effect.**

The creative potential of mind mapping is particularly useful in brainstorming sessions. You need only to start with the basic problem as the center, then generate associations and ideas in order to arrive at a large number of different possible solutions. Other effective uses for mind maps include: organizing ideas for speeches, reports and articles; planning training events, meetings, and parties; problem solving, studying; and interview preparation. Graduates of my mind map course have also reported using mind mapping to reduce stress, set goals, understand themselves, and plan a career. Others have reported that mind mapping is successful in resolving conflicts. In mind mapping, you have a tool that allows the most powerful computer on earth, the human brain, to function in a natural, harmonious way that unlocks the creative genius within you.

Since it is a system that taps into the way the brain naturally functions, you find that mind mapping puts you in touch with your true creative potential, and that you can generate and organize ideas at an incredibly fast pace. Use of color and images stimulates the imagination. In addition, color, symbols, key words, and associative links all make the mind map far more memorable than traditional linear written or typed notes.

The most gratifying proof of the power of mind mapping comes to me from the graduates of my mind mapping course. A computer systems professional wrote: "I feel I have been shown a key to unlocking the flood of creativity I know is inside me." A college professor wrote: "I learned a new way to think. I learned to focus in a new and fascinating way. It was informative, helpful, and eye opening. It was literally mind expanding." Perhaps the most succinct and revealing comment about this method is one which Michael Gelb, a "Master Teacher" of mind mapping, heard from one of his students: "Thank you for finally waking up my brain!"

Dilip R. Abayasekara, Ph.D., Accredited Speaker, is a certified DiSC trainer, inspirational speaker, speech coach, and author. He is the author of *The Path of the Genie, Your Journey to Your Heart's Desire (Executive Books, 2004)*. He is the CEO of Dr. Dilip, LLC, an executive speech coaching and training company in Summerdale, Pennsylvania, USA. He has been an adjunct faculty member in the areas of oral communication and interpersonal communication at Central Penn College and Eastern University's School of Professional Studies. He also serves as Strategic Advisor to the President of Central Penn College. In 2005-2006 he served as President of Toastmasters International and is a professional member of the National Speakers Association. More information is available at www.drdilip.com.