

# Make Useful Notes.



A SIMPLE GUIDE TO A COMPLEX SKILL BY USING  
SKETCHNOTES, OBSIDIAN AND ZETTELKASTEN.

v0.16.0 | 30.03.2023 | draft



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Sketchnote Book  
by Edmund Gröpl

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Cover: Sketchnote inspired by Graham Shaw at TEDx, 2015  
[https://lnkd.in/eC\\_7RRjy](https://lnkd.in/eC_7RRjy)

TO

THIES, JONAS, URS, KATHARINA, ROGER

AND URSEL



# Acknowledgements

I am thankful to the following people for their support and encouragement during the research and writing of this book:

- ...

# Foreword

This book is a Sketchnotes and Zettelkasten approach to use visual thinking for creativity and productivity supported by Obsidian<sup>1</sup>, an amazing note-taking and knowledge management app.

This draft version is just a collection of ideas and drawings from the authors personal learning journey and experiences about basic concepts of visual and networked thinking by using Smart Sketchnotes.

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<sup>1</sup> „Obsidian“, 2022, <https://obsidian.md/>

To ensure you have always the latest version available, please check GitHub<sup>2</sup> for updates.

London

N.N.

January 2023

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<sup>2</sup> „Obsidian-Zettelkasten Starter-Kit - Share & Showcase“, Obsidian Forum, 31. März 2022, <https://forum.obsidian.md/t/obsidian-zettelkasten-starter-kit/51090/1>

# Preface

I'm a data scientist and data storyteller. Networked thinking is part of my job since more than 30 years. Working with sketchnotes is a basic need. But why should I start writing a book about Smart Sketchnotes? The answer is easy.

What I've learned in my digital life:

1. Moments are precious.
2. So, I'm taking photos to remember.
3. Too many photos are overwhelming.
4. So, I love to create Photo Books.

But I needed much longer to understand:

1. Ideas are precious.
2. So, I'm taking sketchnotes to remember.
3. Too many sketchnotes are overwhelming.
4. So, I'm just creating my first Sketchnote Book about Digital Sketchnotes.

Do you already have a photo book? And what about having your own Sketchnote Book collecting Digital Sketchnotes?

If you love the idea, here are some great examples:

- A Simple Guide to Sketchnoting, Alessio Bresciani <sup>3</sup>
- Essentials of Visual Language, Yuri Malishenko<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Alessio Bresciani, *A Simple Guide To Sketchnoting: How To Use Visual Thinking in Daily Life to Improve Communication & Problem Solving*, 2016, <https://www.amazon.de/dp/B01LYP6JWZ/>.

<sup>4</sup> Yuri Malishenko, *Essentials of Visual Language - Workbook* (Leanpub, 2016), <https://leanpub.com/visualthinkingworkbook>.

- The xLontrax Theory of Sketchnote, Mauro Toselli<sup>5</sup>
- Sketchnotes aus Australien, Annelies Schippke<sup>6</sup>
- Collection of 98 Digital Sketchnotes, Chris Spalton<sup>7</sup>

But collecting Digital Sketchnotes is only the first step. In this book about Smart Sketchnotes you will learn how to benefit from networked thinking and visual thinking as well.

Networked thinking and visual thinking are both approaches to organizing and interpreting information that can be used to help you better understand complex ideas and concepts. However, they differ in the way they represent and structure information.

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<sup>5</sup> Mauro Toselli, *The Xlontrax Theory of Sketchnote*, 2016,  
<https://www.maurotoselli.com/blog/the-xlontrax-theory-of-sketchnote>.

<sup>6</sup> Annelies Schippke, ‘Sketchnotes aus Australien’, *meisterbar* (blog), 2022,  
<http://meisterbar.de/australien/>.

<sup>7</sup> Chris Spalton, ‘Collected Digital Sketchnotes’, Dropbox, 2022,  
<https://www.dropbox.com/s/cwoz13elf3604pi/Chris%20Spalton%20-%20Collected%20Digital%20Sketchnotes%20.pdf?dl=0>.

Networked thinking<sup>8</sup> is an approach to organizing information that involves creating connections and relationships between different pieces of information. It often involves creating a network or map of interconnected ideas and concepts, which can be visualized in the form of a diagram or other visual representation. Networked thinking is often used to identify patterns and connections between different pieces of information, and to explore the relationships between different ideas and concepts.

Visual thinking<sup>9</sup>, on the other hand, is an approach to organizing and interpreting information that involves the use of visual elements such as images, diagrams, and graphics to represent and communicate

---

<sup>8</sup> Anne-Laure Le Cunff, 'Networked Thinking: A Quiet Cognitive Revolution', *Ness Labs* (blog), 23 September 2020, <https://nesslabs.com/networked-thinking>.

<sup>9</sup> Willemien Brand and Pieter Koene, *Visual Thinking - Empowering People and Organizations Through Visual Collaboration* (Bis B.V., Uitgeverij (BIS Publishers), 2017), <https://openlibrary.org/books/OL28622690M/Visual Thinking>.

information. Visual thinking can be used to create visual summaries of complex ideas, to convey information in a more memorable and engaging way, and to facilitate the process of problem-solving and decision-making.

In summary, networked thinking involves creating connections and relationships between different pieces of information, while visual thinking involves using visual elements to represent and communicate information. Both approaches can be useful tools for organizing and understanding complex ideas and concepts.

We will start taking notes and taking sketchnotes as well. Linked together we can see almost hidden structures. That's the stuff Smart Sketchnotes are made of.

Start reading to discover your new world of thinking.



# Contents

INTRODUCTION	24
Understand Note-making	30
Why Making Notes	34
Why Making Sketchnotes	37
Connect Your Notes	41
Choose the Right Tools	45
Learn from the Best	47
START FROM PROVEN ZETTELKASTEN CONCEPTS	49
Understand Zettelkasten Framework	55
Be Aware of Your Networked Mindset	60
Appreciate 4 Zettelkasten Values	63
Know 12 Zettelkasten Principles	66

Use Unlimited Zettelkasten Practices	70
1. Fleeting Notes	74
2. Literature Notes	77
3. Permanent Notes	79
4. Bibliographical Notes	81
5. Structure Notes	83
6. Project Notes	85
START FROM PROVEN SKETCHNOTE CONCEPTS	86
Understand Sketchnotes Basics	88
Be Aware of Your Visual Mindset	91
Appreciate 4 Sketchnote Values	95
Know 12 Sketchnote Principles	99
Use Unlimited Sketchnote Practices	104
NOW BUILD UP YOUR WORKFLOW	105
Start with Three Steps	106
Understand Your Flow of Knowledge	110
Build it up on 4 Cornerstones	113

Focus on Creating Output	114
Make it a Habit	117
REMEMBER 12 ZETTELKASTEN PRINCIPLES	118
1. Start With Clear Goals	119
2. Use Templates	121
3. Make Connections	123
4. Use Tags	125
5. Use for creative thinking	127
5. Review and Revise Your Notes	129
7. Keep up to date	131
8. Inspect and Adapt Your Process	133
9. Use for learning	136
10. Encourage collaboration	137
11. Support your work	138
12. Have Fun with Your Zettelkasten	139
REMEMBER 12 SKETCHNOTE PRINCIPLES	140
1. Start With A Structure	141

2. Keep it simple	142
3. Use visual hierarchies	143
4. Leave white space	144
5. Use typography	145
6. Use metaphors and icons	146
7. Use Arrows and Connectors	147
8. Keep it Legible	148
9. Review and Revise	149
10. Practice Regularly	150
11. Experiment with Different Styles	151
12. Have Fun with Your Sketchnotes	152
 USE DIGITAL TOOLS TO SUPPORT YOUR WORKFLOW	 153
Collect Ideas	155
Reference Ideas	156
Visualize Ideas	157
Connect Ideas	159
Combine Ideas	160
Communicate Ideas	162

Outline Ideas	163
Publish Ideas	164
BENEFIT FROM UNLIMITED ZETTELKASTEN PRACTICES	165
Avoid Pitfalls	167
Inspect Process with Dataview	169
Review Notes with Dataview	170
Re-visit lost ideas	171
Re-visit old ideas	172
Discover with Graph View	174
Re-structure with Canvas	175
Use a Bullet Journal	176
Use a Kanban Board	177
Use an Outline Wall	179
CONNECT WITH LEARNING COMMUNITIES	181
Working Out Loud Circles	182
LernOS Circles	183

BE OPEN FOR EXPERIMENTS	184
Draw Ideas	186
Play with Quotes	188
Unlock Your Creative Potential	190
Create Multiple Posts	193
Share Templates	194
Share Starter Kit	195
Re-use Posts for Newsletters	196
Create Storylines with Canvas	197
Use AI	198
APPENDIX	199
List of Figures	200
Zettelkasten Books	201
Sketchnote Books	203
Communities	212
Inspiring People	214
Newsletters	217

Meetups	219
Podcasts	220
Social Media	224
Tools	225
Concepts	226
Obsidian	228
Procreate	230
SimpleMind	232
Zettelkasten Videos	234
Sketchnote Videos	237
References	238
Index	243
The Author	247



# INTRODUCTION

It was on March 2nd, 2022, when I attended the Eventbrite event "Sketchnoting with Mike Rohde"<sup>10</sup>. Therefore, it was an intense pleasure for me to have a live online workshop together with him and more than a hundred participants.

As I listened to his voice and watched his live presentation, I also watched the chat stream powered by some of the most active visitors. Some of these were questions for Mike, some were answers to

The screenshot shows a portion of the Eventbrite chat stream. At the top, a message from 'Carolina NYC an Alle' is visible, preceded by a small dark blue square icon containing the letters 'CN'. The message text reads: 'I highly suggest the book "Taking Smart Notes" by Sonke Ahrens. He explains the concept of the Zettelkasten very well'. Below this, another message from the same user is shown, preceded by a light gray square icon. The message text reads: 'The infinite canvas of Concepts is a total game changer for me!'. The background of the screenshot is white, and the text is in a black sans-serif font.

Carolina NYC an Alle

CN

I highly suggest the book "Taking Smart Notes" by Sonke Ahrens. He explains the concept of the Zettelkasten very well

The infinite canvas of Concepts is a total game changer for me!

FIG. 1: CHAT STREAM EVENTBRITE WITH MIKE ROHDE

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<sup>10</sup> Mike Rohde, 'Sketchnoting with Mike Rohde', Eventbrite, 2 March 2022, <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/269815965817?aff=efbneb>.

questions Mike asked the audience. Suddenly I stopped reading: A few keywords with the phrase "Zettelkasten" appeared on the screen.

Never heard the word "Zettelkasten" in connection with sketchnoting. Long story short, I bought the book the next day and was intrigued from the start. The book opened a door for me to solve my personal problem of organizing my notes and also my sketchnotes.

Yes, that is how the story of Zettelkasten and sketchnotes starts for me. But what are your questions you might have when reading this book about using sketchnotes and Zettelkasten to improve visual and networked thinking with Obsidian? Questions I would be happy to answer for you in the following chapters:

- What is a Zettelkasten and how does it work?  
*See chapter: Understand Zettelkasten (p. 55)*
- What are sketchnotes and how can they be used to improve visual thinking?  
*See chapter: Understand Sketchnotes Basics (p. 88)*

- How can the combination of sketchnotes and a Zettelkasten be used to improve networked thinking and knowledge management?

*See chapter: NOW BUILD UP YOUR WORKFLOW (p. 105)*

- How can Obsidian be used to create and organize a Zettelkasten?

*See chapter: USE DIGITAL TOOLS TO SUPPORT YOUR WORKFLOW (p. 153)*

- What are some best practices for using sketchnotes and a Zettelkasten with Obsidian?

*See chapter: BENEFIT FROM UNLIMITED ZETTELKASTEN PRACTICES (p. 165)*

- Are there any specific challenges or pitfalls to be aware of when using this approach?

*See chapter: Avoid Pitfalls (p. 167)*

- What are some examples of how others have used sketchnotes and a Zettelkasten with Obsidian to improve their thinking and knowledge management?

*See chapter: Learn from the Best (p. 47)*

Overall, you will learn about the specific techniques and tools involved in using sketchnotes and a Zettelkasten with Obsidian, as well as how to apply these techniques and tools in a practical way to improve your own visual and networked thinking.

So now, let's start with the first chapter.

IT IS NOT POSSIBLE TO  
THINK  
SYSTEMATICALLY  
WITHOUT WRITING  
(LUHMANN 1992, 53).

SKETCHNOTING



Sönke Ahrens  
*How to Take Smart Notes: One Simple Technique to Boost Writing, Learning and Thinking*

# Understand Note-making



What are we to do with what we have written down?

Certainly, at first we will produce mostly garbage.

But we have been educated to expect something useful from our activities and soon lose confidence if nothing useful seems to result. We should therefore reflect on whether and how we arrange our notes so that they are available

for later access. — Niklas Luhmann<sup>11</sup>

---

<sup>11</sup> Manfred Kuehn, 'Learning How to Read by Niklas Luhmann', <https://luhmann.surge.sh/learning-how-to-read>.

I love reading and learning. But reading books is not enough. To find new insights note-taking is essential. Here is one of my personal insights I found when working with my Zettelkasten:

**It is not possible  
to think systematically  
without sketchnoting.<sup>12</sup>**

---

<sup>12</sup> Edmund Gröpl, '*It Is Not Possible to Think*', 2022,  
[https://www.linkedin.com/posts/groep\\_l\\_procreate-lernos-lernossketchnoting-activity-7002979335590576128-ocZ](https://www.linkedin.com/posts/groep_l_procreate-lernos-lernossketchnoting-activity-7002979335590576128-ocZ).

My connected notes that led me to this insight relate to my two most valuable note-taking books:

- How to take Smart Notes [178 p.] - Sönke Ahrens<sup>13</sup>
- The Sketchnote Handbook [224 p.] - Mike Rohde<sup>14</sup>

But before we read these books chapter by chapter and page by page, let's get an introductory overview and start with two motivational videos on YouTube, one about Zettelkasten:

- Zettelkasten Method Explained: A Beginner's Guide [9:20] - Vicky Zhao<sup>15</sup>

and one about sketchnoting:

---

<sup>13</sup> Sönke Ahrens, *How to Take Smart Notes: One Simple Technique to Boost Writing, Learning and Thinking*, 2022.

<sup>14</sup> Mike Rohde, *Sketchnote Handbook: The Illustrated Guide to Visual Note Taking* (Milwaukee: Peachpit Press, 2012).

<sup>15</sup> *Zettelkasten Method Explained: A Beginner's Guide*, 2021.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GpV47rUYk8I>.

- Sketchnote Mini Workshop [32:29] - Mike Rohde<sup>16</sup>

I hope you enjoyed the short videos and found time to leaf through the two books. Some concepts may be familiar to you, others may be new.

We now want to have a closer look on taking notes and sketchnotes on the next pages. What are the similarities here, but also the differences between the two options.

---

<sup>16</sup> *Mike Rohde: Sketchnote Mini Workshop, 2017,*  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=39Xq4tSQ31A>.

# Why Making Notes

As I have learned there are several benefits to making notes:

**Improved understanding and retention of information:** Making notes helps you process and understand the material you are learning and makes it easier to review and recall later.

**Increased focus and concentration:** Making notes can help you stay engaged and focused during a lecture or meeting, as it requires you to actively listen and pay attention to what is being said.

**Better organization and clarity:** Notes can help you organize your thoughts and ideas and can serve as a helpful reference when you need to review the material later.

**Enhanced problem-solving and critical thinking skills:** Note-making can help you analyse and evaluate information, as you must decide what is most important and relevant to include in your notes.

**Preparation for future use:** Notes can be a useful resource when preparing for exams, projects, or presentations. They can also serve as a valuable reference when you need to revisit the material in the future.

### So what?

No, it really is not possible to think systematically without making notes.

Learn more about watching Nick Milo<sup>17</sup> on YouTube.

---

<sup>17</sup> Stop Note Taking. Start Note Making: Learn the NoMa Method, 2022.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SAsZDg2l1R0>.

# 1

Ideas,  
not  
Art

- MIKE ROHDE



#EDMUND'2021

# Why Making Sketchnotes



Sketchnotes are rich visual notes created from a mix of handwriting, drawings, hand-drawn typography, shapes, and visual elements like arrows, boxes, and lines. – *Mike Rhode*

Sketchnoting, also known as visual notetaking, is a way of creating visual summaries of information. It involves combining drawings, text, and symbols to capture the essence of a meeting, lecture, or presentation in a way that is more engaging and memorable than

traditional note-taking methods. There are several benefits to sketchnoting:

**Improved retention:** Studies have shown that people tend to remember information better when it is presented visually.

Sketchnoting allows you to create a visual representation of the information, which can help you remember it more effectively.

**Increased engagement:** Sketchnoting requires you to actively process and synthesize information as you create your visual summary. This can help you stay more engaged with the material and better understand the key points.

**Enhanced communication:** Sketchnotes can be shared with others, making them a powerful tool for communication and collaboration. They can be used to summarize meetings, lectures, or presentations, or to explain complex concepts to others in a more accessible way.

**Greater creativity:** Sketchnoting encourages creativity and allows you to express your understanding of the material in your own unique way. This can make the learning process more enjoyable and rewarding.

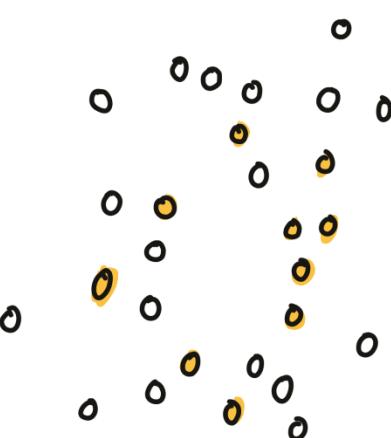
Overall, sketchnoting is a powerful tool for learning, retention, engagement, communication, and creativity.

And I would not leave you alone with this written text. Here is an introduction to visual note-taking from Doug Neill<sup>18</sup> on YouTube.

---

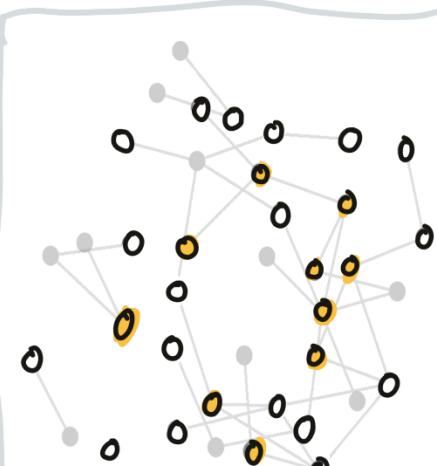
<sup>18</sup> An Introduction To Visual Note-Taking. Verbal to Visual, 2016.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eZQ7lUAsEek>.

## SKETCHNOTES



IDEAS

## SMART SKETCHNOTES



NETWORKED IDEAS

FIG. 2: IDEAS VS NETWORKED IDEAS

# Connect Your Notes



**Write exactly one note for each idea and write as if you were writing for someone else.** — Niklas Luhmann<sup>19</sup>

What is the difference between a sketchnote and a smart sketchnote?  
It is the same as between ideas and networked ideas. Such easy.

---

<sup>19</sup> Ahrens, *How to Take Smart Notes*. p. 34

# =SMART= SKETCHNOTES

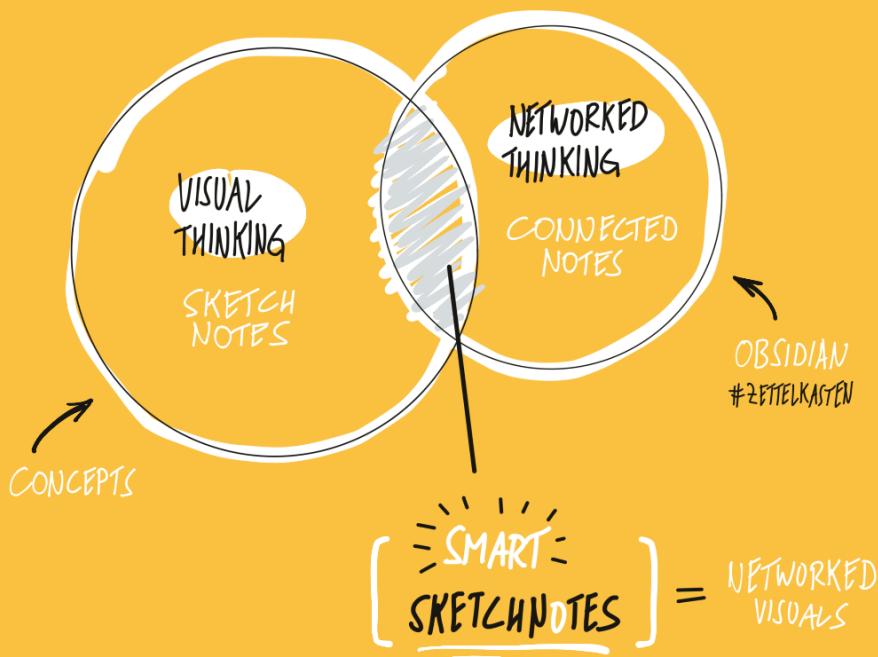


FIG. 3: SMART SKETCHNOTES ARE NETWORKED VISUALS

Smart Sketchnotes are Networked Visuals<sup>20</sup>:

- Visual Thinking creates Sketchnotes.
- Networked Thinking creates Connected Notes.

It is like connecting Mike Rohde and Niklas Luhmann. The only tools you need are Concepts app and Obsidian with Luhmann's Zettelkasten.

Try it your own: Start reading the next chapter.

---

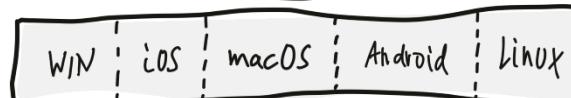
<sup>20</sup> Edmund Gröpl, 'Smart Sketchnotes Are Networked Visuals', 2022,  
[https://www.linkedin.com/posts/groep\\_zettelkasten-procreate-procreatesketchnote-activity-690914937942769794-018A/](https://www.linkedin.com/posts/groep_zettelkasten-procreate-procreatesketchnote-activity-690914937942769794-018A/).

WOL CIRCLE

## ZETTELKASTEN

WEEK 2

# KNOWLEDGE BURGER



METHODS  
KM TOOL  
OS



#EDMUND 2022

# Choose the Right Tools



*Nowadays, I use and value Roam Research, but would probably go with Obsidian if I had to start over today.<sup>21</sup> — Sönke Ahrens*

This useful tip from Sönke Ahrens saved me hours and days. More time than it took me to read his great book. And it helped me to get an easy start.

---

<sup>21</sup> Ahrens, Sönke. ‘Take Smart Notes’, 2022,  
<https://www.soenkeahrens.de/en/takesmartnotes>.

Later, when I was more experienced with Zettelkasten I started some research and experiment with different software. But I was not successful. My first-choice seems to be the best.

My tip for you to start with Obsidian as a tool for Zettelkasten is a short set of six tutorials from Nick Milo<sup>22</sup> on YouTube. And it will save a lot of your precious time too.

More about choosing the right tools you'll find later in the chapter "USE DIGITAL TOOLS TO SUPPORT YOUR WORKFLOW" (p. 153).

---

<sup>22</sup> Obsidian for Beginners: How to Use the Obsidian App for Notes. Linking Your Thinking, 2020. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QgbLb6QCK88>.

# Learn from the Best

For me, the best sources of value are the great authors and also the many talented and influential experts on personal knowledge management and sketchnoters as well who use social media to share their work and connect with their audiences.

Some of the most well-known and influential experts I know you will find in this book at:

- Inspiring People (p. 214)

Learn more about note-making by watching:

- Zettelkasten Videos (p. 234)
- Sketchnote Videos (p. 237)

Learn more about note-making by reading:

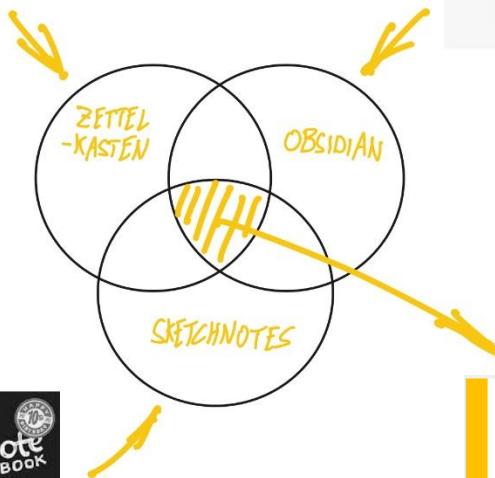
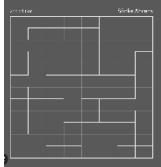
- Zettelkasten Books (p. 201)
- Sketchnote Books (p. 203)

Feel free to use all the supported links to watch their amazing tutorials on YouTube and also read their books.

START FROM  
PROVEN  
ZETTELKASTEN  
CONCEPTS

## HOW TO TAKE SMART NOTES

David JP Lutz  
Oscar Olofsson  
Oskar Wistow  
Learning and thinking



Surely you will find an unlimited number of books about taking notes. I found two of them that inspired me the most. One about:

- **Zettelkasten** from Sönke Ahrens<sup>23</sup> and one about
- **Sketchnotes** from Mike Rohde<sup>24</sup>

Apparently, these books inspired others as well. The book from Sönke Ahrens first published in 2017 has already been translated into 10 languages. Mike Rode's 2012 book is now available in 5 languages.

- **Obsidian**<sup>25</sup> is my preferred note-taking and knowledge management app.

---

<sup>23</sup> Ahrens, Sönke. How to Take Smart Notes: One Simple Technique to Boost Writing, Learning and Thinking, 2022.

<sup>24</sup> Rohde, Mike. Sketchnote Handbook: The Illustrated Guide to Visual Note Taking. Milwaukee: Peachpit Press, 2012.

<sup>25</sup> Obsidian: *A knowledge base that works on local Markdown files.*

'Obsidian', 2022. <https://www.obsidian.md>.

With more than 70,000 members in its Discord chat and 35,000 members on its forum, Obsidian has one of the largest note-taking communities.

But isn't it too complex to learn all these skills just for note taking? No, it isn't. As an experienced note-taker you already know about the complexity of writing useful notes. You've learnt from practice:



**Complex skills are built up by complex activities.**

— Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi<sup>26</sup>, 1993

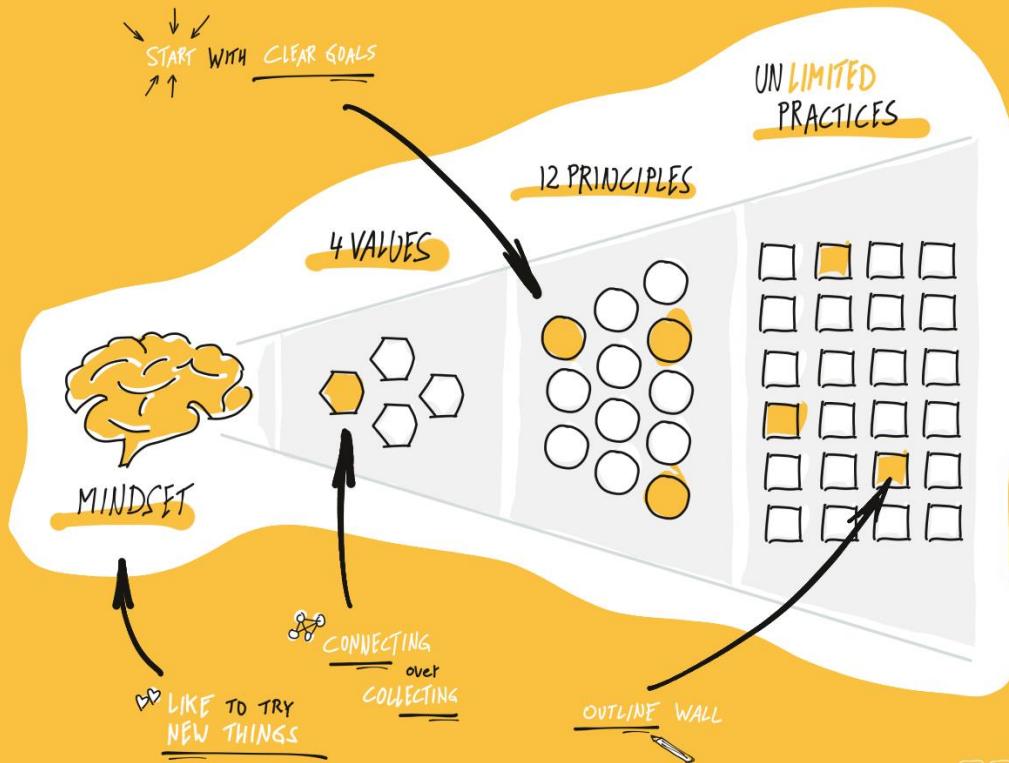
---

<sup>26</sup> Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *The Evolving Self: A Psychology for the Third Millennium*, 1st HarperPerennial ed (New York, NY: HarperPerennial, 1994). p. 170

And it's not only a promise: You now have "A simple guide to a complex skill by using Sketchnotes, Obsidian and Zettelkasten".

# ZETTELKASTEN

## FRAMEWORK



# Understand Zettelkasten Framework

Let me give you an overview: Niklas Luhmann's Zettelkasten is a method of note-taking and organization that he developed over the course of his career as a sociologist and philosopher. The following are some of the basic concepts that are central to the Zettelkasten method:

**Interconnectedness:** One of the key principles of the Zettelkasten method is the idea of interconnectedness, or the creation of connections and relationships between different pieces of information. Luhmann believed that by linking related ideas together, it was possible to create a deeper understanding of complex concepts and to generate new ideas.

**Cross-referencing:** The Zettelkasten method involves the use of cross-references, or connections between different notes or slips, to create a network of interconnected ideas. Cross-references are used to link related ideas together and to facilitate the development of new connections and relationships between different pieces of information.

**Modularity:** The Zettelkasten method is based on the idea of modularity, or the organization of information into smaller, more manageable units. By breaking ideas down into smaller, more manageable chunks, it is easier to identify patterns and connections between different pieces of information, and to rearrange and reorder them as needed.

**Hierarchy:** The Zettelkasten method involves the creation of a hierarchy of ideas, with more general concepts at the top and more specific concepts below. This hierarchical structure helps to create a clear and organized overview of the information and allows for the easy identification of relationships between different ideas.

**Flexibility:** The Zettelkasten method is designed to be flexible and adaptable, allowing users to rearrange and reorder their notes as needed to reflect new insights and connections. This flexibility helps to facilitate the ongoing process of learning and idea development.

To understand the concept of Zettelkasten in detail the framework shown in the sketchnote above will give us some orientation:

- Networked Mindset
- 4 Zettelkasten Values
- 12 Zettelkasten Principles
- Unlimited Zettelkasten Practices

So let us start from top level and begin with our mindset in the next chapter.



# Be Aware of Your Networked Mindset

Let me assume you are a networked thinker like Niklas Luhmann. Then you will have a mindset characterized by the following traits:

- Open-mindedness
- Collaboration
- Connectedness
- Flexibility
- Continuous learning
- Systems thinking
- Embracing diversity and multiple perspectives.

You approach problem-solving by seeking diverse perspectives and drawing connections between seemingly disparate ideas. You view knowledge as decentralized and strive to build relationships and networks to access information and resources.

# ZETTELKASTEN

VALUES

VALUES

- CONNECTING OVER COLLECTING
- FLEXIBILITY OVER STRUCTURE
- TAGS OVER FOLDERS
- WRITING OVER COPYING

# Appreciate 4 Zettelkasten Values

When starting to understand Zettelkasten I asked Google to find a “Zettelkasten Manifesto” for me. As I learned from agile projects, you always need a “Manifesto”<sup>27</sup> before to start working.

---

<sup>27</sup> Ken Schwaber et al., ‘Manifesto for Agile Software Development’, n.d., <https://agilemanifesto.org/>.

After more than 15 minutes of unsuccessful search I remembered an old saying: “If you can’t find it, create it.”

So, here is my first draft:

## 4 ZETTELKASTEN VALUES

We are uncovering better ways of notetaking by doing it and helping others do it. Through this work we have come to value:

- Connecting over Collecting
- Flexibility over Structure
- Tags over Folders
- Writing over Copying

That is, while there is value in the items on the right, we value the items on the left more.

# ZETTELKASTEN

## PRINCIPLES



### 12 PRINCIPLES

- 1 START WITH CLEAR GOALS
- 2 USE TEMPLATES
- 3 MAKE CONNECTIONS
- 4 USE TAGS
- 5 USE FOR CREATIVE THINKING
- 6 REVIEW AND REVISE
- 7 KEEP UP TO DATE
- 8 INSPECT AND ADAPT
- 9 USE FOR LEARNING
- 10 ENCOURAGE COLLABORATION
- 11 SUPPORT YOUR WORK
- 12 HAVE FUN

# Know 12 Zettelkasten Principles

There are 12 basic principles for working with a Zettelkasten:

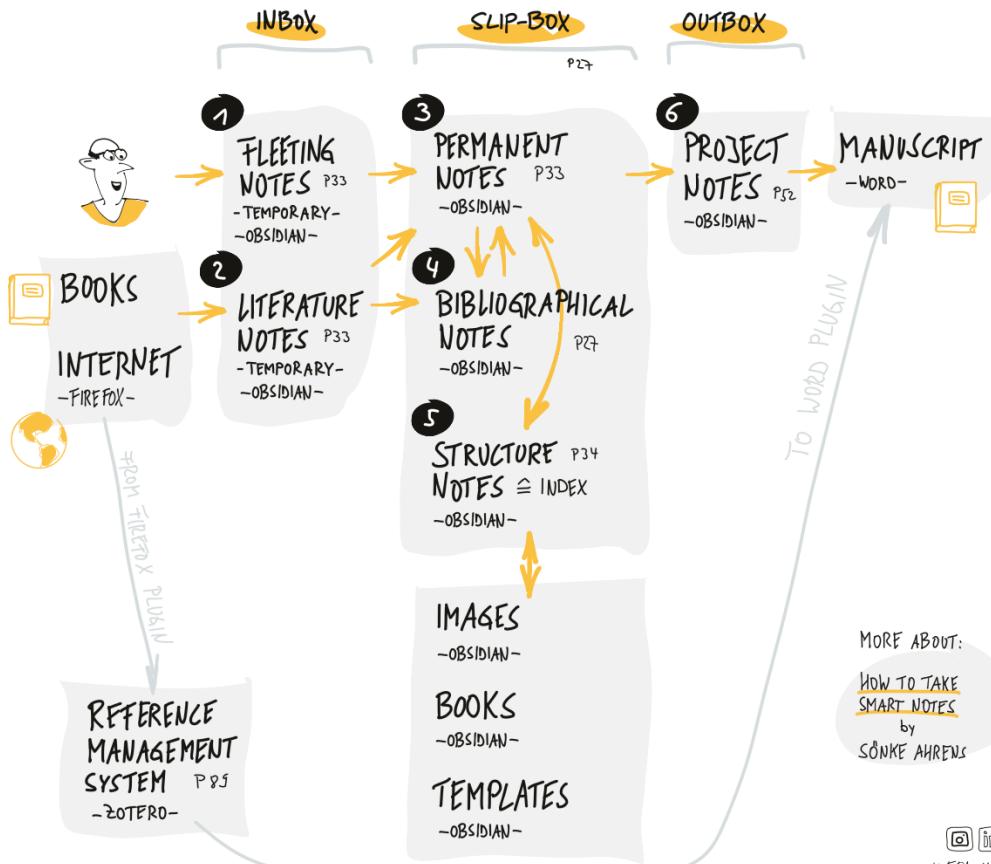
1. **Start with clear goals.** Determine what you want to achieve with your Zettelkasten and use this to guide your note-taking and organization.
2. **Use templates.** Consistently use a consistent format for your notes to make them easy to read and navigate.

3. **Make connections.** Link related notes together to create a web of interconnected ideas.
4. **Use tags.** Use tags to categorize and organize your notes and make it easier to find related information.
5. **Use for creative thinking.** Allow the connections between your notes to spark new ideas and facilitate creative thinking.
6. **Review and revise.** Regularly review and revise your notes to ensure they are up to date and accurate.
7. **Keep up to date.** Consistently add new notes and make connections between them to keep your Zettelkasten current and valuable.
8. **Inspect and adapt.** Continually evaluate and refine the organization and use of your Zettelkasten to maximize its effectiveness and efficiency.
9. **Use for learning.** Use your Zettelkasten to capture and organize new information as you learn, and to facilitate lifelong learning.
10. **Encourage collaboration.** Invite others to contribute to and review your Zettelkasten to facilitate collaboration and shared learning.

- 11. Support your work.** Use your Zettelkasten as a tool to support and enhance your work, whether that's writing, research, or something else.
- 12. Have fun.** Enjoy the process of building and using your Zettelkasten!

HOW  
TO  
USE

# ZETTELKASTEN IN OBSIDIAN



# Use Unlimited Zettelkasten Practices

Just finished reading the amazing book “How to take Smart Notes” from Sönke Ahrens<sup>28</sup>. As a visual thinker and sketchnoter my first idea was to use this method to combine visual thinking with networked

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<sup>28</sup> Ahrens, Sönke. How to Take Smart Notes: One Simple Technique to Boost Writing, Learning and Thinking, 2022.

thinking. Taking smart notes is great but taking smart sketchnotes would be even greater.

To summarize the content of a book like this within one sketchnote is not that easy. So, I started to summarize one main aspect which is important for a reader of Ahrens' book to work with the Zettelkasten method<sup>29</sup>.

It is the major workflow starting with filling the inbox till using the content of the growing slip-box to produce an output of higher value. I added the tools I'm using in this process (Obsidian, Zotero, Firefox and Word) and also the page numbers from the book as a reference for further reading and understanding the underlying method.

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<sup>29</sup> Edmund Gröpl, 'How to Use Zettelkasten in Obsidian - Forum Obsidian', *Obsidian Forum*, 31 March 2022, <https://forum.obsidian.md/t/how-to-use-zettelkasten-in-obsidian/35008>.

You see, there are several types of notes that are relevant for a Zettelkasten system. This are the types of notes that you might use in your Zettelkasten:

1. Fleeting Notes (p. 74)
2. Literature Notes (p. 77)
3. Permanent Notes (p. 79)
4. Bibliographical Notes (p. 81)
5. Structure Notes (p. 83)
6. Project Notes (p. 85)

Let's have a look on the details.

# ZETTELKASTEN PRACTICES



# 1. Fleeting Notes

Fleeting Notes are brief notes that we can use to capture ideas or information that may not be relevant in the long term but need to be recorded quickly. They can be thought of as temporary placeholder notes that can be reviewed and either incorporated into the Zettelkasten or discarded later.

The purpose of Fleeting Notes is to allow you to quickly capture and record ideas or information as they occur to you, without the need to spend a lot of time organizing or categorizing them. This can be especially useful when you are working on a project or engaged in creative thinking, as it allows you to quickly capture and save ideas without interrupting your workflow.

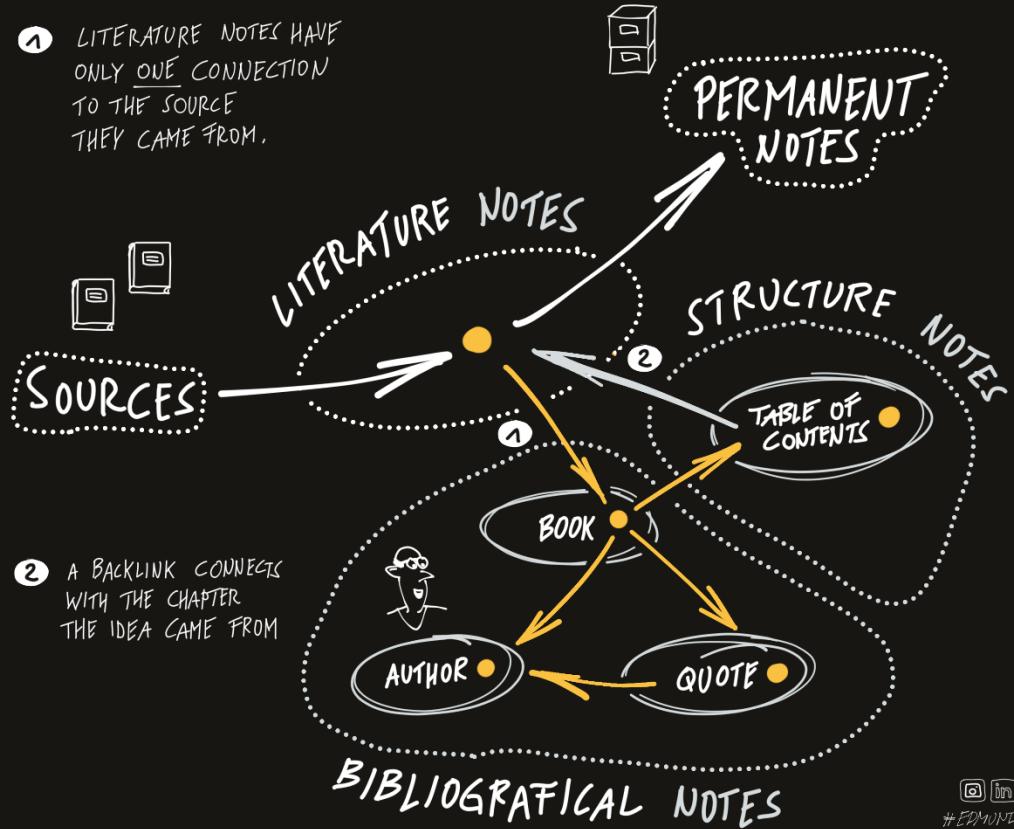
By creating Fleeting Notes, you can ensure that you don't forget important ideas or information, and you can also use them as a

starting point for more in-depth analysis or research later. Ultimately, Fleeting Notes are an important tool for helping you to stay organized and focused and can be an integral part of your successful Zettelkasten system.

**Take Fleeting Notes wherever you are.  
The best tool for this is what you have with you,  
maybe a pencil and a piece of paper.**

# LINKING NOTES

- ① LITERATURE NOTES HAVE ONLY ONE CONNECTION TO THE SOURCE THEY CAME FROM.



- ② A BACKLINK CONNECTS WITH THE CHAPTER THE IDEA CAME FROM

## 2. Literature Notes

Literature Notes are the second type of note used in the Zettelkasten. In a Zettelkasten, notes are organized into a network of interconnected ideas, with each note representing a single thought or concept. Literature notes are used to capture information from external sources, such as books, articles, or lectures, and to integrate it into your own thinking and work.

The purpose of literature notes is to help you to extract and summarize the key points and ideas from external sources, and to relate them to your own thinking and work. By creating literature notes, you can more easily incorporate new information into your Zettelkasten and use it to build upon or challenge your existing ideas. Literature notes can also help you to access and retrieve information from external sources, as

they provide a structured way to capture and organize the relevant information more easily.

Using literature notes in a Zettelkasten can be especially helpful for you to keep track of a large volume of information from various sources. It can also be useful to more effectively incorporate new information into your thinking and work.

**Every Literature Note needs a link back to its source.  
It is not an option. It is a must.**

## 3. Permanent Notes

Permanent Notes, also known as atomic notes, are the central type of note used in the Zettelkasten. They are organized into a network of interconnected ideas, with each note representing a single thought or concept. Permanent notes are the central ideas that form the backbone of this network and are used to connect and relate other notes to each other.

The purpose of permanent notes is to provide a stable foundation for the rest of the notes in the Zettelkasten. They are meant to be long-lasting and not subject to frequent change, in contrast to temporary or working notes (Fleeting notes and Literature notes), which are more focused on capturing and organizing information in the short term. Permanent notes are typically used to represent key concepts, ideas, or themes that are central to your thinking and work.

Using permanent notes in a Zettelkasten can help you to better structure and organize your thoughts and ideas, as well as to identify connections and relationships between different pieces of information.

My most important take away:



**A reader of your permanent note should understand it without reading the source that led to your idea. — Eva Keiffenheim**

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<sup>30</sup> Keiffenheim, Eva. 'Zettelkasten's 3 Note-Taking Levels Help You Harvest Your Thoughts'. <https://learntrepreneurs.com/books-reading-better-learning-more/zettelkastens-3-note-taking-levels-help-you-harvest-your-thoughts/>.

## 4. Bibliographical Notes

Bibliographical Notes, also known as reference notes, are an additional type of note used in the Zettelkasten. They are used to capture and store information about external sources, such as books, articles, or lectures, that are relevant to your thinking and work.

The purpose of bibliographical notes is to provide a central location for storing and organizing information about external sources that you have used or want to use in your work. By creating bibliographical notes, you can more easily keep track of the sources you have consulted and quickly retrieve them when needed. Bibliographical notes can also help you to cite your sources more easily in your own work, as they provide a structured way to capture and store the necessary information.

Using bibliographical notes in a Zettelkasten can be especially helpful for you if you need to keep track of a large volume of information from various sources.

## 5. Structure Notes

Structure Notes are notes that are used to organize and structure the other notes in the system. They are typically used to create relationships between different notes and to establish the overall structure of the Zettelkasten.

There are several different types of Structure Notes that you might use in your Zettelkasten, including:

- Maps of Content (MoC): These notes provide a high-level overview of a particular topic or idea and can help to give context to the other notes in the system.
- Summary Notes: These notes summarize the main points or key takeaways from a particular note or group of notes.
- Index Notes: These notes are used to create an index or table of contents for the Zettelkasten and can help you to quickly find and access specific notes.

- Linking Notes: These notes are used to create connections between different notes in the Zettelkasten and can help to establish relationships between different ideas or concepts.

By using Structure Notes, you can create a logical and coherent structure for your Zettelkasten and make it easier to find and access the information that you need. This can be especially useful when working on a complex project or when trying to make connections between different pieces of information. Ultimately, Structure Notes are an important tool for helping you to stay organized and focused and can be an integral part of your successful Zettelkasten system.

## 6. Project Notes

Project Notes are notes that are related to a specific project or task. The purpose of Project Notes is to help you stay organized and on track while working on a specific project. By creating Project Notes, you can keep all the relevant information for a particular project in one place, and easily reference it as needed. This can help you to stay focused and avoid becoming overwhelmed by the details of the project.

Overall, Project Notes are a valuable tool for helping you to stay organized and focused.

START FROM  
PROVEN  
SKETCHNOTE  
CONCEPTS

# SKETCHNOTE

## FRAMEWORK

↓  
START WITH A STRUCTURE  
↑

12 PRINCIPLES

UNLIMITED  
PRACTICES

4 VALUES



MINDSET

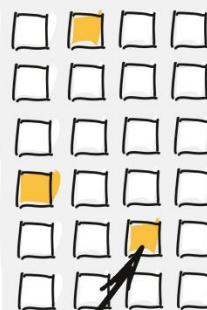


IDEAS over ART

THINK IN  
PICTURES



CONCEPT MAPS



# Understand Sketchnotes Basics

Sketchnoting, also known as visual note-taking, is a way of creating visual summaries of information. It involves combining drawings, text, and symbols to capture the essence of a meeting, lecture, or presentation in a way that is more engaging and memorable than traditional note-taking methods. There are several benefits to sketchnoting:

**Improved retention:** Studies have shown that people tend to remember information better when it is presented visually.

Sketchnoting allows you to create a visual representation of the information, which can help you remember it more effectively.

**Increased engagement:** Sketchnoting requires you to actively process and synthesize information as you create your visual summary. This can help you stay more engaged with the material and better understand the key points.

**Enhanced communication:** Sketchnotes can be shared with others, making them a powerful tool for communication and collaboration. They can be used to summarize meetings, lectures, or presentations, or to explain complex concepts to others in a more accessible way.

**Greater creativity:** Sketchnoting encourages creativity and allows you to express your understanding of the material in your own unique way. This can make the learning process more enjoyable and rewarding.

Overall, sketchnoting can be a powerful tool for learning, retention, engagement, communication, and creativity.

To understand the concept of Sketchnotes in detail the framework shown in the sketchnote above will give us some orientation:

- Visual Mindset
- 4 Sketchnote Values
- 12 Sketchnote Principles
- Unlimited Sketchnote Practices

So let us start from top level and begin with our mindset in the next chapter.

# Be Aware of Your Visual Mindset

Let me assume you are a visual thinker like Mike Rohde. Then you will have a mindset characterized by the following traits:

- Processes information by creating mental images.
- Prefers to see information in a visual format (e.g., charts, diagrams, maps).
- Remembers things better with visual aids.
- Thinks in pictures, rather than words or numbers.

- Understands complex concepts easily with the help of visual aids.
- Has good spatial awareness and sense of direction.

You prioritize the use of visual aids such as images, graphics, and diagrams to understand and communicate information. You also tend to think in pictures, patterns, and spatial arrangements, and may struggle with processing information that is solely in a written or verbal format. Your thinking is characterized by a preference for visual learning and problem-solving, and an ability to quickly see the big picture and identify relationships between ideas and concepts.

As a visual and networked thinker, you combine the characteristics of both visual and networked thinking. You use visual aids to understand and communicate information, but also value relationships, collaboration, and interdependence. You see the value of diverse perspectives, prioritize connections and leverage networks to drive change. You have a systemic view of problems and solutions and understand how information can be used to build relationships. You

are flexible and open to new ideas, and approach problem-solving with a holistic and interconnected perspective.

# SKETCHNOTE

VALUES

VALUES

- IDEAS OVER ART
- GRACEFUL ENOUGH OVER PERFECT
- LISTENING OVER THINKING
- LEARNING OVER KNOWING

# Appreciate 4 Sketchnote Values

Today I asked Google to find a “Sketchnote Manifesto”. As I learned from agile projects, you always need a “Manifesto”<sup>31</sup> before to start working.

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<sup>31</sup> Schwaber et al., ‘Manifesto for Agile Software Development’.

After 15 minutes of unsuccessful search, I remembered an old saying:  
“If you can’t find it, create it.”

So, here’s my first draft:

## 4 SKETCHNOTE VALUES

We are uncovering better ways of visual notetaking by doing it and helping others do it. Through this work we have come to value:

- Ideas over Art
- Graceful enough over Perfect
- Listening over Thinking
- Learning over Knowing

That is, while there is value in the items on the right, we value the items on the left more.

Defining values in the “Sketchnote Manifesto” helps to describe the philosophy behind an evolving body of knowledge. For me it has more a supporting function than a guide on how to do something.

You would like to give some comments on sketchnote values? Feel free to join the open discussion on Twitter<sup>32</sup> to share your ideas and insights also with Mike Rohde, Anja Groß, Mauro Toselli and Nadine Roßa.

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<sup>32</sup> Stefan Wolfrum, ‘Sketchnote Manifesto - Discussion on Twitter’, Tweet, *Twitter*, 29 January 2022,  
<https://twitter.com/metawops/status/1487483099692867592>.

# SKETCHNOTE PRINCIPLES



## 12 PRINCIPLES

- 1 START WITH A STRUCTURE
- 2 KEEP IT SIMPLE
- 3 USE VISUAL HIERARCHIES
- 4 LEAVE WHITE SPACE
- 5 USE TYPOGRAPHY
- 6 USE METAPHORES AND ICONS
- 7 USE ARROWS AND CONNECTORS
- 8 KEEP IT LEGIBLE
- 9 REVIEW AND REVISE
- 10 PRACTICE REGULARLY
- 11 EXPERIMENT WITH STYLES
- 12 HAVE FUN

# Know 12 Sketchnote Principles

VALUES in the “Sketchnote Manifesto” may also be detailed in some important PRINCIPLES in this field. Here my basic ideas also formulated as a rough draft. Having 4 VALUES and 12 PRINCIPLES is not a must. It's a best practice also used in the Agile Manifesto<sup>33</sup>.

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<sup>33</sup> Schwaber et al., ‘Manifesto for Agile Software Development’.

3 or 10 are also good numbers. But limitation is mandatory to create a clear focus.

Here are 12 basic principles that you can follow when working with sketchnotes:

## 12 SKETCHNOTE PRINCIPLES

1. **Start with a structure.** Divide the page into sections to help you organize your content.
2. **Keep it simple.** Use simple drawings and stick to one or two colors.
3. **Use visual hierarchies.** Use size, position, and color to emphasize important information.
4. **Leave white space.** Don't try to fill every inch of the page with content.

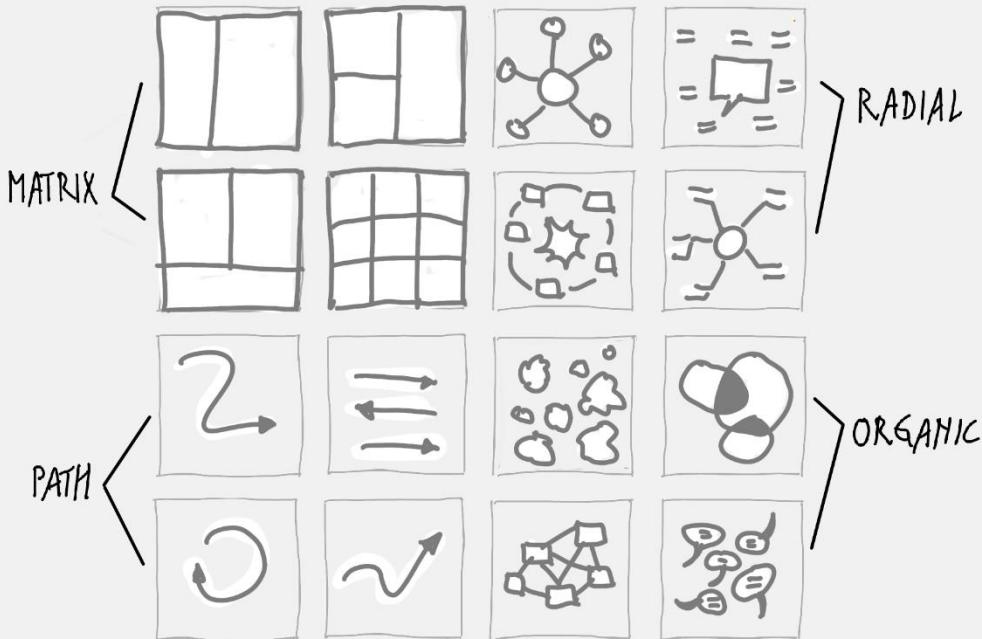
5. **Use typography.** Use different font sizes, styles, and weights to differentiate between different types of information.
6. **Use metaphors and icons.** Use visual metaphors and icons to represent abstract concepts.
7. **Use arrows and connectors.** Use arrows and connectors to show relationships and connections between different pieces of information.
8. **Keep it legible.** Make sure your notes are easy to read and understand.
9. **Review and revise.** Take the time to review and revise your notes to ensure that they are clear and accurate.
10. **Practice regularly.** The more you practice, the better you'll get.
11. **Experiment with different styles.** Try out different drawing styles to find what works best for you.
12. **Have fun.** Enjoy the process of creating your sketchnotes and let your personality shine through in your work.

There's always room for improvement. Any idea for a statement to add or to change?



# lernos<sup>®</sup> SKETCHNOTES

KATA 13 - WEEK 5



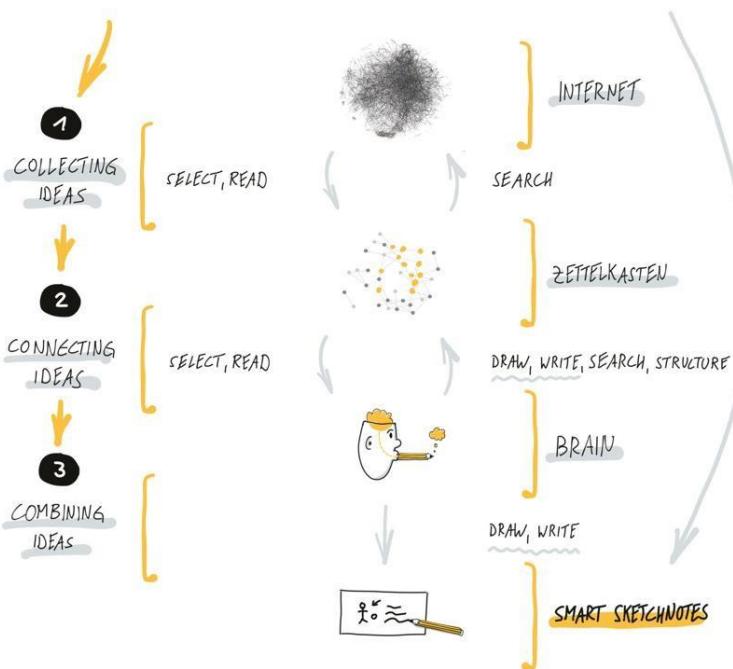
BASIC LAYOUT  
STRUCTURES

# Use Unlimited Sketchnote Practices

- Mind Maps
- Concept Maps

NOW BUILD UP YOUR  
WORKFLOW

# WORKFLOW for SMART SKETCHNOTES



# Start with Three Steps



**YOU CANNOT THINK WITHOUT SKETCHNOTING.**

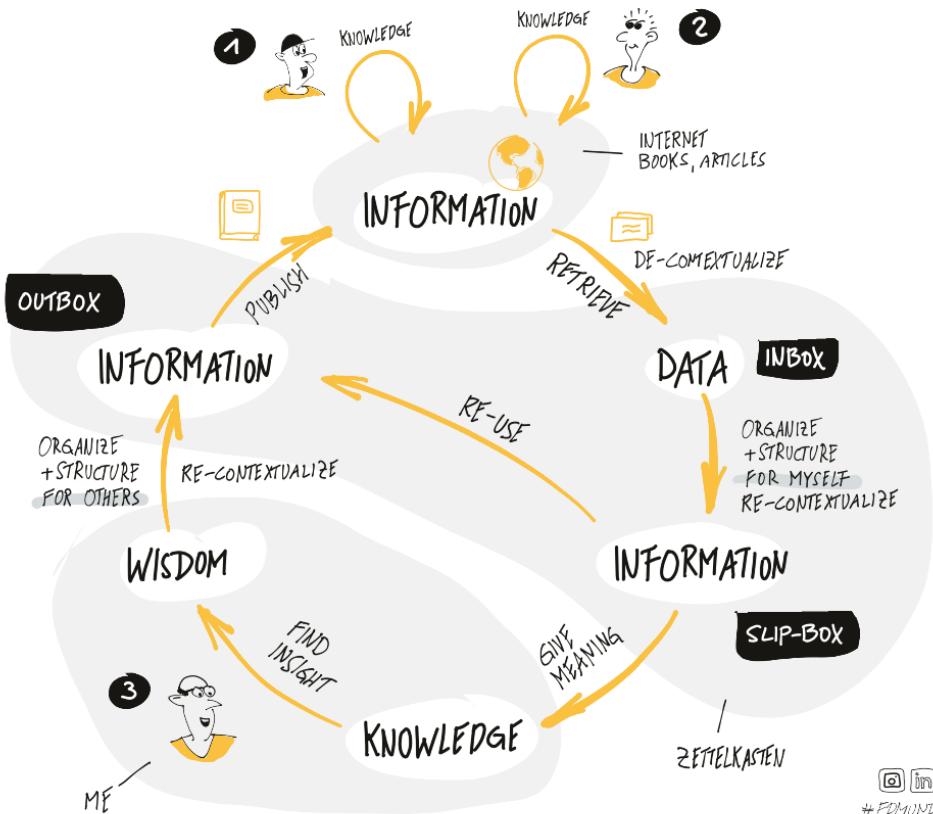
To create Smart Sketchnotes you will need three steps for:

1. collecting ideas,
2. connecting ideas and
3. combining ideas.

Compared with the well known process of sketchnoting there is one element in between: It is the “magic” Zettelkasten, something like a

second brain, where you can store and most important connect your selected ideas of value.

# Flow of KNOWLEDGE



# Understand Your Flow of Knowledge

My first idea was to visualize the “Flow of Notes” within Zettelkasten. Based on a discussion with Sascha Fast on Zettelkasten.de<sup>34</sup> I changed the perspective. Now the “Flow of Knowledge” is in focus. It shows the four areas of knowledge management:

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<sup>34</sup> ‘What’s Your Preferred Workflow for Using Zettelkasten?’, Zettelkasten Forum, accessed 3 January 2023,  
<https://forum.zettelkasten.de/discussion/2217/what-s-your-preferred-workflow-for-using-zettelkasten>.

- Data,
- Information,
- Knowledge and
- Wisdom

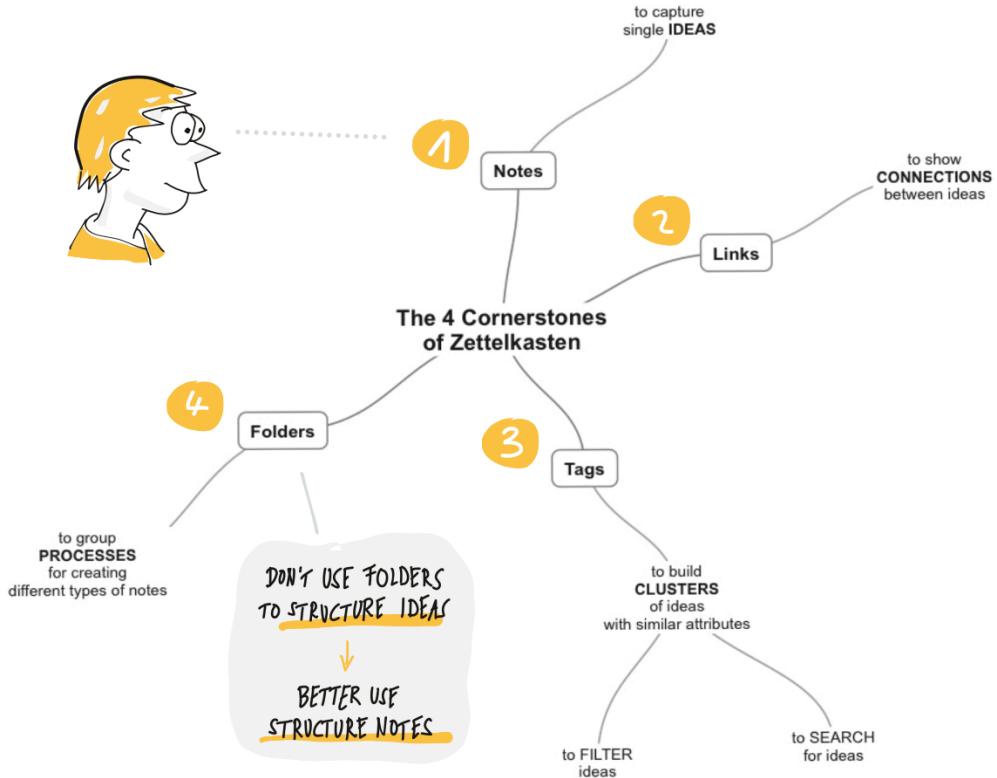
A great benefit is the step inside a Zettelkasten where information is prepared for re-use.

# THE 4 CORNERSTONES

OF  
ZETTELKASTEN



## The 4 Cornerstones of Zettelkasten



Build it up on 4  
Cornerstones

# Focus on Creating Output

Here are my personal strategies for you to focus on creating output:

**Set specific goals<sup>35</sup>:** Identify what you want to accomplish and create specific, measurable goals to help guide your efforts. This will help you stay focused and motivated.

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<sup>35</sup> Doerr John, *Measure What Matters : OKRs - The Simple Idea That Drives 10x Growth* (Portfolio Penguin, 2018), [https://openlibrary.org/books/OL27371716M/Measure\\_What\\_Matters\\_OKRs](https://openlibrary.org/books/OL27371716M/Measure_What_Matters_OKRs).

**Eliminate distractions:** Remove any unnecessary distractions from your work environment. This could include turning off notifications on your phone or computer or finding a quiet place to work.

**Use time-blocking:** Schedule specific times for working on specific tasks or projects. This can help you stay on track and avoid getting side-tracked.

**Take breaks:** It is important to take breaks to rest and recharge. Set aside time for breaks and use them to refocus your energy and get back to work with renewed focus.

**Use tools to help you stay on track:** There are many tools and techniques that can help you stay focused and on track. For example, you might use a timer to break your work into manageable chunks, or you might use a productivity app to help you prioritize tasks and stay organized.

**Get feedback:** Seek feedback from others on your work to help you stay motivated and focused. This can help you identify areas where you can improve and stay engaged in your work.

Overall, the key to focusing on creating output is to set clear goals, eliminate distractions, use time-blocking and other productivity techniques, and seek feedback from others to stay motivated and on track.

Make it a Habit

REMEMBER 12  
ZETTELKASTEN  
PRINCIPLES

# 1. Start With Clear Goals



16

OBSIDIAN  
TEMPLATESZETTEL  
KASTEN

FOR

5

TAGS

## Metadata

Tags

#type/quote #theme/zettelkasten

One cannot think without writing.

1

TITLE

2

QUOTE

3

REFERENCES

⇒ LINKS

YES, IT IS  
A BIBLIOGRAPHICAL  
NOTE

4

BACKLINKS

## References

- How to take Smart Notes by Sönke Ahrens
- Kommunikation mit Zettelkästen by Niklas Luhmann

Linked mentions 2

≡ ⌂ ⌄ 🔎

&gt; Kommunikation mit Zettelkästen 1

&gt; Start here 1



## 2. Use Templates

Templates are the best way to save your time and reduce errors while maintaining the structure of your Zettelkasten system. They quickly customize your notes with pre-defined text, formatting, links, tags, and other customizable content like date, time and note title. This allows you to keep your notes consistently structured, as well as speed up your workflow.

I started with a list of two templates at the beginning: one for notes and one for sketchnotes. But with a growing Zettelkasten, I had to extend this list step by step. About 12 months later here is my

repository on GitHub<sup>36</sup> containing templates and scripts for Obsidian to support the Zettelkasten method for note-taking.

If you like, copy these templates to your Obsidian template folder location to make them available as templates within Obsidian. Also visit Obsidian Forum<sup>37</sup> where you may discuss your own experiences with these templates.

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<sup>36</sup> Gröpl, Edmund. 'Obsidian-Templates for Zettelkasten'. <https://github.com/groep1/Obsidian-Templates>.

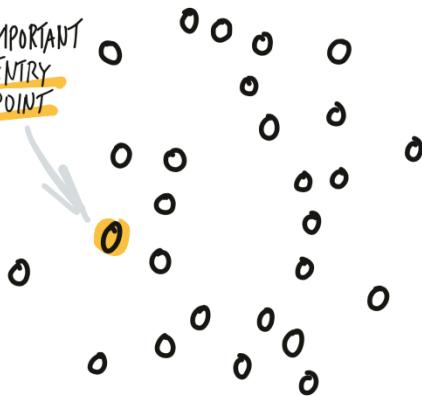
<sup>37</sup> Gröpl, Edmund. '16 Obsidian Templates For Zettelkasten To Start With'. Obsidian Forum. <https://forum.obsidian.md/t/16-obsidian-templates-for-zettelkasten-to-start-with/49098>.

### 3. Make Connections

# 2 TYPES of TAGGING



IMPORTANT  
ENTRY  
POINT



BUILDING AN INDEX

CLUSTER

NOTES

DEFINING A CLUSTER



WHY DO YOU  
NEED TAGS?

MY TAGS ARE  
DESIGNED FOR  
SEARCHING



# 4. Use Tags

I've learned that tags are best thought of as specially designated search terms<sup>38</sup>. I choose using tags for Zettelkasten with two different goals in mind:

- to build up an index
- to define clusters

Both methods of tagging support further searching:

- The terms in my index are leading me to important entry points in the slip-box.

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<sup>38</sup> Gröpl, Edmund. 'How to Use Tags'. *Obsidian Forum*, 5 April 2022.

<https://forum.obsidian.md/t/how-to-use-tags/35320>.

- The terms which define clusters are leading me to a number of similar notes that belong together.

While tags for indexing should link only a few important notes, the entry points for further investigation, the tags for clustering connect larger groups of notes with similar focus.

What's your preferred strategy for tagging? And what's your benefit from using it? If you like to share your insights or questions, please join the discussion at Forum Obsidian.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Obsidian Forum. 'Forum Obsidian', 2022.

<https://forum.obsidian.md/>.

5. Use for creative  
thinking

HOW TO  
CREATE

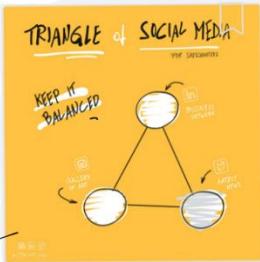
# SMART SKETCHNOTES



CHECK  
COHERENCE

CHECK YOUR IDEAS

- ▶ SKETCH WHAT YOU WRITE
- ▶ WRITE WHAT YOU SKETCH



SMART  
SKETCHNOTE



NOTE IN  
ZETTELKASTEN

( )  
RE-SKETCH

( )  
RE-WRITE



# 5. Review and Revise Your Notes

For me Smart Sketchnotes are networked visuals. I use my notes from Zettelkasten and extend them with sketchnotes. As I learned from Niklas Luhmann, it is best practice to write my notes down in my own words. But why not use sketchnotes for capturing ideas? Visual thinking always provides an additional perspective for my personal understanding of the idea in focus.

„Surprisingly,” while using this method I could see a gap between note and sketchnote in a first draft.

So, I established a small process to build up coherence:

1. Review your ideas.

Sketched what you wrote? Wrote what you sketched?

2. Check Coherence.

3. Re-sketch and re-write.

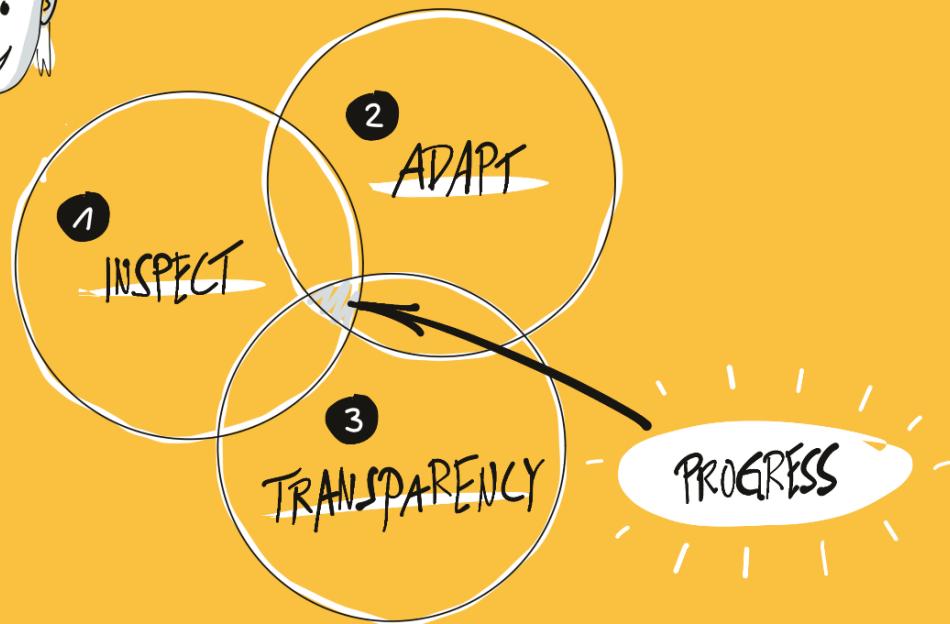
The result is an even better note and also sketchnote. The dual view brings value to my slip-box with permanent notes.

What's your strategy to improve your own writing?

7. Keep up to date

# EMPIRICAL PROCESS CONTROL

FOR ZETTELKASTEN



# 8. Inspect and Adapt Your Process

Empirical process control<sup>40</sup> is a quality control method that involves continuously collecting data and using it to monitor and improve a process. In the context of a Zettelkasten system, empirical process control could be used to continually evaluate and refine the

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<sup>40</sup> Ken Schwaber, *Agile Project Management with Scrum* (Microsoft Press, 2004), [https://openlibrary.org/books/OL34458178M/Agile\\_Project\\_Management\\_with\\_Scrum](https://openlibrary.org/books/OL34458178M/Agile_Project_Management_with_Scrum).

organization and use of the system in order to maximize its effectiveness and efficiency.

Some potential benefits of using empirical process control for a Zettelkasten system include:

**Improved organization:** By continuously collecting and analyzing data on how the Zettelkasten system is being used, it may be possible to identify patterns and trends that can be used to improve the organization of the system. This could involve reorganizing existing notes, creating new connections between notes, or adding new categories or tags to help with navigation and search.

**Increased efficiency:** Empirical process control can help identify bottlenecks or inefficiencies in the Zettelkasten system, allowing you to make adjustments and improvements to streamline the process.

**Enhanced knowledge management:** By continuously collecting data on the use of the Zettelkasten system, it may be possible to identify areas

where the system could be used more effectively to manage and share knowledge within an organization.

**Greater transparency:** Empirical process control can provide a clear and objective view of how the Zettelkasten system is being used, which can help to build trust and increase transparency within an organization.

Overall, the use of empirical process control can help to optimize the use of a Zettelkasten system and ensure that it is being used effectively and efficiently to support knowledge management and learning.

My question: What are your preferred tools and workflows to support this process?

## g. Use for learning

10. Encourage  
collaboration

11. Support your  
work

## 12. Have Fun with Your Zettelkasten

REMEMBER 12  
SKETCHNOTE  
PRINCIPLES

1. Start With A  
Structure

2. Keep it simple

3. Use visual  
hierarchies

4. Leave white  
space

## 5. Use Typography

6. Use metaphors  
and icons

7. Use Arrows and  
Connectors

# 8. Keep it Legible

If handwriting is your voice, make it easy to listen.

## g. Review and Revise

10. Practice

Regularly

# 11. Experiment with Different Styles

## 12. Have Fun with Your Sketchnotes

There is nothing so inspiring ...

USE DIGITAL TOOLS  
TO SUPPORT YOUR  
WORKFLOW



**GET A NEW PEN - MARC GUTMAN**

**THE PAINTER DRAWS WITH HIS EYES, NOT WITH HIS HANDS - MAURICE GROSSER**

**YOU ARE YOUR MOST IMPORTANT TOOL - MARTINA GRIGOLEIT**

I started digital sketchnoting with Paper53®, Adobe Sketch® and Procreate®. But now I surprisingly prefer vector-based tools like PowerPoint®, OneNote®, Miro® and Concepts®. It's also great fun to use a mind mapping tool like SimpleMind®<sup>41</sup> to create structured mind maps like this one.

---

<sup>41</sup> [11]: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i79VqhShVww>

# Collect Ideas

Obsidian

# Reference Ideas

Obsidian

Zotero

# Visualize Ideas

Concepts

Paper 53

PowerBI

Procreate

SimpleMind

Obsidian Canvas

### Ebenen



### Präzision

Gitter ▶ Punktraster

Einrasten ▶ Optionen

Messen ▶ 1:1 mm

Hilfslinie ▶ Bogen

MISTER MAIKEL

# SKETCHNOTE

WORKSHOP

STRICHMASS.

| 0,6mm | 0,3mm | 0,5mm | 0,6mm

SONNE



EINFAMILIENHAUS



LASTWAGEN



APP



SMARTPHONE



DIAMOND



GLÜHBLIRNE



KAN



HOCHHAUS



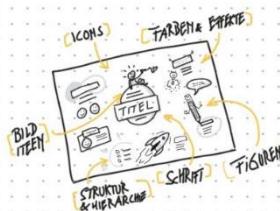
KAFFE



ODER TEE



WA



PERSÖNLICHE  
HIGHLIGHTS  
ERSTE WOCHE

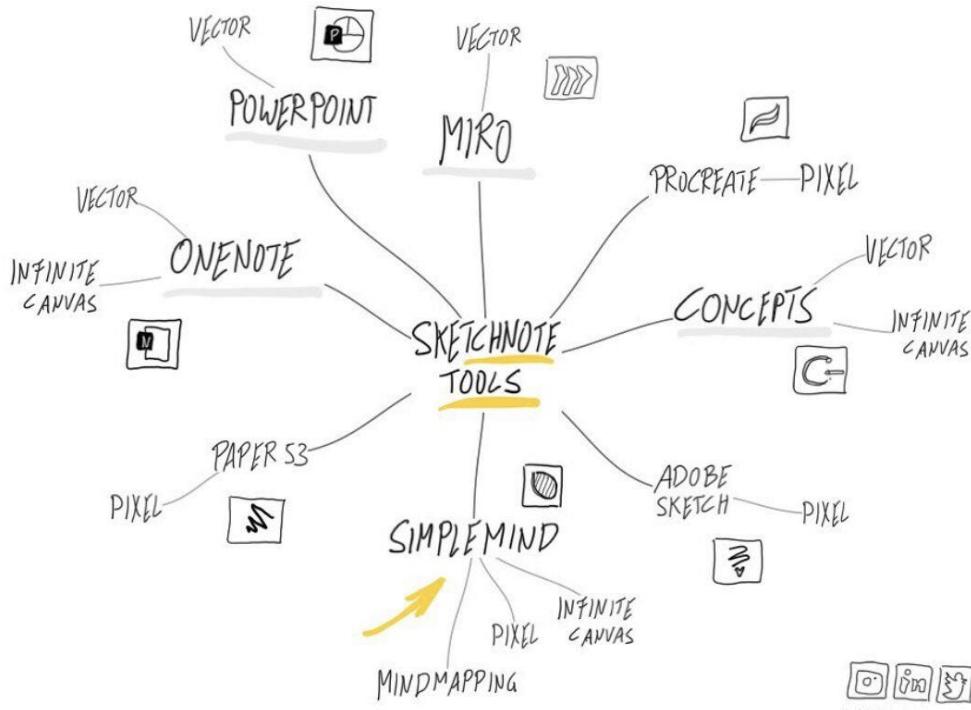


# Connect Ideas

Obsidian

# Combine Ideas

Obsidian Canvas



#EDMUND2021

# Communicate Ideas

Social Media

Miro

# Outline Ideas

Word

Social Media

# Publish Ideas

Obsidian

BENEFIT FROM  
UNLIMITED  
ZETTELKASTEN  
PRACTICES

# 5

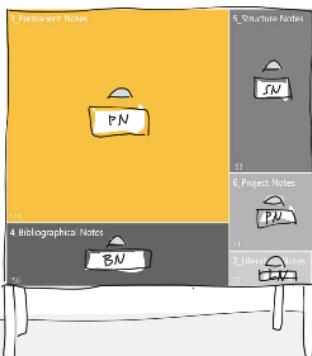
# MISTAKES

TO AVOID

WHEN STARTING YOUR  
ZETTELKASTEN

USING OBSIDIAN WITHOUT

- TEMPLATES
- RULES FOR TAGGING
- FRONTMATTER
- TIMESTAMPS IN MD
- DATAVIEW FOR GARDENING



# Avoid Pitfalls

When I started to write my first notes with Obsidian, I followed the rule “Start early and learn by experiment.”

But I also learned: Experiments took a lot of my precious time. Here are my top mistakes to avoid<sup>42</sup>. when starting your first Zettelkasten:

- **Starting without templates** - so it was hard to build up a consistent note structure I needed later for effective searching.

---

<sup>42</sup> Edmund Gröpl, ‘5 Mistakes to Avoid When Starting Your First Zettelkasten’, *LinkedIn* (blog), 2023, [https://www.linkedin.com/posts/groep\\_l\\_procreate-lernos-lernossketchnoting-activity-7008062279384465408-85vF/](https://www.linkedin.com/posts/groep_l_procreate-lernos-lernossketchnoting-activity-7008062279384465408-85vF/).

- **Using tags without rules for tagging** - so that building clusters for searching was not highly effective.
- **No use of frontmatter** - so that meta data and content of notes became inconsistent and confusing.
- **No use of time stamps** like “created” and “modified” within frontmatter - so that using backups and changing cloud spaces caused a loss of time information connected with my notes.
- **No use of Dataview plugin** as a tool for gardening - so that inconsistencies in my Zettelkasten were growing and growing.

All these mistakes lead to intensive re-work of my notes later.

Inspect Process with  
Dataview

# Review Notes with Dataview

Re-visit lost ideas

Re-visit old ideas

```
```dataview
TABLE WITHOUT ID
    file.link AS "One Week Ago",
    created AS Created
FROM ""
WHERE ((file.ctime >= date(today) - dur(7 day)) AND
       (file.ctime <= date(today) - dur(6 day)))
SORT created DESC
```
```

# Discover with Graph View

Re-structure with  
Canvas

# Use a Bullet Journal

Use a  
Kanban Board



ROBERT CRUMB, 1975

# Use an Outline Wall



I can't start writing until I've thought it through and can see it whole in my mind. — *Robert Caro*

The Outline Wall is a technique used by historian Robert Caro<sup>43</sup>, to organize and make sense of large amounts of information. He would create an outline of the main ideas and concepts of a historical event or period and post it on a wall. Then, he would add all the research materials he gathered, such as documents, images, and notes, and pin them around the outline.

---

<sup>43</sup> Paul, Annie Murphy. The Extended Mind - The Power of Thinking Outside the Brain. Mariner Books, 2022.

The idea behind it is that by visually organizing the information and seeing it in front of him, he can easily identify patterns and connections between the different pieces of information. The outline serves as a structure, helping him to see the big picture and understand how all the pieces fit together, also allowing him to change the structure as he gathers new information. This way, he can think more clearly and make connections between different pieces of information.

Obsidian offers the option to create infinite outline walls with its amazing Canvas plugin. Watch Nick Milo and his introductory tutorial about Obsidian Canvas on YouTube<sup>44</sup>.

---

<sup>44</sup> Obsidian Canvas, 2022. [https://youtube.com/watch?v=vLBd\\_ADeKlw](https://youtube.com/watch?v=vLBd_ADeKlw).

CONNECT WITH  
LEARNING  
COMMUNITIES

# Working Out Loud Circles

# LernOS Circles

BE OPEN FOR  
EXPERIMENTS

# 2

Everybody  
can  
draw

- NADINE ROŠA



#EDMUND'2021

# Draw Ideas



**CREATIVE WORK IS BASICALLY LIKE BREATHING. WE TAKE IN INFORMATION  
AND EMIT NEW IDEAS. – RAPH AMMER<sup>45</sup>**

Ralph Ammer is a professor at the Munich University of Applied Sciences and teaches Biophilic Design, which aims to create life-friendly objects, images, and services based on nature. In one of his

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<sup>45</sup> Ralph Ammer, '*A Lightbulb Is Not an Idea!*', Ralph Ammer (blog), 22 September 2018, <https://ralphammer.com/a-lightbulb-is-not-an-idea/>.

amazing blog posts with animated sketchnotes he proposed four simple steps to draw any idea<sup>46</sup>:

- **Study.** Fill your mind by drawing what you want to think about.
- **Explore.** Let the magic happen by drawing as many ideas as possible.
- **Develop.** See how it works by arranging ideas spatially, grouping them into similar ideas and maybe adding some annotations.
- **Show.** Share what matters by focusing on the essential. One headline, one image and one sentence.

Why not using it as a little exercise to draw one of your own ideas?  
Take a break and visit his web page.

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<sup>46</sup> Ammer, Ralph. '*How to Draw Ideas*', 1 December 2022.  
<https://ralphammer.com/how-to-draw-ideas/>.

# Play with Quotes



# Unlock Your Creative Potential

Mindfulness is the mental state of focusing your awareness on the present moment. Meditation as a practice is something everyone can do. It clears the mind and calms the soul, allowing for boundless creativity to flow through you like never before.

Here is how you can unlock your creative potential through meditation with your Zettelkasten:

1. Find a quiet, comfortable place to sit. Close your eyes and take a few deep breaths.
2. Visualize your mind as a vast and spacious room. Imagine a desk in the center of this room, with a stack of index cards in front of it. This is your Zettelkasten.
3. As you begin to focus on your breathing, allow your mind to quiet down and become more peaceful.
4. Now, imagine that you are holding a new index card in your hand. On this card, you will write down a thought, idea, or concept that you would like to capture and organize.
5. Take a moment to think about what you would like to write down on this card. When you have a clear thought, take a deep breath and begin to write it down in a clear and concise manner.
6. Now, imagine that you are placing this card in the appropriate place within your Zettelkasten. As you do this, visualize the connections that you are making between this card and other cards within your system.
7. Take a moment to reflect on the connections that you have made. Allow your mind to expand and broaden as you consider

the new insights and perspectives that these connections may bring.

8. As you continue to add new cards to your Zettelkasten, imagine that you are expanding your understanding and deepening your knowledge of the topic.
9. When you are ready, slowly open your eyes and return to your physical surroundings. Take a few deep breaths and feel the calm and clarity that you have brought into your mind through this meditation.
10. Use this state of mind and the connections that you have made within your Zettelkasten to continue your creative output and exploration of new ideas.

Create Multiple  
Posts

# Share Templates

# Share Starter Kit

# Re-use Posts for Newsletters

# Create Storylines with Canvas

Use AI

# APPENDIX

# List of Figures

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| <i>Fig. 1: Chat stream Eventbrite with Mike Rohde</i>  | 25  |
| <i>Fig. 2: Ideas vs Networked Ideas</i>                | 40  |
| <i>Fig. 3: Smart Sketchnotes are Networked Visuals</i> | 42  |
| <i>Fig. 4: Unlock Your Creative Potential</i>          | 189 |

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Zettelkasten Forum. ‘Zettelkasten’, 2022.

<https://forum.zettelkasten.de/discussions>.

# Tools

Obsidian: A knowledge base that works on local Markdown files.

'Obsidian', 2022. <https://www.obsidian.md>.

SimpleMind. 'SimpleMind', 2022. <https://simplemind.eu/>.

# Concepts

Why not start from scratch? Also, if you have some experience in sketchnoting there is always the chance to learn and improve. Idea is to restart with the new book<sup>47</sup> from Michael Geiß-Hein (a.k.a. as Mister Maikel) and with the drawing tool Concepts app . As Maikel suggests: It will take no longer than 6 weeks. So, let us start.

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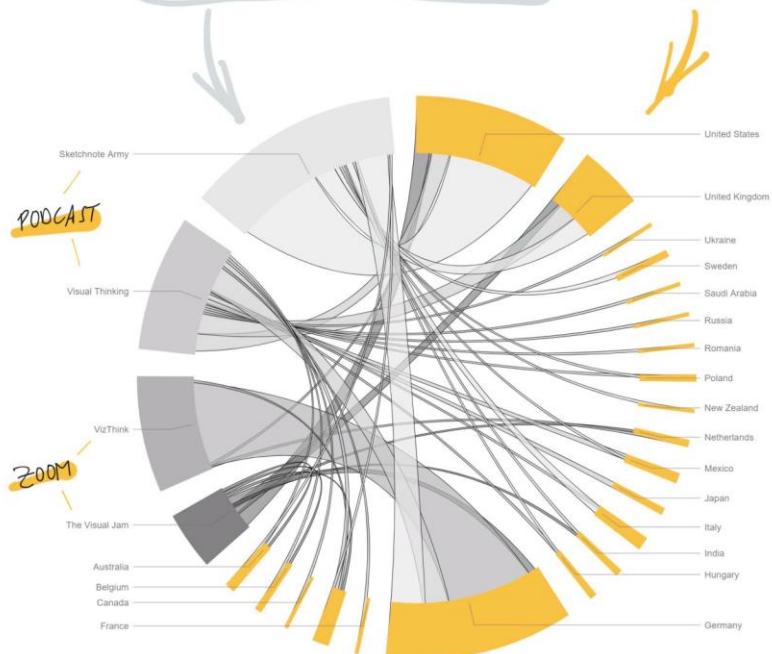
<sup>47</sup> Michael Geiß-Hein, *Sketchnotes - Dein Workshop mit Mister Maikel - In 6 Wochen Sketchnotes lernen*, 2021,  
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4 PLACES TO MEET

GREAT VISUAL THINKERS

FROM MORE THAN  
25 COUNTRIES



#EINMIND 2022

# *Obsidian*

Obsidian<sup>48</sup> is a notetaking and knowledge management app on top of a local folder of plain text markdown files. It lets you turn a collection of plain text files into a rich network of linked thoughts.

## **Pros**

- Incredible graph view. Not only is it super-fast, but you can apply filters, create groups, and even change the look and functionality of the graph itself.
- Cross-platform app available for iOS (iPhone, iPad), MacOS, Windows, Linux
- No account or sign up required.
- Community support
- No need for an active internet connection.

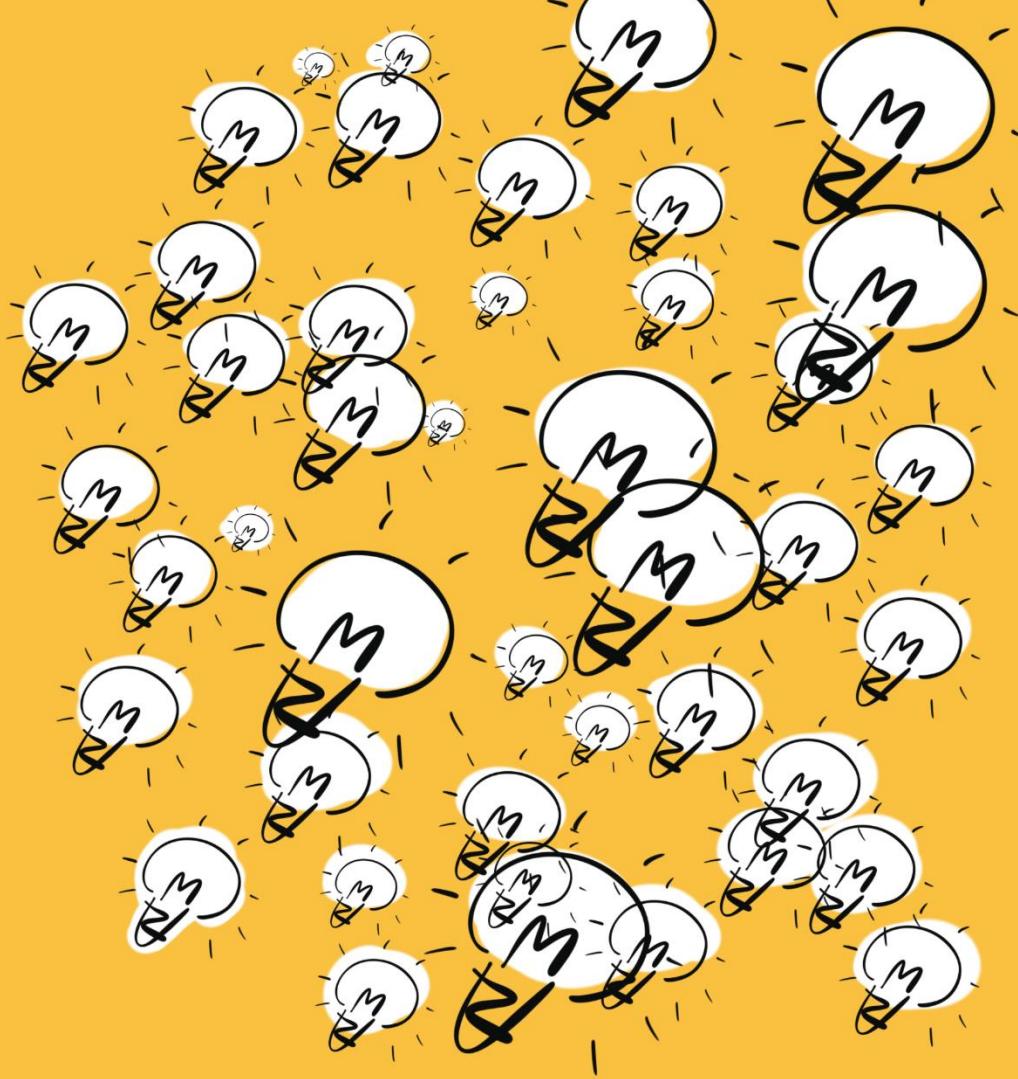
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<sup>48</sup> ‘Obsidian’.

- Obsidian is a fast-growing platform with new tools added regularly.
- Pricing: 100% free for personal use

### **Cons**

- iOS version works only with iCloud



Procreate

# SimpleMind

SimpleMind is a cross-platform Mind Mapping tool with more than ten million users worldwide. It is my preferred tool to create structure notes for my Zettelkasten.

It now offers an integrated drawing editor. Combining mind mapping and sketchnoting is a great idea for brainstorming.

Learn more about this feature by watching SimpleMind<sup>49</sup> on YouTube.

Here are my pros and cons from this use case.

## Pros

- HTML export as an input for structure notes in Zettelkasten
- PNG export

---

<sup>49</sup> 'Add Apple Pencil Drawings on IPad', 2021,  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i79VqhShVww>.

- Cross-platform app available for iOS (iPhone, iPad), MacOS, Windows, Android
- Infinite canvas
- Use of Apple pencil to add drawings as images

### **Cons**

- Drawings with pencil are pixel based, no vector drawing

# Zettelkasten Videos

*Analog vs. Digital Zettelkasten with Sascha Fast (From Zettelkasten.De), 2022.*

<https://youtube.com/watch?v=XgMh6iuFbT4>.

*Beyond the Pressure: Finding Joy in Note-Taking, 2022.*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yuzDQSIEK-I>.

*Does My Zettelkasten Make Writing Harder? morganeua, 2023.*

<https://youtube.com/watch?v=wQPvrcksjUA>.

*How To Take Smart Notes, 2020.*

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*Kartenansicht in Obsidian - Save the Cat Im Scrivener Look (Mit Template), 2022.*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qIYbkFEdHFw>.

*Obsidian for Beginners: How to Use the Obsidian App for Notes. Linking Your Thinking, 2020.*

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*Stop Note Taking. Start Note Making: Learn the NoMa Method. Linking Your Thinking, 2022.*

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*Zettelkasten Method Explained: A Beginner's Guide, 2021.*

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<https://lnkd.in/ecst6NAH>.

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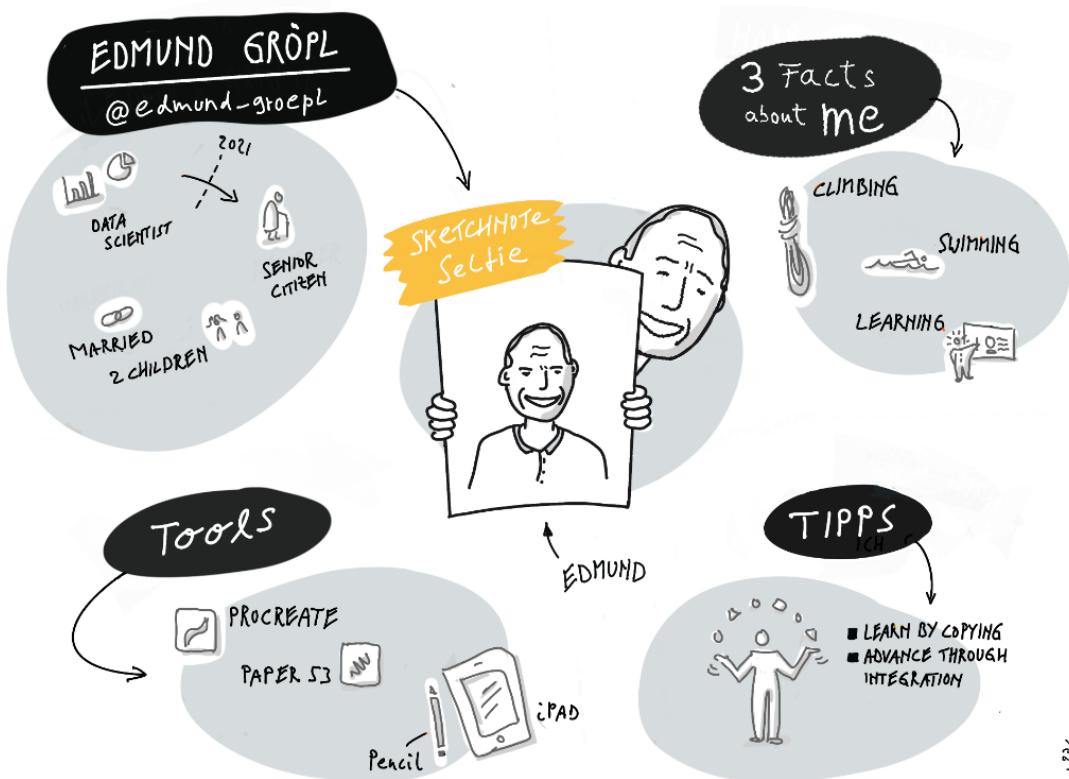
# Index

|                            |            |
|----------------------------|------------|
| Adobe Sketch® .....        | 150        |
| Alessio Bresciani .....    | 11         |
| Annelies Schippke .....    | 12         |
| Chris Spalton .....        | 12         |
| Concepts.....              | 42         |
| Concepts® .....            | 150        |
| Dataview.....              | 164        |
| Digital Sketchnotes.....   | 10         |
| Eventbrite.....            | 25         |
| experiment.....            | 163        |
| Experiments .....          | 163        |
| Fleeting Notes .....       | 71         |
| Flow of Knowledge .....    | 106        |
| Flow of Notes .....        | 106        |
| Graham Shaw .....          | 4          |
| Literature Notes .....     | 74         |
| Maps of Content.....       | 80         |
| Marc Gutman .....          | 150        |
| markdown .....             | 223        |
| Martina Grigoleit .....    | 150        |
| Maurice Grosser .....      | 150        |
| Mauro Toselli.....         | 11         |
| Mike Rohde .....           | 32, 42, 88 |
| Miro® .....                | 150        |
| MoC .....                  | 80         |
| Niklas Luhmann .....       | 42, 57     |
| Obsidian.....              | 42         |
| OneNote® .....             | 150        |
| Paper53® .....             | 150        |
| Permanent notes .....      | 76         |
| Photo Books.....           | 10         |
| PowerPoint® .....          | 150        |
| Procreate® .....           | 150        |
| SimpleMind .....           | 250        |
| SimpleMind Pro®.....       | 234        |
| Sketchnote Book.....       | 11         |
| Smart Sketchnotes.....     | 8, 14      |
| Sönke Ahrens .....         | 32         |
| storytelling.....          | 252        |
| <b>time-blocking</b> ..... | 111        |
| Visual thinking .....      | 13         |
| Yuri Malishenko .....      | 11         |

## Understand Note-taking

# lernOS® SKETCHNOTES

WEEK 6 - KATA 15: SKETCHNOTE-SELFIE



# The Author

First things first I am a huge fan of data analysis and data discovery. It is more than an interest for me to make relations between numbers and produce meaningful results. I have a passion for helping teams to become more data-driven and embracing the power of data storytelling.

I have experience more than 7 years on data analysis, reporting, dashboards and more than 20 years on software development, project management and corporate strategy on biggest companies including research, automation and telecommunications industries in Germany.

In my free time you can find me at the climbing gym, swimming long distances and spending quality time with my wife and my family.

So now I combine these experiences with my math and engineering background here and I am looking forward to sharing my passion and knowledge with you.

Finally, I love Visual Thinking and Digital Sketchnoting<sup>50</sup>!

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<sup>50</sup> Edmund Gröpl, ‘Rework of My Sketchnote Selfie’, 2021,  
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## **ABOUT THE Book**

*MAKE USEFUL NOTES* is a book full of insights for note makers of all proficiency levels. It covers a large scale of concepts useful for note-making on digital devices.

We are learning from great networked and visual thinkers about their almost hidden secrets. Understanding the overall context helps to navigate in this field of learning. Going in detail will be the next step. The book provides numerous links to valuable resources you need to keep growing.

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**



EDMUND GRÖPL is an enthusiast of digital sketch-noting. He is an engineer working as a data scientist and storyteller. Visual thinking is part of his job. Working with sketchnotes and learning from experts is an intense pleasure for him.