Idea Mapping

Mapping isn't quite the same as outlining. When outlining, you establish an order of points as you would like them to appear in your paper.

When mapping, there is no set order. Supporting details can be added in as you think of them, and they can be connected to more than one overarching idea.

Most importantly, though, a map is a visual that allows you to explore ideas without worrying about order or rank. As the sample map below shows, a map centers around the main point with details branching out from the center.

The Basics

Just as the name "mapping" implies, what you create isn't a set of straight lines. It's not a course from A to B. Your ideas are the big cities and towns, connected by highways, interstates, and back roads. Each of these, in turn, pass through other "cities" on the way. You can lay out the map without plotting the course.

Points can be connected in more than one way. Point G may be directly related to points B and E. Point B may be related to points J and C as well as G. (see sample map below).

Maps are visual. They are meant to help you see where you are, where you've been, and where you could go next. It also helps you to see everything at once, and notice what stands out the most (for example, the "city" with the most "highways" that lead to it).
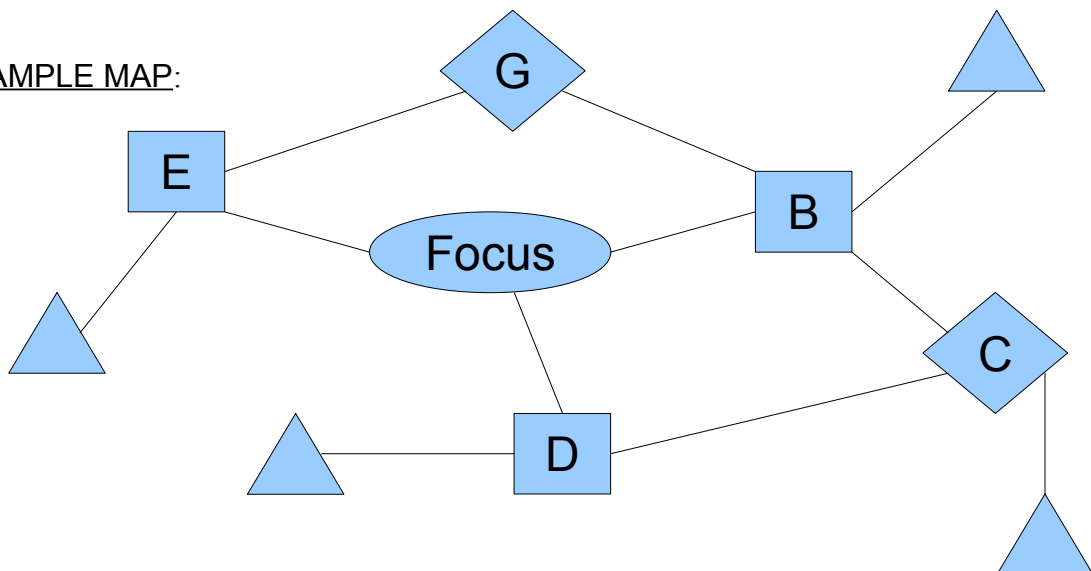
Tips for Mapping

Don't limit yourself. If an idea doesn't connect to your map, then write it off to the side; it may connect later.

Draw connecting lines wherever there is a link between ideas. In order not to clutter your map too much, try using different types of lines for different types of connections – solid lines from main ideas to details and dotted lines for connections between points, for example.

Try using different methods for identifying each idea. For example, use circles for big ideas, and squares for supporting points, and triangles for specific details.

If you're so inclined, use highlighters or markers on your map (a different color for each different type of line, idea, or point).

A SAMPLE MAP:

Mary Lieske