On the selection of good 'trigger' words when constructing a mind map

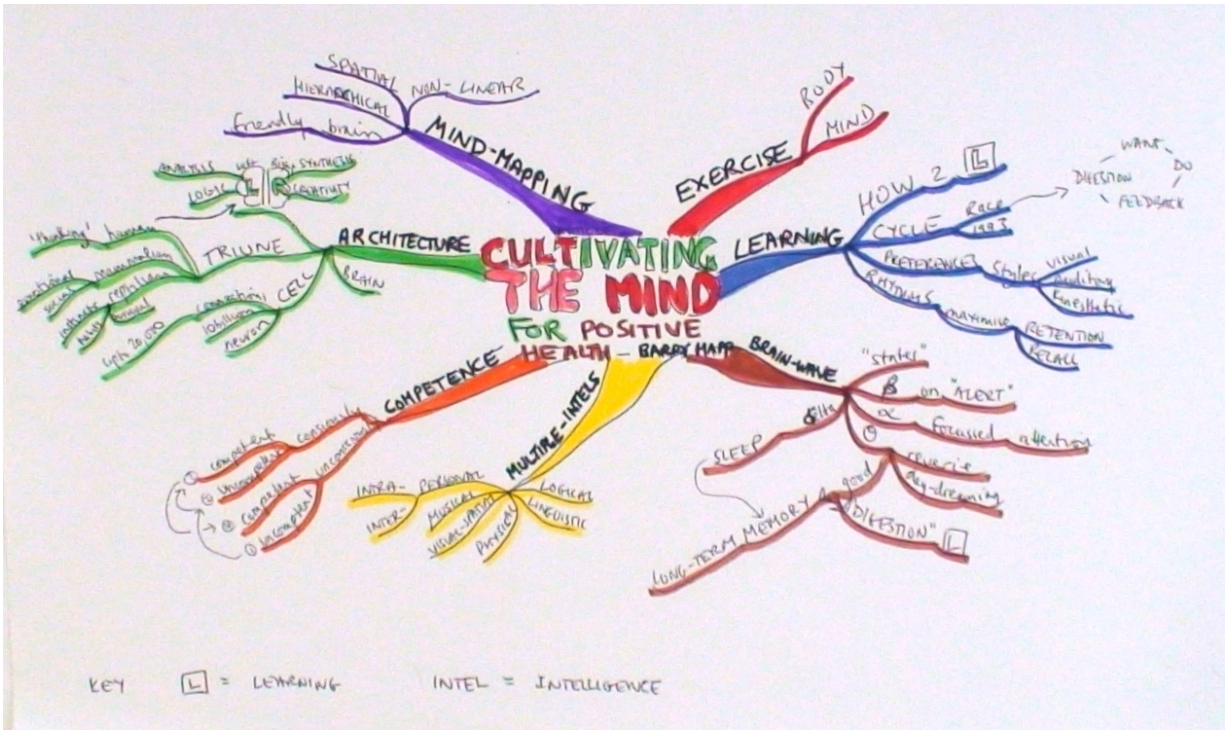
The purpose of words (or images) on your mind map is to help you remember (i.e. recall from memory) important detail about your topic.

Is there a difference between a trigger word and a keyword? Both of these act as prompts or reminders for the brain. The difference is (in my view) that a keyword is a word that everyone would recognise (or at least could look up in a dictionary to find the best meaning) and is usually a noun or strong verb. A trigger on the other hand, whilst including such keywords, can also be anything that happens to remind ***you*** about something (so it may be personal to you and not necessarily recognised by other people)

Thus any word that helps ***you*** remember something can be considered a trigger or prompt. There is always more information in your head about a topic than you realise but the difficulty is 'getting it out' of your head. If you think about it, this 'problem' is similar to trying to locate a file or folder that is stored on your computer or searching the internet for information. It is very difficult to find anything without a good search term. Improving your skill in selecting keywords for a mind map is not much different to improving your keyword optimisation for an internet search. There are lots of instruction and courses available for internet marketers on the topic of SEO and keyword selection, so maybe there ought to be courses on keyword selection for mind mapping! So this article is intended to provide a stop gap giving you some hints and tips on the art of keyword selection for mind mapping.

When you construct a mind map, and especially when you'd like other people to read and make sense of it, the 'keywords' you use will often be the same high-level words that are somewhere in the text (but as shown below, this is not always the case). These keywords are normally buried within the text so you have to ***actively seek them out.***

<u>You'll get most benefit from this short article if you view it in conjunction with my article 'Cultivating the Mind for Positive Health'</u> (whilst also reviewing the video 'Mind Map an Article' from my Mind Mapping E-learning course). Below is the mind map of that article. The first thing to point out is that the article itself was divided into eleven main sections and seven of these sections have been represented by a main branch on the mind map.



The following keywords are used to represent the seven categories:

1. Exercise (representing Exercising the Body-Mind)
2. Learning (this word is used to represent four sections in the article: Learning how to Learn, the Learning Cycle, Learning Styles or Preferences, and the Learning Rhythms - so this is an example of 'chunking up' as four sections of the article have been 'chunked up' into this one category called LEARNING). As you'll appreciate if you have completed my mind mapping course, eleven branches on a mind map is too many, causing clutter on the map, overloading our spatial working memory and distorting the map into a portrait rather than a landscape style (visual and spatial working memories are landscape in nature so portrait mode does not get the best from our memory capability and does not engage peripheral vision)
3. Brainwave (representing brain wave states)
4. Multiple-Intels - I sometimes hyphenate two words together (my 'cheat' solution to turn two words into one) when it is difficult or inappropriate to use a single word. However on reflection INTELS would have been perfectly adequate here on its own as a single keyword.
5. Competence (representing the Competence Cycle)
6. Architecture (representing Brain Architecture)
7. Mind-Mapping (representing Mind Mapping for health)

Let's look at a two of these categories exercise and brainwaves to learn more about keyword selection:

EXERCISE
If you have the actual article in front of you, you'll see that Exercise (of the body and of the mind) is the theme of the first paragraph. On the map, I then go to one further level of detail (1) body and (2) mind. However if you were creating this mind map with the intention of recalling a bit more detail, you would select some additional words about body exercise (aerobic heart) and more detail about mind exercise (trying new things) and these would be contained at a third level of branch structure.

This article was written back in the mid 1990's and since then we've actually discovered how physical exercise itself is also very good for brain health, so if I was writing this article today I would most likely include something about this in the section. Maybe I would add that we can kill two birds with one stone by trying out new forms (requiring brain work) of exercise. For example Zumba, Jazzercise, Fitball or any new sport activity etc. that would exercise the brain as well as the body - but I digress!

BRAINWAVES
Let's look at another category on the mind map, that of 'brain-waves'. Below I've reproduced the actual article text and **highlighted in bold** the five main points that I make about brainwaves: (1) 'States' (2) Beta-wave (3) Alpha-wave (4) Theta-wave and (5) Delta-wave. Notice how these words are buried, and not necessarily evenly distributed, in the text. Finding keywords therefore needs to be an active, thoughtful process and can't be done effectively without some effort on the mind mappers part.

> Brain Wave ***States***
> A simple understanding of the four brain wave states can be very helpful to devise strategies to make learning easier and to make "brain exercise" more effective. The highest frequency - ***" beta"*** wave - is maybe appropriate for fleeing from a band of hungry sabre-toothed tigers but is most often indicative of an "overload" and "confusional" state. Not of any use for learning, but seemingly present in great excess in the average classroom and workplace. The ***"alpha"*** wave is of lower frequency and represents a state of relaxed but alert awareness. It is an excellent frequency for learning. In this state your peripheral awareness is acute but soft and unfocussed, and the mind-body is in a more energy-efficient mode than with beta (utilising less overall energy), but learning is enhanced because it is concentrated around a single activity. If the surrounding environment is high in distracters or stressors it will be difficult to achieve enhanced alpha but equally the more adept you become at holding this state, the easier it is to shut out distraction. (This is also where the importance of the "want' in the learning cycle comes in - if you don't particularly want to do something in the first place it becomes very easy to be distracted.)

Techniques such as looking at a mandala and listening to baroque music enhance alpha wave production. The third state ***"theta"*** is a lower frequency still, and at this frequency the mind-body is focussed inwards and sensitivity to the outside world is temporarily lowered. We observe this state when people "day-dream" or are creating or recreating mental pictures in the mind such as when doing visualisation. The mind likes to work with pictures and theta state is therefore good for memory and recall, and whenever we are seeking to link new ideas to our existing mental database. Einstein attributed much of his "genius" to daydreaming and he insisted that his pupils spent time each day on this activity. (Note that the theta state is highly appropriate for the "digestion" stage of the learning cycle.) Finally the lowest brain frequency is the ***"delta"*** wave state (equivalent to sleep) which also has importance in learning but will not be covered here. From a simple understanding of our brain wave states we can see that mind state is an important consideration for both teacher and learner. It is a waste of effort "exercising" the brain until we have quietened and focussed our minds, and setting aside time for mental imagery and imagination will give our little grey cells a good workout.

As far as the mind map is concerned, if you know your brain wave states then no further sub-keywords are necessarily required on your map. But if you don't know your four main 'states', then you need some additional keyword reminders as to which state is which. (This also makes the point that initially the less you know about a topic the more words will be needed on your map. As you get more knowledgable on the topic the less prompts you'll require)

Below I discuss which keywords I used to remind the reader which state is which:

For beta wave the article text reads "***beta*** wave is maybe appropriate for fleeing from a band of hungry sabre-toothed tigers". There is no single word in this text which summarises the sentence, so in this case I have searched for and used a new word '***alert'*** on the mind map which summarises my intended meaning.

For alpha wave the text reads "represents a state of relaxed but alert awareness" and "learning is enhanced because it is concentrated around a single activity". On the mind map I have summarised these two phrases as ***'focussed - attention'***. (So you may ask why didn't I say this in the article itself which would have made it more concise, but the very nature of article writing is that we do tend to be verbose - and also we may have been commissioned (as I was) to write an article with a certain number of words. On the other hand with mind mapping the objective is to take all the 'padding' away)

For theta wave the text reads "the mind-body is focussed inwards and sensitivity to the outside world is temporarily lowered. We observe this state when people ***daydream*** or are creating or recreating mental pictures in the mind such as when doing visualisation. The mind likes to work with pictures and theta state is therefore good for ***memory*** and recall, and for digesting and linking new ideas to our existing mental database. Einstein attributed much of his "genius" to ***daydreaming*** and he insisted that his pupils spent time each day on this activity. (Note that the theta state is highly appropriate for the ***"digestion"*** stage of the ***learning*** cycle)"
I chose those few words in bold above as my key prompts about theta wave. On the the map you'll also note that I have added the word 'reverie' which is not used in the article itself. This makes the point that the wider your vocabulary, the easier it is find additional words to make good keywords or 'prompts'. Words that you may know but which may not have been used in the article.

SUMMARY

There is no magic to the selection of keywords, just some common sense. However the process of keyword selection can be tricky for us because at school we did not learn this as a skill and the emphasis was always on expanding our ideas and not contracting them down.
Nevertheless the more we mind map the more we get used to this idea of contracting down, simplifying and minimising and thus finding good keywords becomes easier. It will always need to remain an active and thoughtful process however. This is actually one reason why creating your own mind maps is memorable. The process of keyword selection is helping to lay down pathways in your brain that would not have been otherwise there.