

# Clarify Life and Work with Mind Maps

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## **ABSTRACT:**

The authors discuss the powerful tool of mind mapping and its far reaching applications for the library from strategic planning and workflow optimization to daily problem solving and syllabus development. Key features of mind mapping tools will be presented to help readers determine the best product for their individual needs.

Mind mapping explores ideas by graphically representing the relationships among ideas. Many school children practice diagramming a sentence in school to see how the words in a sentence relate to each other – mind maps expand that concept to other applications. Structured ideas which have been recorded are remembered more readily, and mind mapping facilitates this process as well as serving as a tool to stimulate new ideas. Uses of mind maps range from studying, to brainstorming, to project/task management, and even to outlining a paper to be written. Mind maps have an almost magical power to bring clarity to a process.

Ever flounder at the beginning of a task, unsure of how to get started? Turn to mind mapping to conceptualize and plan, step by step, exactly what needs to be done. The process is wonderful for showing clearly the who, what, when, why, where, and how of a project. It saves time because it reduces the initial period of uncertainty and allows a smooth transition from one step to the next, with defined deadlines and results.

For example, in writing a chapter on Evernote, one co-author created a mind map in the free and web-based Mindjet Connect (offered by the same people who produce the paid software MindManager). One node of the mind map has useful features of Evernote. One node has links

to articles, another a list of features useful to librarians, and one node outlines the chapter. Many of the elements have notes, and some have PDFs attached. The outline node has priorities and progress noted for each element in the node. Once done, the mind map is exported to Evernote so it can be used for collaborative chapter editing by both authors.

### **Mind Mapping Applications for Libraries:**

The ways to utilize the power of mind mapping in libraries are almost limitless. Here are only a few of the ways we suggest to get started:

- **Understand our users' needs:** Mind mapping is a useful tool to stimulate conversations among staff about who the main user groups of the library are and how each user group uses the library and its amenities as well as what their needs are (both met and unmet). By better understanding their users, librarians can then brainstorm ways to better serve all segments of the library's population.
- **Understand multi-departmental processes:** By exploring how a current process is done, employees of different areas are coaxed out of their departmental silos and encouraged to collaborate and actively problem-solve. Once all areas understand the interrelationships of their tasks, the employees are better able to uncover ways to streamline and make the processes more efficient.
- **Plan library events:** Mind mapping is a perfect tool for planning large scale library events. With nodes for speakers, food, location requirements, technical equipment requirements, transportation and staff responsibilities, it will be easy to see the event at a glance and to keep track of plans as they progress.

- **Plan a trip to a Professional Conference:** Similar to the planning of library events, mind mapping is also a useful tool for the individual librarian as he or she plans for a conference. Nodes can be arranged by day, with tasks, clothing, contacts and more organized within, or separate branches could be created for packing, setting up child care or animal boarding, outlining tasks for committee meetings, identifying vendors to visit, listing colleagues to re-connect with and organizing special events and sessions that the librarian wants to attend.
- **Plan library renovations:** Mind mapping can collect and organize feedback from staff, committees, users, as well as keep track of options from vendors of furniture, carpets, and architects.
- **Perform strategic planning:** Mind mapping was made for brainstorming plans, goals, strengths, weaknesses, threats and opportunities facing the library, and administrators will find it invaluable in making concepts more concrete.
- **Plan reorganizations:** Library Administrators will also find mind mapping to be valuable when charting possible reorganizations within the library. Maps created of desirable skill sets, like languages, computer application expertise, or specialized training like GIS or Patents can be created and then employees with the varied skills identified.
- **Create presentations or classes:** Instructional librarians will find mind mapping an indispensable tool in the syllabus design process when planning new classes. Likewise, anyone creating a presentation can use mind mapping to organize their thoughts and even as a presentation tool so as to avoid the “PowerPoint syndrome”.

- **Set goals for employees:** Library managers can use mind mapping to help their employees more fully define their annual performance goals. The tool can help them identify the parts that make up a goal and help jumpstart the process of starting work on a new goal area.
- **Conduct research:** Librarians can use mind maps to outline the contents for a new research guide, or as a way to collect seemingly unrelated facts of their own research and discover new ways of relating information when working on projects that initially appear undefined and nebulous.
- **Outline liaison areas:** When subject librarians mind map the areas of concentration that their assigned departments and professors focus upon, they can better understand the needs of the departments they serve.

Virtually any task that deals with clarifying information, decision making and brainstorming alternatives could utilize mind maps as an effective tool. The more frequently a librarian turns to mind mapping tools, the more opportunities that she discovers for their valuable contribution.

### **Selecting a Mind Mapping Program:**

We've discussed why mind mapping software is useful in organizing your time. Now we turn to what features might be most useful to consider when choosing a mind mapping software.

Given the plethora of mind mapping, brainstorming, or related software available, consider what factors are most useful to you or your organization.

- **Price:** Given library budgets, the first consideration is likely to be cost. There are free software programs available, including some powerful ones. Prices on paid versions can run into the hundreds of dollars. If your whole organization will be using the software, it

may well be worth getting a site license. Mindject Connect and Freeplane are both examples of freeware, while MindManager and PersonalBrain are popular software with a price.

- **Function:** Next, consider the primary function. Some are intended for an individual, others are for group brainstorming, and others for concept mapping. Types of mind maps include bubble diagrams, tree diagrams, etc. Some software makes it easier to plan projects by adding task information such as start date, end date, resources (including who is assigned to finish this task), and priorities. Mind maps are hierarchical, while concept maps can link any element to any other element and include linking phrases to define the relationship. Professors often assign concept maps. A group doing brainstorming, however, might find a simple bubble diagram to be of most use. Students might use a 3D concept map to capture all the nuances of a professor's lecture and examine it from different angles. Sciplore is a mind mapping software that is in its own category, written for those doing academic research. It includes a component for managing pdfs, and can integrate with any reference management software that uses the BibTex format , as well as integrating with Word or other word processing software. Sciplore can outline down to the sentence level and export that into a word processing file to create a paper, thesis, or dissertation. The BibTex reference key can be used to add references. It has a higher learning curve than some of the other mind mapping software, but will be worth the time for students, especially graduate students, or librarians or faculty writing research articles. As of January 2012, SciPlore is being replaced by a new product, Docear, which is an update and expansion of SciPlore. This is a product well worth watching, particularly for academic users.

- **Complementary functions combined:** There are a number of mind mapping tools available that offer mind mapping in conjunction with another function. For example, Mind On Track combines mind mapping and task management while Mind IT combines mind mapping and bookmarking.
- **Platform:** This is an important consideration. Desktop applications can be more powerful, but there are feature-rich web-based software options as well. If the mind map needs to be accessed from multiple computers, web-based products are most useful. Mindjet Connect is web-based, while most of the others mentioned are desktop.
- **Integration with other products:** Integration between products is becoming more common, which allows one to embed a piece of information in one application and link to the information in another application. Mindjet Connect, for example, allows exporting a mind map to Evernote.
- **Hyperlinks, notes, and other forms of attachments:** This feature is so useful we've made it one of our primary criteria. Several products, such as Mind42, have this feature, though it is implemented differently in each.
- **Graphics:** A really useful feature for mind maps, they not only add visual interest, but can draw the eye to the most important aspects of the map. Many programs have the ability to add images to a node and work with backgrounds and text. 3D Topicscape offers three dimensional mind maps, allowing the user to swap between 2D and 3D versions of a map. This makes more complex maps possible, and provides new ways of exploring a topic.

- **Printing:** Not all mapping software allows printing. If it does, check to be sure the text size is readable for a large mind map. Sometimes saving the map as a PDF or image format (jpg, gif, png, etc.) can be useful for sizing but is not a universal feature.

It may take some research to decide which software is best for the individual and her library. After choosing one or two that have the most desired features, a short trial period would aid the decision-making process. New products emerge frequently. Creating a Google alert is one way to track new developments.

Some suggested starting places for more information are:

- WikIT (<http://www.informationtamers.com/WikIT>)
- Software for Mindmapping and Information Organisation (<http://www.mind-mapping.org/>).