

## How do I use MindManager to help write my essay?

Mind Mapping is a common technique, usually involving a large sheet of paper and some coloured pens. For written assignments, it can be an effective tool for breaking down your question or task, developing your ideas and giving some direction to your research. Mind Mapping on a computer adds various functions to this already useful strategy and that's what we're going to look at in this lesson.

### This Lesson is for...

- Anyone who wants to write better essays.
- Anyone who finds Mind Mapping a generally effective medium for managing and developing their ideas.
- Anyone looking to control their writing process more effectively, especially when dealing with complex structures and high volumes of content.
- Anyone who finds the end result of their writing to be poorly structured or lacking in clarity.

### This lesson will cover...

Using MindManager to:

- Brainstorm a given question.
- Collect your research notes in context with your structure.
- Develop your map to improve the flow of your plan and expand on your ideas.
- Convert your map to the linear essay plan.
- Export your map to Microsoft Word as a comprehensive writing plan.

### Before you start

- You'll need access to MindManager and Microsoft Word (in this lesson we're using MindManager 14 and Word 2013)
- You'll also need a good grasp of the basic functions of the software including creating and organising topics, adding notes, files and links to those topics, and control the view of your map. Please see the [Introducing MindManager](#) page in the Toolkit if you are at all unsure.
- Remember that you can find more detail about the functions covered here through the MindManager User Guide. This can be accessed from the programme itself, via the 'Help' tab.
- It's highly recommended that you follow this lesson with the software open in front of so you can try it out as we go.

Note that this lesson specifically covers the use of Mind Mapping software to support your writing. For advice on improving your academic writing skills in general, or for guidance on specific aspects of your assignments, please refer to the [Student Learning Service](#) or your Course Leaders respectively.

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## Background

### Making a good plan

The strategy we're about to look at manages the process of writing; starting with the development of your ideas, managing your research, forming a coherent structure, and finally producing an essay plan to guide your writing.

Don't write until you know what you are going to write and where you are going to write it.

Some people do find jumping straight into their word processor of choice, and developing their writing 'on-the-fly', works for them. But this strategy is all about doing all the hard work of combining your ideas with your research into a coherent structure **before** you start thinking about words, sentences and paragraphs etc. We've all experienced the sensation of being lost in our own writing; feeling uneasy about what you've already written, where you're headed next and whether you are still answering the question.

Think, painting-by-numbers... but for writing.

What we want to do, is use our mind map to produce a plan that gives you your structure and summarised content so you can focus on the quality of your actual writing. Like [Painting by Numbers](#), we want to create a framework and key to follow; **essay-writing-by-numbers** if you will.

Of course, it's not that easy...

This process comes across as simple, but essays and other forms of academic writing are not easy tasks; a process cannot simply mass produce 1st class degree winning work as if on a factory production line. However, using Mind Mapping to control your writing process can help you improve, whether you are just starting out in Higher Education or a seasoned veteran of many an academic piece. This software has been used by first-year undergraduates and PhD candidates alike.

## The Lesson

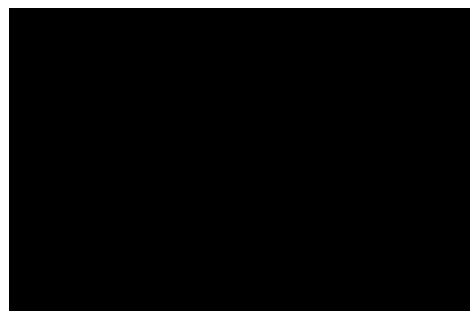
We're going to use a very simple example for this lesson in order to focus on the basic steps of this strategy. The accompanying videos are all HD quality, click the settings cog on videos for better resolution.

### *To what extent is Climate Change caused by Human activities?*

As you proceed, try to imagine adapting/scaling the task to fit the style of writing and size of the task you are doing in your own course.

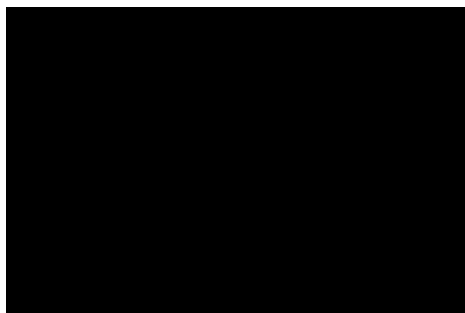
#### Step 1: Brainstorm

1. Open a new Map and enter your essay question in the 'Central Topic'.
2. Break down your question into its component parts and enter them as topics with an appropriate hierarchy.
3. Move your ideas around and start to develop the beginnings of a structure.
4. Finally, identify some initial direction for your research.



Remember at this stage you are free to put whatever comes to mind into the map. You can revise how things fit together as you go, focus on getting your thoughts down.

Some people like to stick with pen and paper for this part of the process because they like the 'tactile' experience. They simply copy the results into the software later to get the best of both platforms.



## Step 2: Capture your Research

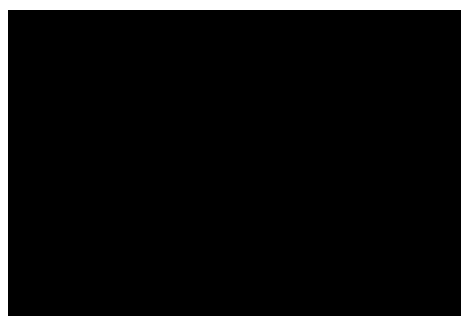
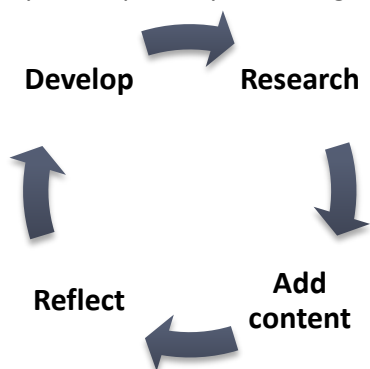
1. Enter notes into your topics by right-clicking on them and selecting 'Notes'.
2. Add Hyperlinks to web pages, files or other Maps through the same context menu, selecting 'Add Link...'
3. Attach files of all kinds by selecting 'Attach Files...'

As you enter your notes, remember to enter your references at the same time. Keeping it all together in one map is one of the advantages of this strategy.

There are many ways to capture notes and source materials so experiment with images, video links, audio recordings; anything you can digitally capture can go into the map, anything else can be entered manually.

## Step 3: Develop your map

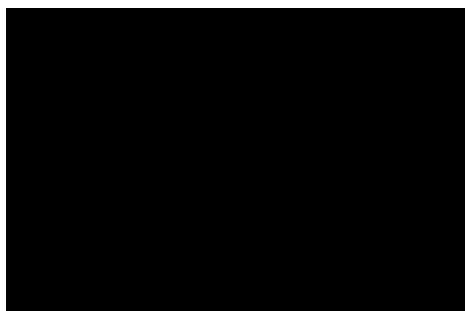
1. As you research your piece, you can develop the structure of your map to fit your emerging ideas.



2. Use the flexibility of the software to try out different structures and feel in control of your work.

Some people like to add colour and images to help them feel more connected to the information and ideas they are working with.

Use the various options in the 'View' ribbon (on the ribbon bar) to narrow and expand your focus as required to give you the perspective you need; hide the other branches while you concentrate on one specific topic.



### Step 4: Turn your map into a linear essay plan

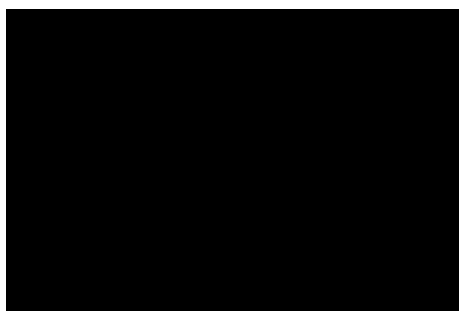
1. Once you're happy with your research and ideas and feel ready to think about actually writing, click on the 'View' ribbon and select the 'Outline' view.
2. Use this view to adjust and follow the structure that your writing will take.
3. Read through the notes, which will become your content to get a good feel for what the assessor will eventually see.
4. Switch between Outline and Map view as you need until you are happy with your structure and content.

The Outline view is an outstanding way to read through the flow of your writing before you commit to words, sentences and paragraphs.

Some people prefer the Outline view to work with and there is no reason you can't use this view exclusively to plan and develop your structure – some people work better with lists than maps.

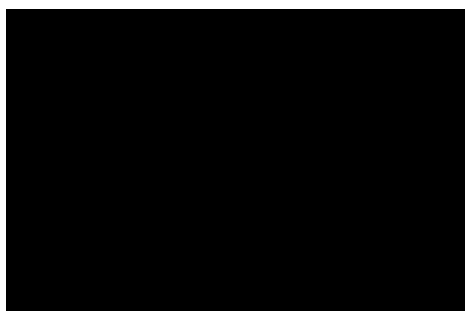
### Step 5: Export to MS Word

1. Open the file menu, select Export and choose "Export to Microsoft Word"
2. Choose your export options and click Ok to select a filename and location.
3. Wait for the export to complete.
4. Open the resulting Word document



There are many export options, allowing you to filter out different kinds of map content and determine how the resultant document will look like.

There are also various options for what file format you export, so you can plan a PowerPoint presentation or share your map via PDF and so on.



### Step 6: Use your plan to guide your writing

1. In Word, you will be presented with your plan including the structure and content.
2. Use this scaffolding to get writing, replacing the content with formal prose as you go.
3. Remove the un-needed headings as required.

Think of this process like how an artist may create a pencil drawing, then paint over this guide.

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## Wrap Up

Hopefully, you will now see how MindManager can be used to scaffold your writing process. I strongly recommend that you play around with this strategy and make it your own; Explore the myriad functions of the software, such as using map markers, task management, Gantt charts and MS Office integration to extend its usefulness.

See below for links to related resources and details of how to ask any questions you might have.

### Workshops and Drop-in Sessions

- [Details of face-to-face training and information sessions](#)

### Toolkit Resources

- [MindManager: Introduction](#)

### Academic Writing Skills

- [Student Learning Service](#)

### External Resources

- [MindMapping.com](#)
- [MindJet.com](#)