

# Mind Mapping Your Research Plans and Results

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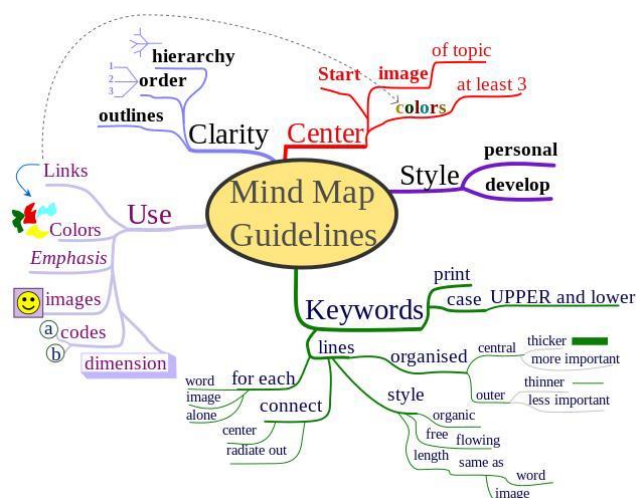
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The concept of “mind mapping” – visually outlining information and thought processes – might seem relatively new, but it is a perfect fit for the way the typical genealogist’s mind operates. While most mind mapping programs, and even the tried and true pen and paper method, are used for brainstorming and idea generation, mind mapping can also be used to plot out research and even help break down those pesky brick walls.

## Mind Mapping – A Brief Introduction

The concept of mind mapping is really not new; we just have new online tools available that help facilitate the process. Some researchers in the field of “visual thinking” contend that mind mapping can trace its origins back as far as Porphyry of Tyros, a 3<sup>rd</sup> century philosopher. Credit for the modern term “mind map” is given to Tony Buzan, a popular British psychologist who promoted its use to diagram key words and concepts:



Very often, when attempting to make a proof in our genealogy research, it helps to organize information visually. Doing so allow us to look at not just the resources and actions required during the research, but also how each item connects to the other. Pieces of evidence of can have a “fit” with other evidence, or for that matter, have no “fit” at all. Mind mapping allows you to not just map possible pathways to a solution, but also note the “dead ends” to you don’t keep going down those paths.

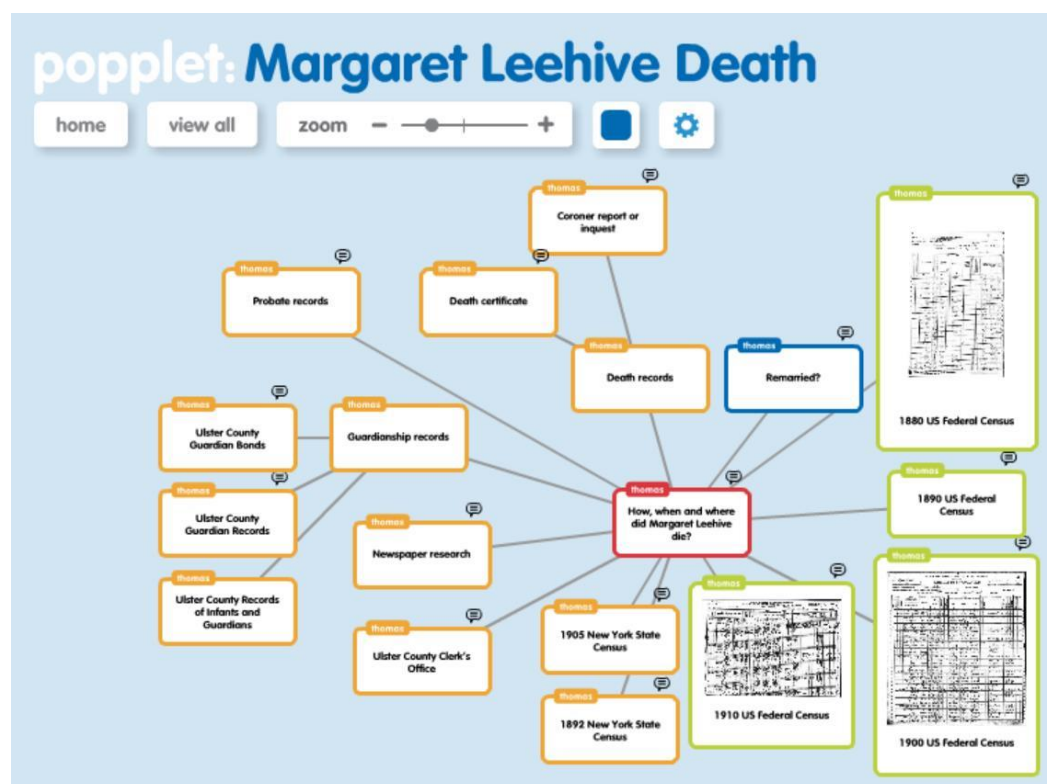
## How Mind Mapping for Genealogy Works

Here are some basic concepts to understand before you start using mind mapping software or even the paper and pen method:

- **Start with a concept or proof question in the center.** This is called the **Central Idea**. Examples include “Who was \_\_\_\_\_?” which is rather general or a more narrow focus might be “Where was \_\_\_\_\_ born?”
- **Consider using an image.** Some mind mappers like using an image of an ancestor or a record as the Central Idea for inspiration.
- **Colors count.** Initially, start with just black lines and connectors on a white background. As you add more concepts and ideas, consider color coding them such as blue for birth information, green for marriage information, red for death information, etc. Over time try to use colors in a consistent manner.
- **Connect ideas.** Branch out from your Central Idea to **First Level Ideas** which then branch to **Second Level Ideas**. This helps organize thoughts, questions and concepts.
- **Don’t go too deep.** Most mind maps don’t go beyond a Second Level Idea.
- **Use one word or short phrases per line.** When adding concepts and data, distill the idea down to its root word or words. No compound or long sentences.

## A Sample Mind Mapped Genealogy Research Proof

Determine the death circumstances (how, when, where) for Margaret Leehive, born 1867 in England. Margaret appears as a child in the 1880 US Federal Census living with her father John Leehive in Rosendale, Ulster County, New York. By 1900 there seems to be no record of Margaret. Several Slattery children are shown in the 1900 US Federal Census living with a Michael Leehive, brother of Margaret.



## Mind Mapping Platforms

Here are a variety of free and paid mind mapping programs in various platform formats including web-based, software, apps and cloud-based.

- **bubbl.us** (<http://bubbl.us>) is the oldest web-based mind mapping program around. Can embed mindmaps in blog posts and webpages; export to XML, HTML, PND or JPY format. Free accounts limited to 3 mindmaps; premium accounts start at \$6/month or \$59/year.
- **Coggle** (<http://coggle.it>) is a free mind mapping program which requires a Google account to use. Download finished maps in PDF or PNG formats.
- **Mindmeister** (<http://www.mindmeister.com>) is a cloud-based, online mind mapping tool which also offers mobile access. Collaboration in real time and live chat are also available. Pricing starts at \$4.99 per month.
- **Mindmup** (<http://www.mindmup.com>) is a free, opensource, online mindmapping canvas that stores data in the cloud and integrates with Google Drive. Mindmaps limited to 100k in size; free mindmaps only stored for six months. Mindmup Gold is premium service available for \$25/year.
- **Popplet** (<http://popplet.com>) is a free mind mapping tool that works form the view of curating ideas and concepts into a visual map. Allows uploading of text, videos, images and more. An ios app is also available for mobile access.
- **Scapple** (<http://literatureandlatte.com/scapple.php>) is a mind mapping application for Mac from the makers of Scrivener. While geared towards writers, Scapple provides a space for mapping out thoughts in a “free way,” without conforming to a single idea or goal. Free trial and costs \$14.99.
- **Spider Scribe** (<http://www.spiderscribe.net>) is an online mind mapping and brainstorming platform for organizing ideas using notes, files and even calendar entries. Free for personal accounts.
- **XMind** (<http://www.xmind.net>) is a free, open source, mind mapping program with a paid version offering additional export and presentation features.

## Best Practices for Mind Mapping

Here are some guidelines to use when employing mind mapping for genealogical research and analysis:

- **Mind mapping takes time.** This is not a “quick sketch on a napkin.” You are translating many points of information into a visual map and a thought process.
- **Be messy.** Mind mapping is not just note taking or making an outline. Mind mapping is not linear or orderly.
- **Big in the center.** Start with an overarching idea or concept or proof such as “Who was \_\_\_\_\_?” or “When was \_\_\_\_\_ born?”

- **Start simple.** Don't aim for an elaborate mind map that needs its own key or glossary.
- **Practice.** It will take time to develop a rhythm and your own style of mind mapping. Within a few weeks your maps will be consistent in terms of formatting and usefulness.
- **Use color.** Colors can be used in connecting lines, boxes, shapes or even text. Some mind mappers use the color red to convey stopping points and green to convey solutions.
- **Make your own template.** Once you've found your "groove" and created a few maps, create a template to use for each new map.

If you take one concept away from this presentation it should be this: focus on the process of mind mapping and not on all the lingo or the formatting. You should be inspired to go out and creatively "sketch" out a research strategy using some or all of the tools and methods outlined above.

Most important is this: it is your research and your process. If mind mapping doesn't work for you then try other methods of analyzing your research. And if you do take up mind mapping, use the features that help, not hinder your research analysis.

## Resource List

### Resources

- **24 Essential Mindmapping and Brainstorming Tools**  
<http://mashable.com/2013/09/25/mind-mapping-tools/>
- **How to Use Mind Maps to Unleash Your Brain's Creativity and Potential**  
<http://lifehacker.com/how-to-use-mind-maps-to-unleash-your-brains-creativity-1348869811>
- **List of concept- and mind-mapping software**  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_concept-\\_and\\_mind-mapping\\_software](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_concept-_and_mind-mapping_software)
- **The Mind Mapping Show**  
<http://mindmappingshow.com>
- **What Is A Mind Map?**  
<http://www.tonybuzan.com/about/mind-mapping/>

### Programs

- **bubbl.us**  
<http://bubbl.us>
- **Coggle**  
<http://coggle.it>
- **Mindmeister**  
<http://www.mindmeister.com>
- **Mindmup**  
<http://www.mindmup.com>
- **Popplet**  
<http://popplet.com>
- **Scapple**  
<http://literatureandlatte.com/scapple.php>
- **Spider Scribe**  
<http://www.spiderscribe.net>
- **XMind**  
<http://www.xmind.net>