

How to Organize Ideas

Writing a paper can be a daunting task, especially when we have so many ideas about what to include. Creating some sort of visual aid before writing the first draft helps to organize your ideas and may even help you discover what your main point is. There are a variety of ways to get your ideas on paper. Choose the method that aligns best with the way your brain works.

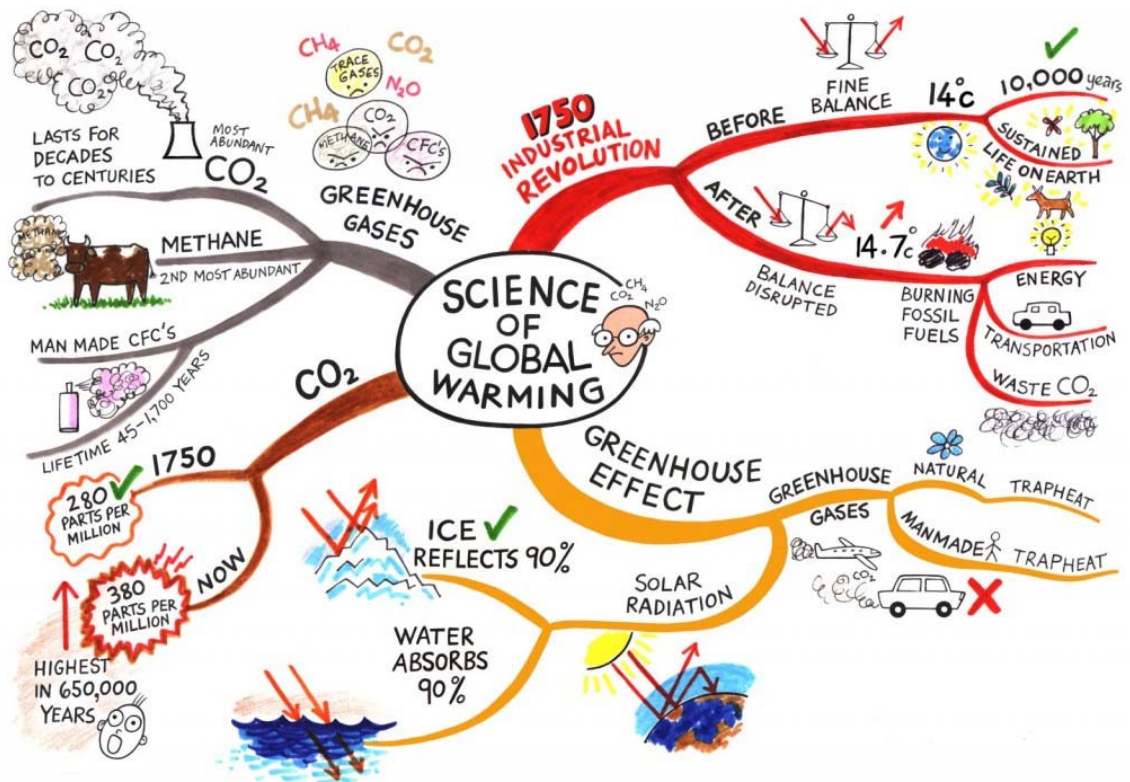
Create a Mind-Map

A mind-map generally works for people who consider themselves “messy” thinkers. Start by drawing a circle in the center of your paper (length-wise works best) and writing your topic inside of it. Draw lines that stem from the center circle (like a web) and a circle at the end of each line. Your sub-topics go in these smaller circles, and you can draw additional lines around each circle to provide details, explanations, and/or examples. Later you can decide which ideas you want to keep and what you don’t need, but for now the purpose is to get all of your thoughts on paper so you can filter through them later.

Mind Maps are very efficient graphic exercises that allow the creative mind to explore the task at hand. Use a Mind Map to help generate new thoughts about a topic or to help organize materials to identify the main topics. Through associative thinking, you’re able to process new ideas and focus on the “real” topics. The Mind Map is an easy, yet powerful, way to organize thoughts.

To create your own mind map, get a blank sheet of paper and place it sideways (landscape view) so that you may use the entire sheet. There are no rules here except to allow your mind to focus on the subject and generate sub-topics through association. By the end of the exercise, you’ll have a visual map organizing your ideas. Then, with map in hand, you may return to your notes finally begin to compose.

- On a clean, blank sheet of paper, draw a circle in the center and write down the subject you’re writing about.
- From the center circle, draw a line adding a circle at the end. Write the new topic in the circle at the end.
- Draw new lines with ending circles for all new topics. Typically, one has at least 3 lines radiating from the central circle. Use key words to help your mind focus here.
- Each circled sub-topic should generate supporting ideas/subtopics
- After you’ve identified subtopics and their supporting ideas for each topic, you can rest and reflect upon what’s been created.



Source: Bala's Blog, jhakkas.wordpress.com

Some people create mind maps that become beautiful and colorful works of art. Some like to use different color pens/pencils for each topic and generate vibrant visual mind maps. Still others use ink or pencil and create diagrams reflecting relationships of ideas. If you'd like to create digital mind maps, [Free Mind](#) and [XMind](#) are free applications to help you organize information.

Choose whichever option most appeals to you!

Make an Outline

An outline is a more tidy version of the web, typically based on the structure of an essay or paper. The general essay structure that might be expected is:

Introduction:

- Opening Statement: a catchy line that draws the reader in. This can be a question, quote, fact, description, anecdote, etc.
- Context: think of this as the synopsis of your topic, where you discuss everything the reader needs to know before delving into your paper, but briefly.
- Thesis statement: this is the main point or argument you'll be making.

Body Paragraphs. Each body paragraph should contain the following:

- Topic sentence: what is this paragraph about?
- Supporting ideas: what evidence do you have?
- Analysis: why is this evidence important?
- Transition statement: how does this connect to your next idea/paragraph?

Conclusion:

- Restate your point in a new and fresh way.
- Add a final thought – something to leave the reader with.

You can create a box for each of these ideas.

Build a House

Another option is build a house using the essay structure frame. This technique falls somewhere between the web and the outline. Like the web, it allows for more freedom, but, like the outline, it is more structured.

Turn a blank sheet of paper length-wise. Draw a roof at the top (a simple triangle) in which you'll write your thesis statement. Next draw 3 or 4 pillars beneath it (rectangles). In each of them you'll write a topic sentence for a paragraph. Within the same column you can add any additional information you'd like to include about that topic (supporting evidence, details, examples, etc.). Finally, build the floor of your house with a horizontal rectangle, in which you'll write your conclusion.