EFFECTIVE MIND MAPS

Type of map: Personal organizer

Software used to create: MindManager

Source: BiggerPlate.com

URL: http://www.biggerplate.com/viewmap.asp?id=249&p=index.asp

Overview

This map is designed to organize your personal and professional information into a single mind map. It condenses an incredible amount of information in a compact format, and does so with an impressive level of clarity. There is much to like about this mind map, which we will explore in detail in this report.

Please use the colorful numbered call-outs to follow along as we deconstruct this excellent planning map.
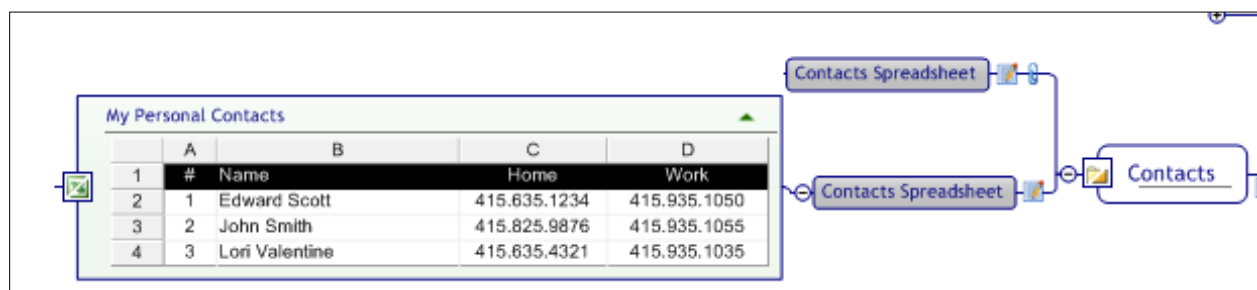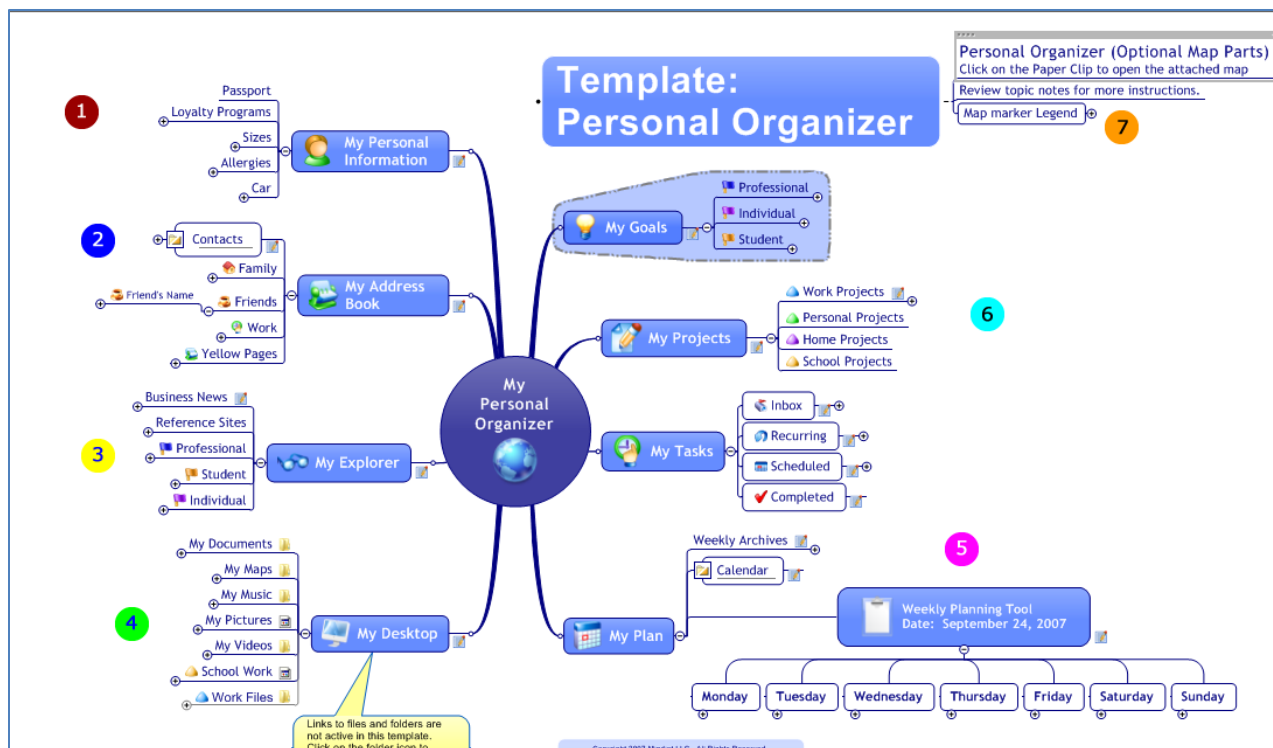
1 My Personal Information

This is an excellent place to capture all of the key information that you only need occasionally but is critically important when you do need it – things like your automobile's insurance policy number, the logins for your airline and hotel loyalty programs, and more.

I would add a link to a sub-map that contains a packing list for business trips. This is one of those lists that I find essential when packing, but which I have systematically neglected to organize as a map template.

Keep in mind that if you only occasionally need this information, you can easily collapse this branch of the mind map so it doesn't create needless visual clutter.

2 My address book

What's intriguing about this part of the mind map isn't the fact that the author has added a contacts directory, but it's the way in which they did it – by leveraging MindManager's ability to create small ranges of cells as "mini-spreadsheets" that can be attached to any topic in the map. Expanding the "contacts" sub-topic exposes this range of cells:


As you can see, this isn't a complicated spreadsheet – just a few columns for the person's name, work and home phone numbers. If your needs are fairly simple and the number of contacts you want to track is fairly limited, this may be a viable way to include this information in your personal organizer map.

My gut feeling, however, is that you're going to want to track additional data, such as e-mail and website addresses, job titles and more – which may not lend itself to this type of "ad hoc" spreadsheet.

Curiously, however, using the "find" command doesn't locate this record in the map. But an Outlook Contact in this same section of the map (see below) does show up:
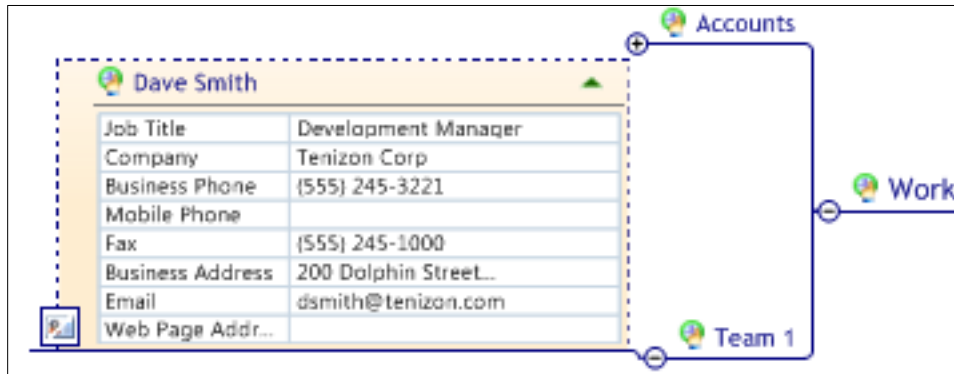
Lesson to be learned here: Insert key contacts into this personal organizer map by importing them from Microsoft Outlook – especially if you want to be able to find them again!

3 My Explorer

This part of the personal organizer map is your window to the world – the place you go within your mind map to learn about new trends and developments in your key areas of interest.

It makes very nice use of MindManager's news feed map part to pull in news from key business news websites, and displays the RSS feeds in an attractive format. You can customize these sources to track literally any news or blog feeds, which is quite useful. What's more, you can drag and drop any topic to another location within your map, if a news item should become the basis for a work task, for example.
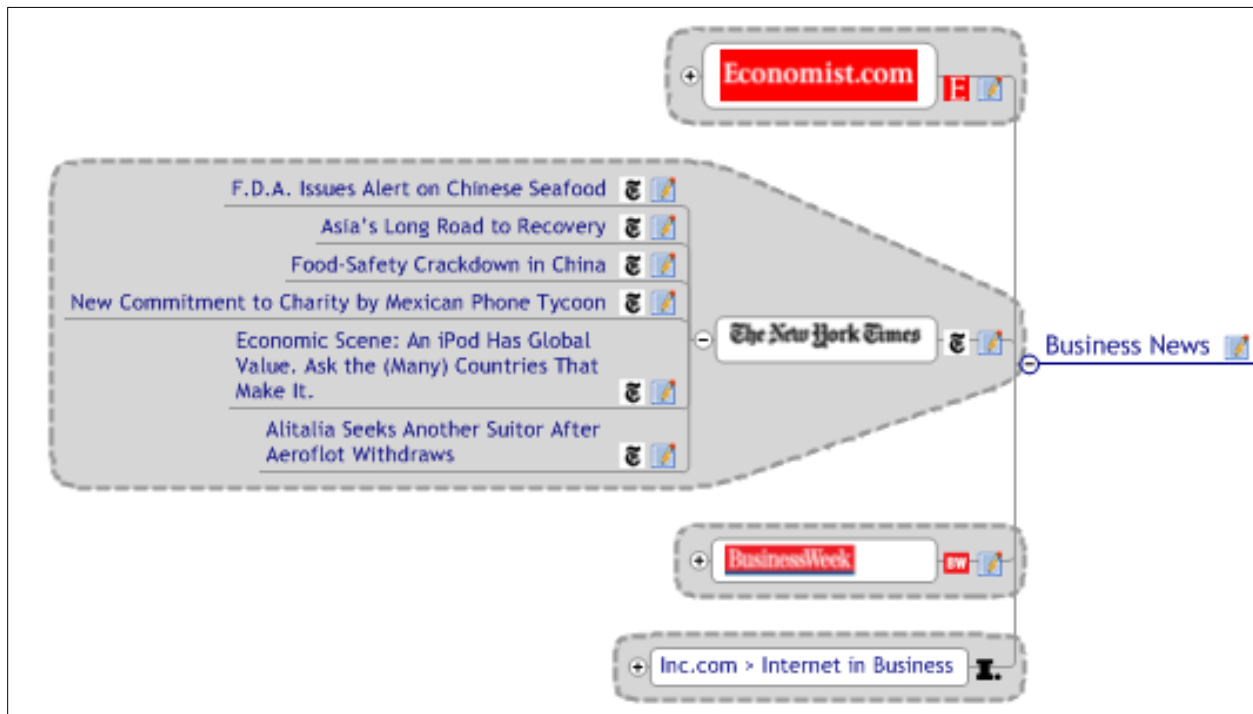
The news feed Map Part may be one of the least understood and least used – yet most valuable – tools that Mindjet provides in MindManager. It can be used to track so many different types of structured information. If the data you need to track is available in the form of an RSS feed, then chances are you can integrate it into a map using this tool!

The template we're looking at has these RSS feeds set to automatically refresh with the latest feed data, which is quite helpful. This saves you from having to manually update these feeds. Still, if you want to manually control feed updates, you can do so via a right-click command in MindManager 8. You also have the option of "disconnecting" the feed and converting the data you've captured into static topics. This may be useful if you're conducting online research and want to keep a permanent record of your findings. If you don't do this, chances are that the headline you were interested in will scroll off of the feed fairly quickly.

This section of the map can also be customized with external hyperlinks to reference sources (such as an online dictionary and thesaurus), industry trade magazines, professional associations and more.

4 **My Desktop**

One of the other types of map "smart parts" that MindManager 8 ships with is the File Explorer. This enables you to create shortcuts within your map to specific folders, or to all of the files within that folder.
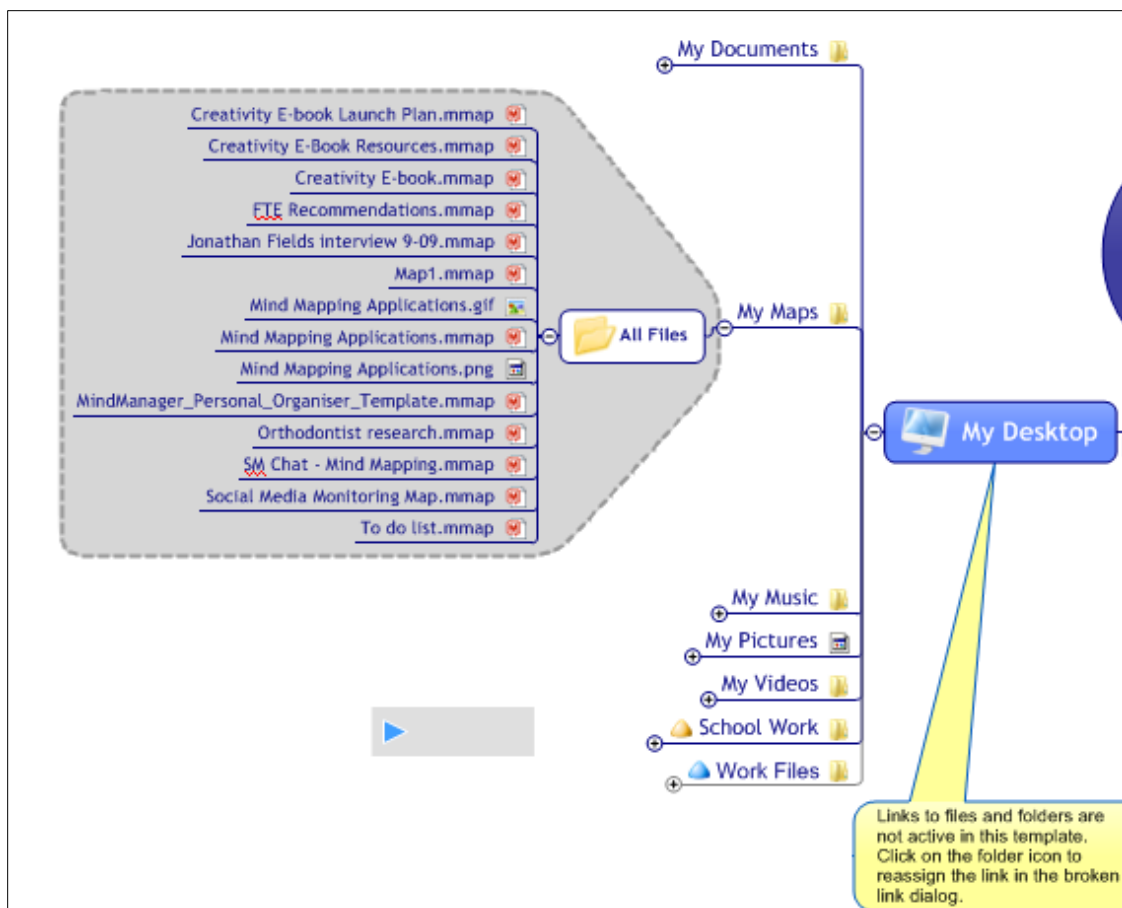
Note how the author of this personal organizer map has created separate sub-topics based on their specific areas of interest – work files, school work, etc. Each one leads to a different folder and file view. Because this map is a downloadable template, all of these folder links are broken, but you can easily update them (as I have done with the "My Maps" folder view) by right clicking on the folder icon to the right of the topic name and selecting the "edit hyperlink" command.

Why add such folder and file views to your personal organizer map? In a word, time. You can access these files faster by clicking on them in your mind map than it would take you to open an Explorer (or Finder) window and then drill down through your hierarchy of folders to find that specific file. Like the RSS feeds, these "smart parts" are set to automatically refresh the folder and file views – so if you worked on a project and added several more files to that folder, they will be reflected in your mind map. Nice!

When you're not using your files and folders, remember to collapse the "My Desktop" branch so that it helps you to keep visual clutter to a minimum. Still, it's nice to know that all of your key files and folders are just a few clicks away, within your master organizer map, isn't it?

5 Weekly Calendar

I like the way this part of the mind map is organized in a horizontal format. Expanding this branch of the personal organizer map gives us this view:
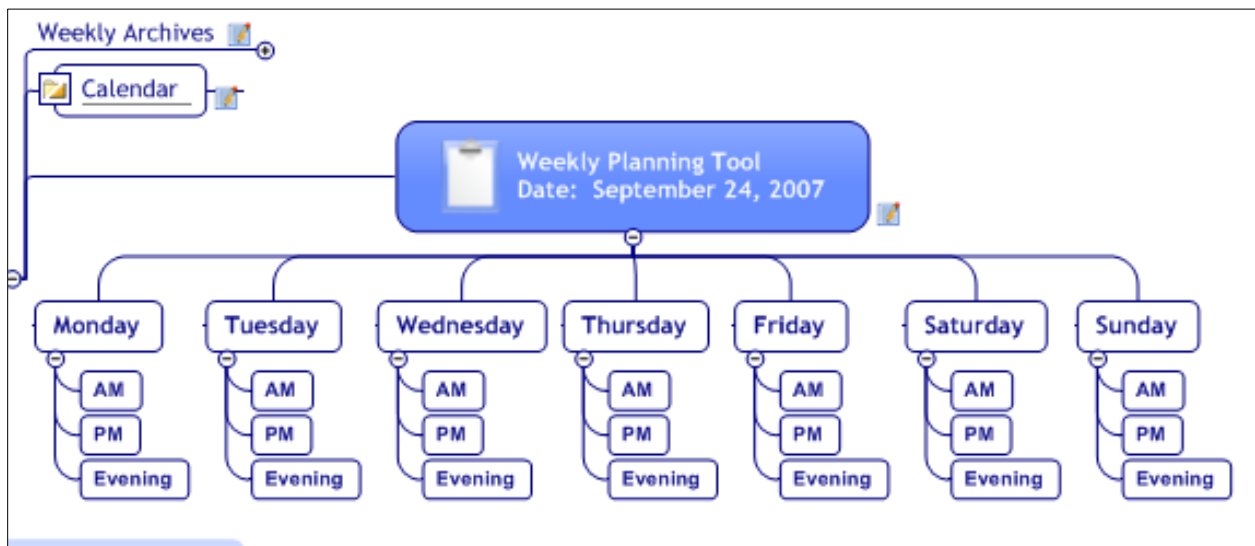

Note how it gives you a "week at a glance" view of your key activities. What goes here? Upcoming appointments, as well as key projects where you need to dedicate large blocks of time to make progress on them. Note the "weekly archives" topic at the top right. It contains sub-topics for each month of the year, and makes it possible to move old versions of this weekly

planning tool out of view, but still keep them available – just a few mouse clicks away – if for some reason you need to review what you did during a specific week.

The "calendar" topic just below it links to the calendar folder of your PC's Microsoft Outlook – very convenient. Thanks to strong task, contact and e-mail integration between Outlook and MindManager, it's possible to "live" in only these two productivity applications for most of your work day.

Although this personal organizer map doesn't focus on e-mail integration, that's something that I have used to really boost my productivity. You can literally "send" individual e-mails from Outlook to the current branch of your open MindManager map. And, since that's where a growing percentage of the tasks, knowledge and other important information we "touch" in a typical work day resides, it makes sense that there's a streamlined way to pull it into MindManager for further interpretation, annotation and use. Great stuff!

6 Goals, Projects & Tasks
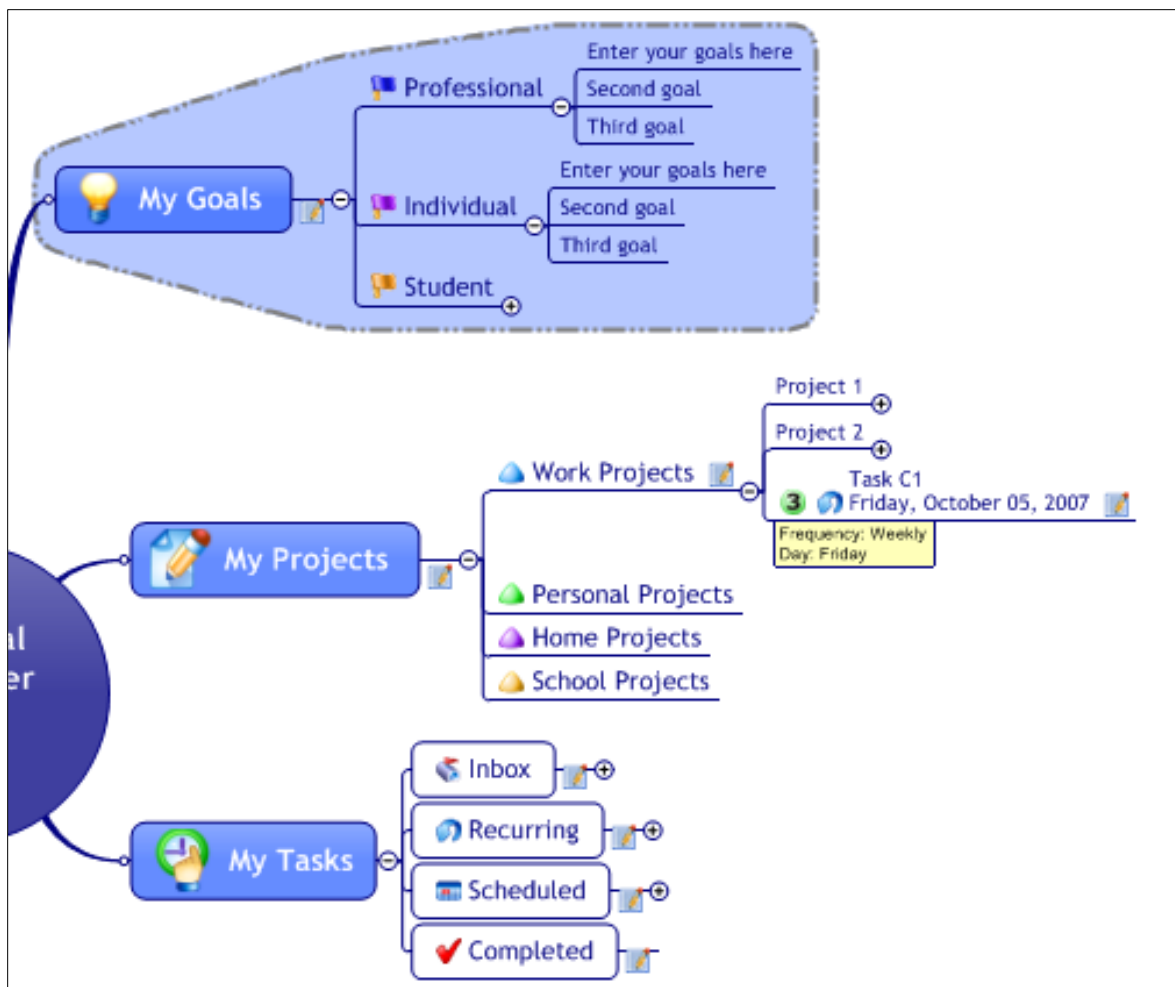
This is where the rubber meets the road in the personal organizer map. From top to bottom on the right-hand side of this mind map, we can see how items start out at the highest level as goals, and then get translated and expanded into projects, tasks and weekly plan items. I like the way the author has organized this part of the planning map, because you can clearly see the progression from high-level focal points to specific actions that will help you to achieve them.

Note how the goals and projects are subdivided into life roles: professional, individual and student. You can easily customize them to meet your needs. Also note how the author has placed a border around "my goals," which draws more attention to them and attests to their primary importance as the drivers of our lives. Nicely done!

7 Map Legend

One of the problems with large, complex mind maps is understanding what they mean. To make this process easier for us mere mortals, most mind mapping software now includes icons or symbols that enable us to add context and meaning to our visual maps. But, unfortunately, they have introduced their own special problem: The author of a mind map may know what each icon and symbol means – because they created it – but anyone else looking at it is likely to go, "Huh??!!"

That's why it's so important to include a legend in most of your mind maps. Like the "legend" in a geographical map explains the symbols and conventions used to represent different types of landforms and landmarks in the real world, a map legend provides anyone who is viewing the map with a valuable guide to interpreting its meaning. The legend in this personal organizer map is particularly well done, if a little too detailed (right).

In total, this legend describes over 30 types of icons or symbols utilized in this personal organizer map. Can anyone digest this much data? Probably not. Psychologists tell us that the average person can retain an average of 7 items in their mind at one time, plus or minus one or two. For best results, we should probably limit our use of icons and symbols accordingly.
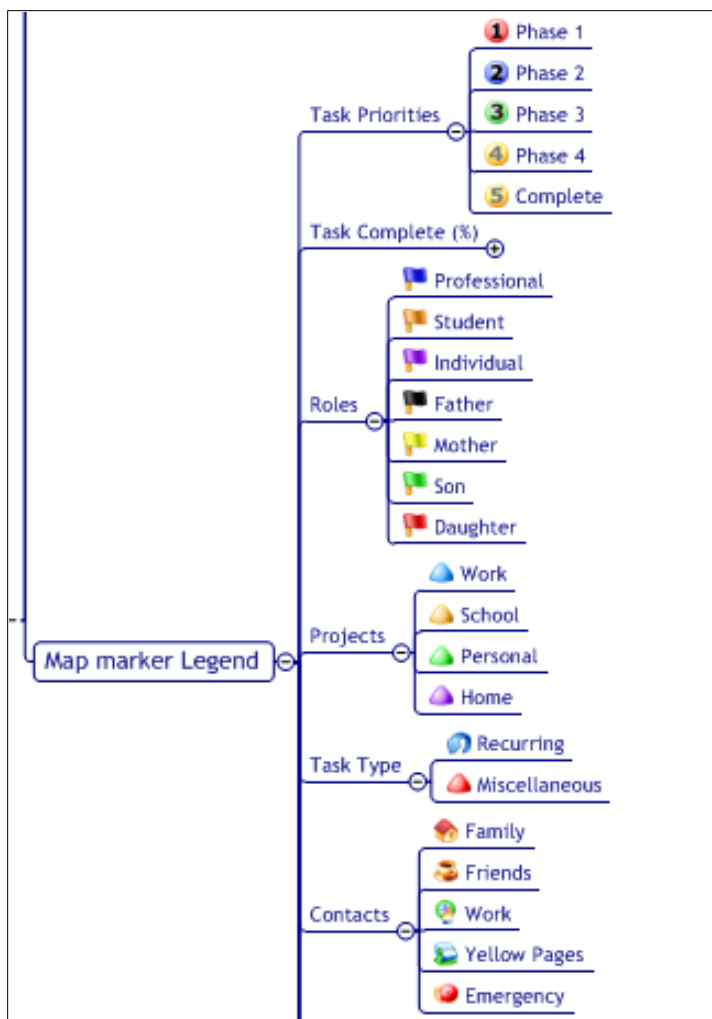
Ask yourself:

- Does this icon or symbol add clarity or meaning to this map? If not, don't use it. Employ a topic note, subtopic or other means to convey the same meaning.
- Will this icon be used to filter the map's contents? If not, is it really an essential part of the map?

One other recommended improvement – and I realize that we're limited by the libraries of icons that the software developers provide – it would be nice if the color of an icon provided an additional level of meaning. Say, for example, anything that is work-related would be blue, everything that pertains to my home life role would be green, etc. Do you see what I'm driving at? Shapes help us to visually classify items, but color could also be a useful visual filtering tool.

Questions?

Please contact Chuck Frey at chuck@innovationtools.com.

Please visit the Mind Mapping Software Blog for all of the latest news, trends and resources related to visual mapping.

You can also follow Chuck Frey on Twitter for even more insights and ideas.