

ConceptDraw MINDMAP 7
Writing Whitepaper

Mind Mapping for Writing

How organizing your thoughts visually
can unlock your creativity

By Hobart Swan

CS Odessa, LLC

1798 Technology Dr STE 244
San Jose, CA 95110-1399
(877) 441-1150
Amersales@csodessa.com

Introduction

My goal in this article is to describe how you can use ConceptDraw MINDMAP to make your writing faster, easier, and more coherent. The crux of my argument will be the use of outlines. But before you drift into a painful reverie of high school English assignments, let me make a distinction: I'm not talking about the kind of linear process that forces you to stare at a blank page until you determine the very first thing you want to write. I'm talking about mind-mapped outlines that, for many writers, provide a sense of openness and liberation instead of restraint and anxiety.

This approach to writing isn't for everybody. There are as many approaches to the craft of writing as there are models of cell phones. But because mind mapping can be so transformative for some people, I encourage you to read on and see if it makes sense to you.

Marshaling your ideas

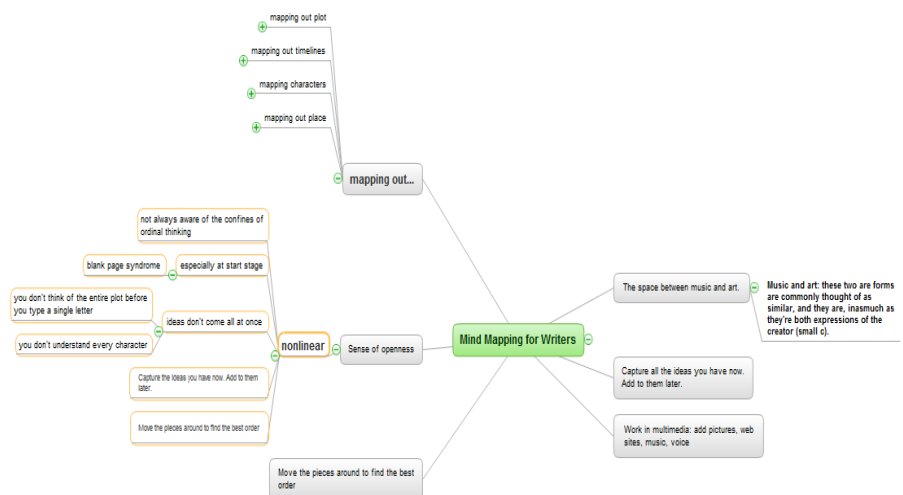
Let me start by saying that to prepare to write this article, I opened a mind map and just started jotting down, in no particular order, some of the things I wanted to address:

Quickly getting started



I'm not yet concerned with how the article will come together. I'm just brainstorming—entering ideas as they come to me. Later in the process, there will be time for detail (infinite detail, if that's the way you like to prepare). In this very early stage, my goal is to capture as many ideas as I can. The following image may be too small for you to read. But it should give you an idea of how my ideas evolve and how the map automatically creates space on the page for me to capture them:

Automatic organization



The process of adding new ideas is as simple as using the Enter and Insert keys. ConceptDraw MINDMAP makes the process fast so you don't have to pay attention to where on the page your new idea should go. You can simply keep your attention on coming up with ideas, and let the interface do the rest.

The goal is to capture lots of ideas. But this isn't a hard and fast rule. At any point in the process, you may decide that you want to do more thinking on one of the ideas. For instance, I want to do more thinking about the idea of how the creative writing process can, at times, fall somewhere between composing a piece of music and painting:

Adding details

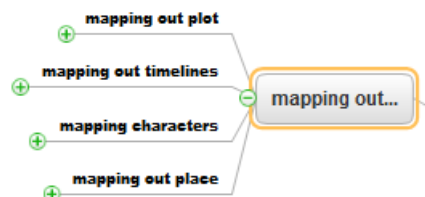


I could go back into the map and start embellishing more ideas. But I don't want to get ahead of myself. There are lots of other things I want to make sure I put in this article. So I continue building up the map of my ideas.

Managing your ideas

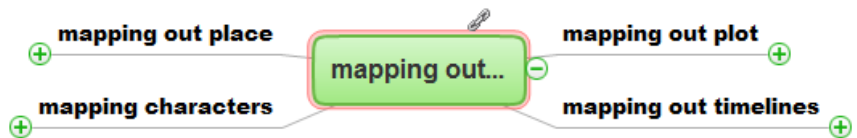
At the top left of the above image, for instance, I added a branch labeled "mapping out." This branch is particularly relevant for people who need to do a lot of research. This could be research about characters, places, plots, and chronology.

Various research topics



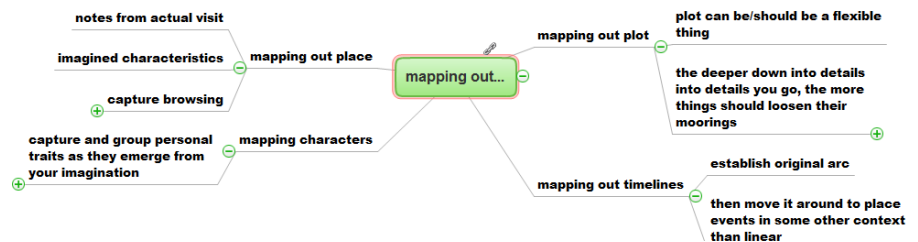
There are lots of things I want to say about this section. So I use one of my favorite features of ConceptDraw MINDMAP and turn this branch into its own map. I just put my cursor on the branch, right click, and choose “Send to new page” and I have a brand new map:

Sent to a new Page



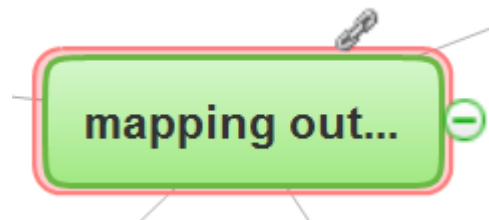
Now I can start adding ideas on how you can use mind maps to organize information on these topics:

Fleshing out the research



Note that right up above the center of the map is a little piece of chain:

Hyperlink icon detail



The chain icon symbolizes a hyperlink. When you created that new map, ConceptDraw automatically created a link from this map back to the first map you created. And on that map, you'll see another link of that will take you from the main map to the “mapping out” map. In this way, you can quickly toggle back and forth between the two maps.

Original map w/ link icon

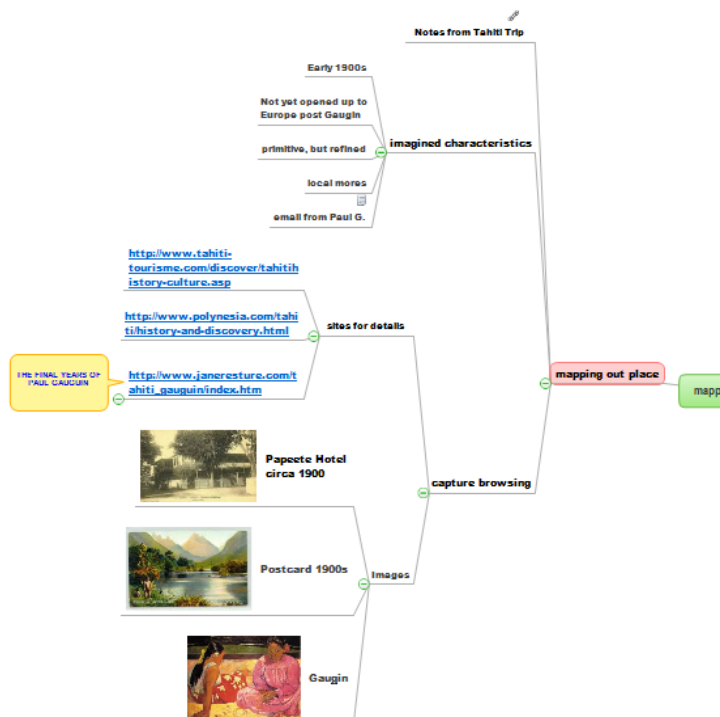


A case in point

Just for the sake of illustrating how this all might work in the real world, let's say I want to write a story about a woman who falls (or jumps) overboard from a freighter and washes ashore on Tahiti circa 1900. I start first use the mind map to start collecting information.

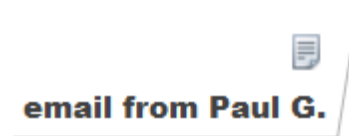
As I browse the Internet, I can attach information I find online to the map. This lets me very quickly gather information on the history of the islands, images of what it might have looked like back then, and maybe memoirs of people who visited around that time. I can also create hyperlinks to documents, such as my notes from a trip I took to Tahiti 5 years before (again, that little link of chain indicates a hyperlink—this time to the Word document of my notes).

Adding information from web searches



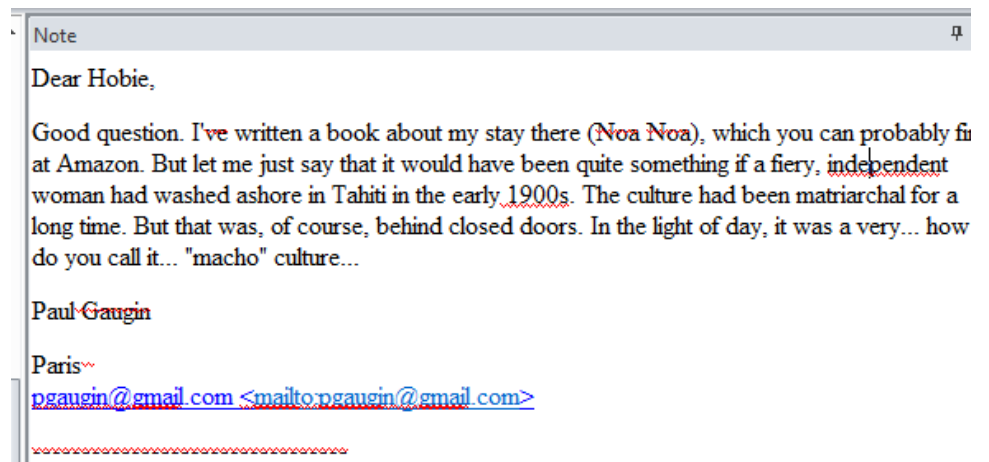
I have even been able to include an email from M. Gaugin himself.

Link to any type of document



Click on the page icon and a “Notes” window opens up next to the map, where you can read the contents of the email I pasted in the window:

Notes section



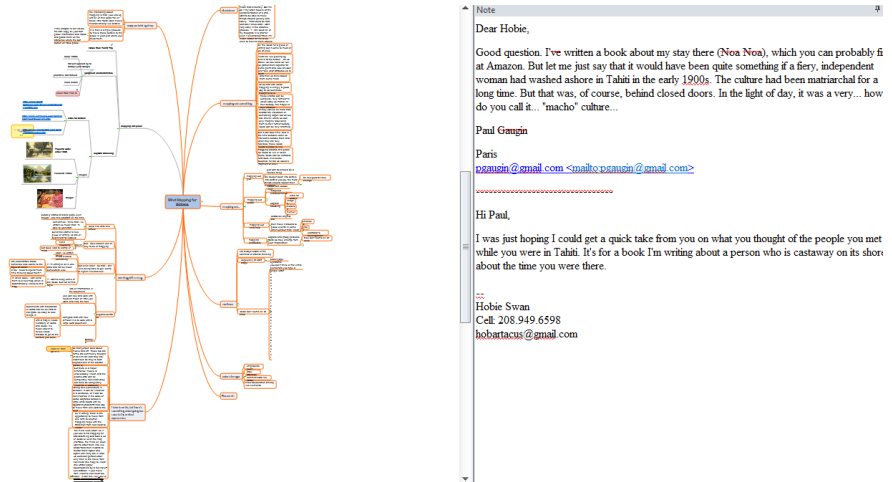
And so you can proceed, adding detail after detail to build up the information that will inform your writing.

Managing background information

You may be the kind of person who likes to do most of your planning and research before you start writing. If that's the case, then you will find that you have created this incredibly rich, visual, detailed document you'll be able to refer to as you begin to write.

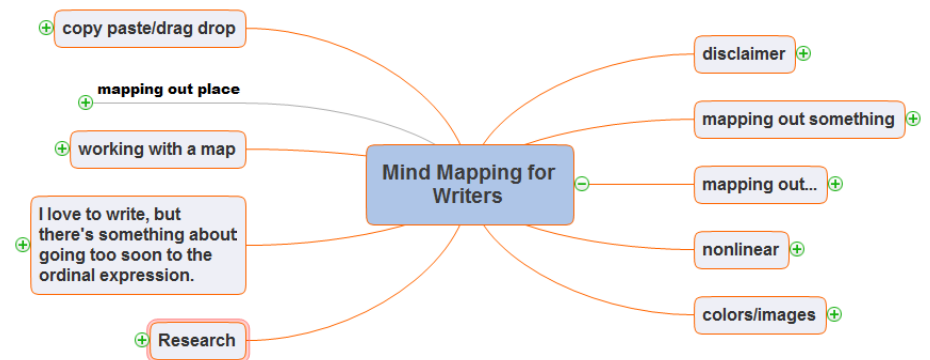
And when I say “refer to,” I don't mean hefting a big file onto your working surface or your computer desktop—then wading through it to find the detail you need. I'm talking about a multimedia document that allows you to very quickly and visually navigate through what may have become an entire universe of information to find just the information you need. It is this ease of capturing, organizing and then, later, actually finding information and ideas that can transform the writing process.

Fully expanded mind map



The above represents what an early-stage map for one of my writing projects. It may look just as overwhelming as an over-stuffed manila folder. But the magic of MINDMAP is that you can collapse the branches of your mind map. When you do, the above map condenses itself to look like this:

Collapsed mind map for information triage



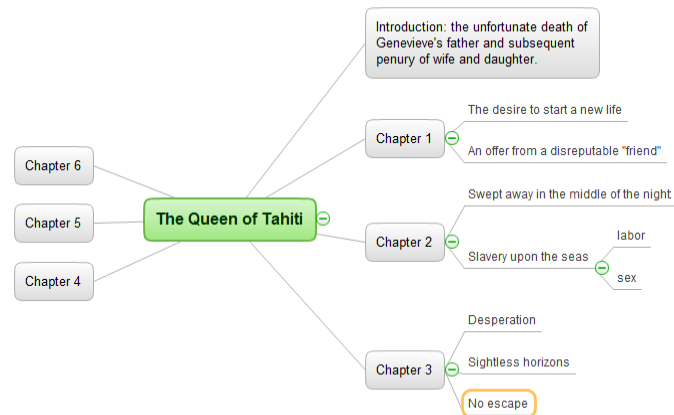
From this collapsed view, you can open up branches one at a time to visually navigate to just the piece of information you need just at that moment.

Think for a second about how you manage your information. Do you keep notes on scraps of paper? What about historical research? Do you create physical and/or digital folders and files? Do you get some information via email? And how do you manage the writing itself? Working on a writing project inevitably involves herding lots of little bits of information—knowing where it is and where it comes from. And then there is the writing itself.

Taking a small bite of a large elephant

What seems to me almost magical is the ability to create a map of the book you intend to write. That map might look something like this:

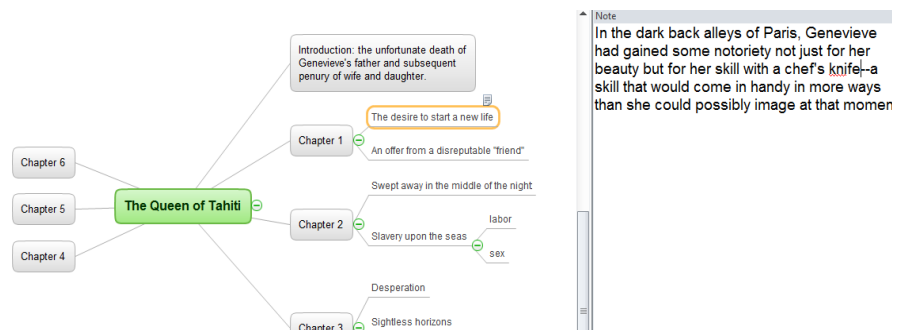
Capturing ideas as they occur



This isn't necessarily the content of the chapters or the order they will appear. I'm just thinking, taking a first shot at mapping out the narrative. I can always drag and drop the branches to change the order or to move the contents of one chapter into another chapter. But it enables me to break the big task of writing an entire book into smaller and smaller bites.

Personally, I am into immediate gratification and like to write as I go. So I create a new branch wherever I want to do some writing, open a new Notes window, and get to it. The map will store my writing just as it did M. Gaugin's email.

Composing in Notes pane



This is actually an interesting way to write. It can give you a lot more freedom to jump into your story at any point, write what you feel moved to write, and then jump to another section.

That's fine, you say, but what good is it to have all this writing trapped inside a map? You may have already anticipated this but the answer, of course, is that the content of the map is not trapped. On the contrary, it is eminently exportable. Here, for example, is how this map appears after I've done some writing for different chapters and exported it to a Microsoft Word outline:

Output to Word

The Queen of Tahiti

Introduction: the unfortunate death of Genevieve's father and subsequent penury of wife and daughter.

Chapter 1

The desire to start a new life

In the dark back alleys of Paris, Genevieve had gained some notoriety not just for her beauty but for her skill with a chef's knife—a skill that would come in handy in more ways than she could possibly image at that moment.

An offer from a disreputable "friend"

Chapter 2

Swept away in the middle of the night

Slavery upon the seas

However attractive the captain may have been, having to satisfy his endless urges was made all the worse by the fact that she got no respite. When Genevieve was not in his cabin, she was in the galley peeling potatoes and baking loaf upon loaf of bread. What kind of man can take unceasing advantage of a woman in both these ways? She wasn't his wife after all.

labor.

sex

Chapter 3

Desperation

Sightless horizons

No escape

Chapter 4

Chapter 5

Chapter 6

When Genevieve washes ashore and I need to describe what she sees, I simply navigate back to the map with the images of the islands, the notes from my visit, the recollections of M. Gaugin. All this information is so close at hand—so easy to get to.

Do you chunk?

I have found two distinct advantages to writing this way. First, the map allows me to keep all of my writing at my fingertips, immediately accessible... but separate—"chunked," if you will. I often find it easier to write this way. I don't feel like I'm pushing the entire book forward, which can be overwhelming. Instead, I navigate to the area I want to work on, do my writing, and move on.

Secondly, the map layout makes it easy for me to move the pieces around. I mapped out the outline for a book once that I expected to be strictly linear. But after talking to my editor, we decided to mix up the timeline so I could do more foreshadowing. Rather than having to parse pages of text to see where to cut and paste, I could simply drag map branches around, export to Word the chunks of text I'd written, and see how it read.

At some point in the writing process, I leave all this behind. I export the entire map and all my chunks to a Word document and treat it as a whole. But I appreciate being able to get to this point incrementally instead of trying to start the way I used to: with a blank page, stacks of folders and files, and no clear map of the destination I was trying to reach.

What's the right tool for you?

At its simplest, mind mapping provides what may be for you a refreshingly intuitive, flexible way to plan your writing. When fully exploited, it can give you the means to quickly transform your entire writing process. The ConceptDraw MINDMAP software itself is very simple to learn. Most people can get up and running with the basic operations as quickly as it takes them to locate the Enter and Insert keys, and to use the right click. With those few skills alone, the sky's the limit.

If you find yourself intrigued by the idea of mind mapping and do a Google search for mind mapping applications, you will find dozens if not hundreds. Some are web-based and free. Others are desktop apps that range in price from a few dollars to a few hundred dollars. If you are interested in simply collecting your thoughts, some of the cheaper products will work. ConceptDraw MINDMAP is designed for people who want a lot of power in their mind mapping—people who want to be able to add a wide variety of information types to their maps and to export map content to everything from a Word outline to OPML to PowerPoint.

In this article I have touched on only some of the ways ConceptDraw MINDMAP helps the writing process. Left unexplored for now is everything from creating tasks and due dates to help you keep stick to writing schedules and meet deadlines, to using graphic icons to visually communicate such things as problem areas and how much writing you've yet to do any given section. I invite you to visit www.ConceptDraw.com, download a free trial, and look around for yourself.

About the Author

Hobart Swan is a professional writer who has worked in the mind mapping industry for the past 10 years. His book, *The Cancer Code*, follows the creation of one of the leading mind-mapping software programs.