

Brainstorming & mind mapping for assignments

Brainstorming aims to expand your thinking on a topic. **Mind Mapping** then helps you to organise your ideas and consider the relationships between items.

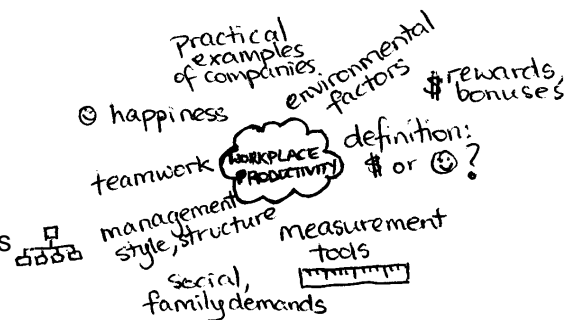
These techniques may assist you to:

- focus your research
- solve problems
- develop a structure for an assignment

There are 2 stages in the process: a **free thinking stage** and an **organising stage** – these **should not** be done together.

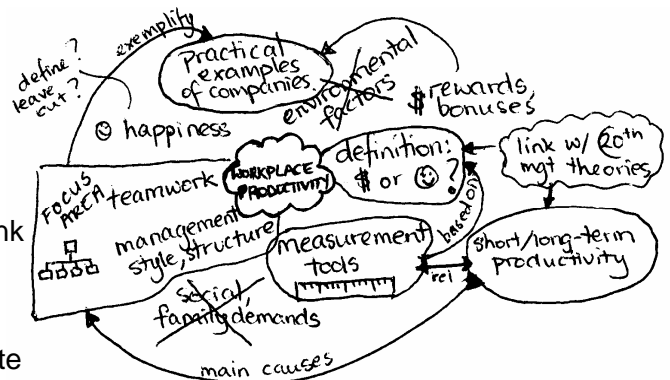
Stage 1: brainstorming = **free thinking** → producing ideas

1. Write your topic or area of study in the centre of a blank page.
2. Use colours, pictures, words and symbols to record any other ideas, topics, authors, theories or anything else associated with the topic. You can put these anywhere on the page. Associate freely and do not filter out ideas; at this point anything and everything is OK.



Stage 2: mind mapping = **identifying relationships** → organising ideas

1. Circle the key points or ideas you have identified.
2. Identify gaps in your knowledge, and any questions you have.
3. Look at each item and consider, "How does this point relate to the others, and to the topic as a whole?"
4. Map the relationships between the ideas or key points using lines, arrows, colours and words to link them.
5. Identify the type of relationship between points: contrast / similarity / cause / effect (see over). Write these along the linking lines.
6. Use this map to plan/guide your assignment: arrange items in a logical order to create the structure of your assignment.



For more detailed instructions for mind mapping, try these websites

- Buzan Centre – Australia/New Zealand <http://www.buzan.com.au/learning/mindmapgallery.html>
 James Cook University, Aust. – Study Skills Online <http://www.jcu.edu.au/studying/services/studyskills/mindmap/>
 University of Victoria, Canada - Learning Skills http://www.coun.uvic.ca/learn/program/hndouts/map_ho.html
 University of Illinois – Mind Module <http://classes.aces.uiuc.edu/ACES100/>

Major thought relationships

Speakers and writers organise their ideas to provide clarity for their audience. This organisation generally involves one or more types of major thought relationship.

Major Thought Relationships

1. **Exemplification:** using examples to clarify ideas
2. **Contrast:** identifying differences and the basis of those differences between things
3. **Comparison:** identifying the similarities or commonalities among things
4. **Enumeration:** listing and classifying items
5. **Chronology:** ordering content around events or time periods
6. **Causality:** indicating a time relationship, incorporating the idea that one thing might cause another
7. **Process:** outlining a sequence of events, or ordered steps
8. **Spatial Order:** organising information according to physical location or spatial sequence

These relationships are often combined in a text, although one can be selected as the dominant means of organising the ideas.

These thought relationships may be either explicit, with the use of clear relationship signals, or implicit, without the use of such signals.

Examples of Relationship Signals

1. **Exemplification:** 'An illustration of this is the...', 'Characteristics such as...', 'For instance,...'
2. **Contrast:** 'As opposed to,...', 'This differs from X in that ...', 'Whereas,...'
3. **Comparison:** 'Like X, Y is ...', 'X resembles Y in that ...', 'In the same way, ...'
4. **Enumeration:** 'There are several kinds of ...', 'These can be divided into three types,...',
5. **Chronology:** 'The earliest ...', 'Thereafter, ...', 'By the time, ...'
6. **Causality:** 'As a consequence, ...', 'This resulted in ...', 'Hence, ...'
7. **Process:** 'Step 1 involves ... Step 2...', 'Initially, ... then ... finally ...'
8. **Spatial Order:** 'The base is positioned next to ...', 'X moves outwards to the ...'

The ability to identify these thought relationships will assist your comprehension of reading material, and confidence with using them in your writing will aid textual coherence.

Adapted from Arnaudet, M & Barrett, M 1984, *Approaches to Academic Reading and Writing*, Prentice Hall Regents, New Jersey, Chapter 2, pp 27-68.