

How to do a Mind Map

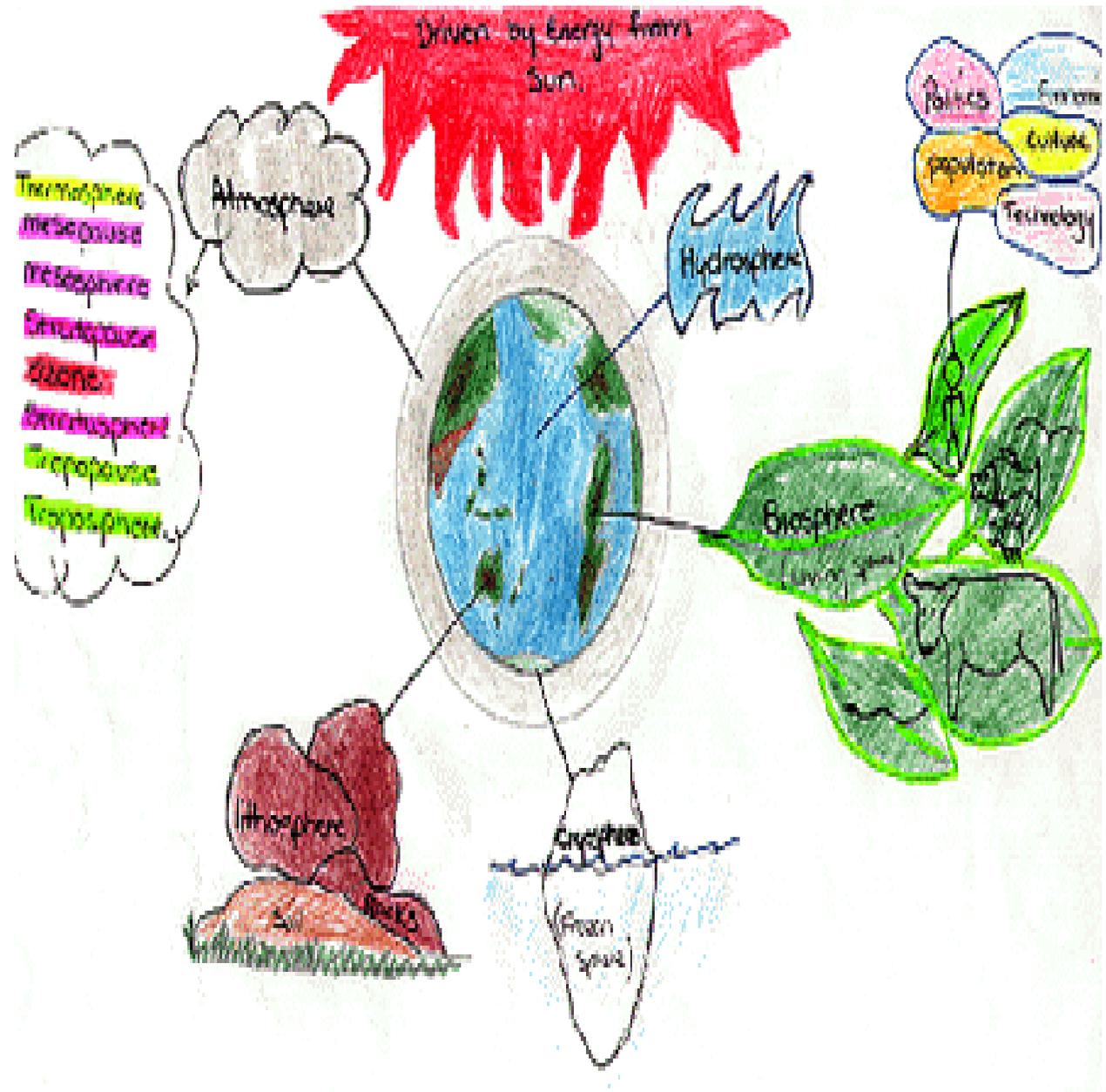
Mind mapping (or concept mapping) involves writing down a central idea and thinking up new and related ideas which radiate out from the centre.

By focussing on key ideas written down in your own words, and then looking for branches out and connections between the ideas, you are mapping knowledge in a manner which will help you understand and remember new information.

Sample Reading Mind Map

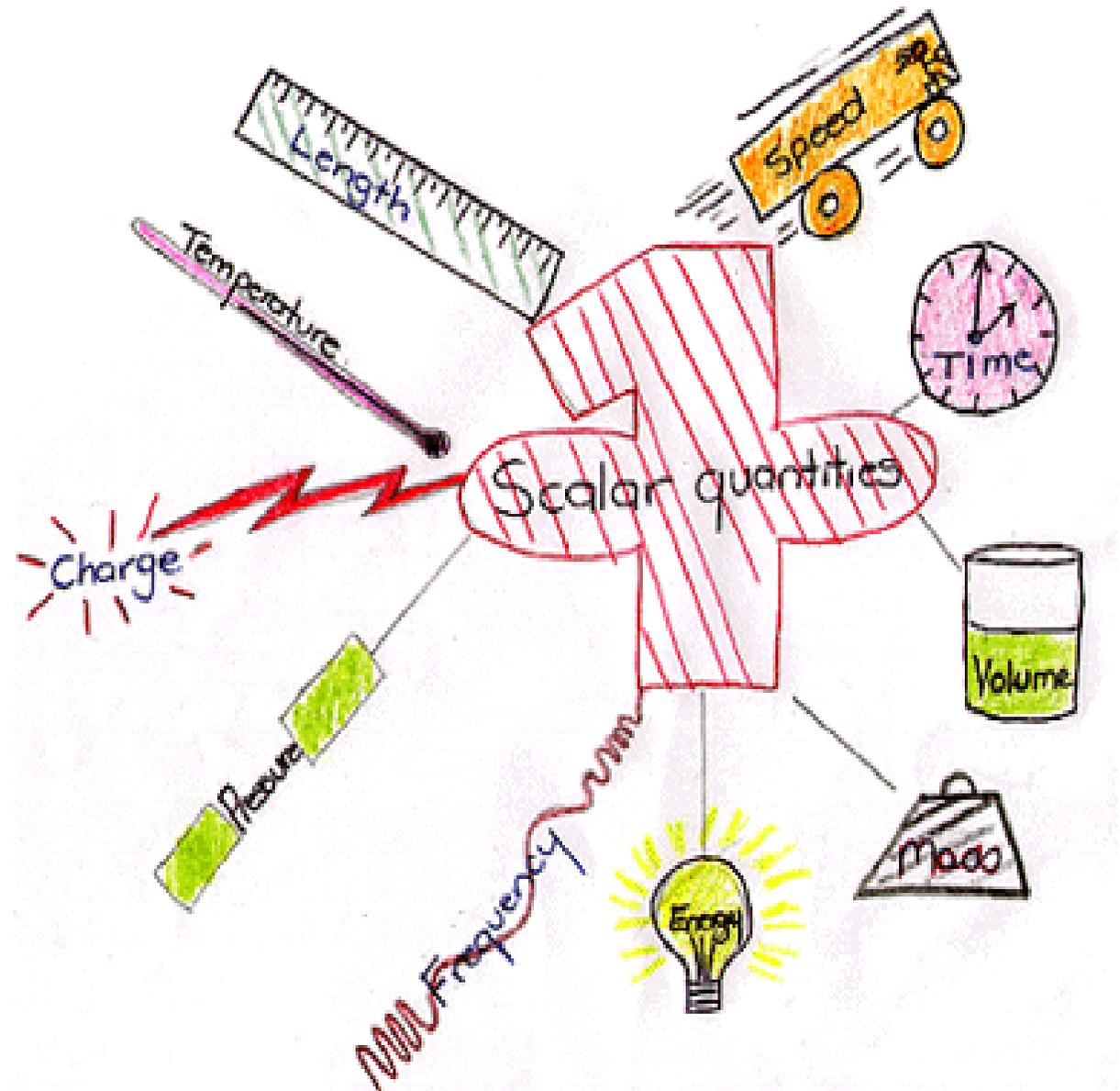
This mind map contains only the essential points a student picked up from the first reading of a text and was produced from memory alone.

The student who produced this mind map then went on to add details and questions and then consult the text again. Notice how space has been left for this purpose.



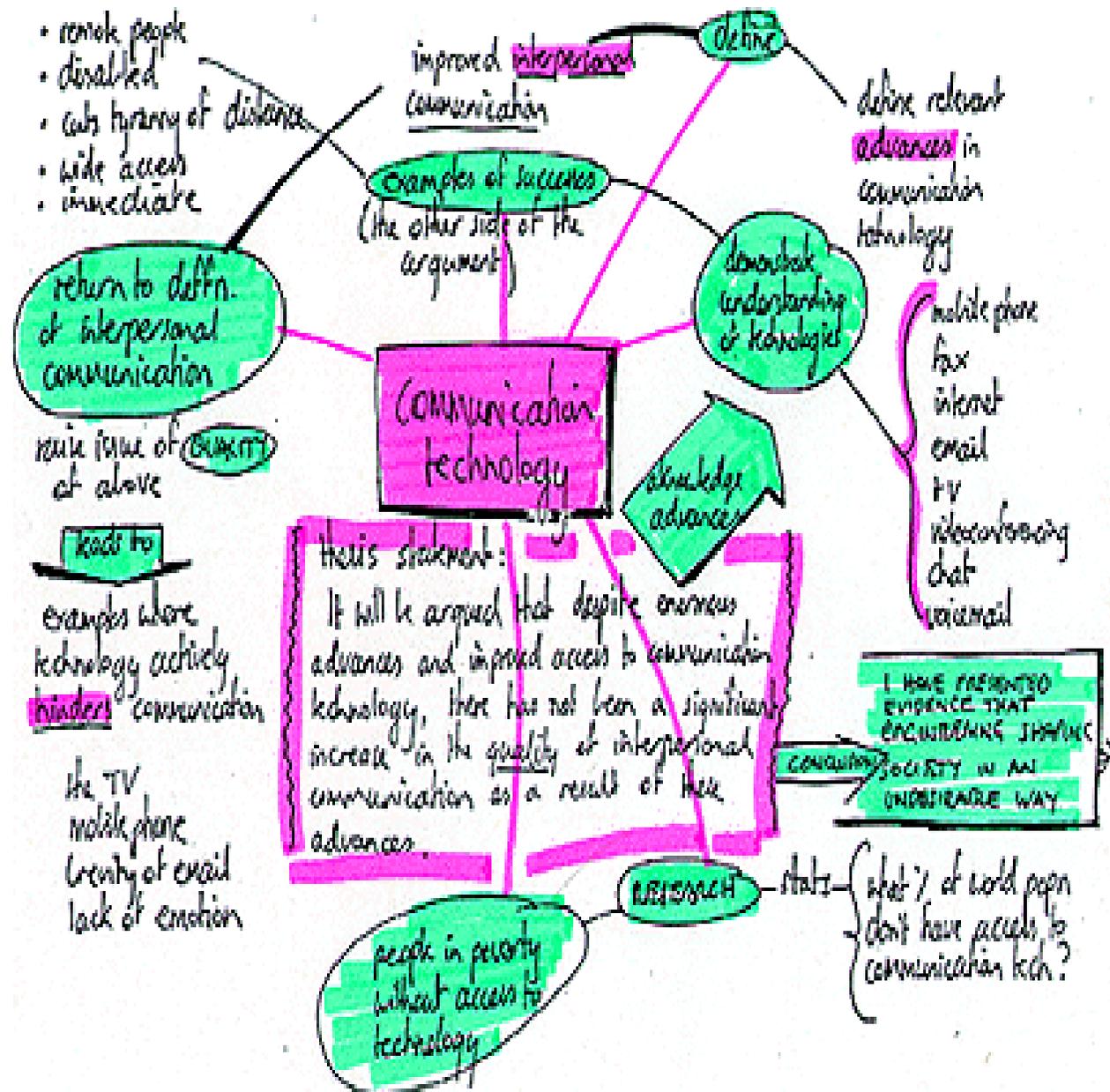
Sample Lecture Mind Map

This mind map was produced from standard lecture notes so that a student could clarify the key points of the lecture. The mind map was produced in the first review after the lecture and was added to throughout the term. It was then used for exam preparation.



Sample Essay Mind Map

This mind map was used to plan a critical essay in engineering. It doesn't use capitals or include items such as assessment criteria but it does show a thorough outline of possible approaches the student could take.



How to start

Look for relationships

Use lines, colours, arrows, branches or some other way of showing connections between the ideas generated on your mind map. These relationships may be important in your understanding of new information or in constructing a structured essay plan. By personalising the map with your own symbols and designs you will be constructing visual and meaningful relationships between ideas which will assist in your recall and understanding.

Draw quickly on unlined paper without pausing, judging or editing

All of these things promote linear thinking and the idea of mind mapping is to think creatively and in a non-linear manner.

There will be plenty of time for modifying the information later on but at this stage it is important to get every possibility into the mind map. Sometimes it is one of those obscure possibilities that may become the key to your knowledge of a topic.

Write down key ideas

Some students find that using capital letters encourages them to get down only the key points. Capitals are also easier to read in a diagram. You may, however, wish to write down some explanatory notes in lower case. Some students do this when they revisit the mind map at a later date while others write in such things as assessment criteria in this way.

Put main idea in the centre

Most students find it useful to turn their page on the side and do a mind map in "landscape" style. With the main idea or topic in the middle of the page this gives the maximum space for other ideas to radiate out from the centre.

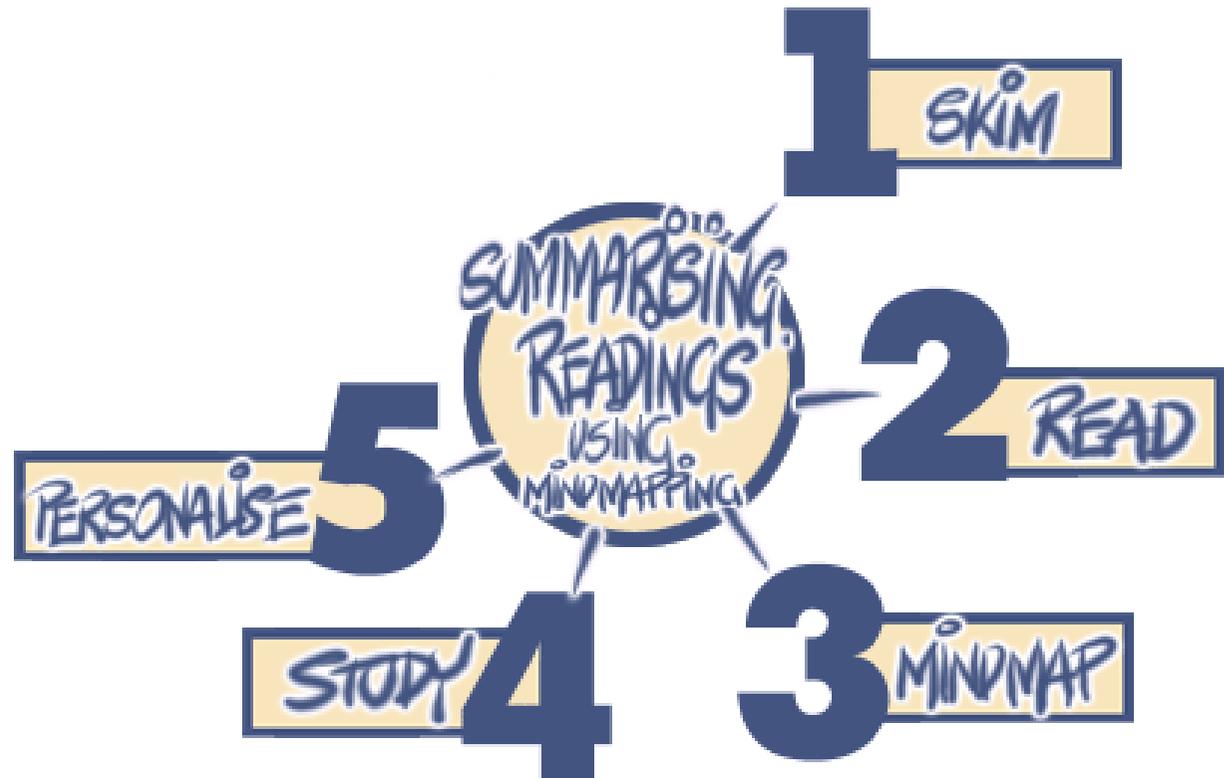
Leave lots of space

Some of the most useful mind maps are those which are added to over a period of time. After the initial drawing of the mind map you may wish to highlight things, add information or add questions for the duration of a subject right up until exam time. For this reason it is a good idea to leave lots of space.

Summarising Readings

Mind mapping can help you understand and remember the important issues in your readings.

We suggest you follow **5 steps** in creating mind maps which summarise your readings.



1. Skim

Firstly, read the abstract, introduction, conclusion, key headings or chapter headings. When skimming through the text observe any diagrams, pictures or graphs. This gives you an overview of what you are about to read, puts it in context and may already give you some clues as to where the most relevant parts are located.

2. Read

Read the article in one sitting (or in sections/chapters if it is a whole book) and go over any parts you are not quite sure of.

3. Mind Map

It is important to do the mind map from memory at this stage so don't consult the article or any other source of information.

4. Study

The mind map you have just done is very valuable: it will show both areas you have understood and also areas you are not sure of. Study your mind map to discover the gaps in your knowledge and refer back to the source material to fill them in.

5. Personalise

Using different colours or symbols, add your own comments and questions to the mind map. It is in this personalising stage where your mind map really starts to help you with your learning.

The trick now is to address all those questions you have raised and to keep returning to your mind map with the answers!

Essay Preparation

Mind maps can help you in the early stages of your essay by summarising your research and providing you with a picture of all aspects of the question. You can then move from your non-linear mind map to a more structured essay plan.

Housekeeping

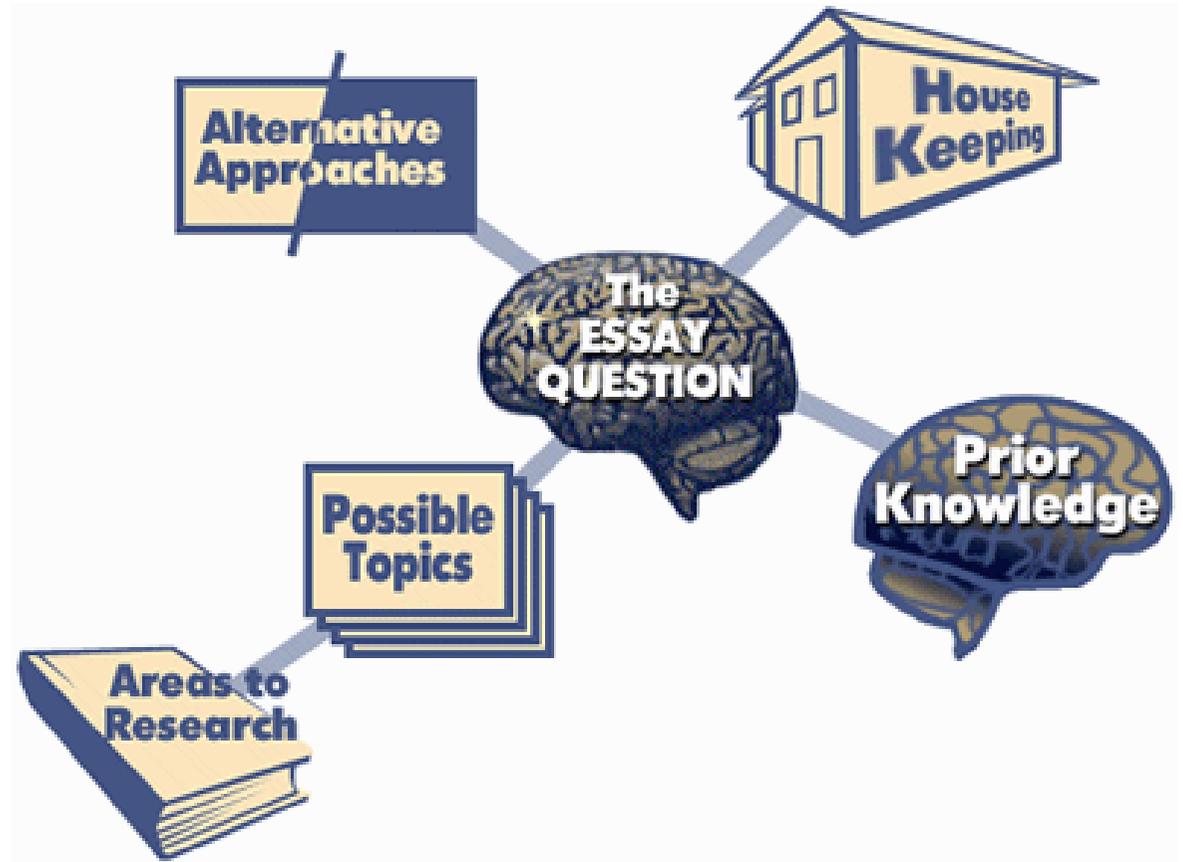
It is often useful to put down on the mind map various "housekeeping" details such as:

- assessment criteria and weighting
- due date
- timeline
- any other requirements

Prior knowledge

You should always put down on your mind map all that you already know about the essay question.

This knowledge may have come from personal experience, lectures, readings or other sources. You may be surprised as to how this part of the mind map branches out in lots of directions!



Possible topics to be covered

Most essays will involve the possibility of tackling a number of topics within the question. Put all of these possible topics down. You may not have the time or length of essay to tackle all of them but getting them down and looking for connections, relevance and priorities is a good start.

Areas to research

The areas to research will be suggested by the possible topics and from here your mind map may lead you on to various sources of information you will need to pursue. Often you will have to choose carefully which areas will be the most productive and relevant to research.

Alternative approaches

One of the powerful things about mind mapping is that it is a tool which encourages creative thinking and often creative solutions to problems. Always look at alternative ways of approaching essay questions and always be prepared to be a critical researcher and writer who is prepared to go outside the normal boundaries!

These hints on how to construct a mind map have been adapted from the work of Tony Buzan and others who have promoted mind mapping as a learning and thinking tool. For a full explanation of the mind mapping technique see Buzan, T. (1991). *The mind map book*. New York: Penguin.
<http://www.jcu.edu.au/studying/services/studyskills/mindmap/index.html>