

Essay Planning: Visual Mapping

The visual mapping step of the pre-writing process is similar to outlining; however, it allows the writer to follow how points connect more easily. Visual maps can be anything from incredibly detailed diagrams to simple, rough sketches. By using a visual map, the writer can view how thoughts relate before beginning to write, which creates a more coherent and organized essay.

What Are Visual Maps?

Visual maps help the writer diagram his or her essay. They are most effective if the writer has a thesis statement prepared because visual maps incorporate main points and supporting ideas around the topic. The topic, main points, and supporting ideas connect to one another with lines.

Topic

Place the **topic** of the essay in the middle of the page or flush against one side of the page.

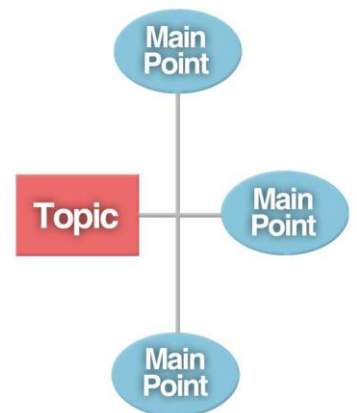
- The topic can be a word, phrase, or complete sentence. It should be the thing around which the visual map focuses.
- All main points of the visual map should relate directly to the topic.
- The topic in this example is in a large box.



Main Points

Gather the **main points** around the topic.

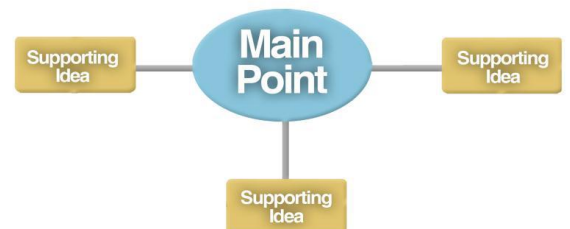
- Just like the central thought, a main point can be a word, phrase, or complete sentence. However, each main point must directly describe the topic. The main points will become topic sentences, and they will start body paragraphs.
- If the information in the main point does not relate directly to the central thought, it might be a supporting idea that could describe a main point.
- The main points in this example are in ovals and are connected to the topic.



Supporting Ideas

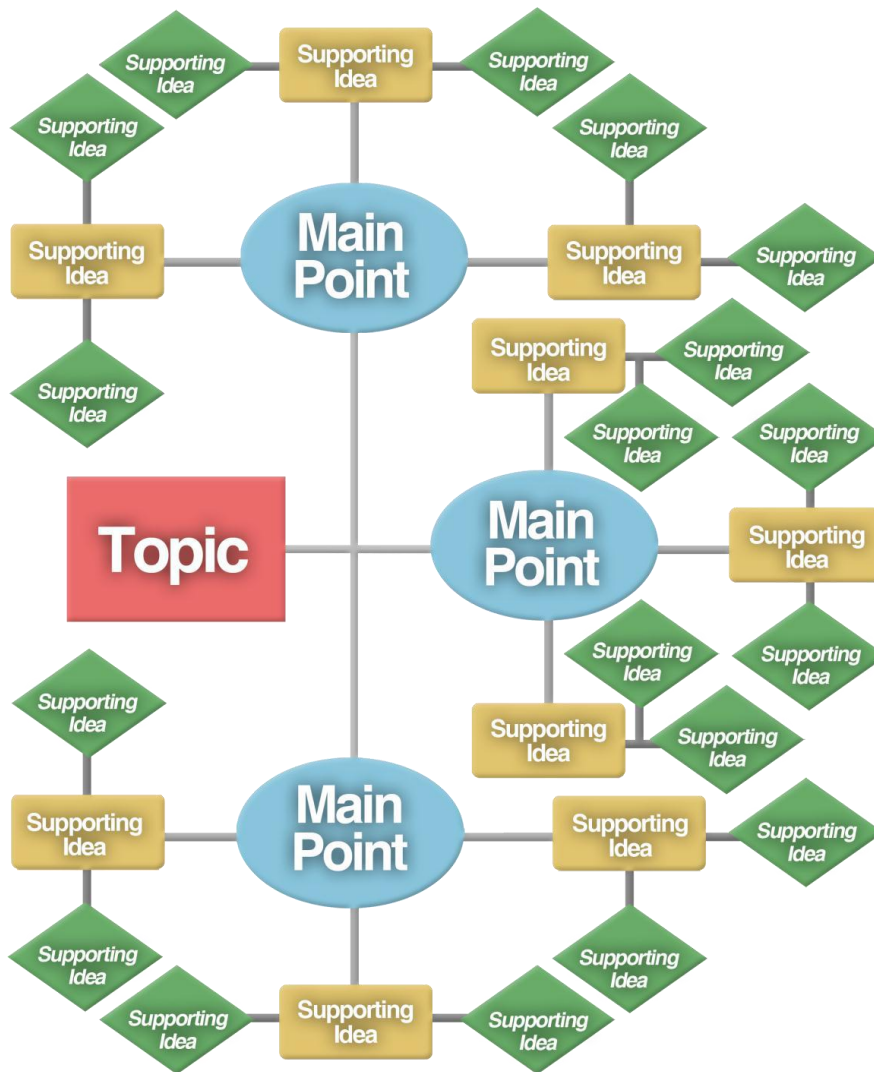
Gather **supporting ideas** around each main point.

- Again, a supporting idea can be a word, phrase, or complete sentence. Supporting ideas should describe, clarify, or exemplify the main point to which they are attached. Supporting ideas reinforce the main points.
- There can be multiple levels of supporting ideas, but the number of levels is up to personal preference.
- The supporting ideas in this example are in rectangles and are connected to a main point.



Model Visual Map

This model shows how a visual map allows the writer to follow each thought through the map back to the topic. Notice how each level is connected to the previous level with lines. In addition, this map has an extra level of supporting ideas (in diamonds). These diamonds are connected to the previous level of supporting idea.



Sample Visual Map

This visual map is based on a sample thesis statement: "My three favorite creatures are reptiles, fish, and mammals." The visual map expands on the thesis statement and includes possible information that could be used in body paragraphs for topic sentences and examples.

