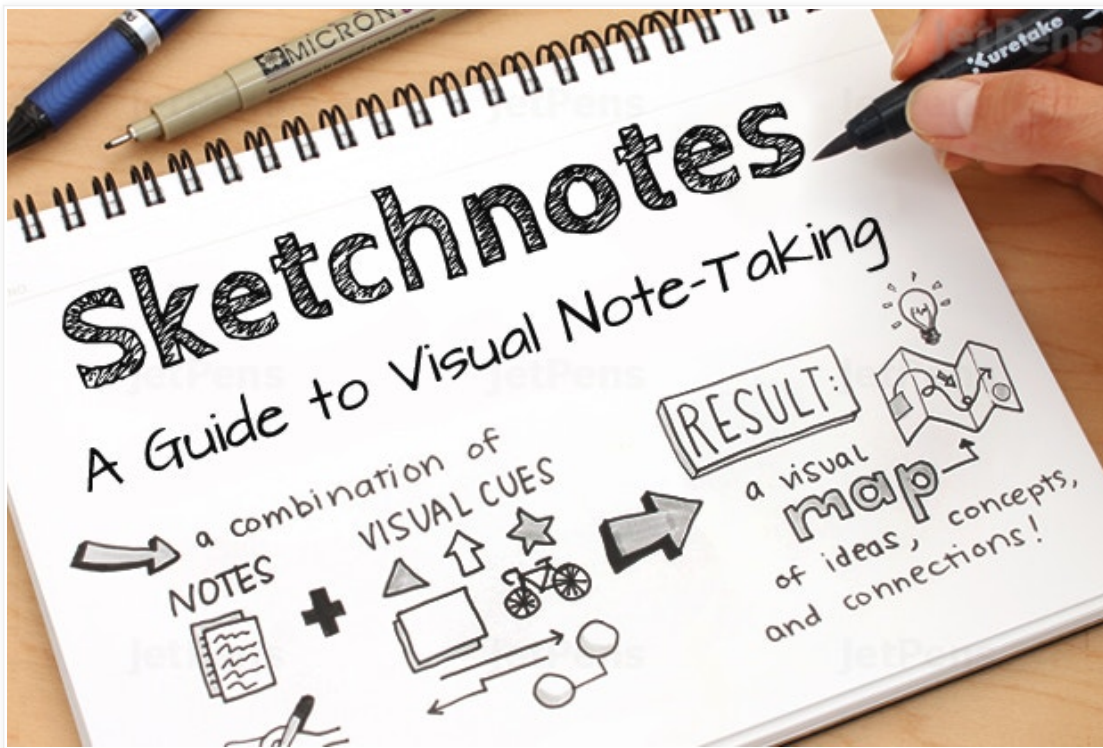


Jetpens Presents: **Sketchnotes: A Guide to Visual Note-Taking**

August 22, 2016 - Posted by Elaine



If you're a visual learner with a passion for pens and paper, the sketchnote method is perfect for you. Sketchnoting combines traditional handwritten notes with drawings, symbols, and other creative elements. The result is an engaging map of ideas with clear visual cues.

With sketchnotes, you can:

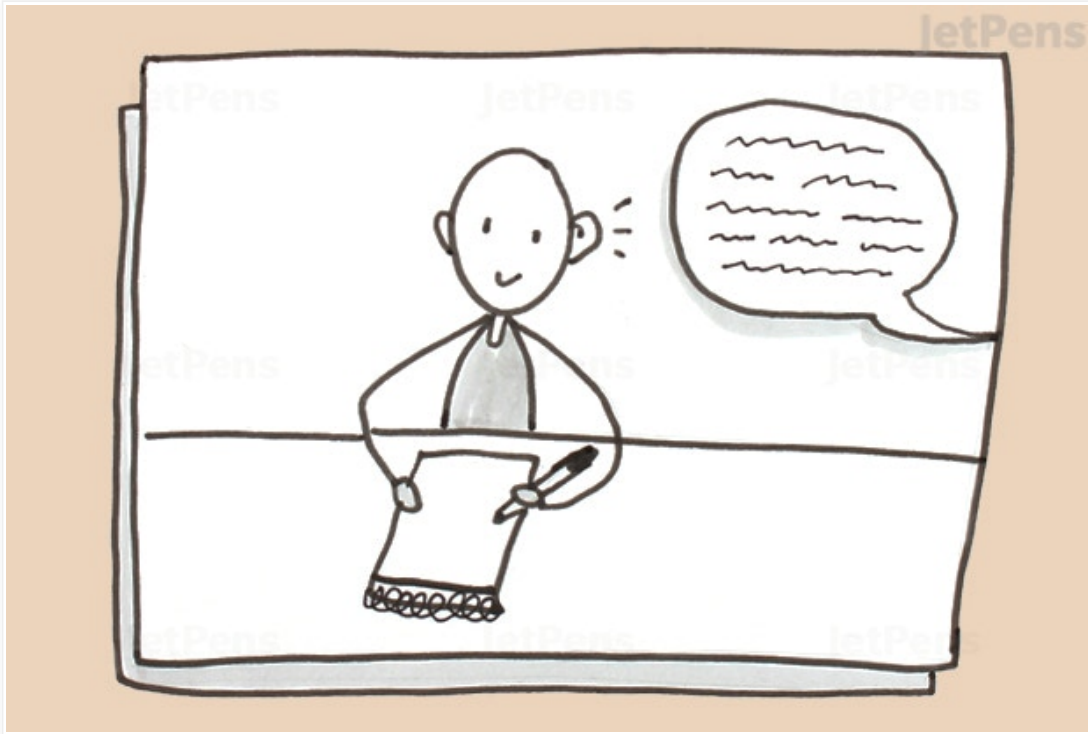
- Use visual cues to boost memory retention
- Keep your brain active and engaged with variety and stimulation
- Develop ideas more comprehensively by creating connections between points
- Make your notes more compact and easier to review at a glance

The term "Sketchnote" was first coined by designer and author Mike Rohde. Mike has written [two books on sketchnotes](#) and leads an active community of enthusiasts called the [Sketchnote Army](#).

In this guide, we introduce basic techniques, recommend some [supplies](#) to get you started, and interview Mike Rohde himself about the history of sketchnotes.

THE SKETCHNOTE PROCESS

Step 1: Listening and Experiencing



Listen closely for key points.

Be alert! If you are attending a meeting or conference, take note of lists, famous quotations, or items that the speaker repeats. If you are using sketchnotes to record personal experiences like travels, observe sensory details like sight, smell, or sound.

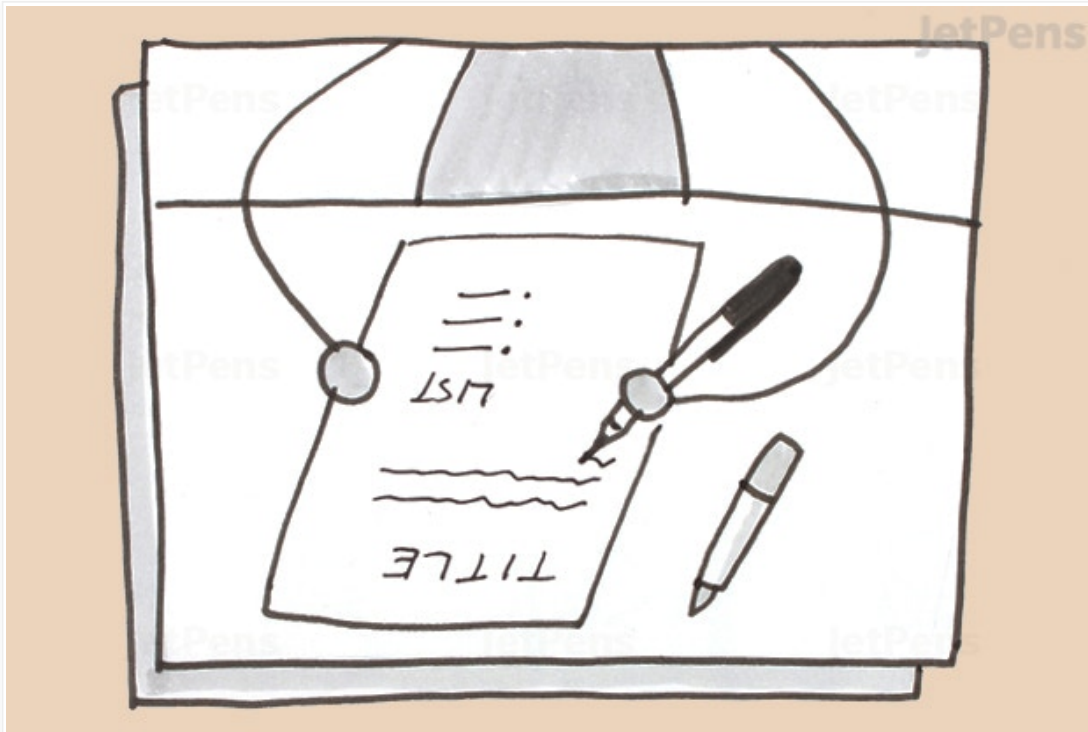
Step 2: Processing



Process content and only record important material.

Don't write down everything-- instead of taking verbatim notes, process the content and only write the most important material. It is better to fully take in one major point, rather than frantically scribble many lesser ones. During this step, think of yourself as a thought curator.

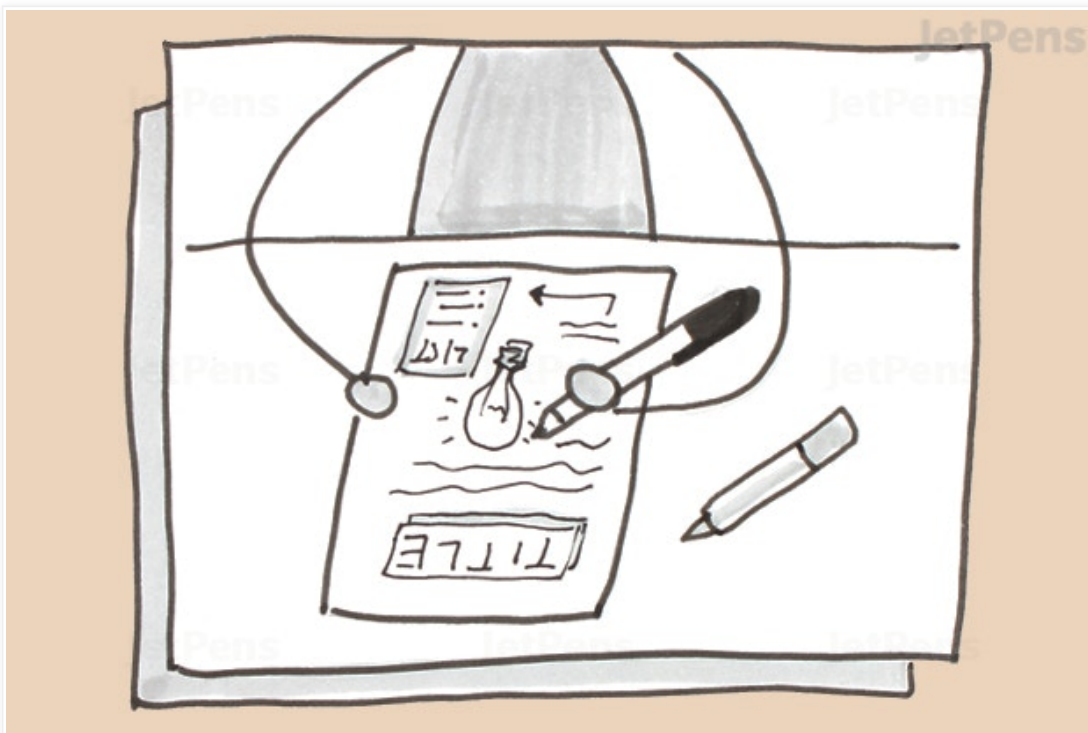
Step 3: Writing



Write quickly and keep your letters consistent.

Start writing. Your handwriting should be fast, but legible. Use abbreviations when necessary, and keep your letter size consistent so the emphasis points can stand out. Remember that sketchnotes do not have to follow a linear order, so you can use any part of the page. When relevant, add your own responses or thoughts on the topic.

Step 4: Visualizing



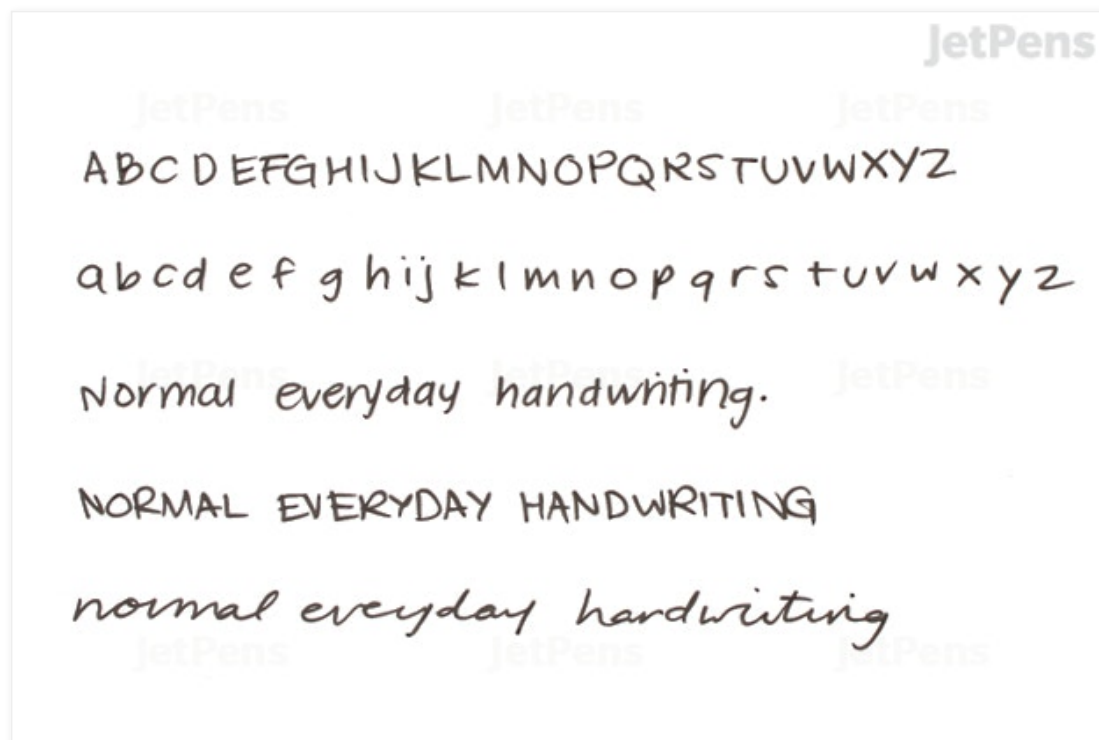
Add visual elements like boxes, arrows, and images.

You don't have to be good at art to add visualizations to your sketchnotes. During down time

or pauses in the presentation, add shapes, lines, and symbols to the most important sections. This act of revisiting uses visual cues to help cement the concepts in your mind. Then, use shading to add depth.

ELEMENTS OF SKETCHNOTING

Text

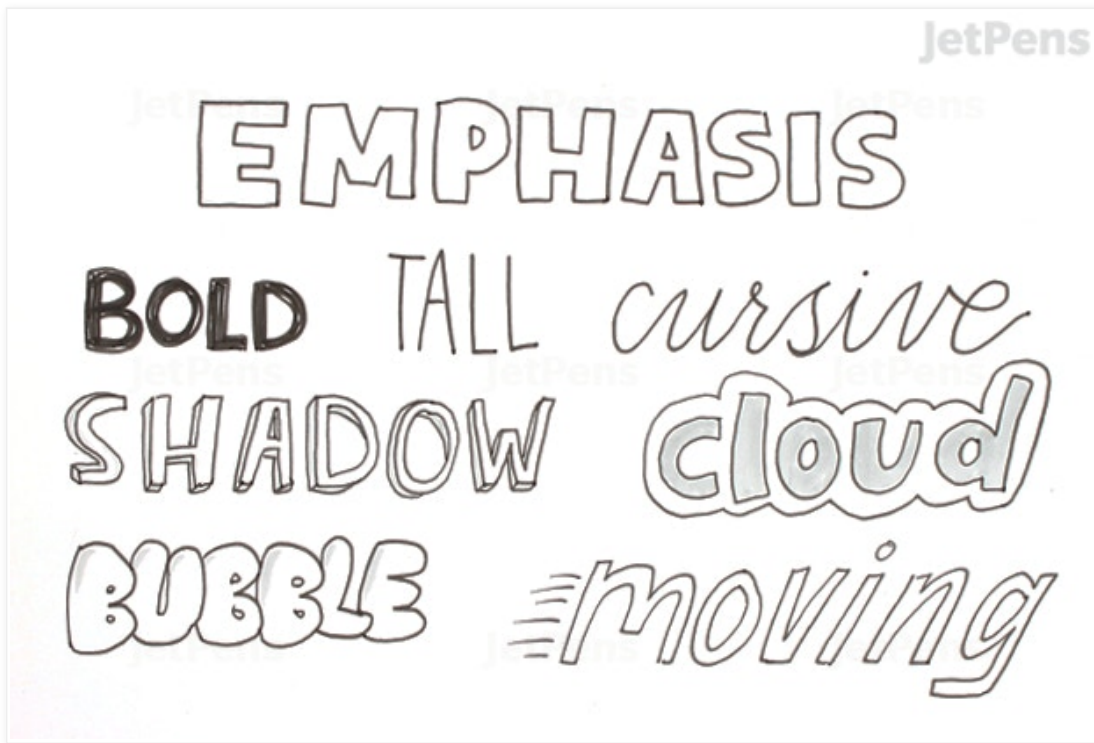


Start with your normal everyday handwriting.

The most basic element of sketchnoting is your standard everyday handwriting. Your penmanship does not have to be perfectly tidy-- after all, you will be writing quickly. It should, however, be legible and consistent.

Suggestion: Use your regular handwriting for specific details or items in a list.

Emphasis Text

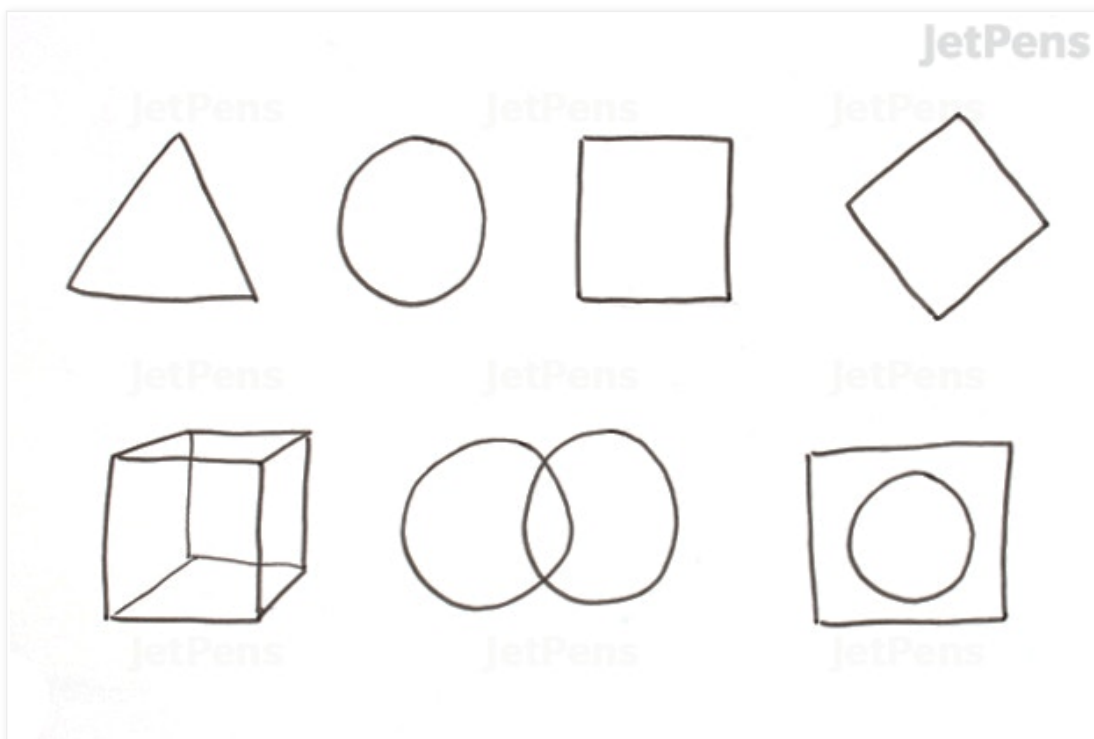


Use emphasis text to make a heading stand out.

Emphasis text is meant to stand out on the page, and is often used for headings, titles, and important takeaways. Add emphasis by embellishing your letters or using a different writing style. Some examples include bold text, all caps, or bubble letters.

Suggestion: Use bold, block print for headings.

Basic Shapes



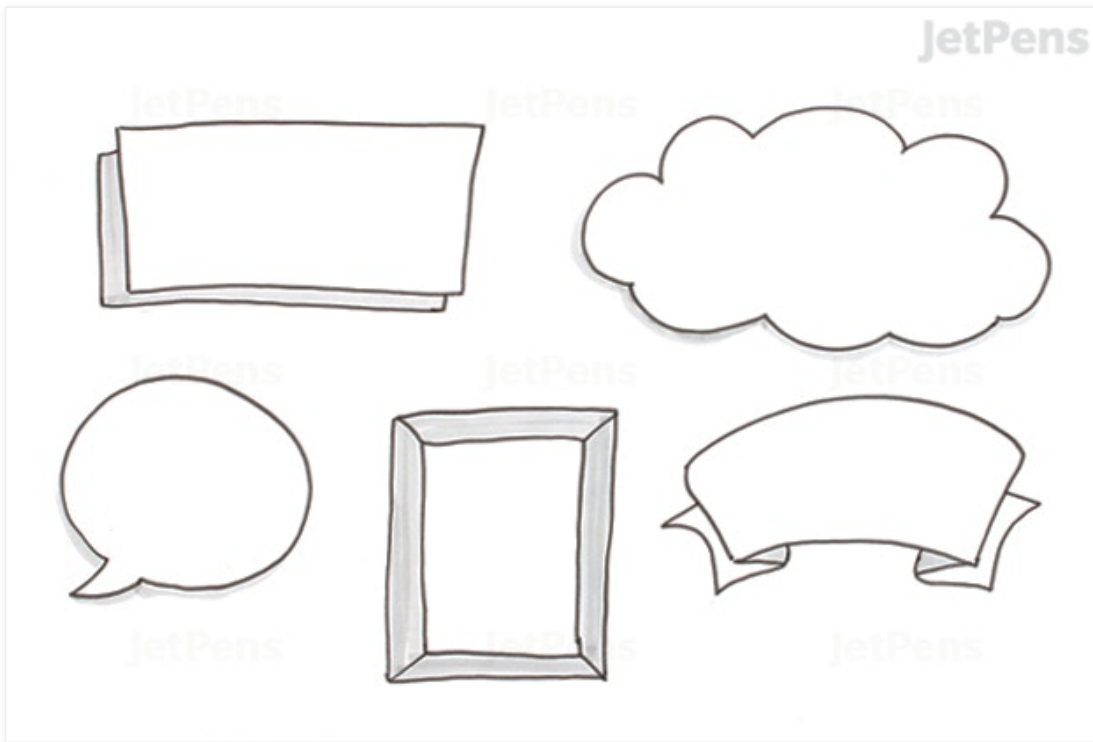
Basic shapes are an easy way to add visuals.

Everyone can draw basic shapes like circles, triangles, and squares. Use these as

alternatives to plain black bullet points, or to mark items of the same category. You can also combine basic shapes into figures like cubes and venn diagrams.

Suggestion: Draw a rectangle around all dates and times.

Containers

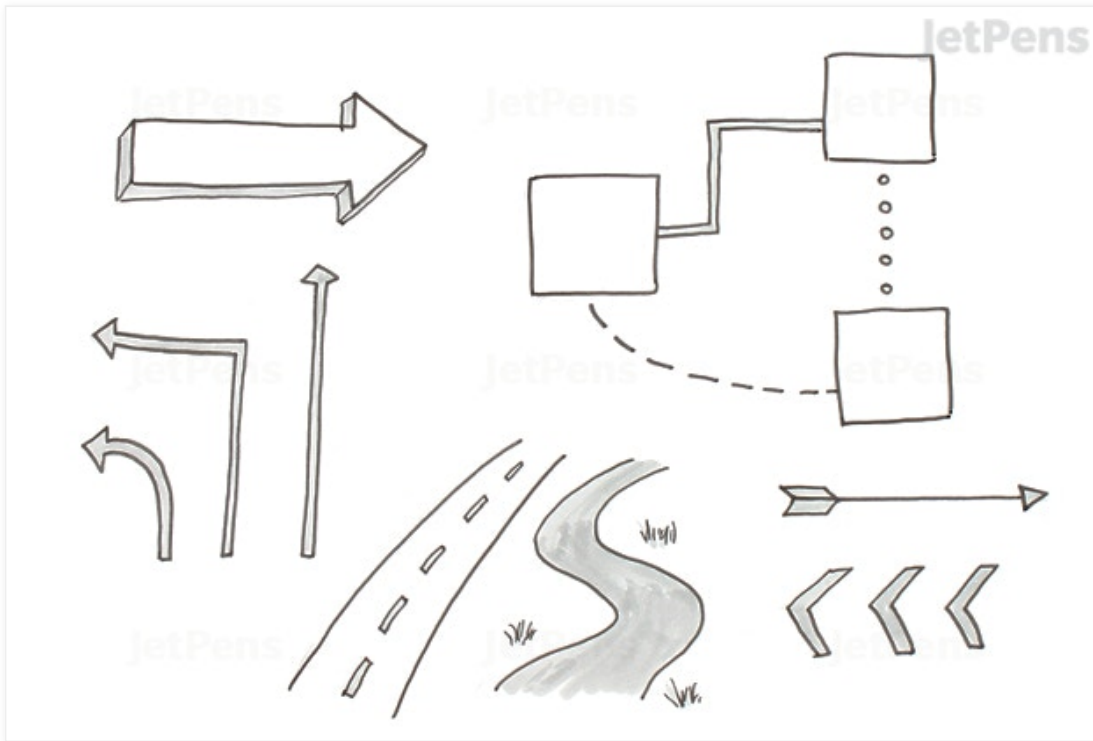


Containers collect thoughts or items together.

Containers are used to collect a group of thoughts or items together, or to emphasize one primary point. Some examples of containers include boxes, speech bubbles, thought clouds, and banners.

Suggestion: Draw a thought cloud around future goals.

Connectors



Connectors link related ideas to one another.

Connectors are used to connect one idea to another. Arrows, paths, lines, double lines, and dotted lines can be used to link related concepts. You can also use connectors to illustrate chronological items like timelines or cycles.

Suggestion: Draw an arrow to illustrate cause and effect.

Icons and Symbols



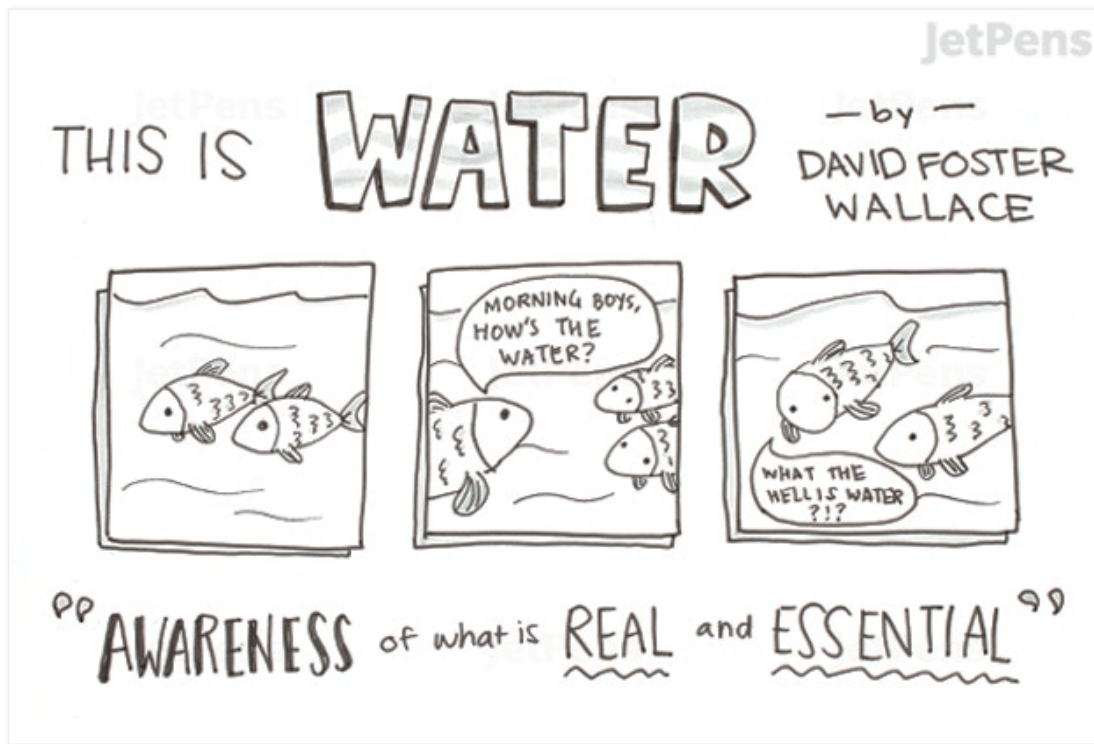
Use icons to represent ideas or objects.

Simple icons and symbols are an easy way to add visuals to your sketchnotes. Some

examples are a stick figure, book, gear, and cloud. As you advance your sketchnote skills, build a repertoire of common symbols like buildings, modes of transportation, and more.

Suggestion: Draw an envelope to represent email.

Sketches and Illustrations



Illustrations can capture stories or metaphors.

If you want to further stretch your artistic muscles, add detailed drawings to your pages. A picture is worth a thousand words, and illustrations can vividly capture analogies and metaphors.

Suggestion: Draw a mini comic to depict the events of a story.

SKETCHNOTE SUPPLIES

Sketchnotes can be created using whatever materials you have on hand. You never know when inspiration will strike, so it's perfectly fine to use a free hotel pen and a cocktail napkin to capture that brilliant idea. However, having a designated set of sketchnote supplies will keep your notes organized and visually consistent. Quality materials will also look more professional in a business setting, and make your sketchnoting experience more enjoyable.

Notebook

A [blank, plain paper notebook](#) is best. Avoid ruled notebooks because the lines are too rigid and may get in the way of your sketches. Graph and dot grid notebooks are good alternatives if you prefer your sketchnotes to be nicely aligned, but be aware that the grid may limit your creativity.

Top Notebook Recommendation: [Maruman Mnemosyne Inspiration Notebook](#)



Maruman Mnemosyne Inspiration Notebook

The minimal [Maruman Mnemosyne Inspiration Notebook](#) lives up to its name-- its silky-smooth blank pages will inspire you to write and sketch freely. Durable ring binding allows the notebook to lay flat on your lap or desk, and each page has a subtle "Title/No." section to keep your sketchnotes organized. If you opt for the graph version, the gridded lines are light and subtle.

Also Consider: [Leuchtturm Softcover Notebooks](#), [Rhodia Dot](#) or [Rhodia Blank Pads](#)

Black Ink Pens

Because you will be jotting down notes at a fast pace, choose black ink pens that can write quickly without skips or stalls. Avoid pens and markers that may smear or bleed through to the next page.

Top Drawing Pen Recommendation: [Sakura Pigma Micron Pens](#)



Sakura Pigma Micron Pens

Beloved by artist and designers worldwide, the [Sakura Pigma Micron](#) is a reliable marker pen with crisp, bleed-free lines. It comes in many tip sizes, from tiny 0.2 mm to bold 0.5 mm. The ink is archival, which means your sketchnotes will be well-preserved for years to come. For more information, check out our [Guide to Drawing Pens](#).

Also Consider: [Staedtler Pigment Liners](#), [Uni Pin Pens](#), [Ohto Graphic Liner Drawing Pens](#)

Top Gel Pen Recommendation: [Pentel EnerGel Euro Needle-Point Gel Pen](#)



Pentel EnerGel Euro Needle-Point Gel Pen

The [Pentel EnerGel](#) is known for its incredibly fast-drying ink, which makes it great for lefties and fast-paced writers. It is the ideal pen of sketchnote inventor Mike Rohde, author of *The Sketchnote Handbook*. To learn more about these reliable pens, read our [Guide to the Pentel EnerGel](#) or check out our [Guide to Fine Tip Gel Pens](#) for other alternatives.

Also Consider: [Uni-ball Signo RT UMN-103 Gel Pens](#), [Zebra Sarasa Dry Gel Pens](#)

Emphasis Pen

To add depth and dimension to your sketchnotes, you will need a marker pen that can quickly add emphasis to important points. Most commonly, the emphasis pen is a gray marker that can add shading to letters and sketches. It can also be a highlighter or accent color, such as blue or orange, but avoid using too many colors in one sketchnote.

Top Emphasis Pen Recommendation: [Kuretake Fudebiyori Brush Pen - Gray](#)



Kuretake Fudebiyori Brush Pen - Gray

With its versatile brush tip, the [Kuretake Fudebiyori](#) allows you to quickly add shadows or accents to your sketchnotes. Use the very tip of the brush to fill in small spaces, and use the side of the brush tip to cover larger areas. The light gray color is unobtrusive and easy on the eyes, while still providing an eye-catching visual effect.

Also Consider: [Zebra Mildliner Highlighters](#), [Faber-Castell Pitt B Brushes](#),

Carrying Case

If you are traveling on a business trip or running across campus to your next class, you'll need to keep your sketchnote essentials together in a compact, organized way. Using a carrying case ensures that your supplies will be ready whenever you are.

Top Carrying Case Recommendation: [Lihit Lab Teffa Bag in Bag](#)



[Lihit Lab Teffa Bag in Bag](#)

The [Teffa Bag-in-Bag](#) is a durable organizer that will easily hold your entire sketchnote kit. One large compartment is for notebooks, and smaller exterior pockets are for pens and markers. It can also hold small accessories like earbuds or a USB drive.

Also Consider: [Cubix Round Zip Pen Case](#), [Sun-Star Digistyle Carrying Bag](#)

WHAT TO SKETCHNOTE

The sketchnote method can be used in many creative ways. We've collected some potential sketchnoting scenarios below.

Conferences and Conventions

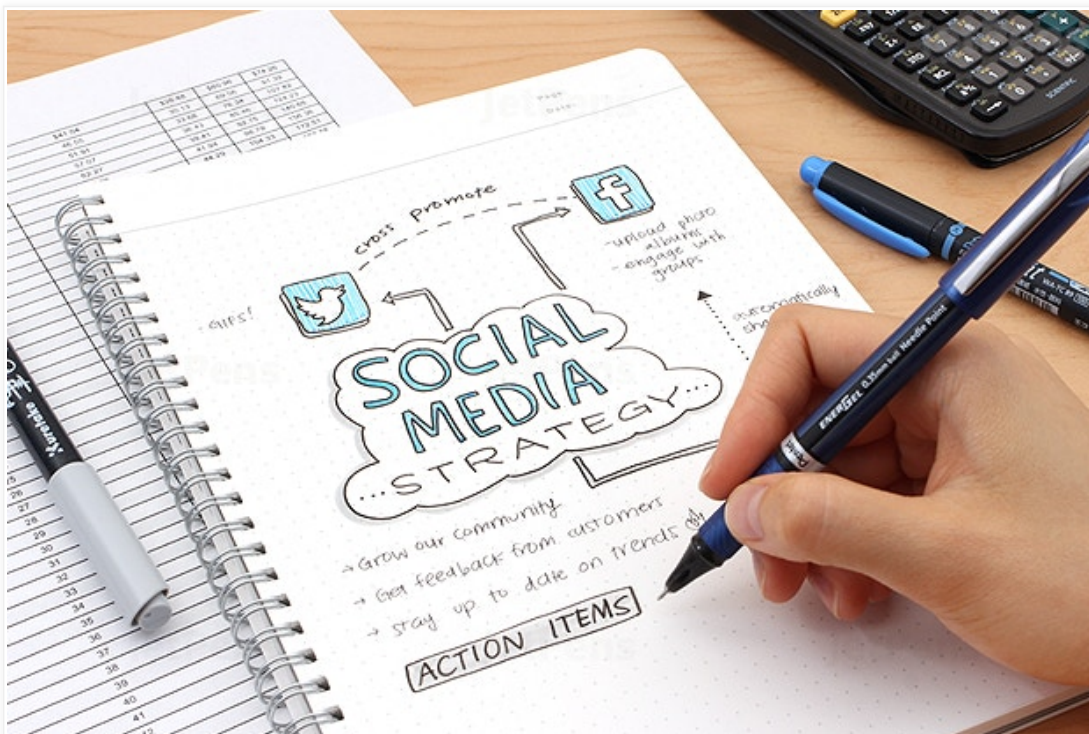


Capture key ideas at conferences and conventions

Sketchnoting first gained traction at large design conferences, and it continues to be a great method of note-taking during these busy, action-packed sessions. Even if you don't regularly attend conferences, practice by sketchnoting podcasts or TED Talks.

Products Used: [Staedtler Pigment Liner Marker Pen](#), [Uni-ball Signo RT UMN-103 Gel Pen](#), [Faber-Castell PITT Artist Pen B Brush](#), [Maruman Mnemosyne N183A Inspiration Notebook](#)

Work Meetings



Use sketchnotes to develop a big-picture view at meetings.

Instead of taking ordinary notes at the next work meeting, encourage your team to try sketchnoting. Because sketchnotes don't follow a strict linear order, they offer a big picture view that can facilitate discussions and brainstorming. Additionally, sketchnotes from multiple viewpoints will reveal a greater variety of opinions and insights.

Products Used: [Pentel EnerGel Euro Needle-Point Gel Pen](#), [Kuretake Fudebiyori Brush Pen](#), [Tombow Kei Coat Double-Sided Highlighter](#), [Kyokuto F.O.B COOP W Ring Notebook](#)

School Notes



Draw timelines and icons in your school notes.

Whether you are learning history, science, or math, sketchnoting is an effective way to map out complicated dates and formulas. Use connectors to mark important dates in history, or symbols to illustrate the steps of a microbiology cycle.

Products Used: [Zebra Sarasa Dry Gel Pen](#), [Sakura Pigma Micron Pen](#), [Faber-Castell PITT Artist Pen B Brush](#), [Maruman Mnemosyne N182A Inspiration Notebook](#)

Personal Diary



Record day-to-day memories with drawings and bullet points.

If writing entire paragraphs in a diary is not your style, switch it up by trying a visual diary instead. Combine journaling with drawing to create an at-a-glance view of the day's events, including your outfit, current mood, and meal plans.

Products Used: [Uni Style Fit Slim Gel Pen](#), [Zebra Mildliner Double-Sided Highlighter](#), [Hobonichi Techo Planner](#)

Travel Log



Document your travels and plan your itinerary with sketchnotes.

Sketchnoting can be a fun, creative way to document your travels and highlight favorite memories. You can also plan your itinerary sketchnote-style: use connectors to mark flights and train rides, or draw a container around a list of must-see landmarks.

Products Used: [Pilot Hi-Tec-C Gel Pen with Grip](#), [Kuretake Fudebiyori Brush Pen](#), [Tombow ABT Dual Brush Pen](#), [Traveler's Notebook Starter Kit](#)

Sporting Events



Keep track of your favorite sports team's victories.

Whether you're a die-hard Warriors fan or obsessed with the Seahawks, keep track of your favorite sports team throughout the season by sketchnoting their winning matches and best plays. You can also use sketchnotes to build your ultimate fantasy sports team. Score!

Products Used: [Pentel EnerGel X Needle-Point Retractable Gel Pen](#), [Kuretake Fudebiyori Brush Pen](#), [Leuchtturm1917 Softcover Pocket Notebook](#)

Books, TV Shows, and Movies



Sketchnote a list of characters as you read.

Are you a bookworm, TV critic, or movie buff? Sketchnoting can be a fun way to record episodes, plot twists, and favorite characters. For example, use sketchnotes to decipher the increasingly complicated Game of Thrones family tree.

Products Used: [Uni Pin Pen](#), [Faber-Castell PITT Artist Pen B Brush](#), [Rhodia DotPad Notepad No. 16](#)

INTERVIEW WITH SKETCHNOTE CREATOR MIKE ROHDE

Mike Rohde is a Milwaukee-based designer, author, and innovator who pioneered the sketchnote method. We asked him a few questions about the history of sketchnotes, his favorite tools, and some tips for beginners. Mike also worked with us to create the [Sketchnote Starter Kit](#), which includes some of his personal favorite tools.

You can read more about Mike's sketchnote story over at his [official website](#). You can also see curated sketchnotes from all over the world at [Sketchnote Army](#).

How did you first start sketchnoting?



Mike Rohde, creator of the sketchnote method

I started sketchnoting about 9 years ago. At that point, I hated note-taking, even though I was really good at it. I tried to capture every detail of the meetings and events I attended by using large, lined notebooks and writing with a pencil (so I could fix mistakes).

The problem was, this type of court reporter note-taking was stressful, because I felt I was always missing something. It was clear I needed to change, so my solution was to fashion some constraints for myself and my note-taking.

As a designer, I always work within constraints, and that's what makes for the most fun and most interesting of solutions. It was the same for my notes. I chose to switch from a large, lined book and a pencil, to a pocket-sized book and a pen.



Mike's personal sketchnotes

I literally could not take the detailed notes I was creating, and the pen forced me to be deliberate about what I was going to capture. This led me to analyzing talks live on the spot, and incorporating drawings and lettering to make my notes more interesting than lines of

gray text.

I had so much fun within these constraints, I kept using the new technique, and here we are 7 years later with 2 books, a vibrant community and most importantly— lots of other people using sketchnotes to break out of their note-taking ruts.

Did you coin the term "Sketchnote"? If so, how did this come about?



Travel sketchnotes from Amsterdam.

I did coin the word. As I was exploring on this new note-taking approach which included images and words as partners to capture ideas, It seemed natural to describe that combination as a "sketchnote." I used sketchnote to describe what I was doing, and the name stuck.

The word "sketchnote" works well, because it combines the idea of both image and text in a single word. When you say "sketchnote" you are describing what a sketchnote is—which I love!

What inspired you to write a book about sketchnotes?

People like my good friend Patrick Rhone kept asking for a guide to sketchnoting, because nothing existed at the time. I'd been thinking about ways to capture my experiences over the past 5 years, and a book had crossed my mind. However, I wasn't certain where or how to start, so it went on the back burner for a while.

While visiting my friend Von Glitschka in Portland, Oregon, he convinced me I should write a book on sketchnoting. Over dinner. He emailed his editor, Nikki McDonald, right after dinner, she loved the book idea and the rest is history!



Mike has published two sketchnote books.

The two books I wrote, [The Sketchnote Handbook](#) and [The Sketchnote Workbook](#), were two of the hardest, yet most satisfying projects I've ever undertaken. They pushed me to my

limits, because I wrote, illustrated, managed sketchnote submissions, and did all of the final print production on both books.

I'm so proud of how they've turned out and the impact they've had on the world, especially with translations of the books into German, Russian, Czech, Chinese and French.

What are your personal favorite sketchnote tools?

Favorite Pens and Pencils:

- [Pentel EnerGel 0.7 mm Gel Pens \(black\)](#)
- [Papermate Flair Pens \(black and other colors\)](#)
- [Uni-ball Air Rollerball pens \(black\)](#)
- [Retro 51 Tornado 1.15 mm Mechanical Pencil](#)
- [Black and Gray Brush Highlighters](#)

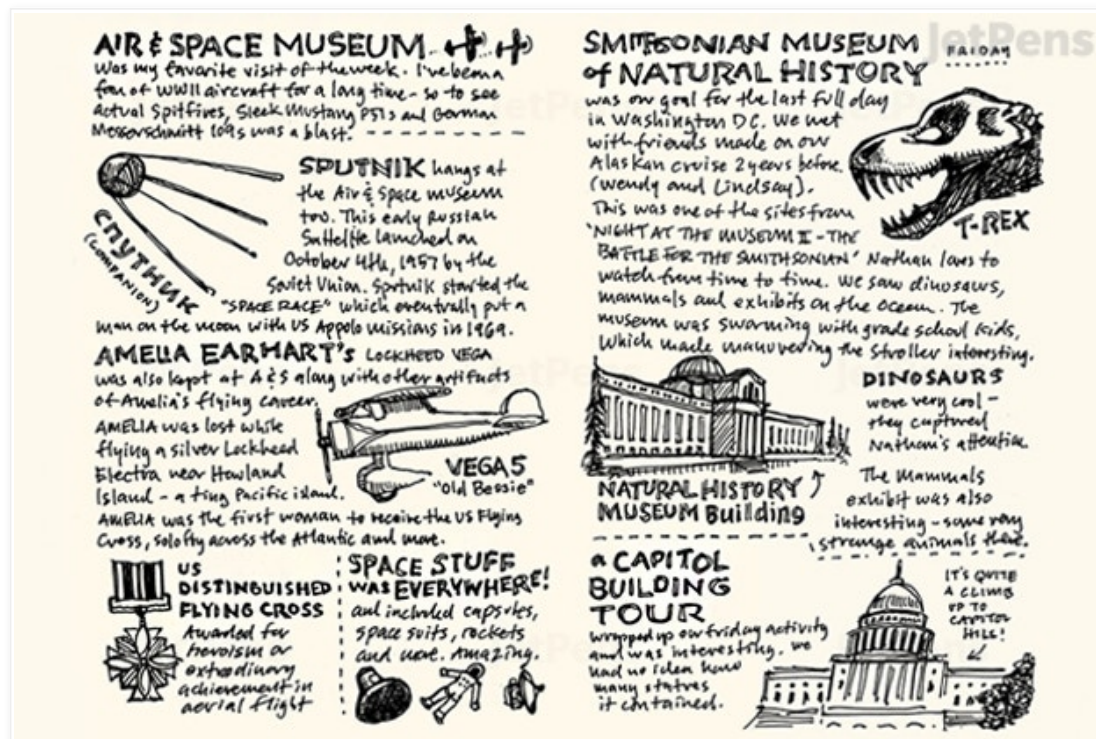
Favorite Sketchbooks:

- [Baron Fig Confidant Sketchbook](#)
- [Leuchtturm1917 A5 Sketchbook](#)
- [Moleskine Large Sketchbook](#)

Favorite Notebooks:

- [Leuchtturm1917 A5 Dot Grid Notebook \(my work log\)](#)
- [Hobonichi Techo Planner \(my personal daily log\)](#)

What is your favorite item to sketchnote?



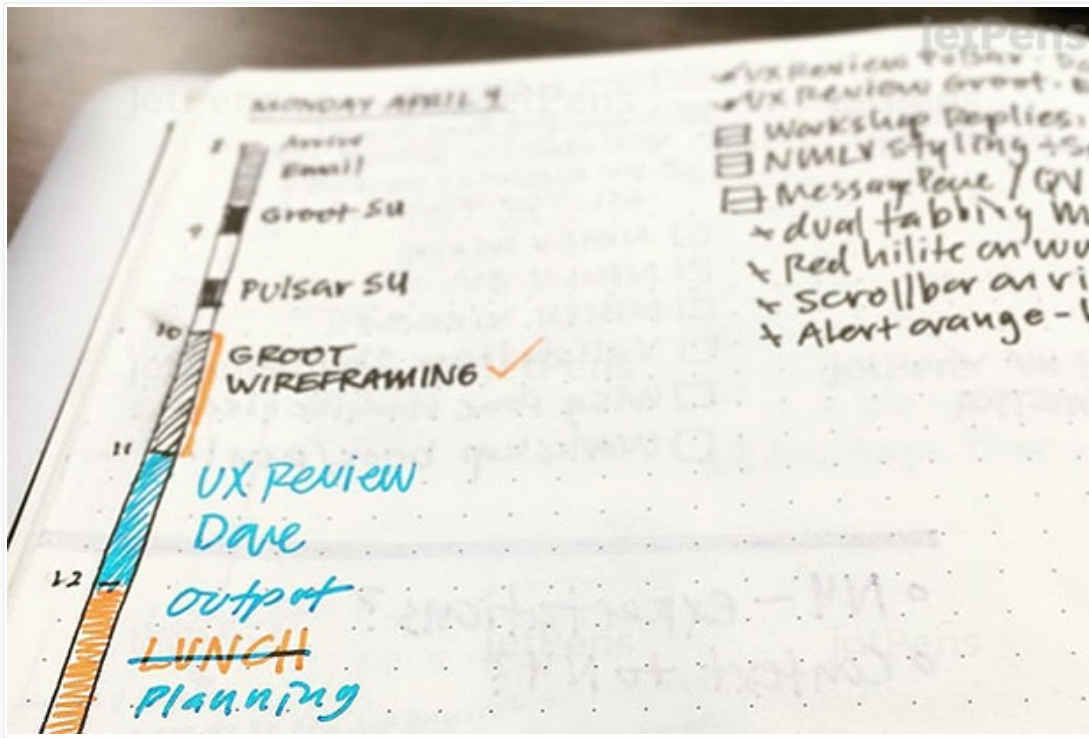
Sketchnotes from a trip to Washington, D.C.

I love sketchnoting experiences, especially travel experiences. I find the detail I can recall later on by sketchnoting travel makes the effort to capture sketchnotes worth the time.

Very often I won't sketchnote much on the spot, but I do occasionally. Mainly I take notes and photos as the day unfolds, then spend time in my hotel reconstructing the day's events with writing and drawing using photos and notes for reference. I get to re-live each day that way, which is enjoyable.

The benefit years later is a rich, visual record of a travel experience that I can jump back into, or share with my kids, or grandkids some day.

How has sketchnoting improved your productivity and workflow?



Mike uses sketchnotes to plan and schedule events.

I am using sketchnotes at work to record my daily activities, to capture meeting notes and help the developers on my software team work through ideas on the whiteboard. Sketchnotes just seem to leak out!

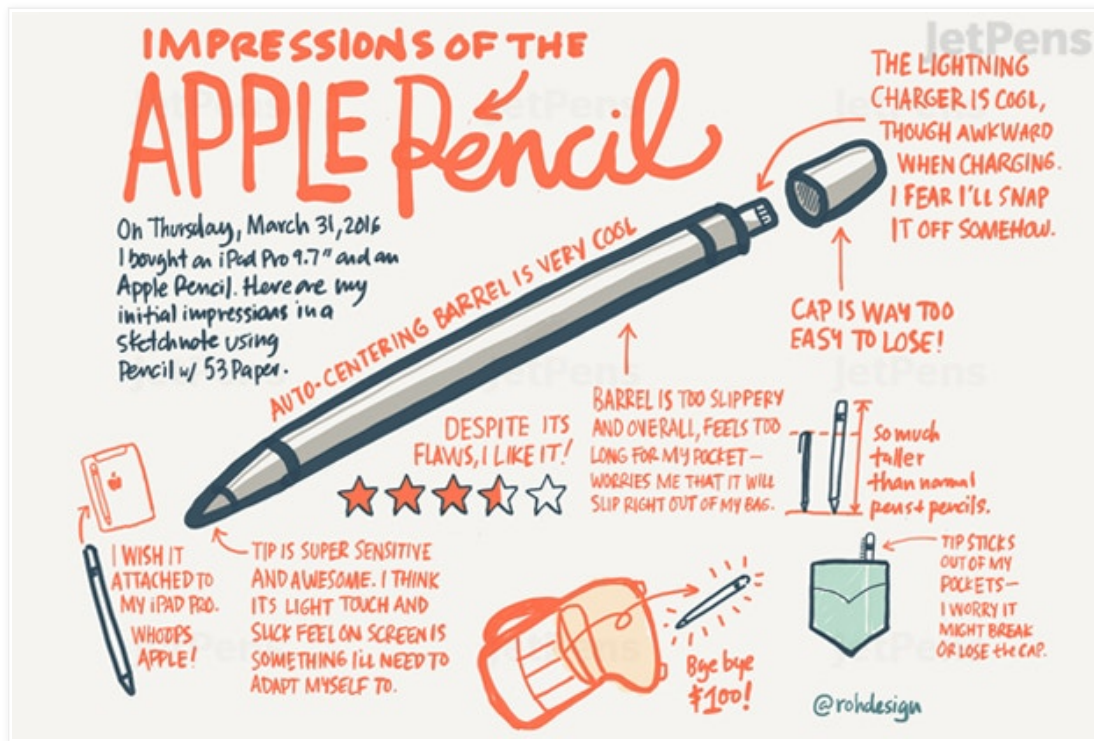
Personally, I like to keep a logbook in a [Hobonichi Techo](#) to capture my daily activities and often those take the form of sketchnotes. Having a visual record like that seems to capture my days in a way only text doesn't, and makes review of the year more interesting and impactful.

Do you think sketchnoting should be taught in schools?

I do think there is a place for them in schools, and I am seeing more and more teachers bringing them in for just that reason—which is very exciting. A few weeks ago I taught 24 engineering professors at Marquette University how to sketchnote, and they had a blast. They were already talking about integrating sketchnotes into their curriculums when the workshop was only half done!

I think it's a valuable skill that can help many students capture attention and use the natural skills for visualization to learn. To suppress that ability seems a shame, so I definitely encourage sketchnoting in school settings.

What do you see for the future of sketchnoting?



Digital sketchnotes created with an Apple Pencil

I see more movement into education, and an expansion with new digital tools like the iPad Pro and Apple Pencil.

I've been experimenting with the iPad and find it very powerful, but personally it feels more like an extension of my analog tools rather than a replacement. I love pens, pencils and paper too much to abandon them!

Do you have any sketchnoting advice for beginners?



Travel sketchnotes from New York City

My two biggest pieces of advice for someone new to sketchnoting:

1. Give yourself lots of grace as you learn.
2. Practice, practice, practice!

It's challenging if you haven't drawn for a while, and I know you are likely a harder critic of your own work (I know I am). Give yourself a large dose of grace, because it's likely you won't feel that your work is perfect.

But remember that it's about the process—know that you will improve! I think practice is the way to improve. Keep working on your skills, and you will see it become more natural over time. There is no replacement for practice. I've found as I keep moving, I improve slowly and surely, and you can too.

A FINAL NOTE

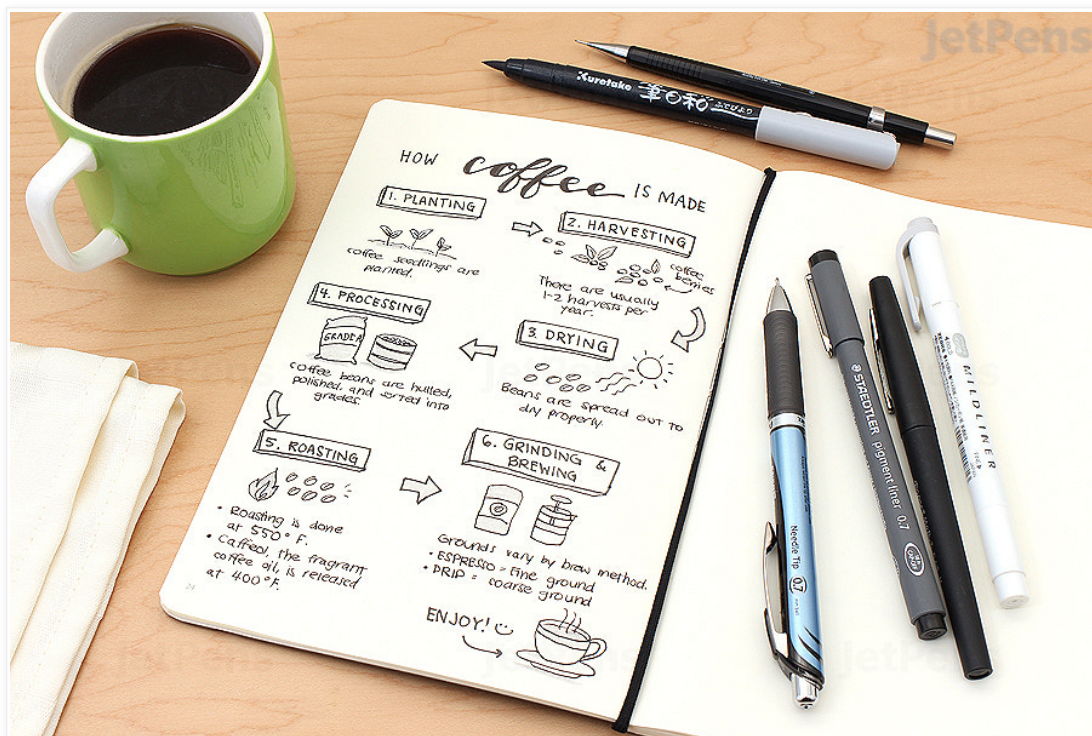
While the term “Sketchnoting” first emerged among attendees at design conferences, it has since spread beyond the graphic design community to schools, professional settings, and beyond. The next time you need to remember something, consider picking up your favorite [sketching supplies](#) and trying the sketchnote method.

Have you tried sketchnoting? Do you currently use sketchnotes in your day-to-day life? Share your experience by leaving a comment below!

Product Type	Recommendation	Product Highlights
Notebook	Maruman Mnemosyne Inspiration Notebook	Durable lay-flat binding, smooth paper, clean and minimal style
Notebook	Leuchtturm1917 Softcover Medium Notebooks	Slim size, variety of page formats, ribbon bookmark, elastic closure
Notebook	Rhodia No. 16 Pads	Portable A5 size, top-bound format is good for left-handed writers
Drawing Pen	Sakura Pigma Micron Drawing Pens	Crisp bleed-free lines, various tip sizes and colors, archival quality ink
Drawing Pen	Staedtler Pigment Liner Drawing Pens	Permanent, acid-free, fade-resistant, and archival-quality ink
Drawing Pen	Uni Pin Pens	Precision tip sizes, markerproof, waterproof, fade-resistant
Drawing Pen	Ohto Graphic Liner Needle Point Drawing Pens	Sturdy and wear-resistant metal rollerball tip, archival quality ink
Gel Pen	Pentel EnerGel Euro Gel Pens	Quick-drying EnerGel ink, comfortable rubber grip
Gel Pen	Uni-ball Signo RT UMN-103 Gel Pens	Retractable tip, comfortable rubber grip, water-based pigment gel ink
Gel Pen	Zebra Sarasa Dry Gel Pens	Quick-drying ink, sturdy binder clip for attaching to papers and notebooks

Product Type	Recommendation	Product Highlights
Emphasis Pen	Kuretake Fudebiyori Brush Pen	Springy and flexible brush tips, light gray color is subtle and easy on the eyes
Emphasis Pen	Faber-Castell Pitt Artist Pens B Brush	Large variety of available colors, pigmented and lightfast ink
Emphasis Pen	Zebra Mildliner Double-Sided Highlighters	Soft and subtle colors, twin tips for both highlighting and writing
Carrying Case	Lihit Lab Teffa Bag in Bags	Sturdy construction, large zippered compartment, smaller velcro pockets
Carrying Case	Cubix Round Zip Colored Pen Cases	Compact size for holding pens and markers, interior mesh pockets, elastic straps
Carrying Case	Sun-Star Digistyle Carrying Bags	Cushioned compartments, lined outer pockets, good size for an iPad or tablet

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JetPens Sketchnote Starter Kit

Still not sure where to start? Check out our [Sketchnote Starter Kit](#) for collection of versatile tools that will transform your ideas into tangible sketches. From figure drawings and portraits, to wireframes and mockups, these sketch tools will be an indispensable part of your creative arsenal.

