



## All-Purpose Invention Strategies: Mapping

*By Karl Schnapp*

Mapping is a brief visual representation of your thinking and planning. Writers often use key words and phrases to record material they want to remember, questions they need to answer, and even new sources of information they want to check. Maps show the ideas, details, and facts they are examining. They also show possible ways materials may be connected and focused.

Maps might be informal graphic displays with words and phrases circled and connected by lines to show relationships, or they might be formal sentence outlines. Mapping can be especially useful because it provides visual representation of your thinking and planning. Three types of mapping: listing, clustering, and outlining.

### **Listing**

We all list: shopping lists, present lists for the holidays, errand lists, people to call. Listing can help as a first step in discovering possible essay topics. Listing is a great help in planning an essay, too. It allows us to recall what you already know about a topic and suggests what more you may need to find out. Listing is also an excellent strategy when you have very little time for planning, such as when you take tests or need to produce a written text in a short amount of time. Listing lets you order your ideas quickly.

How to use listing as a discovery strategy:

- Give your list a title that indicates your topic or main point.
- List items related to the topic, writing as fast as you can and relying on single words and short phrases.
- Include anything that seems useful. Anything at all. Do not be judgmental at this point. Just list!
- After you have finished, reflect on the list and organize in the following way.
- Put an asterisk by the most promising item. Number key items in order of importance.
- Put items in related groups.
- Cross out items that do not seem promising.
- Add new items. (This is a very important step, because it may lead you to further discoveries about your topic.)

### **Clustering**

This is a strategy for revealing possible connections and relations among facts and ideas. Unlike listing, clustering requires a brief period of initial planning. You first have to come up with a tentative division of the topic into subparts or main ideas.

How to use clustering as a discovery strategy:

- In a word or phrase, write your topic in the center of a piece of paper.
- Also in a word or phrase, write down the main parts or central ideas of your topic. Circle these, and connect them to the topic in the center.
- The next step is to generate facts, details, examples, or ideas related in any way to these main parts. Cluster these around the main parts and connect them.

Clustering can be useful at any stage of your writing assignment: you can use it early in order to find subtopics and to organize information; you can use it to plan brief sections or a paper during drafting or revising.

### **Outlining**

Outlining is usually thought of as a means of organizing. Outlining is a useful exercise to check the organization of a draft you have already written, and some teachers ask students to submit outlines with their term papers.

Many student writers find it helpful to outline a paper during the early stages of drafting -- it helps them focus and keep on track. But, often when writers start making an outline, they begin to see new possibilities in their subject, discovering new ways of dividing or grouping information and seeing where they need additional information to develop their ideas.

One type of outline is the "scratch outline," a very informal rough list of the main points of an essay. A scratch outline is especially helpful for organizing information while you are still gathering it and for deciding how to revise an essay after it has been drafted.

A more conventional form is the "topic outline," which uses the numbered and lettered headings (Roman numerals, capital letters, Arabic numerals, small letters, and so on). Topic outlines are particularly practical for fully representing how the main points of your paper will be supported with explanations, illustrations, and evidence. It is customary for items at the same level of indentation to be grammatically parallel, and there's a good reason for this. If subtopic 1, 2, and 3 can be expressed in parallel form, then they probably don't all do the same thing.