

How to Make a Mind Map: Creative Examples for Art Students

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presented well.

What is a mind map?

Mind map creator [Tony Buzan](#) coined the term 'mind map' to refer to a diagram that has a branch or root-like structure radiating from a central image on the page, and which uses lines and colour to show relationships, groupings and connections between words, ideas and images. A mind map helps students think clearly and ensures that a range of possibilities are considered, encouraging thinking outside-the-box.

How to make a mind map

Tony Buzan sets out official guidelines for how to draw a mind map upon the [ThinkBuzan](#) website. His recommendations include: using a landscape format; starting with a central image to represent your topic or theme; using curving lines to add main branches to the centre and then connecting these to smaller branches; using single words and images; and adding colours for aesthetic and organisational purposes.

Examples from the Tony Buzan mind map gallery:



It should be noted, however, that when your Art teacher asks you to begin creating a mind map, they are almost always happy with *any visually pleasing representation of ideas* – such as a tree diagram, spider diagram – or even just a splurge of thoughts on paper, as long as it documents a range of ideas and possibilities connected to a theme (or a set examination topic). The examples below, therefore, contain different visual brainstorming methods, not just those that are official mind maps.

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- Single words are unlikely to express an idea adequately. As you think through possibilities, it is likely that you will want to jot down whole phrases and brainstorm possible ways of beginning or approaching a subject. Intentions and possibilities should be clear to someone else who reads the mind map at a later date
- Images should be sourced first-hand (i.e. drawn or photographed yourself) or clearly referenced, and should be integrated within the mind map in a visually pleasing way
- The appearance of the mind map is crucially important. This is likely to be one of the first things an examiner sees when opening your sketchbook – first impressions count

Creative mind maps and visual brainstorming

Please note that although some of these presentation methods are more complex and time consuming than others, this does not mean they are better. Sometimes a quick, expressive splurge of ideas upon paper is all that is needed.

Take a beautiful photograph to place in the centre, as in this example of a mind map by [Dave Tiedemann](#):

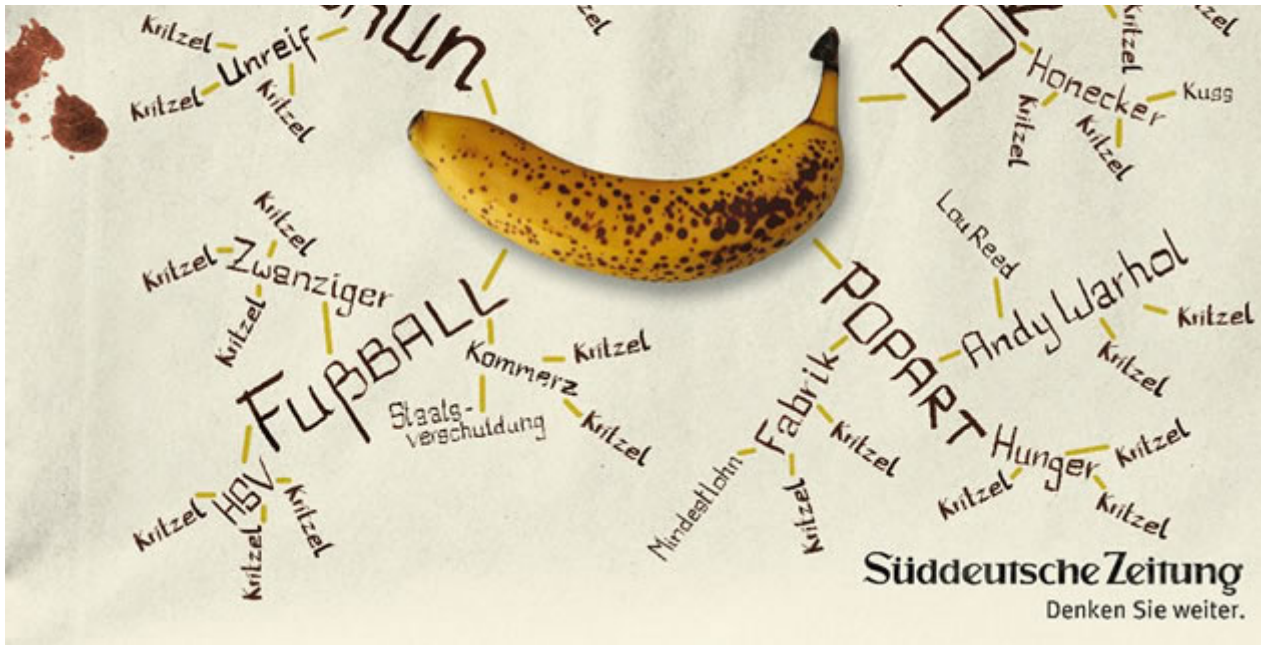
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An appropriate object can be photographed, printed, trimmed and then glued onto your workbook page – or digitally superimposed upon a page and then printed. Alternatively, you might photocopy an object (placing the item directly upon the photocopier or scanner, with teacher supervision) so that it seamlessly integrates with the page. The remainder of the mind map can then be added by hand. As the photograph becomes a dominant element upon the page, the object should be selected with care.

Use painted areas to contain text, as in these creative examples by artist Martha Rich:

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This approach gives you an opportunity to play with space and colour, while recording ideas. A range of different painted marks could be used – splashes / smears / drips etc. It is worth remembering that colour choices should be thoughtful and not distract from subsequent work in your sketchbook.

Draw lots of small pictures to illustrate ideas visually, as inspired by this [Curiosity map of London](#) illustrated by Nicole Mollet:

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In many cases, the brainstorming phase of an Art project has to be completed quickly, however, if you are a fast drawer and have a spare weekend, you might wish to produce a collection of drawings to illustrate your ideas. You should avoid drawing things from imagination and may wish to include a range of different mediums. Before spending considerable time on this exercise, you should check with your art teacher whether this is appropriate for your project.

Overlay words digitally around a central image, as in this brainstorming example by A Level Graphic Design and Fine Art student at Durham Sixth Form:



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Many Art students find that drawing itself allows them to relax and thoughts to flow freely. You may wish to make a mind map in and around an observational drawing that sprawls across a page, in a fragmented, semi-complete way. As you think of possible ideas, these could be scrawled upon the drawing and extending out from this, creating an organic and spontaneous record of ideas. Strong observational drawers could find this an excellent way to flaunt skill to the examiner from the very first page of their sketchbook.

Collage torn images, textures and surfaces together, as in this example by Brittney:

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Collecting, ripping and arranging a range of images, textures and surfaces can provide a creative base upon which to write and draw further ideas. These pages from a visual journal explore ideas related to illustration, fairytales and mythology.

Create mind maps from flowing painterly forms, as in this amazing example by artist Ward Shelley:

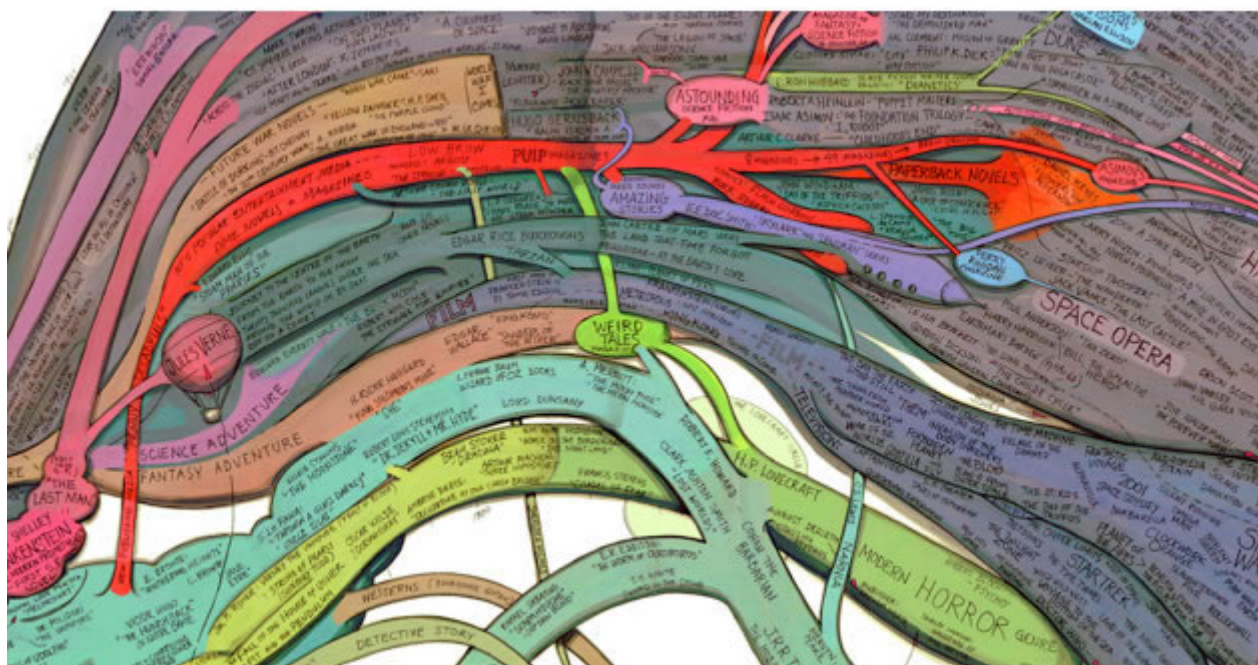
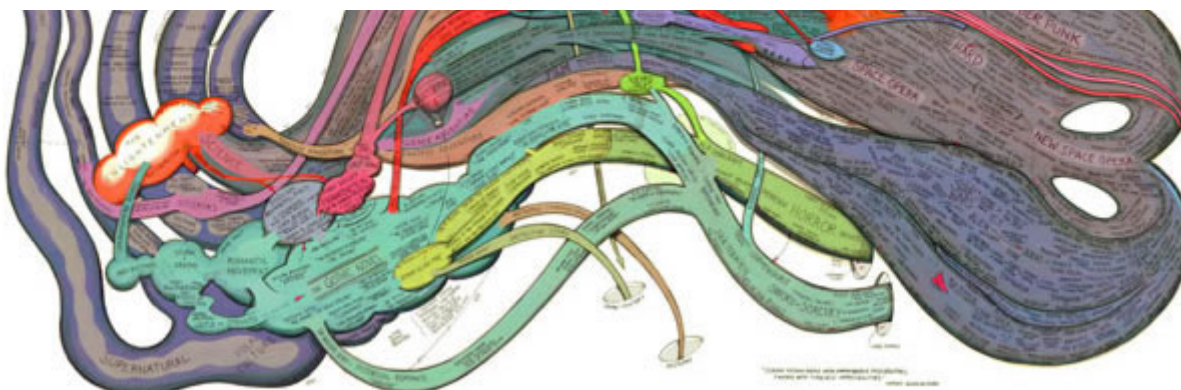
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Using paint to create voluptuous forms can be a fun presentation method for students, as it allows them to 'make art' from the very first sketchbook page. A fast drying acrylic or water colour paint is ideal. This approach is most appropriate when the forms and colours can be connected with the subject matter itself. Care should be taken to ensure that the resulting mind map is not overly distracting and disconnected visually from the remainder of the work.

Draw over an abstract watercolour ground, as in this artist mind map by Roberta Faulhaber:

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Drawing a mind map over blurred and running watercolour forms can result in an exciting abstracted diagram. As mentioned in the above example, colours that link in with the subject matter should be chosen (muted, softer colours are usually more appropriate than psychedelic pinks and greens, for example).

Create a simple mind map using text, with circles and dots for emphasis, as in these examples by [Lia Perjovschi](#):



Record a stream of consciousness using handwriting and images, as in this journal by Sabrina Ward Harrison (via Doodlers' Anonymous):

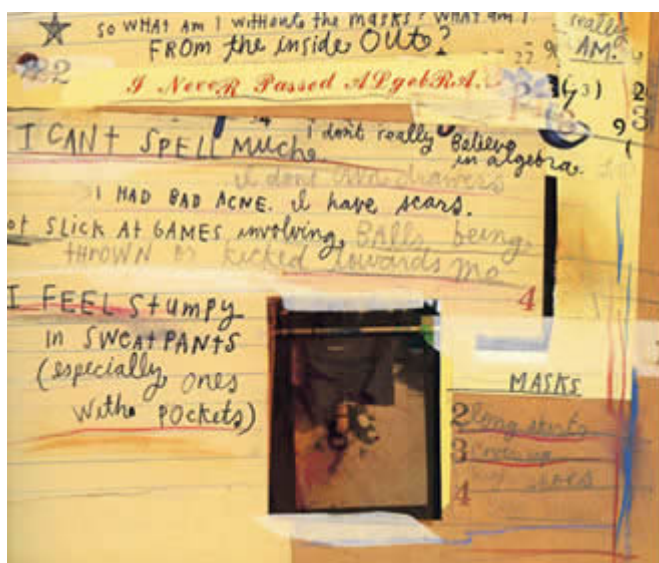
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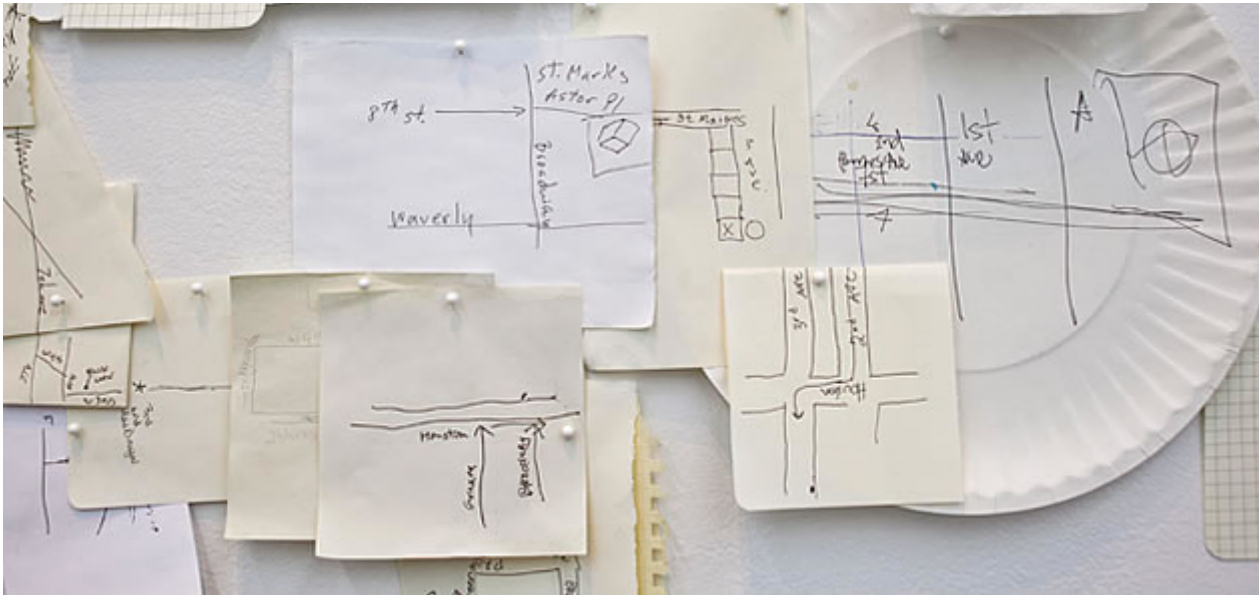
These journal pages are reminiscent of how many artists record thoughts and ideas. The background of images, layered paper and smeared paint has been covered with scrawled handwritten texts; passages have been written in larger font to create emphasis and lines help to segment parts of the text.

Brainstorm ideas using chalk on a blackboard and photograph it, creating a work similar to this mind map by [IA Factory](#):

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If you do not wish to feel constrained by the size of your page, you may wish to begin making large-scale mind maps on a blackboard, whiteboard or other large sheet of paper. Once completed, this can be photographed and integrated within your sketchbook, possibly with further digital manipulation taking place.

Make a mind map on small pieces of paper and cardboard, inspired by the road map created from multiple sketches by strangers, compiled by [Nobutaka Aozaki](#):

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You may wish to layer white pieces of paper and torn card and then photocopy this, writing ideas onto the photocopy; glue pieces directly into your sketchbook; or write onto the layered paper and then photograph the finished piece, as in the example above. The latter option has the advantage that pieces can be moved around and added to as needed.

Attach images and notes to a pinboard, as in the 'Capturing Memory Mind Map' by Red Biddy:

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Many students begin with a 'mood board' along these lines: a collection overlaying images, materials and text. This example has string and other items connecting different parts. This could then be photographed and annotated further.

Hand write ideas over a photograph, as in this example by [Stefan Sagmeister](#):

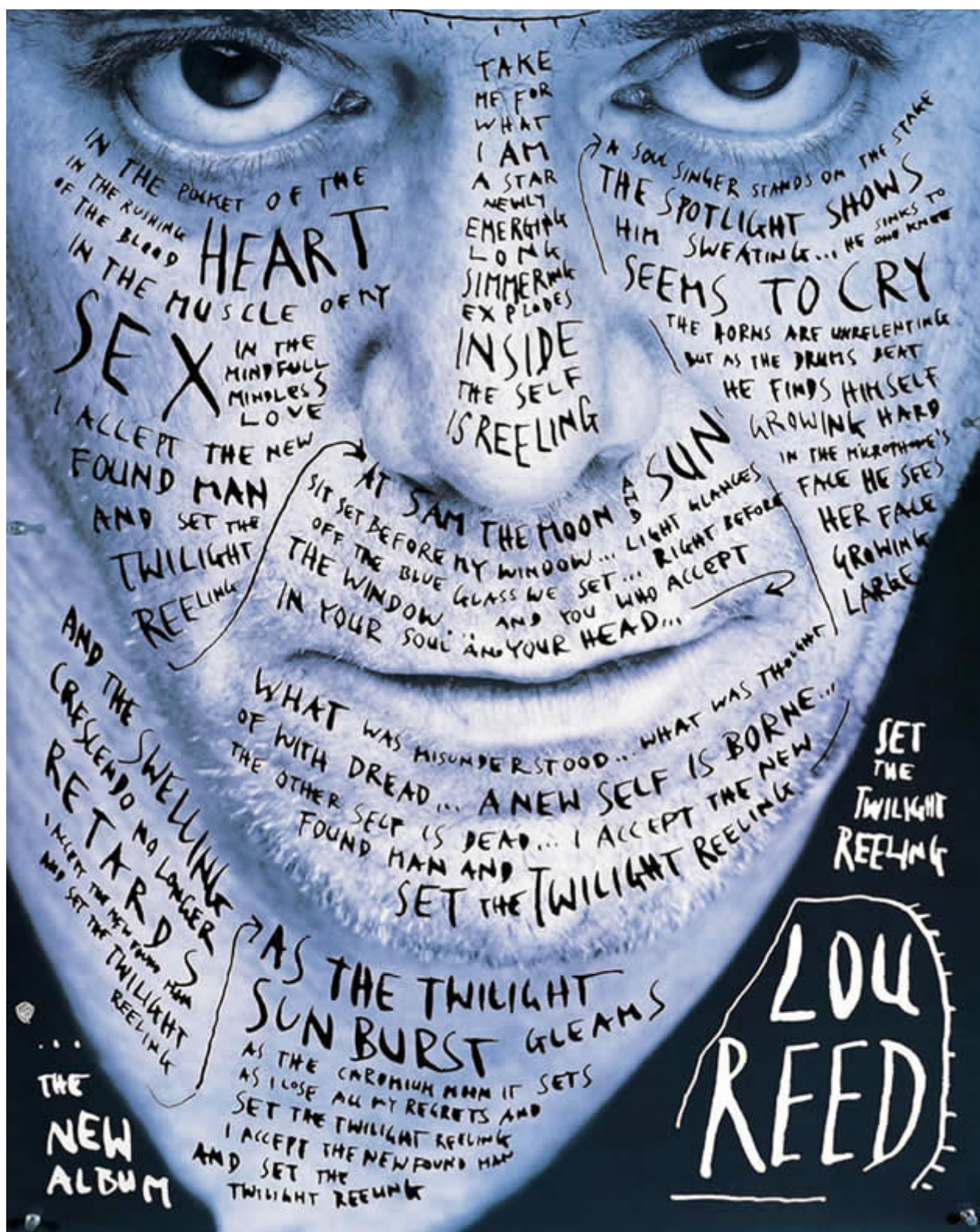
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Students who enter an Art course with strong photography skills may wish to create an entire mind map or brainstorm upon a large-scale photograph. This may be photocopied to create a surface that is easier to write upon – or a medium such as Indian ink can be used to write directly upon a printed photograph.

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digital drawing tool, as in this bubble diagram by [Leon Wharton](#):

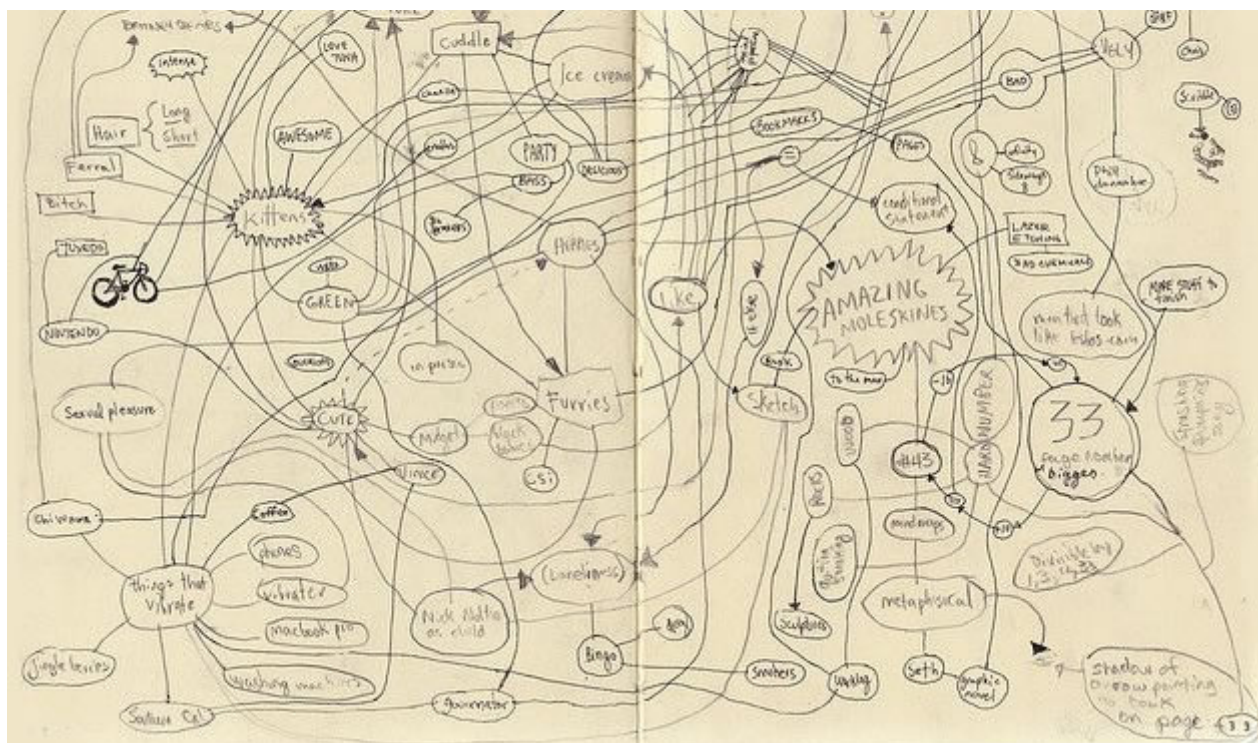


Students who are confident using digital technology – and who have access to a computer during class – may find this an easy way to quickly generate an aesthetically pleasing mind map. This may be particularly appropriate for a design student, who intends to produce a considerable portion of their portfolio using digital tools (whereas this approach may appear out-of-place within a Painting / Fine Art submission).



Exploring the topic Force, this mixed media mind map contains a wealth of details, texture and depth. Similar colours have been used throughout, linking the different aspects of the work and making the page cohesive.

Produce a sprawling hand-drawn mind map, as in this example by Tlemermeyer:

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It is worth emphasizing, as mentioned above, that students should not feel obligated to produce an intense, time-consuming brainstorm presentation. Many high achieving students submit very simple mind map presentations (if indeed any are submitted at all). It may help to imagine what kind of brainstorming method you would use if you were a famous, crazy, genius artist!

Use illustrations and colours to communicate and emphasise ideas, as in these 'sketchnotes' by Eva-Lotta Lamm:

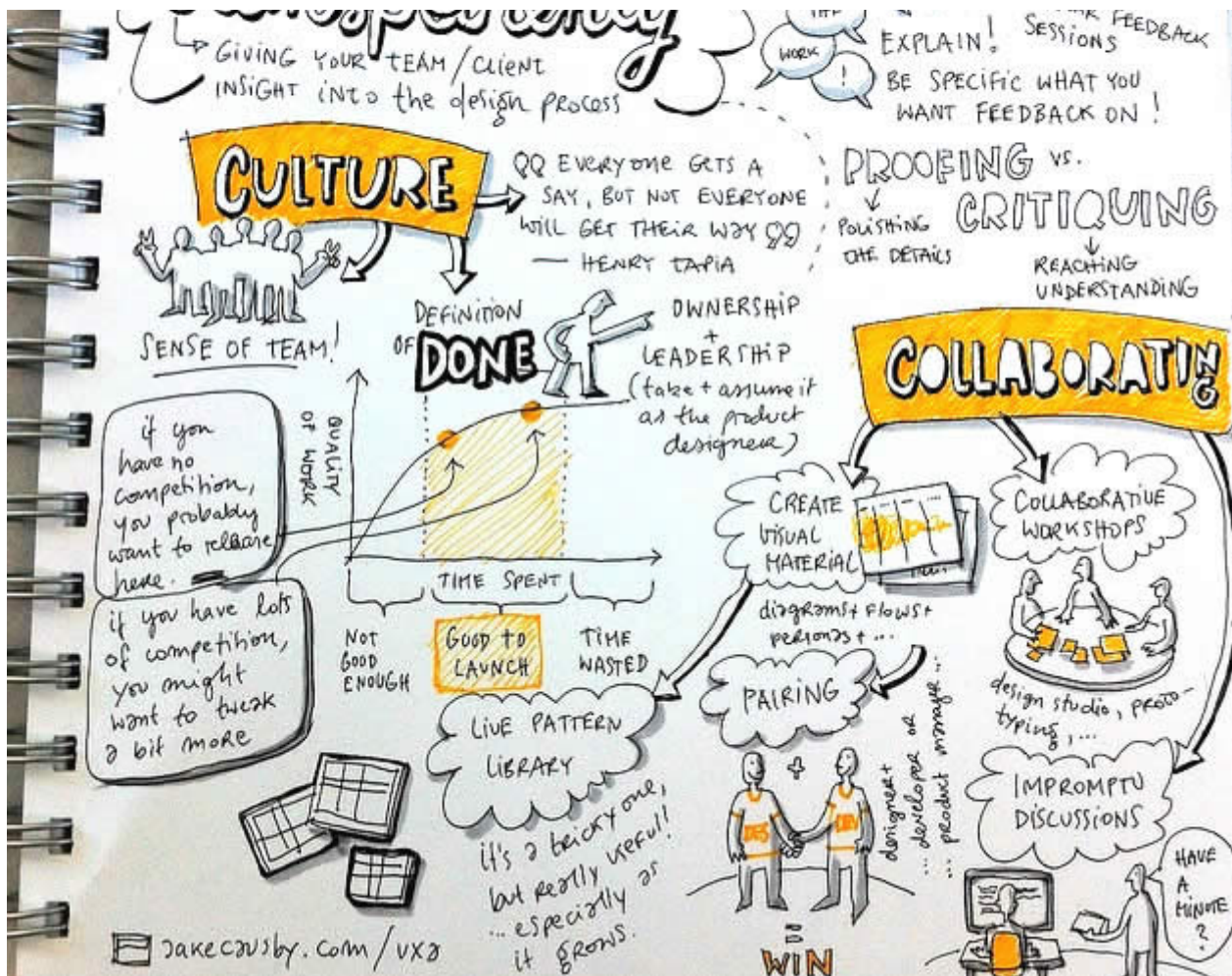
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Graphic Design students in particular often feel confident brainstorming ideas in graphical format. Note the clever repetition of colour in this work and how borders around certain areas of text draw the viewer's attention.

Organise ideas visually in a grid formation, as in this illustration of design studio tools by Grid London:

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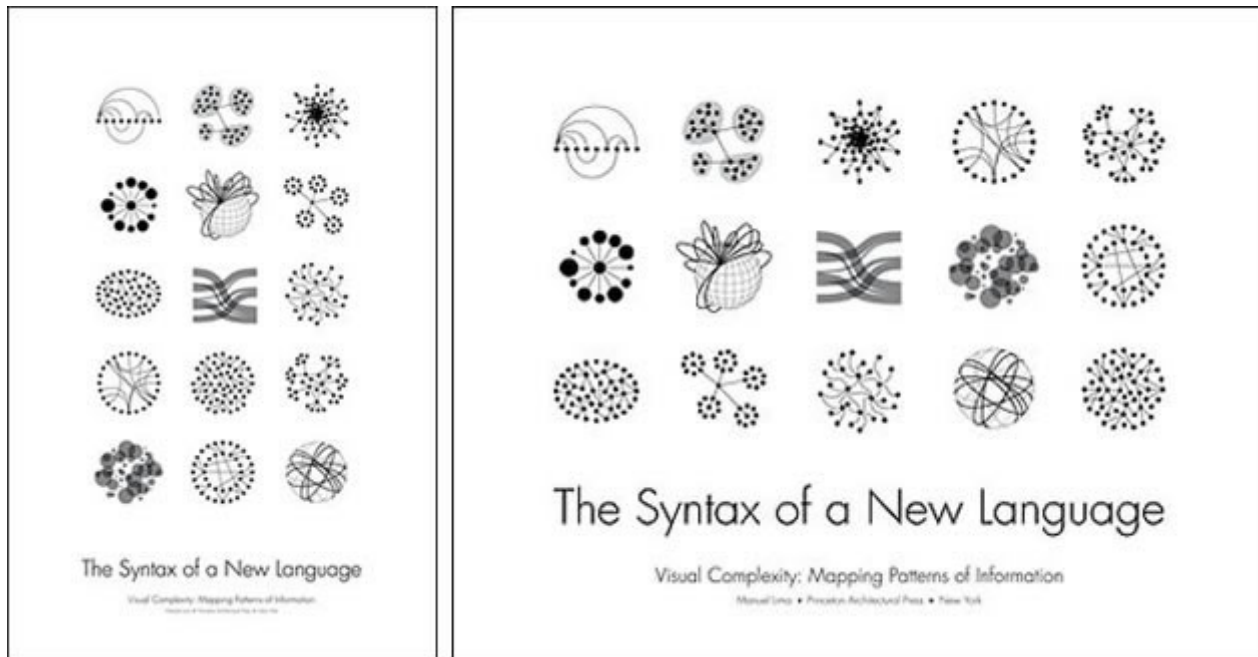
If your teacher is open to this approach, a more formal, grid-like structure can be an aesthetically pleasing way to collect ideas (these could be organised in related rows). Although this doesn't facilitate discussion or linking between different ideas, it can be a great minimalist way for students to contemplate a whole range of possible subject matters that are related to a theme. Images can be photographed, drawn or collaged, with annotation beneath.



<https://www.studentartguide.com/articles/how-to-make-a-mindmap-creative-ideas>

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ideas can be organized and structured in creative and innovative ways.



Combine a mood board with a brainstorm, as in this analysis of 'glitch art' by [Gareth Wrighton](#):

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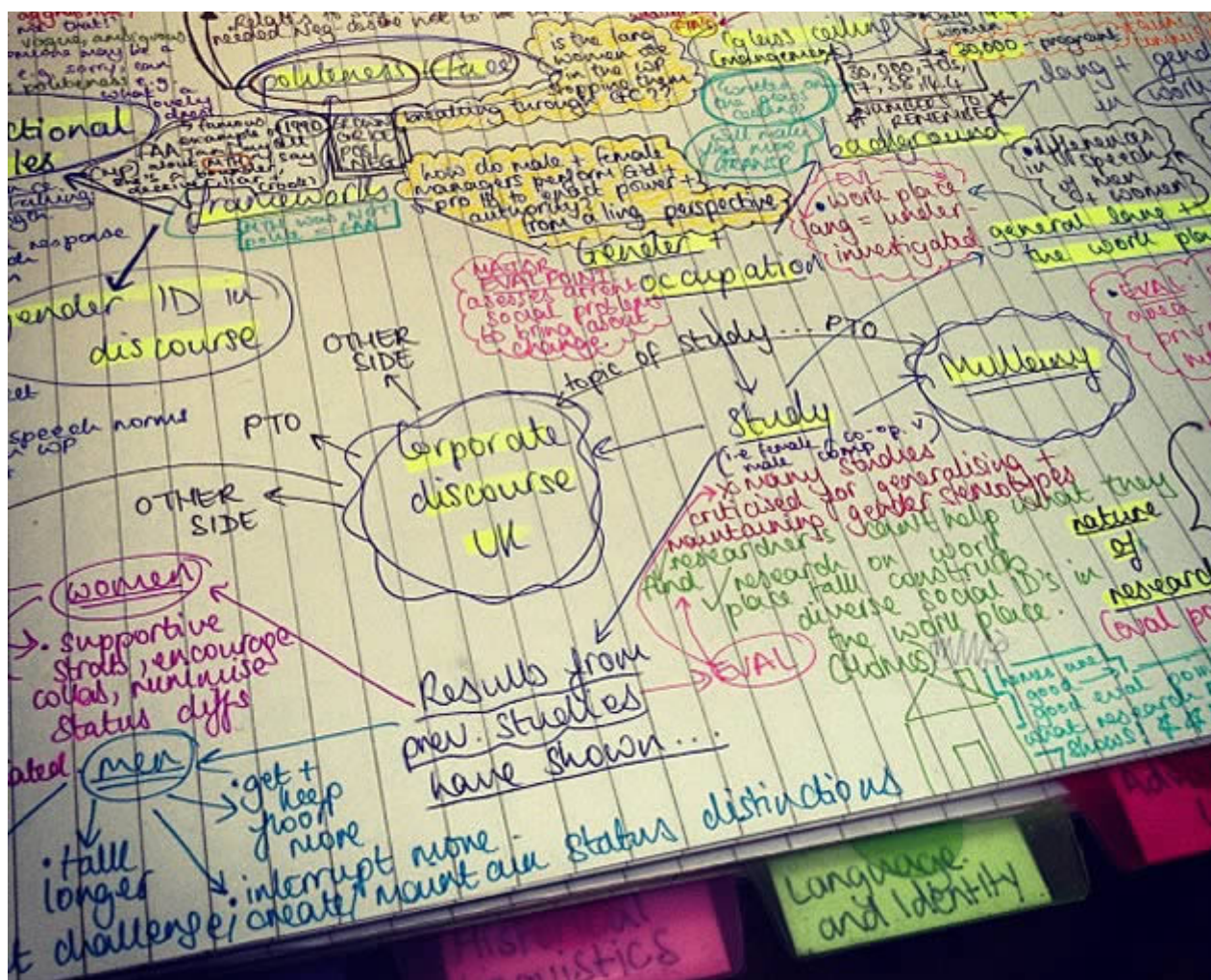
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In this example, numerous small images have been cut out and arranged, accompanied by annotation. Colours have been positioned carefully, so that the final image appears balanced and cohesive (rather than busy and chaotic).

Used multiple coloured pens, as in this example by Cassandra Brown:



This can be a quick and effective way for students to explore ideas. As with the other examples shown on this page, it is important that the colours and presentation methods link in with the remainder of your project. This style of presentation may be particularly appropriate for a graphic design or 3D design project.

Once you have selected a presentation method for your brainstorming, the next step is to actually generate some ideas! Please read our guide to [selecting a great Art project idea](#).



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