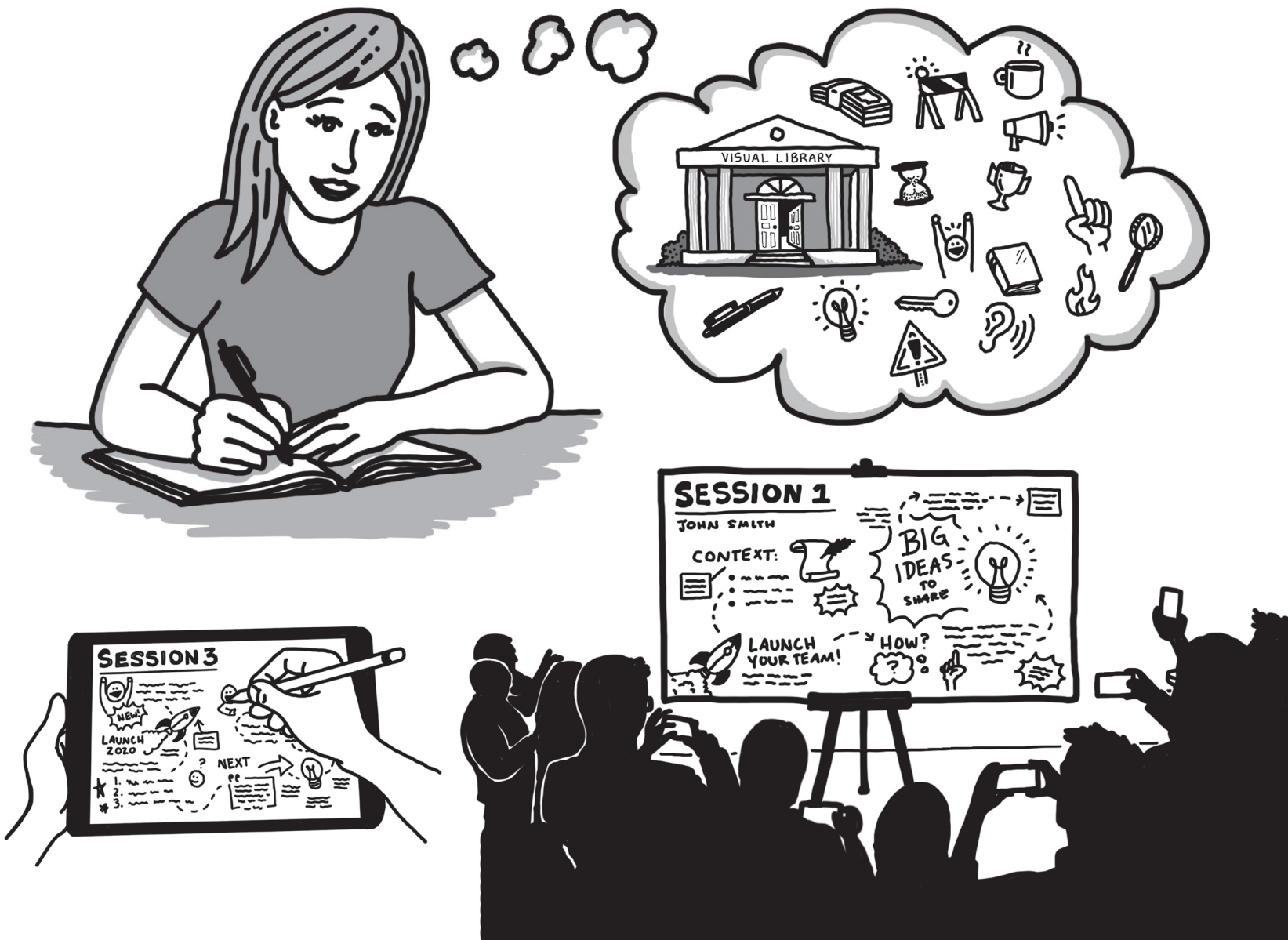


Improve information retention by **up to six times!**

THE ART OF VISUAL NOTETAKING

An interactive guide to visual
communication and sketchnoting



EMILY MILLS



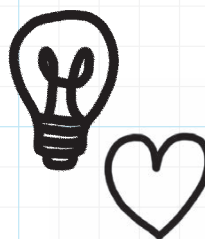
THE ART OF VISUAL NOTETAKING



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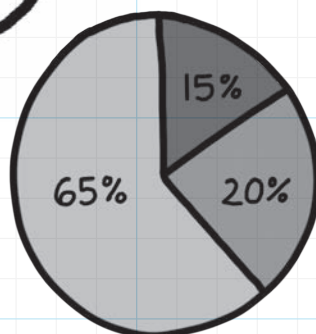
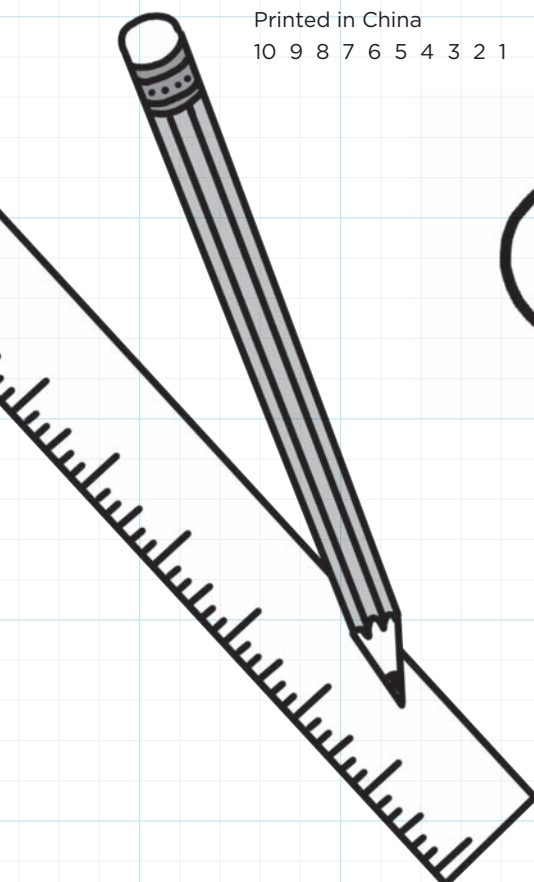
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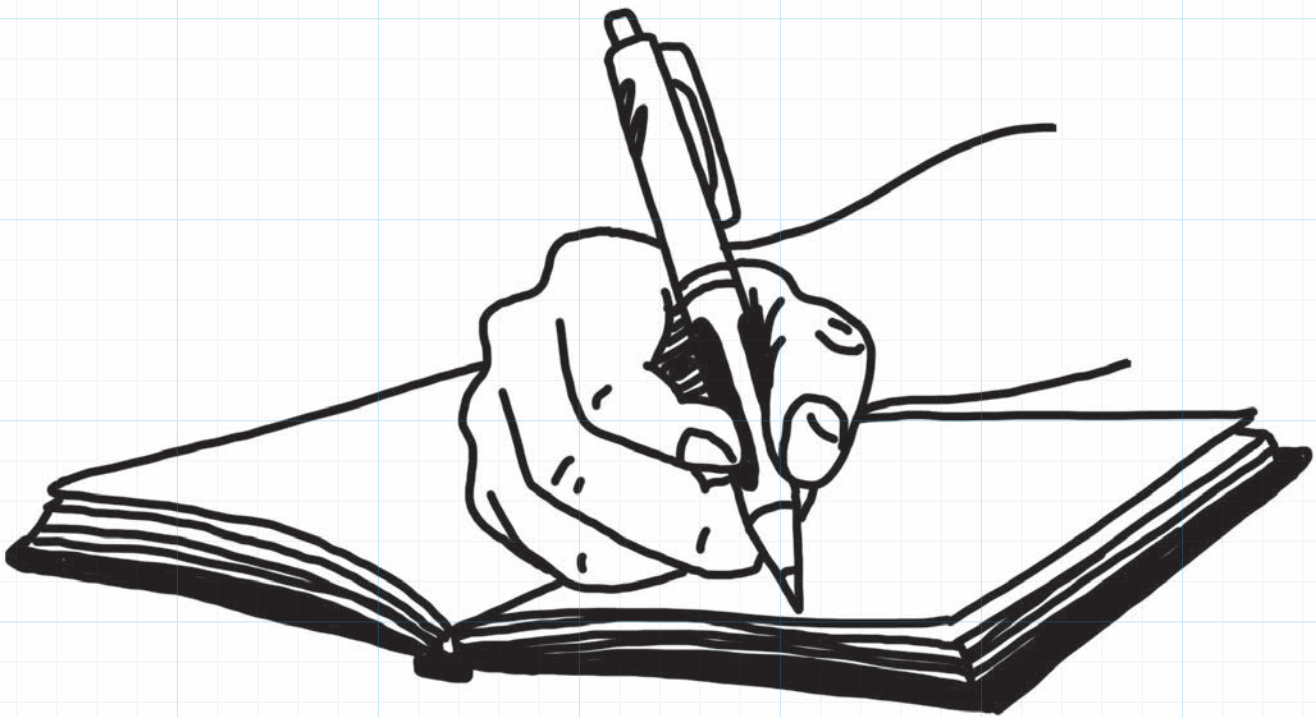
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THE ART OF VISUAL NOTETAKING



EMILY MILLS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....	6
How to Use This Book.....	7

THE BASICS: WHAT ARE VISUAL NOTES?.....	8
Why Are Visual Notes Important?	13
Who Can Take Visual Notes?.....	15
Types of Visual Notes?	16
How Can I Use Visual Notes?	18

TOOLS: THE VISUAL NOTETAKING ARSENAL OF SKILLS.....	19
Surfaces	19
Writing and Drawing Tools.....	24
Miscellaneous Supplies	26
Considerations When Choosing Your Tools	28
Mindset	28

PREP WORK: BEFORE YOU BEGIN.....	29
----------------------------------	----

LISTENING.....	30
Listening Cues	32

WRITING.....	34
Print	34
Cursive.....	36
Block Letters	37
Serif Letters	38
Embellishments	39

HIERARCHY & COMPOSITION.....	44
------------------------------	----

DRAWING.....	48
The Basics	49
Imagination and Association	50
Leveling Up.....	51
Figures	52
Hands	55
Cartoon-Style Faces	58
Putting It All Together	67

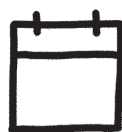
VISUAL DIRECTION.....	70
Containers	70
Numbers	72
Arrows	73

FINDING INFORMATION FAST.....	76
Icons	76
Indexing	78

VISUALIZING INFORMATION IN DIAGRAMS.....	80
--	----

YOUR VISUAL LIBRARY.....	84
--------------------------	----

VISUAL METAPHORS.....	86
-----------------------	----



HEADERS..... 90

How to Create a Header..... 92

LAYOUTS..... 96

Types of Layouts..... 96

Choosing the Best Layout..... 97

Time Blocking..... 99

REFINING..... 104

What to Refine..... 105

Spelling Issues..... 106

Guiding Shapes..... 109

Shadows..... 110

Color..... 112

WHAT MAKES VISUAL NOTES "GOOD?"..... 115

Looking "Good"..... 116

SHARING YOUR VISUAL NOTES..... 118

Capturing the Best Image..... 119

The Value of Sharing..... 121

When Should You Share?..... 122

IMPROVING YOUR CRAFT: TRACK YOUR TRENDS..... 124

Tips for Left-Handed People..... 125

PROFESSIONAL & EDUCATIONAL VISUAL NOTETAKING..... 126

ABOUT THE AUTHOR..... 128



INTRODUCTION

I stumbled into the world of visual notetaking quite by accident.

It all began with whiteboards. I drew cartoons on my mom's office whiteboard, and the teachers and staff at the school loved coming by to see my comics. I continued that tradition throughout college and even after I joined the workforce and had an office of my own.

One day a former coworker emailed me out of the blue. He worked at a film studio that had agreed to create a voiceover whiteboard video for a client—only they didn't have anyone on staff who could draw. He remembered those whiteboard drawings in my office and asked me to come in and help. The whiteboard video project was one of the most fun projects I had ever worked on, and it opened my eyes to the possibilities of using illustration to help tell a story, as well as convey complicated information.

Not long after, a company called **The Sketch Effect** saw my work and hired me as an artist in their network. Years later, I'm still here in the world of visual notes, learning and growing as much as I can. I continue to work professionally, attend conferences and trainings, and host my own workshops to teach others what I have learned.

THAT'S WHERE YOU COME IN!

You've picked up this book, so chances are high that you're interested in the idea of visualizing information and have even seen the value it provides. Whether you're taking up visual notetaking as a hobby or perhaps want to become a professional notetaker, I can't wait to help you on your journey to create compelling, memorable, and shareable notes! The best part? Anyone can take visual notes if you can hold a pen and listen...

ARE YOU READY? LET'S GET STARTED!

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

This book is formatted just like the live workshops I teach. Visual notetaking is simple to look at (that's the whole point!), but there's a lot beneath the surface that you may not realize!

It's important to progress through this book in order. Don't jump ahead or skip any section! Visual notetaking is an additive process, and each lesson builds on the last. We'll build a strong foundation, add skills and tools, and in the end, you'll have a strong, complete framework of knowledge you can be confident in.

CUTTING CORNERS:



BUILDING SKILLS:



Each section features instruction, practical tips, and exercises to help you practice the skills you learn, along with some fun stories from my experiences along the way.

I encourage you to use an unruled journal or sketchbook for practice. Bound books keep your work contained in one place, and they're easy to transport and store. If journals aren't your style, use whatever paper you have on hand. Above all, I can't reiterate enough that you must **KEEP YOUR WORK!** It's so important to look back and see your progress as you grow. My first sketchnote was pretty bad, but I got better with practice! I'm so glad I have my old work so I can see where I've improved and how far I've come, no matter how embarrassing it might feel.

Turn the page to get started building that foundational knowledge!

THE BASICS:

WHAT ARE VISUAL NOTES?

You're probably eager to start practicing visual notes on paper, but first we have to build a foundation and learn the why and what behind visual notes. If you don't know why you're doing something, you probably can't do a very good job at it! Let's dive in.



Visual notes, also referred to as “sketchnotes,” are made for the purpose of retaining information. Visual notes are hand-rendered, visual records of information or an experience using drawings and written text.



Whoa, that was a lot! Let's break it down.

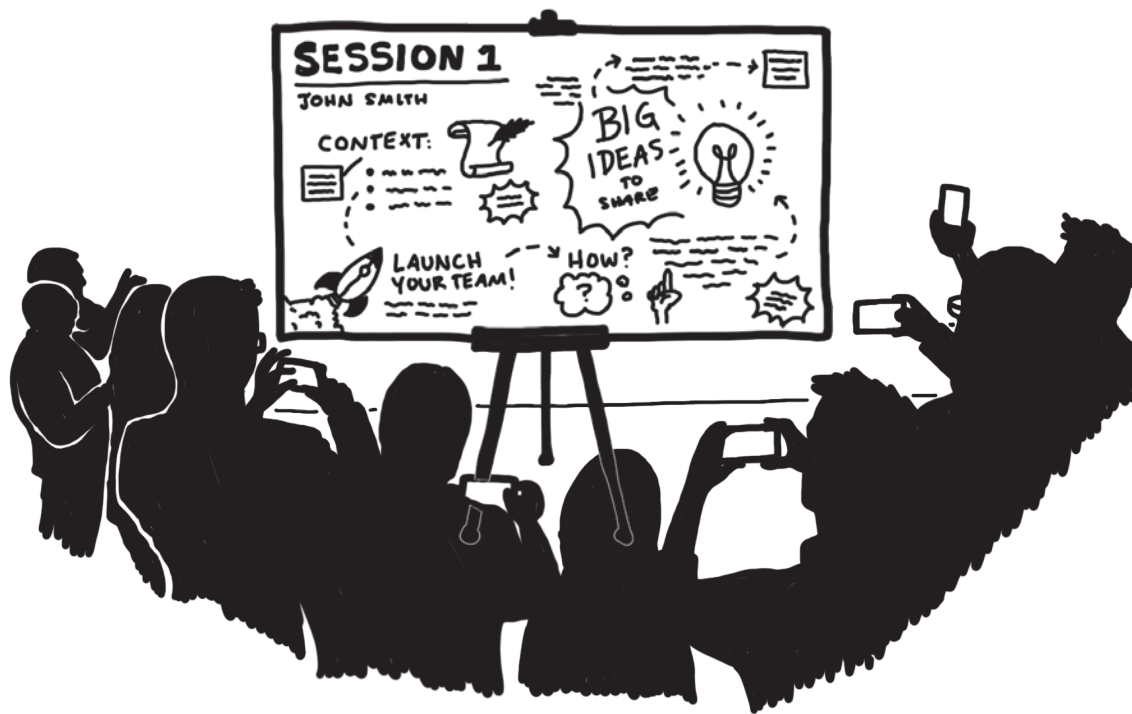
FOR THE PURPOSE OF RETAINING INFORMATION

The overall goal with visual notes is to remember the information that was shared or experienced. Information has zero value if it can't be remembered or shared! Visual notes help information retain its value over time.



HAND-RENDERED

Visual notes must be done by a human hand, whether in real time or after the fact, digital or on paper. The human element is essential for effective visual notes.



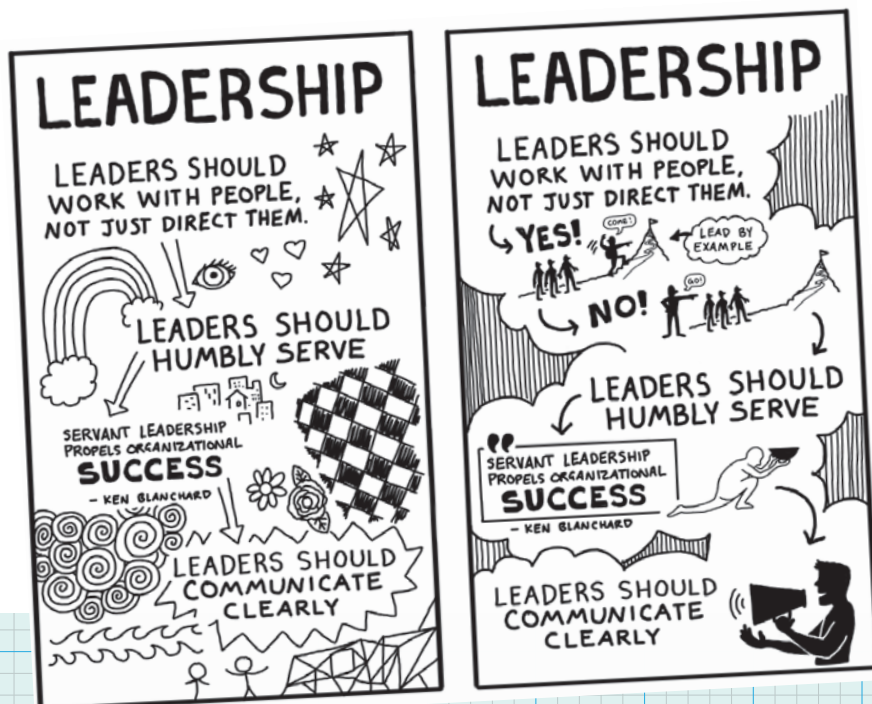
VISUAL RECORDS OF INFORMATION

Just like a photograph is a visual representation and documentation of a moment in time, visual notes are a visual representation of imparted information or an experience.

DRAWINGS & WRITTEN TEXT

This part is really important to master! With visual notes, you either create clarity or confusion. **Visual notes exist to visualize, clarify, and organize information.** The purpose of the illustrations is to help the information be understood and remembered, so the illustrations that are paired with the information should always be directly related, otherwise you will create confusion. The illustrations and information should work in tandem to create a visual understanding for better clarity. We'll get into the science behind this later.

Below is this concept in action.



It's easy to see which page of notes is more effective. When information is illustrated, it's powerful!

VISUAL NOTES ARE NOT JUST ILLUSTRATIONS

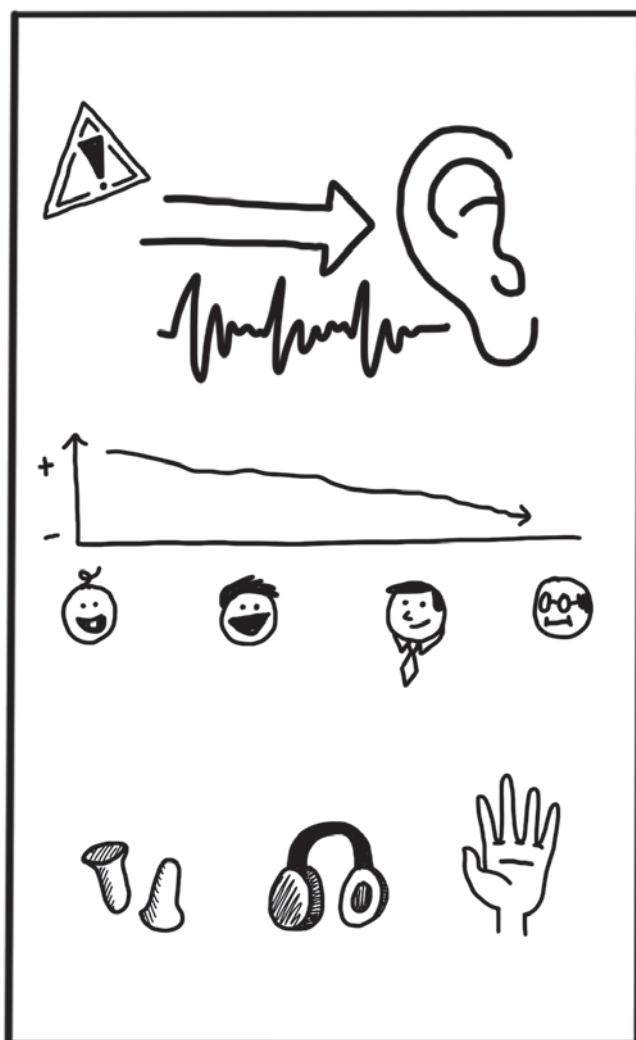
Illustration by itself is primarily form over function. Visual notes pair illustration with information to provide function over form. The driving power of visual notes lies in the information. An illustration's purpose is to visualize and highlight the information; therefore, the information must be present before the illustration can exist.



“But what if I can draw a really great picture that gets the concept across clearly?
Do I *have* to write words?”

I'll ask you this: What takes longer? Writing the sentence “Leaders should listen to their employees” or drawing a picture of a leader listening to employees? Writing is MUCH faster than drawing.

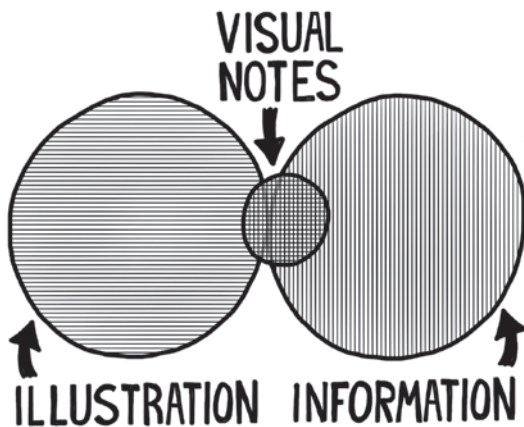
If the information isn't shared with written words, it loses clarity. Effective visual notes will always include written words. Together, illustrations and information work with each other to create a more powerful learning experience.



VISUAL NOTES ARE NOT JUST INFORMATION

Just as visual notes are not only illustration, neither are they only information.

While the information always takes priority in visual notes, it loses its driving power without the aid of illustration. A wall of written words is overwhelming and not interesting (or memorable!). Hand a sheet of written text to a person and ask them to read it—they'll probably groan! If you hand them a sheet with images and text on it, the reaction will probably be different.



Visual notes are all about illustrations and information working together to create a visual understanding for better clarity. Let's visualize this concept. Illustration and information are two separate spheres. The place where they overlap is called "visual notes," and you'll notice that "visual notes" includes much more information than illustration.

VISUAL NOTES ARE NOT DOODLES

The definition of a doodle, according to the dictionary, is "a rough drawing made absentmindedly." Visual notes are **ANYTHING** but absentminded! Effective visual notes are taken with complete focus. As we learned earlier, the illustrations are intentionally related to the information being shared.



VISUALS ARE THE SHARED HUMAN LANGUAGE

Visuals transcend culture, age, gender, spoken language, and just about every other difference. Human beings are highly visual—we always have been. From the Lascaux cave paintings in France to modern-day emojis, we love communicating visually! If you were to go to France and needed to ask for directions to the Eiffel Tower, all you'd have to do is draw a picture and you would be understood.

“I wanted to learn all the languages in the world, so I learned to draw.”
– Alejo Porras



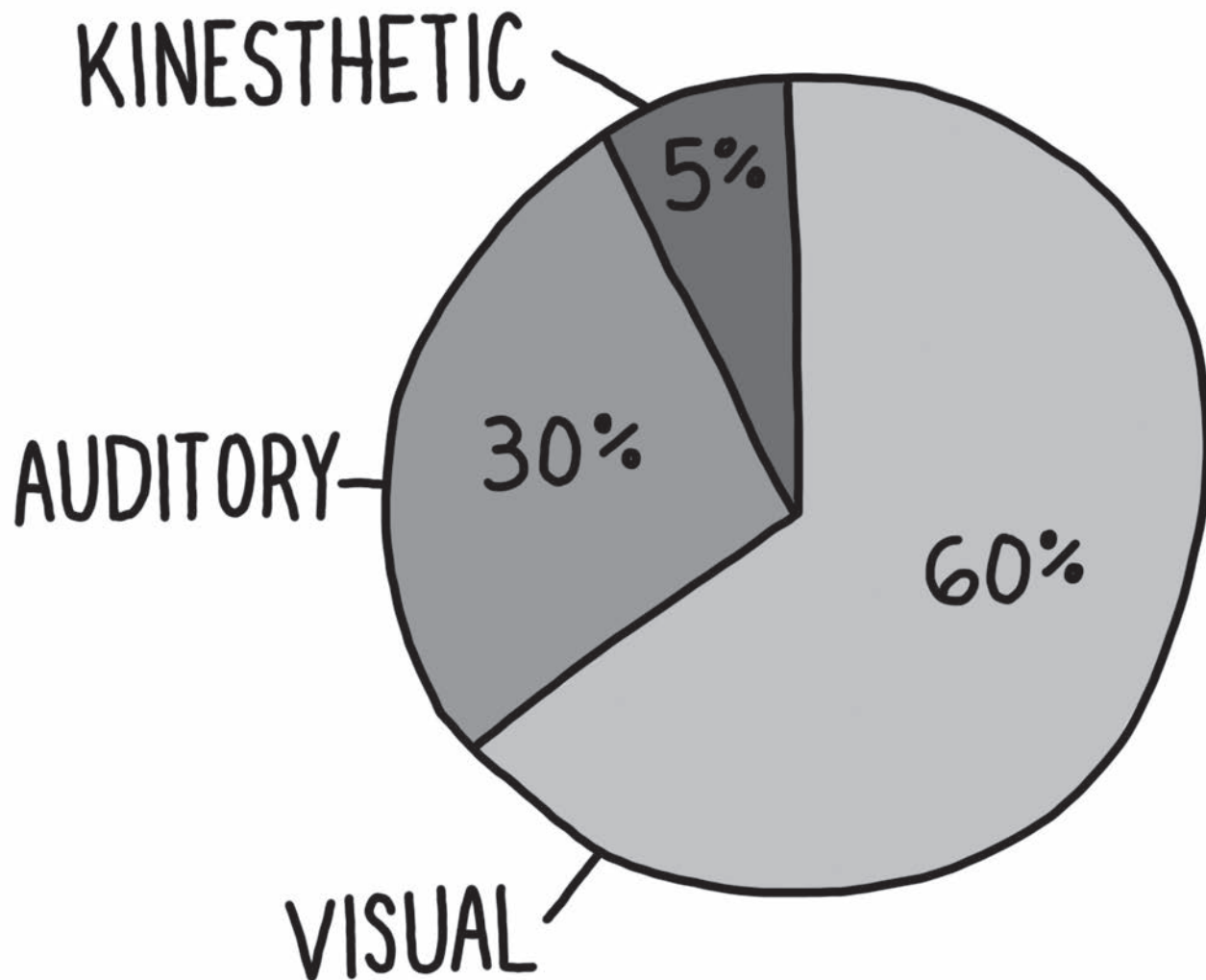
“If you want to be in today's conversation, you need to be visual!”
– Dan Roam

In modern Western culture, if you're not communicating visually, you're not communicating effectively. Think about it. Most of the apps you use are highly visual. Does your weather app show you pictures of what the weather looks like? Do you use Instagram™ to view photos of your friends and heroes? Do you watch YouTube™ videos to learn something or be entertained? Most modern communication is visual, and it's not going to change any time soon. If you want an effective way to capture ideas and share them, visual notetaking is invaluable.

WHY ARE VISUAL NOTES IMPORTANT?

VISUAL NOTES ARE ONE OF THE BEST WAYS TO LEARN

As we discovered earlier, visual notes exist to visualize, clarify, and organize information so that the information remains memorable and compelling. Sixty-five percent of the population identifies as visual learners—visual notes are a no-brainer! Visuals are human language; if you aren't communicating visually, you're missing out.



Auditory information has a shockingly low chance of actually sticking when it's presented alone (i.e. hearing a lecture). Information has a better chance of sticking when you pair it with other methods of learning, like visuals and movement.

The more learning methods you use, the better. Everyone learns differently. Some learn best by listening, some by seeing, and some by doing. When you take visual notes, you get to do all three. When we include visual and kinetic learning (a.k.a. drawing pictures by hand) we engage more parts of the brain—and the information retention rate is up to six times greater!

VISUAL NOTES AS LEGACY

When you make visual notes, you create a tangible artifact of your life, your work, what you learn, everything! These are precious things you can pass down to your family. Think about how cool it would be to flip through the visual notes of your grandma's life in the early 1900s! Or if your children could see the things you cared about when you were young. Physical artifacts, like photos and letters from family members, are getting harder and harder to come by, and it's only getting more difficult as our digital age progresses.

Consider also how the world has been changed by the sketches of Leonardo da Vinci and the diary of Anne Frank. Physical creations like visual notes might not change the world, but if something you create can inspire one person, that's powerful!



SUMMARY

Taking visual notes is important because

- Visual notes clarify and organize information.
- Humans communicate visually, and visual notes are one of the best ways to learn.
- Most the world's population identify themselves as visual learners.
- Information retention is improved when paired with other methods of learning, such as visuals.
- Visual notes create tangible artifacts of life.

WHO CAN TAKE VISUAL NOTES?

Anyone! Whether you consider yourself an artist or not!

Visual notes are powerful in **learning environments**. Teachers can use them to explain complex concepts and reach students who are visual learners. Students as young as 6 or 7 years old can use visual notes to visualize their thoughts and ideas and share them with others or take visual notes in classes to retain information better. Visual notes can help students map out ideas for a term paper or project and help synthesize and simplify ideas.

In the **business world**, visual notes are powerful because most environments lack visuals. Most working people can attest to boring meetings, presentations, and conferences. Because the business world doesn't typically rely on visuals to communicate, there can be a lot of miscommunication, which means that those who use visuals are automatically ahead of the game.

“Whoever draws the best picture wins.”
– Dan Roam

Using visual notes can help document your meetings, clarify information, and easily share with others in a format that has a better chance of being read. (Admit it, you rarely read the meeting follow-up email with the minutes!) Visual notes put the focus on the big ideas, instead of documenting every single overwhelming detail.



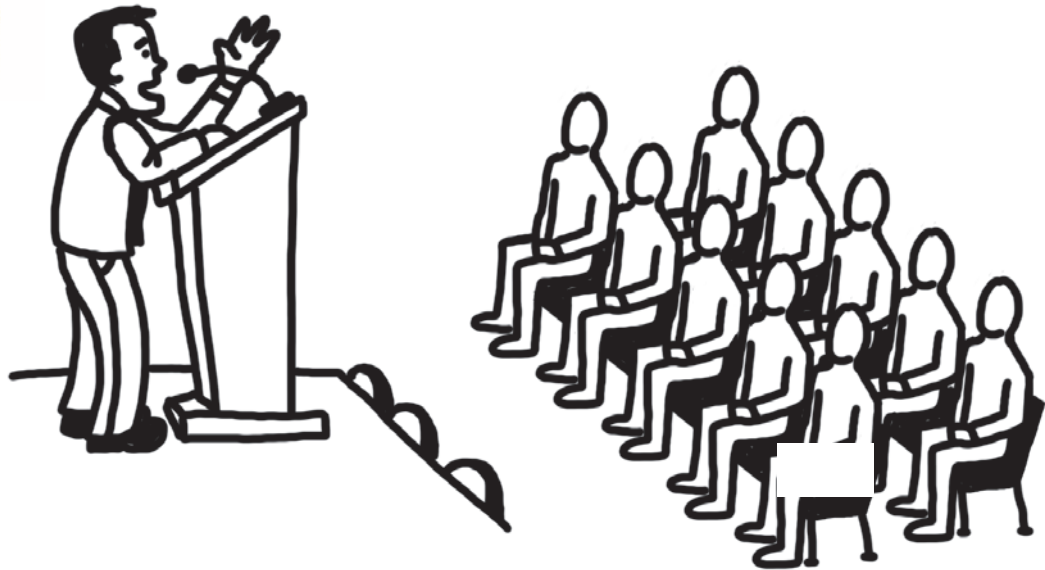
TYPES OF VISUAL NOTES?

There are two categories of visual notes:

- 1) Lecture-based
- 2) Experience-based

LECTURE-BASED

visual notes are taken when one person gives insight or information to another. Some examples are conferences, church sermons, panels, meetings, and workshops.



EXPERIENCED-BASED visual notes are taken when you experience something personally. Some examples are traveling, making a recipe, trying a new restaurant, and keeping a personal journal.



Lecture-based visual notes should be taken live in real-time.
Experience-based visual notes should be taken later.
Here's why...

LECTURE-BASED visual notes usually involve more information, such as facts, quotes, statistics, examples, and stories. That information is usually more complex, and because it comes from an external source, it's more foreign and not as easily or quickly understood. Because the information isn't personal, it's harder to grasp right away. To take the best lecture-based visual notes, take them live, in real-time, to capture as much information as possible, so nothing (or very little) is missed. The information is fresh in your mind, and your notes will be more accurate than if you relied on your memory to recall it later. Remember, auditory-only learning is highly ineffective, so don't trust yourself to remember lecture-based information later!

EXPERIENCE-BASED visual notes are different in that the information is intensely personal, and you'll have an easy time recalling the experience later. Experiences should be enjoyed in the moment, with as few distractions as possible. See sights! Make memories! Try new things! Don't worry about your notes until you have some time to sit, reflect, process, and capture them. Documenting an experience shouldn't prevent you from fully experiencing it. If you need to take pictures or jot down some quick notes in the moment, go for it... but leave the full visual notes for later.

REAL-LIFE EXAMPLE



I once tried to take visual notes at a restaurant table. First, it was probably rude. When you're with people, it's better to enjoy their company in the moment. Second, when I moved my water glass over my sketchbook, condensation dripped onto the page and made the ink bleed! Sometimes it's just better to wait for the right time!

SUMMARY

Lecture-based visual notes need to be taken live, in the moment, because

- The amount of information to document is higher.
- Information is complex.
- Information isn't necessarily as personal to you.

Experience-based visual notes need to be taken later because

- The amount of information is lower.
- Information is simpler.
- Information is personal (familiar = more memorable).
- It is logistically easier.

HOW CAN I USE VISUAL NOTES?

First ask, “Who is this for?”

The audience or end use will determine the best method of visual notetaking.



VISUAL NOTETAKING METHODS

If the visual notes are for yourself, **sketchnotes** are really effective, as they are confined to a journal or notebook that is easily portable. To share your work, scan your notes and email them.

If you're documenting for a group, **graphic recording** is a good method, as the large format is easy to read and see. You can use paper, whiteboards, posterboard, or foam core. But while this method is easy to share with groups, it can be hard to transport and keep. I recommend taking photos of your work and sharing digitally. Whiteboard work should also be temporary! If you need something to last longer, don't use whiteboard—try paper or foam core instead!

Graphic facilitation is like graphic recording, but instead of listening to the meeting, you're leading it! You keep your goals in mind as you lead people through your agenda and ask clarifying questions, visualizing everything that is shared along the way. Graphic facilitation is not for the faint of heart and is most effective with prior sketchnote or graphic recording experience.

Visual videos (also called sketch videos or whiteboard videos) are a great way to simplify complex concepts, instructions, or methods and share them with others. As we learned earlier, humans are highly visual creatures, and we're more likely to watch a video than we are to read a text-heavy paper about it. We're also more likely to share it!



Start small with a sketchbook or a journal. As you practice improving your skills and building confidence, work your way into larger, more complicated formats.

TOOLS:

THE VISUAL NOTETAKING ARSENAL OF SKILLS

One question I'm constantly asked is: "What pen are you using?" People don't ask me how they can learn to sketchnote, what books or classes I recommend, or even how I learned myself—they ask about my tools! However, the tools do not make the artist.

The only way to become an effective visual notetaker is through regular practice.

It's not about the tools you use; it's about the visuals you create. Some of the most effective visual notes I've seen were done with a ballpoint pen on a legal pad! There's nothing wrong with using fancy, expensive tools—you should always create to the best of your ability—but the priority of visual notes is the information, not the aesthetics.

SURFACES

Before you choose your surface, determine how your visual notes will be used or shared. For example, will you be sharing your visual notes online? Many visual sharing platforms, like Instagram™ and Facebook™, favor square and horizontal images, so making vertical visual notes on legal-size paper won't make sense. A better option would be to take your notes horizontally or use a square piece of paper.



PAPER

Some people sketchnote on sheets of paper; some people use a notebook. I use a notebook because it's portable. The cover and binding protect the paper, and I can tuck it into my bag and not worry about damage. Consider the following when choosing paper:

COLOR: White paper is easiest if you're just starting out. If you mess up, you can use correction fluid.

WEIGHT: Paper comes in different weights, which refers to how sturdy the paper is. A piece of cheap printer paper is usually 20-lb. weight. It's thin and easily damaged. Drawing paper is usually 60–80 lbs. The highest-quality papers, also called stock paper or board, are over 100 lbs.

TOOTH/SURFACE: "Tooth" refers to how rough or smooth the paper feels. Watercolor paper and Kraft paper are considered rough. Look for words on the packaging like "fine tooth," "Vellum surface," or "smooth texture" to get an idea of what to expect. Some paper packs or sketchbooks also tell you what they should be used for. For example, "ideal for classic sketching and drawing" or "for dry media."



PROS

- **Inexpensive**
- **Shareable**
- **Permanent.** Paper lasts a long time compared to other methods.



CONS

- **Takes up physical space.** Not everyone has the space to store the volume of work they put out. It can also be hard to organize.
- **Prone to damage.** A flooded basement or spilled coffee can ruin your visual notes in no time.



Try a wide variety of papers and experiment with your drawing tools to see how they hold up.

REAL-LIFE EXAMPLE



I once bought thick card stock with a smooth surface for a client piece. I thought the high durability would be ideal, but my markers didn't blend together quite as well, and the smooth surface made the ink smudge easily. It was a good lesson in knowing how a drawing surface can affect the outcome of your artwork!

NOTEBOOK

Notebooks are a convenient way to take visual notes. Try a book-bound notebook and a spiral notebook to see what your preference is.



BOOK



SPIRAL

THIS IS GREAT BUT...
HOW DO I FRAME
A NOTEBOOK?

If someone is hiring you to create visual notes so they can frame the original, a notebook is not a good idea!



WHITEBOARD

Recall that whiteboard visual notes are done on a larger scale and are called “graphic recording.” With whiteboards, you can easily correct mistakes. But you have to be smart about making corrections. Every time you focus on editing, you’re not focused on listening. Whiteboards can also be disappointing. A passerby can easily brush up against it and erase your work. You might even accidentally erase something yourself!



PROS

- Simple to use.
- Easy to edit.

CONS

- **Not permanent.** Too easily erased.
- **Hard to photograph.** Whiteboards are reflective, so capturing photos can be difficult.
- **Limited palette.** There are limited color options for whiteboard markers, and many of them are hard to read.
- **Size.** The large size can be intimidating, and dry-erase pens are limited to about three different tip sizes.



Don't use whiteboard paints on a whiteboard! They are really messy, hard to control, and hard to clean off.

DIGITAL

With new technology being pushed out constantly, digital formats are increasingly popular for visual notetaking. Here is what you need to consider:

COST

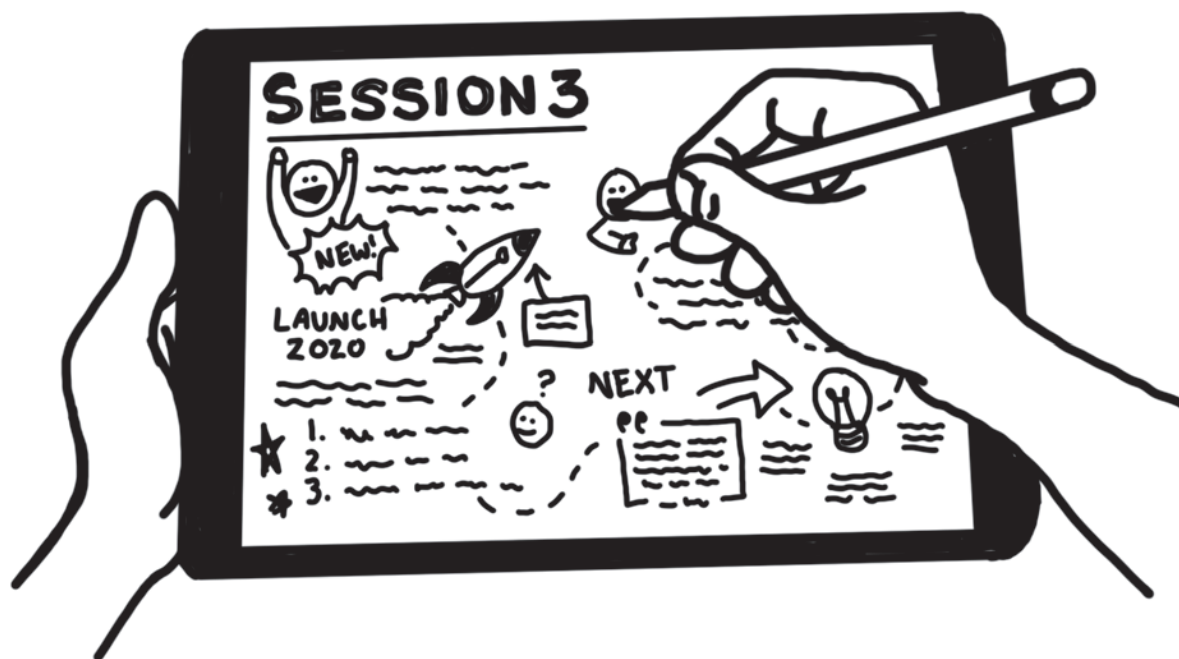
With the rate of new products and updates being released, will the cost of purchasing a tablet be a wise investment for you, or will it be outdated in a few short years and unable to run new programs? For some, purchasing a digital tablet is a no-brainer. For others, it might be best to stick with analog to save money.

TIME

Many notetakers love the idea of taking digital visual notes, but recognize that it does take longer to capture the info. Weigh the possibility that your tools could cause you to miss some information. Visual notes exist to visualize, clarify, and organize information. If you can't take them in an efficient manner, their purpose is lost.

SHAREABILITY

Digital visual notes are easy to share. One small possible downside is that your notes might be more difficult to share in person—not everyone is eager to hand over their expensive tablet to someone else!



I'm not a fast visual notetaker on my iPad® Pro, but I'm really fast at taking them on paper. I get the best of both worlds: I take my notes in a way that is efficient and that I'm confident in, and I have an editing tool that I'm also proficient in. This workflow is perfect for me.



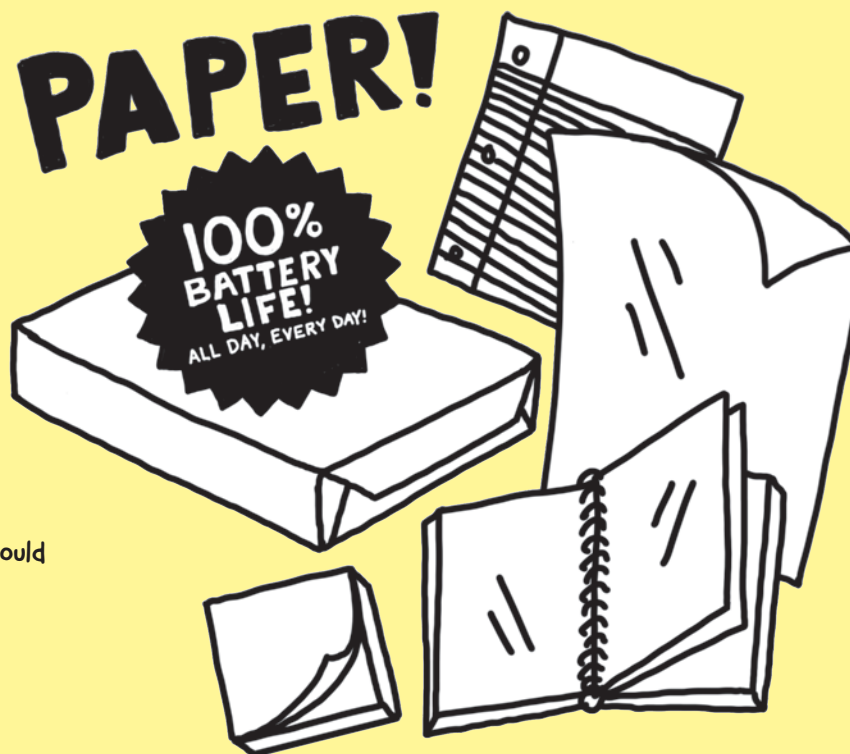
PROS

- **Endless tools.** A single program can give you infinite colors, brushes, and editing capabilities.
- **Cost.** For many, digital visual notes are more cost-effective.
- **Convenient.** All you need is a tablet and a stylus.
- **Shareable.** Share your visual notes in just a few taps or clicks!
- **Built-in light source.** Adjusting screen brightness is a huge benefit!



CONS

- **Endless possibilities.** Sometimes the sheer number of choices can be overwhelming and you can spend too much time searching for the perfect brush.
- **Aesthetic.** Some digital visual notes look too computerized and lack the whimsical hand-drawn aesthetic. There's just something about pen and paper that draws attention to visual notes.
- **Slippery.** A lot of complaints I hear about sketchnoting digitally is that the surface is more slick than paper and pen, so it's easier to make a mistake.
- **Cost.** Conversely, digital visual notes aren't always cost-effective. You have to decide what is right for you.
- **Battery life.** If you're not diligent about charging or don't have a backup battery pack, your notetaking device could drain quickly!



WRITING AND DRAWING TOOLS

You can take visual notes effectively using any writing utensil available (remember: the tools aren't important!), but there are some things to consider when picking out a pen.

Did you catch that? I said PEN.

"But I'm new at this! I'm going to make a lot of mistakes!"

Exactly. I believe the best way to become an effective visual notetaker is through deliberate practice using pen. Ink can't be edited and causes forced failure. Failure doesn't sound fun, but it's helpful long-term. You learn faster and in greater amounts from failure than you do from constant small improvements that don't involve risk. Using pen is also an easy way to improve your confidence, and it has the added benefit of being easier to read than pencil.

PEN CONSIDERATIONS

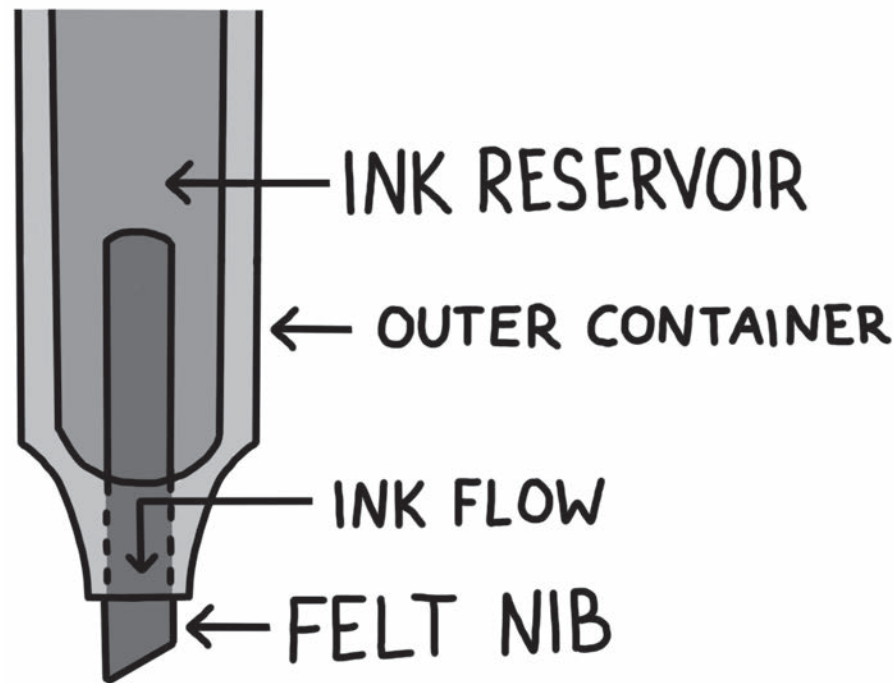
- Does the ink dry quickly, or will it smudge (especially important for left-handed people)?
- How does the pen work with your paper and other writing tools?
- How much is it? Is a \$10 pen practical if you're replacing it every few weeks?
- Is the ink or ink cartridge refillable, or do you have to replace the whole pen each time it runs out?
- Is the pen readily available? Can you buy it locally or do you have to order it online?
- Does the ink go bad over time?
- Can you use the pen as soon as you take the cap off, or does it need "warm-up time" to get the ink flowing?

MARKERS

Markers deliver ink supply through a porous nib, like felt or even porous ceramics.

Tombow® Brush Pen Markers The dual tips are convenient for coloring large areas and creating small details. Colors can be blended, or you can purchase blending markers. Tombow offers more than 90 colors. The ink is water-based, and the whole marker must be replaced when it goes dry. You can layer the ink for richer color.

Paper Mate® Flair® Flairs are my go-to marker pens for simple black-and-white visual notes without color or shading. There are about 24 colors to choose from. The ink is water-based, and the whole marker must be replaced when it goes dry. The fine tip has a great feel.



I don't recommend traditional permanent markers: the colors tend to be untrue, they are alcohol-based, they have a strong smell, and the ink bleeds or spreads.

Sakura® Pigma® Micron® These markers feel like pens because of their fine tips. The ink is archival pigment (not dye), so it doesn't bleed on paper, but it will bleed if blended with other markers or colors. There are about 15 colors, and the whole marker must be replaced when it goes dry.

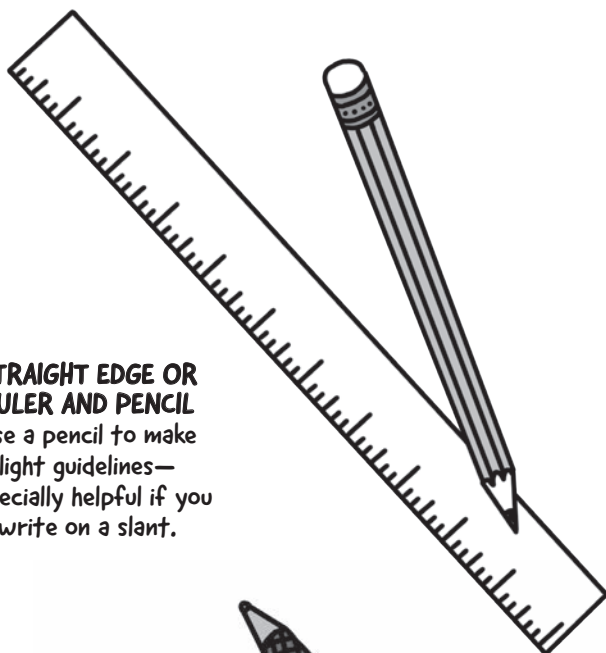
Copic® Multiliner This is a great tool similar to the Pigma Micron, but with a few added benefits. The archival ink is more black and eraser doesn't fade it. Copic Multiliners come in very few colors.

Neuland® Markers: SketchOne (0.1–0.7) + fineOne® (0.5 – 5 mm) The SketchOne pen is similar to Microns and Copic Multiliners, but the ink is water-based and it bleeds more. The whole marker must be replaced when it goes dry. The fineOne markers are my go-to for adding color. I use Neuland's larger markers for graphic recording, and I love being able to use the same ink (RefillOne) to resupply all my Neuland markers.

Pentel® EnerGel®: 0.3, 0.5, 0.7 Gel ink doesn't soak into paper like marker does, so it usually takes longer to dry. Once dry, very few color and shading tools will make the line bleed. They are available in a variety of colors, and I can check the ink level. Pentel also sells refills, so you don't have to keep buying the same pen casing over and over.

Sakura® Gelly Roll® White Gel Pen I use this white gel pen like correction fluid, as well as to highlight artwork. It is not refillable and must be replaced when it goes dry.

MISCELLANEOUS SUPPLIES



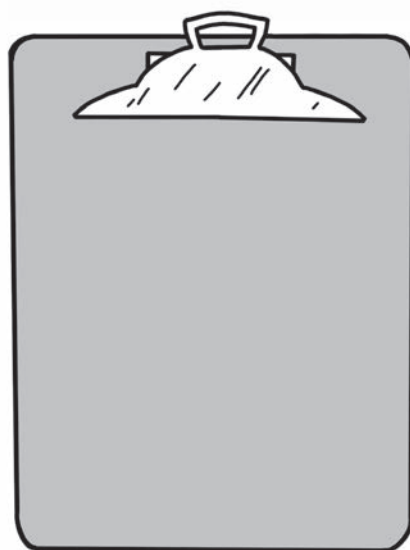
**STRAIGHT EDGE OR
RULER AND PENCIL**
Use a pencil to make
light guidelines—
especially helpful if you
write on a slant.



PLASTIC BAG
Keeps your stuff waterproof, and prevents
pen explosions and leaks from ruining everything!



PENCIL CASE
Keep your tools in one place
so they're easy to access.

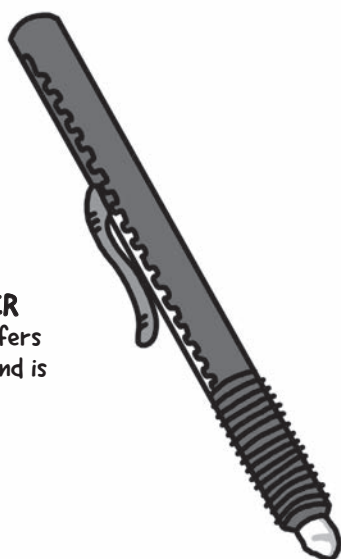


HARD SURFACE
A clipboard or book,
or you can use a
tablet or laptop.

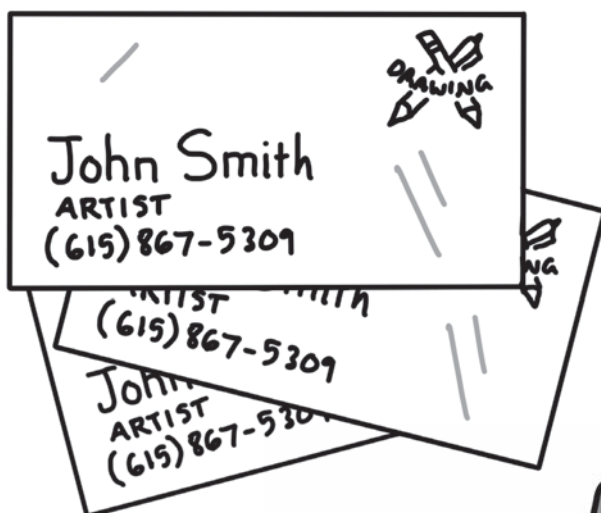
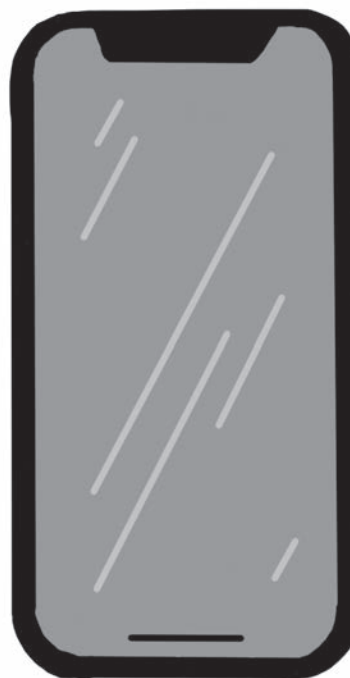


**BOOK LIGHT OR
HEADLAMP**
For dark
environments.

CLICK ERASER
Stays clean, offers more control, and is refillable.



SMARTPHONE
Great for looking up spellings, reference images, and portraits.



BUSINESS CARDS
People think visual notes are neat and may want to contact you later to see them on social media, get a copy, or hire you.



CORRECTION FLUID
To fix mistakes. This only looks good if your paper is bright white!



BACKPACK
It's helpful to have something that holds all your stuff and keeps your hands free.

CONSIDERATIONS WHEN CHOOSING YOUR TOOLS

Pick tools that meet the needs of your audience

- How will the notes be shared? Are you choosing a medium that makes your notes easier to share?
- Will the tools you're choosing make it easier for your notes to be seen by the right people?

Pick tools that work together

- Do your writing utensils and paper work together? Does your ink smudge more easily on one paper over another? If you're left-handed, does your hand pick up color from the paper as it rests on it?
- Do your writing utensils work when used together? For example, if you go over a black pen line with your yellow marker, does it bleed or ruin your marker?

Pick tools that work for your environment

- Will the room be bright? A whiteboard might be too reflective for the audience to see. Will the room be dark? You might need to bring a book light or headlamp.
- Are you going to be in a confined space? Large formats might not work well if you need space to move around.
- If you do decide to use alcohol-based markers, is there air flow so you don't distract or disturb people with the odor?
- If you work in a large format, do you have a way of easily displaying your work?
- If you work in a small format, are you going to have a table to use? Do you need to bring a hard surface or sturdy sketchbook?

MINDSET

To take effective visual notes, you need a good mindset.

You have to stay focused.

If you're taking lecture-based visual notes, you can't get distracted by your thoughts.

If you're taking experience-based visual notes for yourself, free yourself from distraction and focus on what you thought and how you felt during the time you are capturing.

You can't be a perfectionist.

You won't be able to capture everything you hear or experience. The point of visual notes is to visualize, clarify, and organize information, focusing on the main points and ideas. Your pictures might not be perfect, and that's okay. Your handwriting might be a little messy, and that's okay. You might have misspelled a word, and that's okay too!

You need to go with the flow.

Speakers will go off topic or run longer than expected. Schedules will change. Your pen might run out of ink. You might need to use an extra page of paper. Accept all of these things as okay!



PREP WORK: BEFORE YOU BEGIN

Before jumping into visual notetaking, you need to set yourself up for success! Let's look at a few ways to prepare yourself and your environment for optimal notetaking.

GET THE BEST SEAT

You can't take good notes if you can't hear. The most important part of finding a good seat is **being able to hear the speaker clearly**. Keep an eye out for the following sneaky distractions:

DOORWAYS

- People coming in and out
- Light changes
- Noise

PEOPLE

- Talkers
- Fidgeters
- Babies and children

VENTS

- Air blowing on you or your notebook pages
- Abrupt temperature changes
- Noise

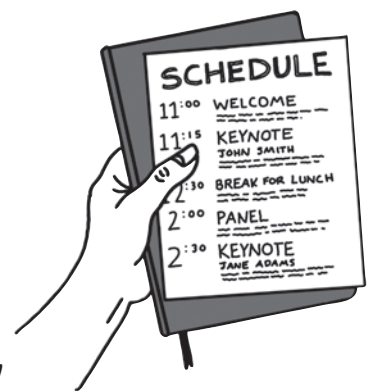


When I have a choice of seating and can arrive before an event begins, I like to introduce myself to the people working the sound booth and ask them where to sit to hear clearly. Often, the best seat is close to the booth itself.

GET A SCHEDULE

One of the most common questions people ask when they see my work is, "How do you know how to space everything out so perfectly?" Easy: **planning ahead!** I always get an event schedule ahead of time. Schedules are a goldmine of necessary information for visual notetakers! A schedule usually has speaker names, the talk titles, and time frames. I can populate my visual notes with this information before the event begins.

Once you know how long the session is, you can plan your visual notes. I very loosely plan my space in 5- to 15-minute intervals. I write out the times in pencil across the pages or board so I know if my spacing is on track with the time remaining. I generally do one notebook page of visual notes for every 30 minutes of content.



Room temperatures for meetings and conferences can fluctuate, so it's helpful to dress in layers to stay comfortable.

LISTENING

There is one more essential step to learn before putting pen to paper, and taking effective visual notes all hinges on this one skill: listening.

THREE STEPS TO GOOD LISTENING

There are three steps to good listening:

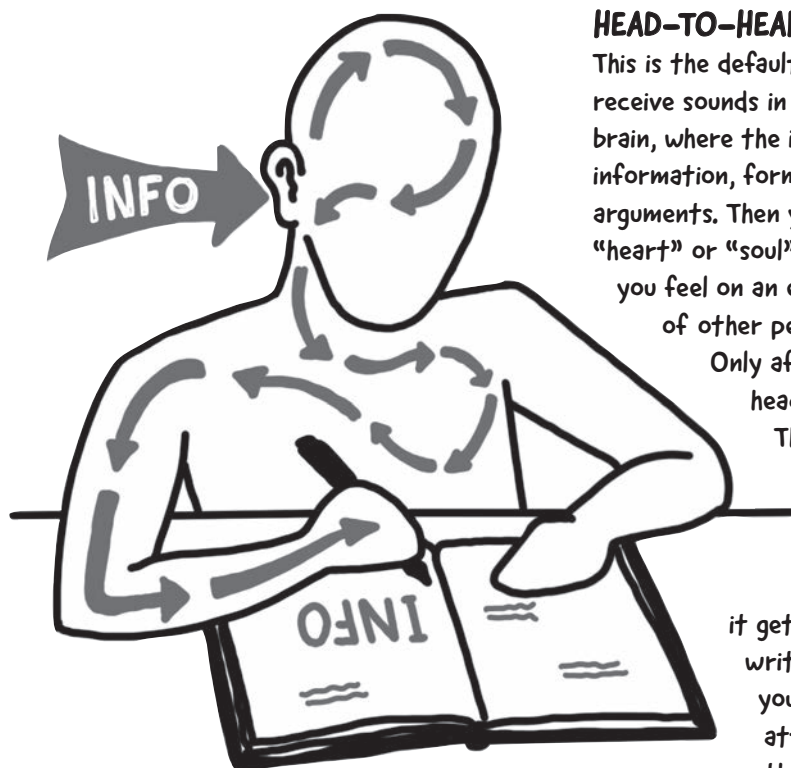
- 1) Hear:** The first step to good listening is being in a good position to hear well. If you're in a smaller setting with no sound system, get as close to the presenter as possible. Move away from noisy areas or people. If you're in a large room, make sure you're near or under a speaker.
- 2) Focus:** Remove any distractions. Put your phone on "Do Not Disturb" mode.
- 3) Listen:** This is the final step to good listening—actually listening! There are two kinds of listening: head-to-heart and head-to-hand.



HEARING VS. LISTENING

Have you ever zoned out while "listening" to a colleague in a meeting? Or thought about what you wanted to order while "listening" to your friend at lunch?

In these instances, you're not listening—you're hearing. Hearing is what happens when you receive sounds. Listening is what happens when you intentionally focus on the sounds.



HEAD-TO-HEART LISTENING

This is the default listening method for most people. First you receive sounds in your ears. Next the sound travels to your brain, where the information is processed. You think about the information, forming your own opinions, judgments, and even arguments. Then you process it in what you might call your “heart” or “soul”—thinking about how the information makes you feel on an emotional level. You might even start thinking of other people who need to hear the information too.

Only after you’ve considered the information in your head and heart will you write something down.

This process happens very quickly, but there are many steps involved, and that’s why it’s not effective.

When information enters your head and heart, it gets stuck and lost along the way. By the time you write it down it’s a fraction of what was said, and you probably stopped listening to the speaker as attentively because you were focused on your own thoughts and feelings about the information.

HEAD-TO-HAND LISTENING

Head-to-hand listening is also called **active listening**. You’re completely focused on the message of the presenter. The information bypasses your thoughts, judgments, arguments, and feelings and goes straight into your notes. More information comes out in your notes because it doesn’t get lost in your head and heart. **This is what we’re going for!** When you take visual notes, you want to go straight from what you hear on the stage to the page.

When people see my visual notes after a presentation and talk to me, our conversation is often like this: “Did the presenter actually say that? I don’t remember that!” My answer is always, “Yes! I don’t add anything myself in my notes—I capture what I hear.” People are always surprised at how poorly they paid attention when they see how thorough my notes are.



HOW TO KNOW IF YOU’RE DOING IT RIGHT

During presentations, do you catch yourself saying, “I think this guy is wrong because..,” or “I think Suzy really needs to hear this talk,” or “I wonder when lunch is?” or “Oh, that was so good. I need to form that habit.” If so, you’re letting your head and heart get a say in the information—and they aren’t invited! Refocus your attention to the present and what the presenter is saying.

LISTENING CUES

It's impossible to capture everything that is said on a stage or in a meeting—we simply can't write at the speed of spoken word. Luckily, capturing everything isn't the point of visual notes. When you take visual notes, you're going for the main ideas and recurring themes, not every detail. Don't worry about trying to write down every word, just focus on the important stuff!

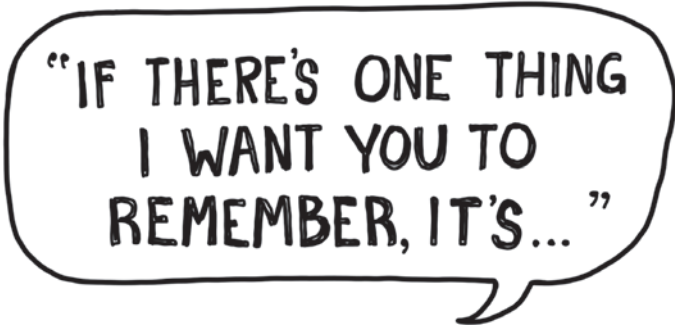
The next question you're probably asking is, "How do I figure out what's important and what isn't?" I have found this mostly comes with experience and practice. Over time, you'll learn to identify important themes in the moment, but there are also a few listening cues to help you identify these important points.

It might surprise you to know that you can **listen with your eyes** too! Watching a speaker will help you listen and once you know what to look for, listening becomes so easy that it's almost like cheating! I call these "Listening Cues," and they are behaviors that you need to learn to identify. Let's get into it!

VERBAL

The easiest listening cue is one you don't have to work for—the presenter will tell you what the big ideas are. Listen for phrases like:

- "There are three steps to solve this.."
- "My first point is.."
- "If there's one thing I want you to remember, it's.."
- "To sum it all up, this is all about.."



"IF THERE'S ONE THING
I WANT YOU TO
REMEMBER, IT'S..."

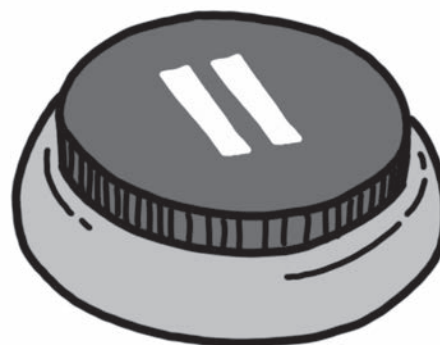
These phrases give you the structure of the talk, so you don't have to listen closely for it. Some, but not all, experienced presenters verbally share the structure. Others use a storytelling format with less structure, so you'll have to rely on other listening cues as well.

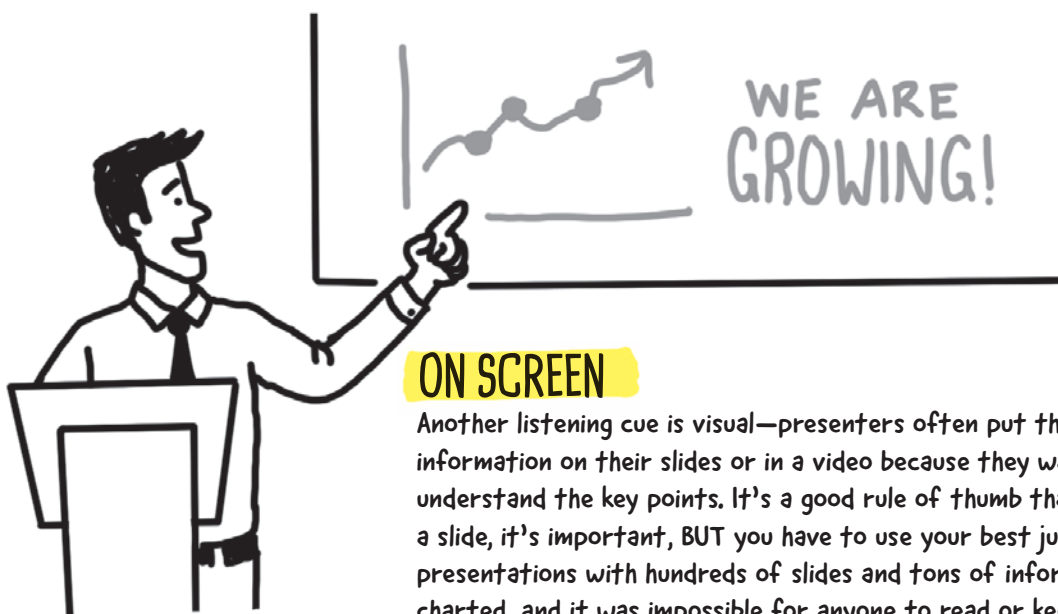
REPETITION

Presenters want you to understand what they're saying, so they'll often repeat their ideas more than once. Experienced presenters know it takes longer to write than to talk, so they'll often use a repetition method called "bookending." This involves introducing the big idea, talking about it, and then repeating it again before moving on.

PAUSING

Presenters who are about to share something important sometimes pause before and after they share it. This could be intentional—they want the idea to have "room to breathe" and time for you to soak it up. Or it could be unintentional—they are gathering their thoughts to share the big idea in the best way; for instance, they may pause after sharing the big idea as they consider the best story to explain it.



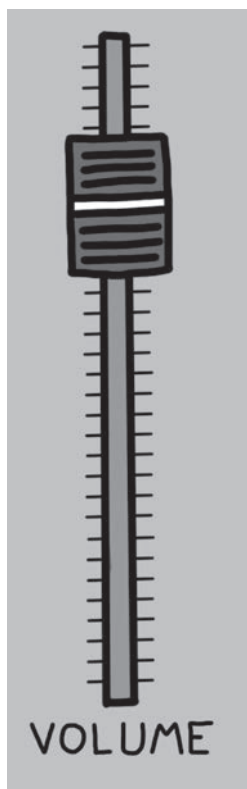


ON SCREEN

Another listening cue is visual—presenters often put the most important information on their slides or in a video because they want to ensure you understand the key points. It's a good rule of thumb that if something is on a slide, it's important, BUT you have to use your best judgment. I've attended presentations with hundreds of slides and tons of information, both written and charted, and it was impossible for anyone to read or keep up with. In cases like this, you'll have to discern what is most important to you at the time.

GESTURES

When presenters get to important points, they often use gestures and movements with their hands and body to help communicate. This could be as simple as holding up a finger, as if to point out something important, or it could be a full-body motion to get you to notice and pay attention.



SPEED & VOLUME

Some of the subtler listening cues to recognize are speed and volume. People who are talking about something they care about change the pace and they often get louder. A presenter who normally speaks fast might slow down to make sure you get the point. A presenter who normally speaks slowly might speak faster to bring energy to the point they are sharing. You can bet that when a presenter gets louder, they're trying to get your attention. Notice it, and see if the volume corresponds to something you need to capture.



WHAT ABOUT STORIES?

Many speakers open with a story, but the stories don't always relate to their topic. Sometimes the story is to warm up the crowd or for the speaker to get comfortable. When a speaker starts with a story, wait for a few minutes before you take notes. If they spend more than a few minutes on the story, it usually relates to their talk. Capture the big ideas from the story or a small related picture—but not every detail.

WRITING

This is it! This is when you finally get to start putting pen to paper! If you don't like your handwriting or are worried about legibility, fear not! With practice, anyone can master taking visual notes that everyone can read.

PRINT

While it might have been decades since the last time you practiced writing your ABCs, let's do a quick refresher. Practice the following alphabet:

A B C D E F G H I J K L M

N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z

a b c d e f g h i j k l

m n o p q r s t u v w x y z

If you draw your letters differently than the above example, that's okay! I still encourage you to practice this classic alphabet and try it in your notes at least once before going back to your default handwriting. It's important to try new things that stretch us creatively—even when it comes to penmanship!



One thing that helped me relax was to not think about it as writing letters, but *drawing* them.

CHURCH OF THE CITY 3/15
AWAKENING a series for Lent
in our cities + in our churches

Ezekiel 37:4-5  valley of the dry bones
"I will breathe into you and you shall LIVE"

HABAKUK 3:2 Lord I have heard of your fame
I stand in awe of your deeds, Lord
renew in our day
Your wrath remember mercy

God is **REAL** and we need to **CENTER** around Him

"I don't want to go to my grave without seeing the impossible things of God."

IF GOD DOES SOMETHING UNPRECEDENTED IN THE US, IT WILL ECHO AROUND THE WORLD

Ryman
Sam Jones in 1880 - Revival in tents
Angry Businessmen went to heckle Sam Jones
↳ he weeps instead at the power of God
Tents? No. I'll build you a building
Thomas Ryman - Union Gospel Building

JAMES 4 - you do not have because you do not ask.

E.M. BOUNDS of franklin
• sensed a darkness over the city
• gathered men to pray in the streets

God will teach us what to ask for

OFFENSIVE →
← DEFENSIVE

REAL-LIFE EXAMPLE



Here is the first page of visual notes I ever took during a sermon at a church (left). You can barely read my handwriting! Once I realized wanted to share my notes, I knew my handwriting would have to improve. Even though I was slower at first, I completely changed my style of writing to something more legible (below).

RESEARCH: UNIVERSITY OF MEMPHIS

STATISTICAL CONFIDENCE

900 PEOPLE

CHAPTER 7

THE VALUE of **FUN!**

YOU CAN MAKE ANYTHING Miserable.

TRAIN ME!

HIT IT ON THE WALL

KILL! KILL! KILL! KILL! KILL!

YOU FOUND A WAY TO RUIN PING PONG!

JENNY

DOES FUN MATTER?

SATISFACTION + PERFORMANCE

FUN = 46% MORE SUCCESSFUL

MAKE IT FUN VS. HAVE FUN

REWARD + FEAR APPROACH + AVOIDANCE

PRACTICE SPEECHES TO NOT BOMB.

THE JOHN MAXWELL WHEELBARROW LINE

AFTER EMAIL? FACEBOOK FB LIVE VIDEO

SUPPORT LOCAL BOOK STORES!

10 YEARS.

NO "FINISH" WITHOUT WRITING "START."

HARDEST PART WAS EDITING

SURPRISING?

CUT GOAL IN HALF IS 63% MORE SUCCESSFUL

CHANGE THE DEFINITION OF "WHAT COUNTS"

BUCKLING DOWN SUCKS OUT THE JOY

GOT STARTED WITH BLOGGING

BOOK TOUR

JON ACUFF

REALLY TALL

THE VENN DIAGRAM:

PASTOR LUMBERJACK

NOTICE THE NO TOUCHING

LUMBER CONFIDENCE

PULL!

CRAZY GOALS

"I'M GOING TO BE THE FIELD GOAL KICKER!"

HOW DO I ACTUALLY FINISH?

LESS THAN 1% FINISH A BOOK!

FLAG DAY IS FOR BURRITOS!

"WELL BEGUN IS HALF DONE."

I WISH IT WERE MORE DIFFICULT TO BUY A CHAINSAW...

FINISH

GIVE THROUGH THE GIFT OF GIVING

JON ACUFF

CURSIVE

Now try cursive! Not everyone was taught how to write in cursive in school—if this is you, don't panic! It seems complicated, but with practice, you'll pick it up quickly. Practice the following cursive alphabet.

A B C D E F G H I J K L M
N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z
a b c d e f g h i j k l
m n o p q r s t u v w x y z

Now that you've got down the ABCs, practice writing some words in cursive and see how the letters link together. Here's a list of words you can practice with if you need some ideas:

joker
short
zoom

systems
gratify
trade

fine
offering
ultimate

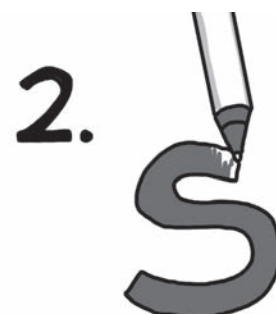
thematic
breathless
fox



PRACTICE HERE!

BLOCK LETTERS

Now you can begin to create different kinds of letters for more variety (and fun)! Let's start with block lettering. Think of block lettering as a bold version of basic print. Block letters are great for creating emphasis and calling attention to something. I often use block letters for the titles and headers of my visual notes. There are a few methods to create block letters.



TRACE OVER Write a letter in normal print. Then use a writing tool with a thicker stroke to trace over it. This method is quick, but not always very clean looking.

BLOCK LETTER Draw the outline of a block letter. You can leave it blank inside or fill it in. This method is more difficult and comes with practice!



DOUBLE LINE Write a letter in normal print; then trace the letter just outside the lines, creating a double-lined letter. If your writing tool is thinner, you can fill in the lines for a solid block letter.



PRACTICE HERE!

SERIF LETTERS

Another way to embellish letters is to add serifs, which are the “feet” at the ends of the letterforms.

Line
SERIF

LINE SERIF This style is easiest because you simply add a small line to the ends of your letters. This looks best in smaller sizes when you use a single stroke for each letter.

Classic
SERIF

CLASSIC SERIF This style is probably familiar if you’ve ever used Times New Roman. The easiest way to create a classic serif is to add a small, curved triangle to the ends of the letter’s lines. As you practice, try curving the line to create a tapered look.



PRACTICE HERE!

Block
SERIF

BLOCK SERIF This style is like a bolder version of a line serif. Instead of drawing a line, draw a box at the end of the lines or on angles and intersections.

EMBELLISHMENTS

Let's add some embellishments! These extras will help add emphasis and visual interest to your visual notes.

SHADOWS Shadows are one of the most eye-catching embellishments to add to text. When used well, shadows can make the right parts of your visual notes stand out.

To add a shadow, pick one side or two adjacent sides of each letter of the word. Add a gray or black mirror of each letter behind it. You can also add a flat shadow along the bottom (baseline) of your words.

1. Hello

2. Hello

--- or ---

3. Hello



Making embellishments can be a distraction and cause you to not actively listen. Focus on getting the information in the moment, because you can always make it look cool later. I only add embellishments if there is a lull in the presentation or afterward. If I know I want to add embellishments somewhere, I leave a larger blank space and jot down the idea in pencil; and then I move on.



TEXTURES Adding a texture helps break up the uniformity of letters. Textures work best on white or “empty” letters.

The possibilities for texture are endless! You can use dots, lines, or shapes to add variety. For a dramatic effect, try using the texture in a gradient.

DON'T WRITE IN
LIGHT COLORS!

COLOR Selectively coloring your writing is also an easy way to add emphasis. Just be sure not to overdo it—choose a select few colors that work together. Make sure the ink has enough contrast with the paper to be legible!

1. *apple*

2. *apple*

3. *apple*

Embellishing cursive is a little harder, but not impossible. One simple method is to add another line on one side of each letter, creating a hand-lettered look.

You can also use brush-style markers or other nib styles while writing to achieve different weights and effects when you write in cursive.

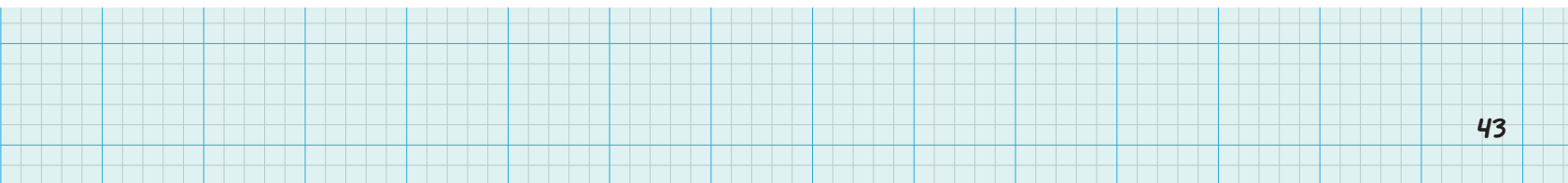
If you're interested in mastering cursive, calligraphy, or hand lettering, pick up some other books and guides to get a more in-depth look at how to create these effects.

Sample
Sample
Sample
SAMPLE



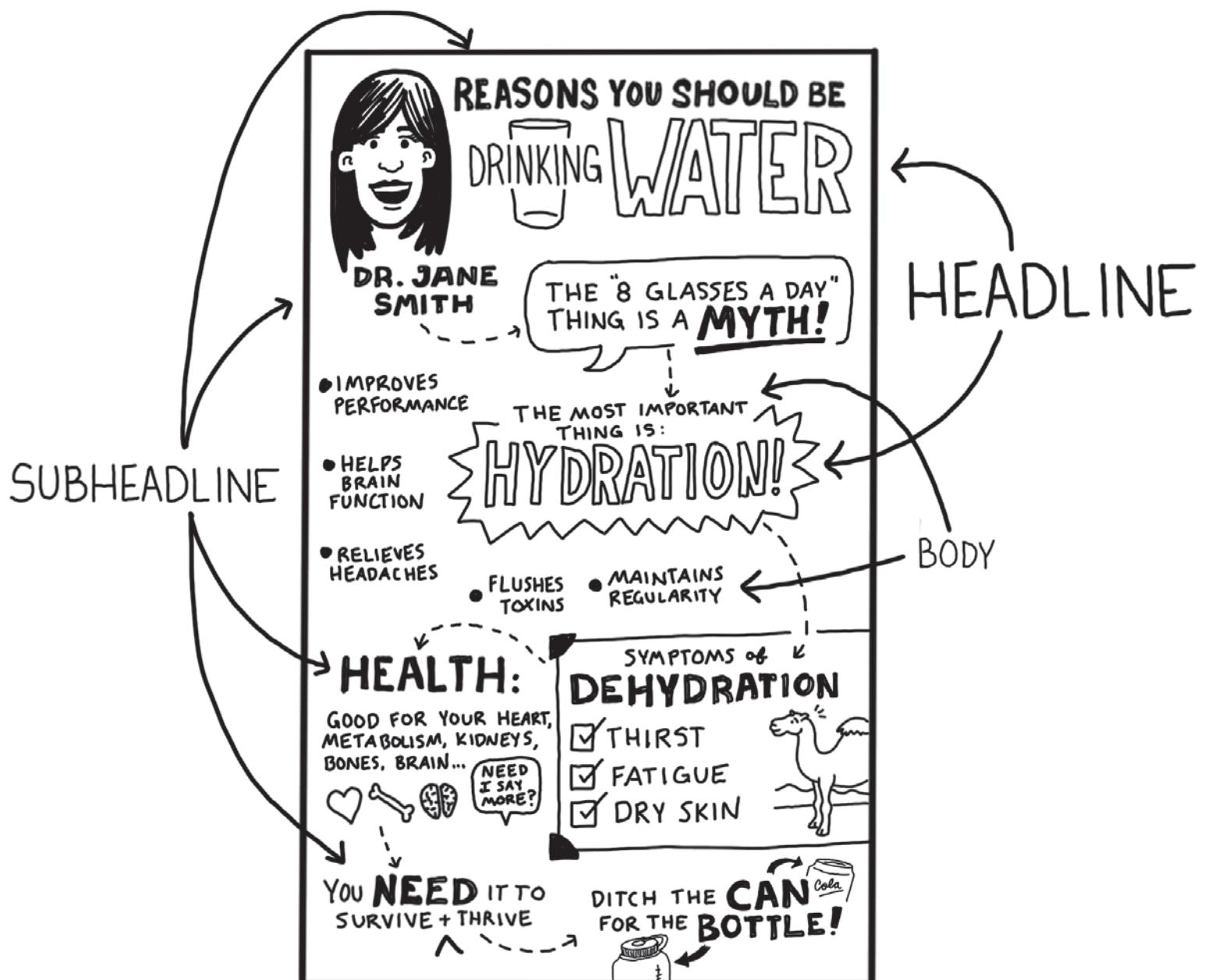
PRACTICE HERE

Use these pages to practice any of the writing styles shown on the previous pages!



HIERARCHY & COMPOSITION

Hierarchy is a system of organization to help your readers quickly and easily understand the importance of the information.



Visual notes with good hierarchy are easy to read and follow. The information isn't overwhelming because there is visual balance—a mix of large and small writing. As you begin to take visual notes, I recommend using three writing sizes. These title sizes are used across journalism, programming, and writing fields and may be familiar to you! Overall, make sure your writing is consistent. Too many styles and sizes create chaos and make your notes hard to read—and we don't want that!

HEADLINE The largest size you write in. This could be a block letter or have serifs. Use this size for the title or header, as well any central ideas, themes, or words.

SUBHEADLINE Smaller than the headline, but larger than your body copy. This could be a block letter or serif. Use this size to write important phrases, quotes, or action items.

BODY The size of your normal handwriting; usually has no embellishment or style. Most of your content will be in this size.

EXERCISE NO. 1

Read the following paragraph. Create some written blurbs and use hierarchy to show importance. Remember: the most important points and central themes should be larger than everything else.

It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who neither know victory nor defeat.

—Excerpt from "Citizenship in a Republic"

Theodore Roosevelt, 1910

DOESN'T COUNT:

- CRITICS
- PEOPLE WHO POINT OUT FAILURE
- PERSON WHO COULD DO IT BETTER

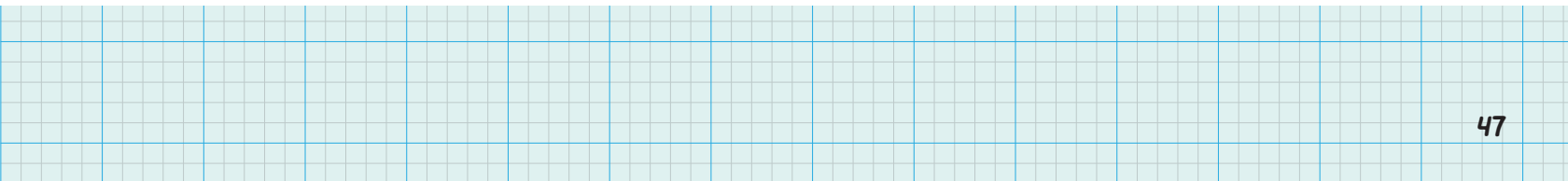
EXERCISE NO. 2

It's one thing to read information and be able to put it into a hierarchy, but it's another to hear it! Find a famous speech or a conference talk on YouTube™. Practice writing the information you hear in a visual hierarchy. Don't worry about drawings, color, or layout just yet—focus on making sure the writing hierarchy portrays the importance accurately.



PRACTICE HERE

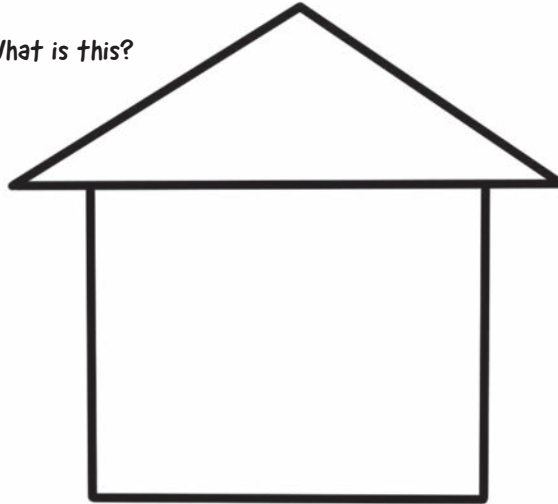
Use these pages to complete the exercises described on page 45.



DRAWING

"I can't even draw a stick figure!" is one of the most common things I hear when people see my visual notes. The point of visual notes is to focus more on accurate information than on illustrations. Visual notes are as effective with simple drawings and stick figures as they are with professional drawings.

What is this?



One more time...
What is this?



Clearly, this is a house too, but the drawing is more advanced.

Our brains are capable of identifying images whether they are simple or complicated. Your brain might not remember the details, but it knows there was a house pictured.

Remember: the most important thing is to prioritize accurate information above illustration.

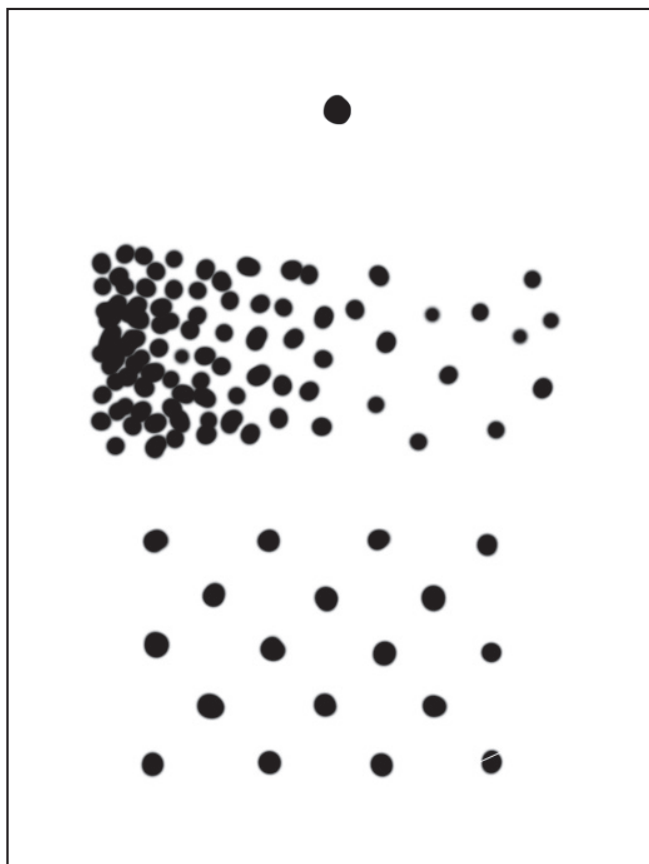
The most important lesson I want you to learn from this section is that you need to go for recognizable over realistic when it comes to your drawings.

This wasn't a trick question! If you answered "a house," you're correct!

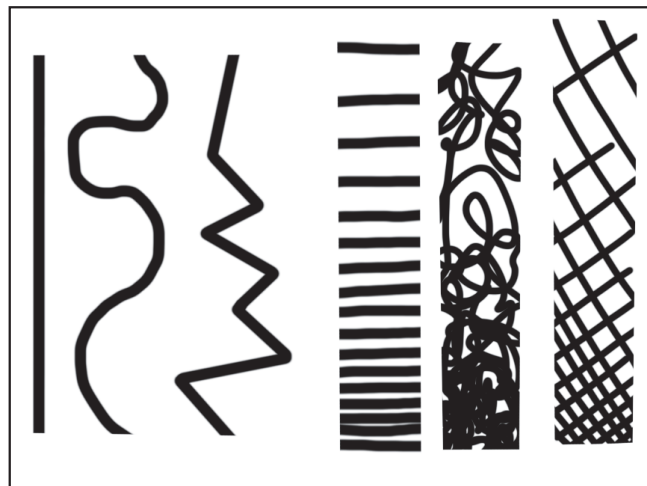
With that in mind, let's dive in to drawing!

THE BASICS

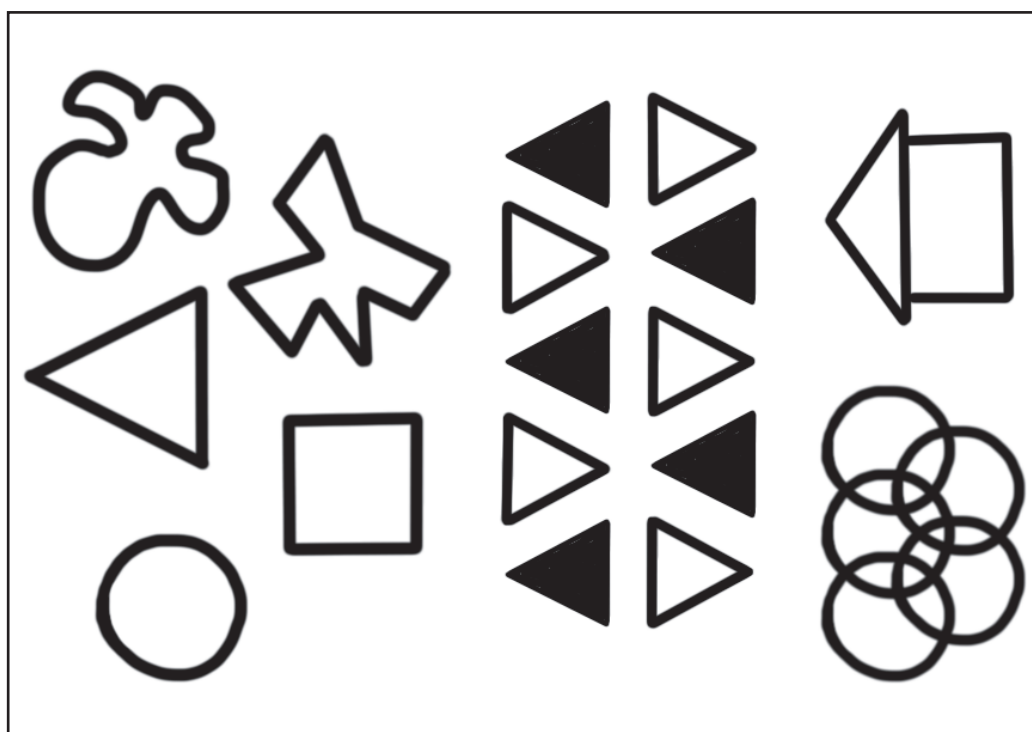
All drawings can be condensed into three elements: dot, line, and shape. You can combine each element together to create anything!



DOTS A dot is single point on a page—simply putting pen down to paper. Use a lot of dots together for shading and texture, and space them out in a gradient for smooth transitions.



LINES A line is simply a dot that extends out in any direction. Lines can be straight, curvy, or crooked. They can be parallel, perpendicular, or overlap.



SHAPES A shape is a line that comes back to its point of origin to become enclosed. It can be curvy or straight, solid (filled), or empty.

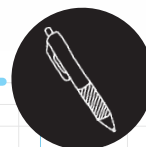
IMAGINATION AND ASSOCIATION

Illustration starts with imagination. If you can dream it in your head, you can draw it. Our brains are also really good at association, or finding something familiar in something unrelated, like seeing a dog shape in a passing cloud. Let your creative mind loose to see new possibilities in the most basic shapes, and you can grow your imagination and improve your drawing skills.



EXERCISE

Draw some shapes in your notebook or on a sheet of paper, and add dots, lines, and other shapes to show what they could be. There are no right or wrong answers—it's all in what you imagine! Keep it simple. Go for recognizable over realistic.



If you get stuck or can't draw something, remember your arsenal of tools! Get out your smartphone and search the Internet for images of what you're trying to draw (i.e. "light bulb drawing"). One trick I use is to add the word "clip art" after the search words. While clip art isn't very good quality, it's a great method for simplifying ideas into images you can easily recreate. Just be sure to never copy someone else's work and pass it off as your own! That's called copyright infringement.



When I teach visual notes workshops and illustration classes, I often have people practice drawing in groups, because you can learn a lot from others. Nearly everyone draws the same object in a different way, in their own style. If you're stuck or looking for a new way to draw something, ask a friend or family member to draw it for you—you're sure to get some ideas!

LEVELING UP

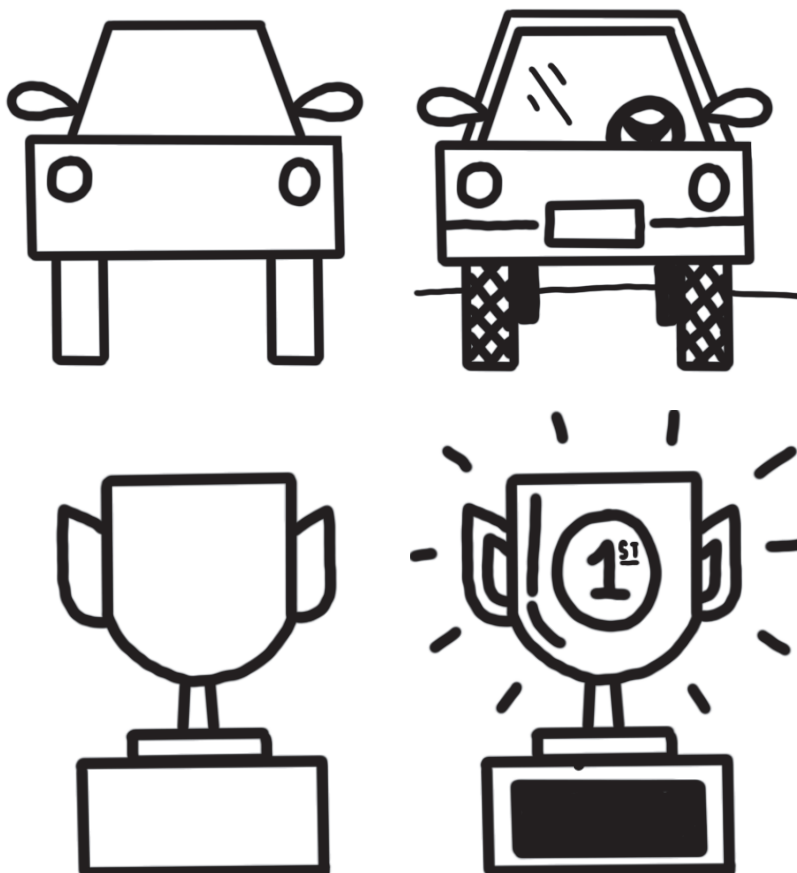
It's time to introduce "leveling up!" This is the term I use when I add to or improve a drawing. Consider the house example from earlier.



The simple house on the far left could be level one. Each time you finish a drawing, ask yourself, "Is there anything I can add to improve this?" If there is, add it! If not, that's okay too. Each time you add something, consider leveling up. Don't add on for the sake of adding on, though. Each addition should be intentional and make the drawing more recognizable. It's okay to start simple, but try to grow and "level up" as your confidence and skills increase.

Here are some ideas for leveling up your drawings:

- Add more dots, lines, or shapes
- Add shading
- Add details
- Add context (Who, What, When, Where, How, Why)
- Ask a friend for tips on how they would make it better
- Add color
- Change an existing element
- Add dimension or change the angle
- Add a label or caption

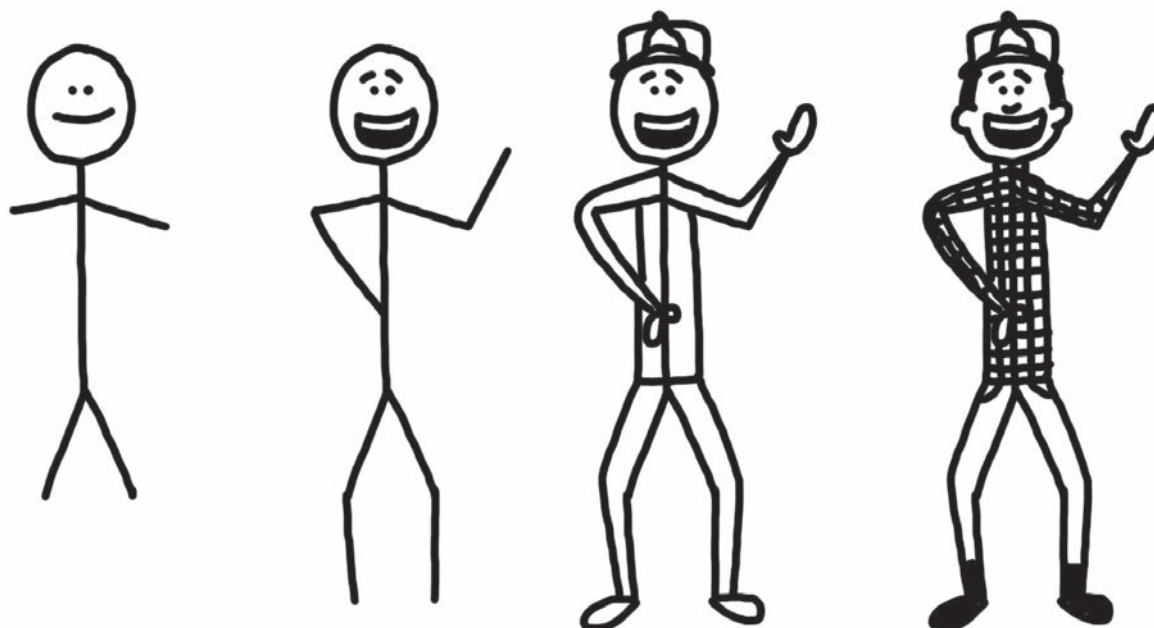


FIGURES

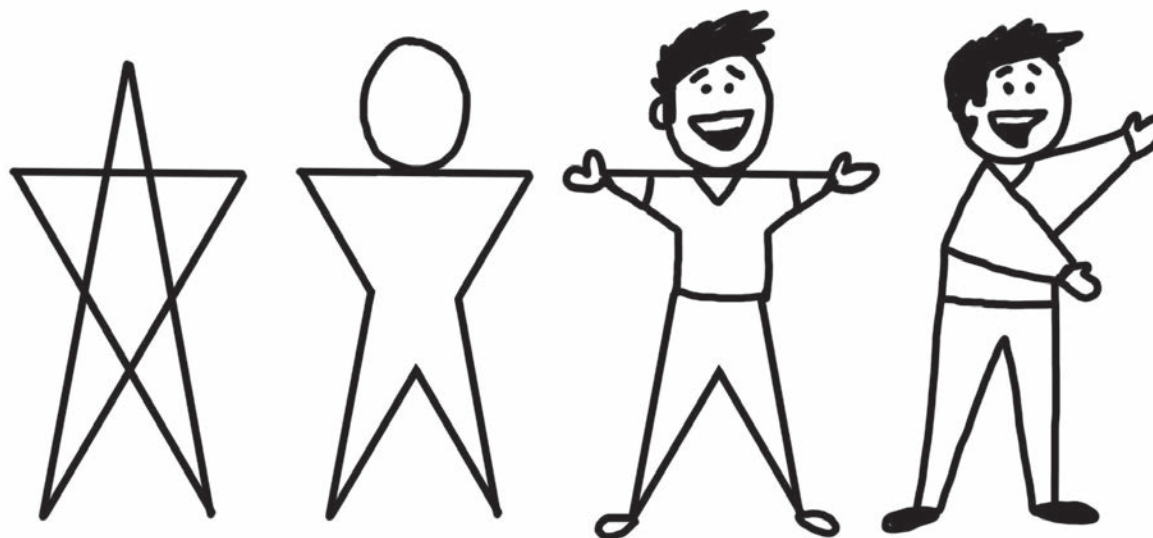
Drawing people can be intimidating for some. It's important to learn to draw people, because that's mostly what we talk about: ourselves! Our brains are wired to respond to faces—even infants can recognize faces before learning to identify other objects. Remember, go for simple and recognizable, not realistic.

In your notebook, copy these examples. Remember to level up your drawings as you improve and practice! Each example shows ways to level up as you move to the right.

STICK PERSON The stick person is the most familiar, and you probably have a drawing from grade school using this method! Start with the figure on the far left, and see if you can level it up! Notice the progression; the basics are still there, but it's improved upon for added recognition.

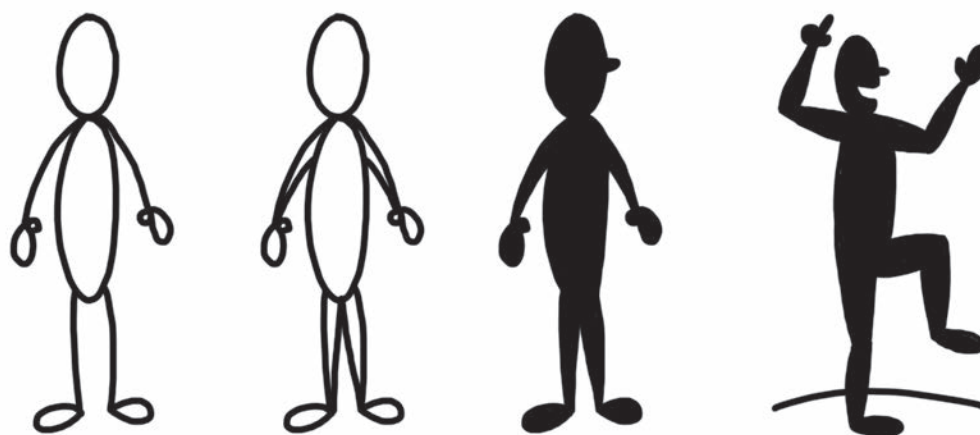


STAR PERSON Another recognizable shape is the star! Using a star can be a great tool to draw people. Start with the basic shape and add to and change it to make the best star person you can!



"A" PERSON

Draw a letter A, and then add a head, feet, hands, and even clothes! Keep leveling up and changing it to improve!



OVAL PERSON

The oval person consists of circles and ovals connected by lines to show body position.

FACES

Faces are the best way to portray an emotion or reaction. Drawing the whole body isn't necessary when you can focus on a person's head and face to get the point across.

Faces don't always have to be human. Humanizing your drawings with faces can help convey emotion. Putting a smile on a dog or a sad face on a rain cloud might not be realistic, but remember—we aren't going for realistic! As long as a face adds clarity and improves the recognition and understanding of what's happening, go for it!



EXERCISE

Practice drawing a human face. Draw 10 to 15 circles, and then pick emotions from the list below to draw in each circle. Remember—you don't have to be realistic!



AFRAID
ALIVE
ANGRY
ALARMED
CONFUSED
DEPRESSED
GOOD
HAPPY
HELPLESS
HURT
INDIFFERENT
LOVE
OPEN
POSITIVE
SAD

STRONG
AFFECTION
ALOOF
ALONE
BRAVE
CLEVER
COMPOSED
DREAD
ENVY
FRUSTRATED
GLOOMY
HATE
HURT
INFURIATED
INTRIGUED

JOYOUS
MOURNFUL
NERVOUS
PANIC
PLAYFUL
RESENTMENT
SERENITY
SHY
SKEPTICAL
TENACIOUS
THANKFUL
UNCOMFORTABLE
VEXED
VICTIMIZED

Other things to consider:

- **Intensity:** Are they a little sad or REALLY sad? Can you tell the difference?
- **Age:** Is the face old, young, or ageless/neutral?
- **Angle:** Faces don't always have to be drawn straight on! Consider a three-quarter or side view.
- **Extras:** Is there anything else you can add for context and to improve understanding? For instance, drawing tears on a sad face to convey woe or drawing hearts around a happy face to convey love.

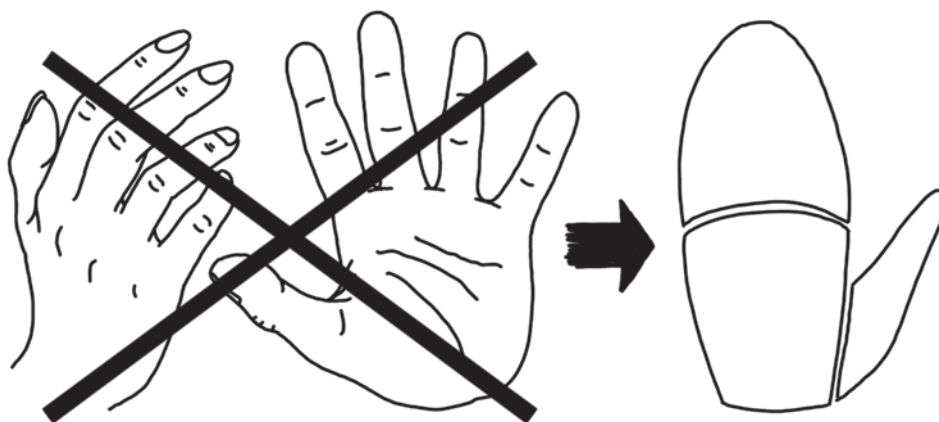


Can't figure out how to draw an emotion? Cheat and look at the emoji on your phone for ideas!

HANDS

Drawing hands is the most requested demonstration during my workshops and classes. Whether we're using sign language or making a simple gesture like pointing, hands are a big part of how we communicate. It's no wonder people want to draw them in their visual notes!

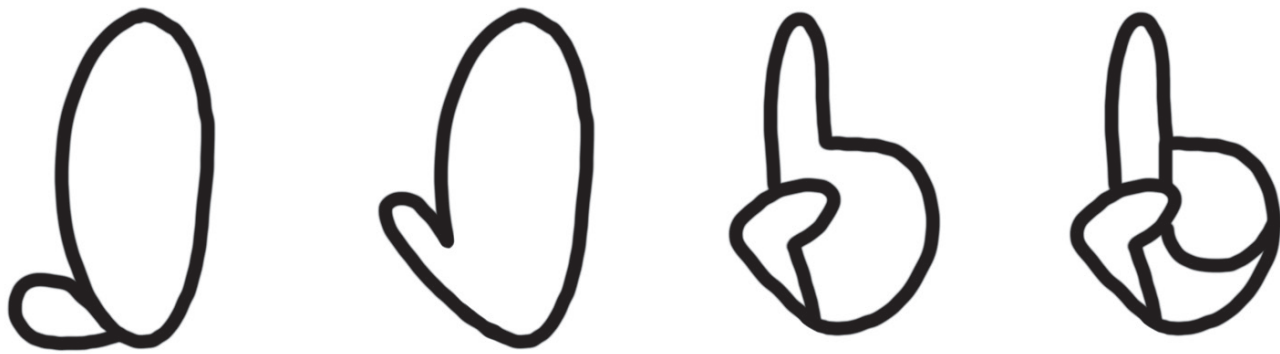
Hands can be easy to mess up because of all the parts that move in very specific ways. Fortunately, you're going for recognizable—not realistic. The first step is to break down all those complicated parts into three things: the palm, the fingers, and the thumb.



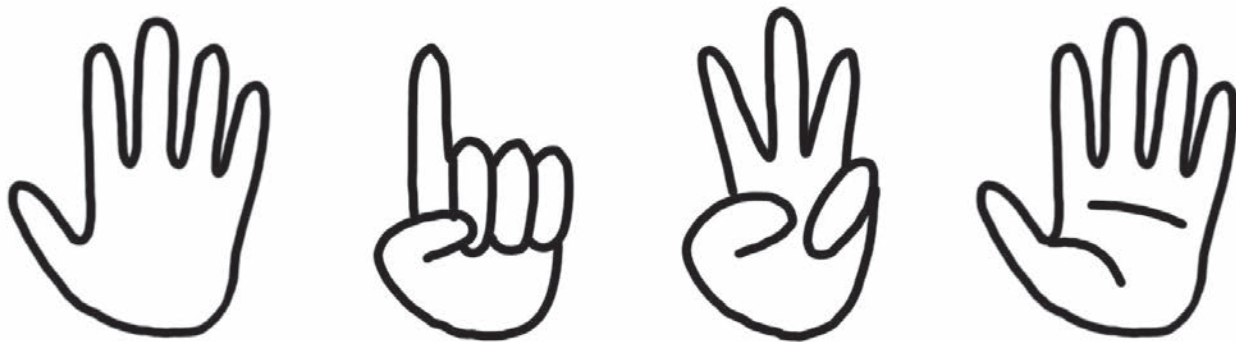
STICK HAND This is one of the easiest hands to draw. Simply pick a point; then draw a short thumb out to one side and three or four lines on the other side. The lines can be straight, curvy, or crooked. Since it's a recognizable (not realistic) hand, you don't even always need all five fingers. I think three is the minimum needed.

To level up the stick hand, draw a box for the palm. Add the thumb coming from the base of the box, and then add the fingers on the top edge. The box method usually looks best with four fingers.





THE MITTEN Another simple hand is the mitten. Simply draw a large oval with a smaller oval connecting at the base. The downside with mitten hands is you can't be very specific, like holding up three fingers. These mitten hands are perfect for stick people and oval people.

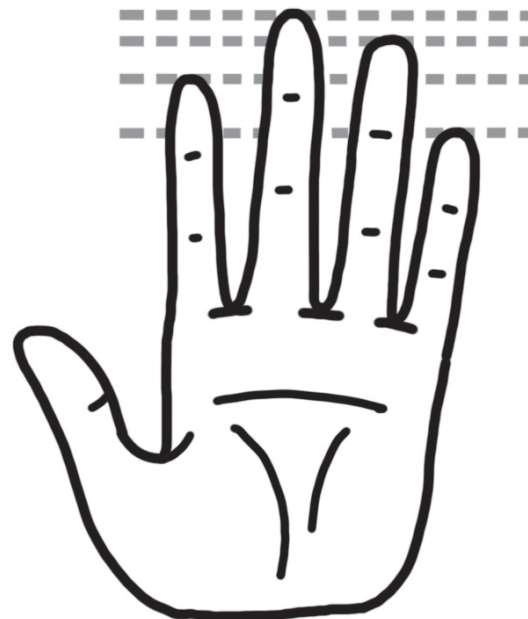


BASIC HAND A more advanced way to draw hands is like you might see on a cartoon character. Draw one continuous line for the hand shape, covering the three basic parts: thumb, palm, and fingers. If you draw these three things, you'll make a recognizable hand! If the palm is facing you, level up and draw the curved thumb crease, and even the crease under the fingers.

LEVELING UP

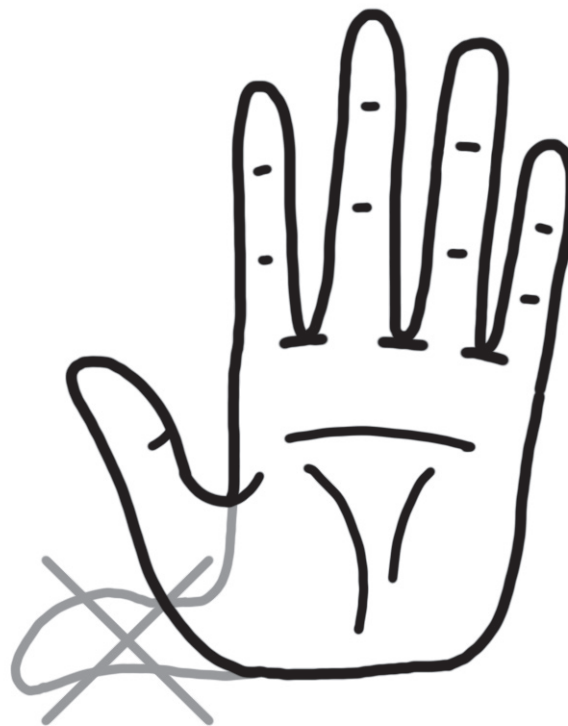
Perhaps you've been drawing recognizable hands for a while, but there's still something "off" about them and you want to be more accurate. Striving to improve your drawings to be more accurate is just fine, as long as drawing more realistically doesn't take away your focus from actively listening! Here are some things to look for when you're ready to level up.

The mitten hand is more accurate than you may realize! **Fingers are not all the same length.**





The bottoms of the fingers also don't connect in a straight line. Think of the palm as a square with bulging sides.



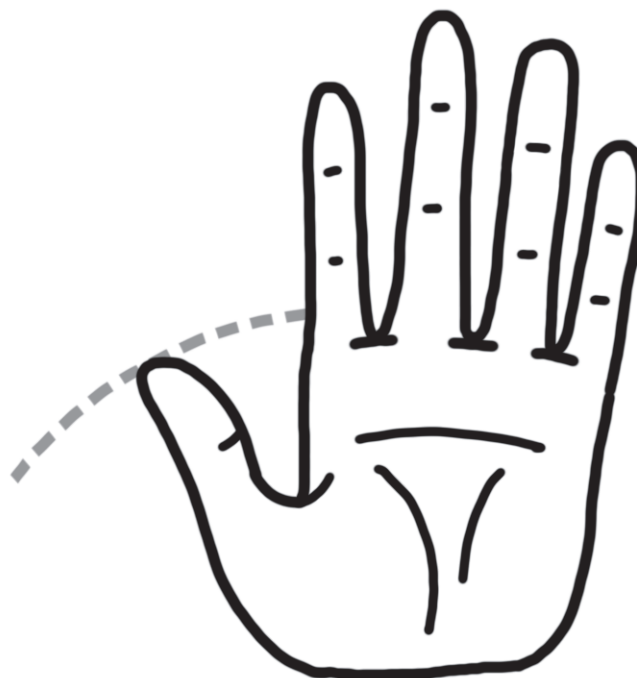
The thumb connects at the base of the hand, but it doesn't actually come out directly from the connection point. Note how it comes out in the middle of the palm at an angle. Don't forget to curve the inside of the thumb!



EXERCISE

Put your non-drawing hand in the following positions and draw each one using any of the drawing methods:

- Open hand, fingers apart
- Open hand, fingers together
- Pointing one finger, fingers facing you
- Hand holding a writing utensil
- Making a fist, thumb over fingers



Don't make the thumb too long! The tip reaches just a little bit higher than where the fingers connect to the palm and moves in a downward arc.

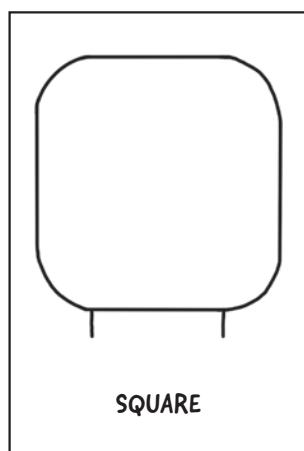
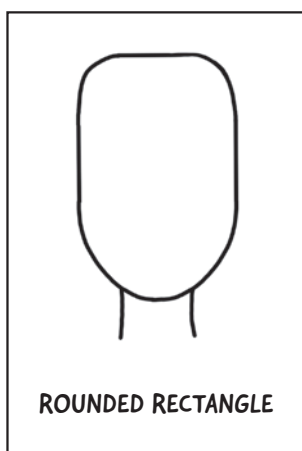
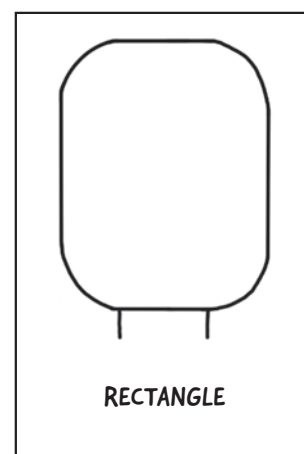
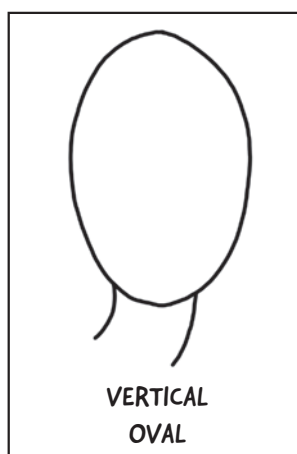
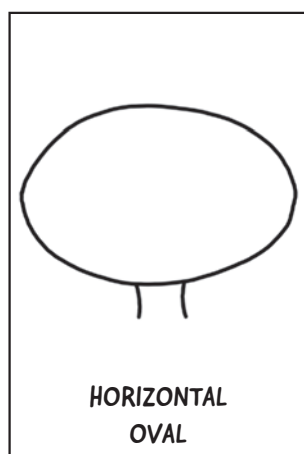
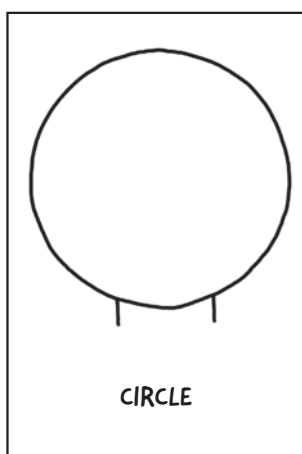
CARTOON-STYLE FACES

I love drawing cartoon faces in my sketchnotes because they are fun and familiar to people. Cartoons also alleviate pressure you might put on yourself to be more realistic in your drawings.

Anyone who has read comics knows there are unlimited ways to draw cartoons—everyone has their own style. Practice some of these concepts, and feel free to come up with your own cartooning methods that are quick and easy for you.

HEAD

Some people like to draw the head before the face, and some like to draw the head after the face. I do both. Sometimes I get inspired to draw a face, and then I have the creative freedom to come up with a head shape to match. Other times, I know exactly what the head should look like, but not the face. Here are a few basic head shapes to get you started.



THINGS TO TRY

- Change the width at one end (i.e. wider at the top than the bottom)
- Try a front view of each shape, in addition to a side view
- Add a chin
- Go back to line basics: try straight, curvy, and crooked parallel lines to draw different styles (and lengths!) of necks

EYES

If there's one thing you should practice a lot, it's the eyes! The eyes are the most important part of a cartoon face—they help convey much of the emotion or action.



CIRCLES



CURVED LINES



DOTS



HALF CIRCLES



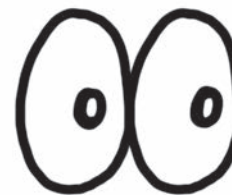
CIRCLES AND LINES



HORIZONTAL OVALS



POINTED OVALS

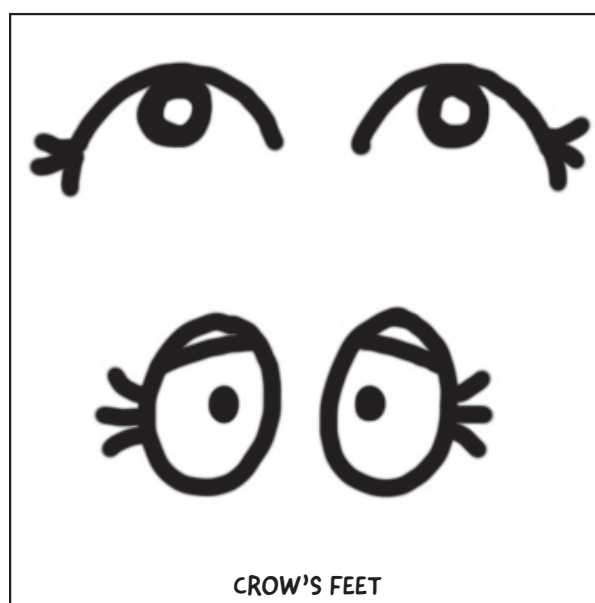
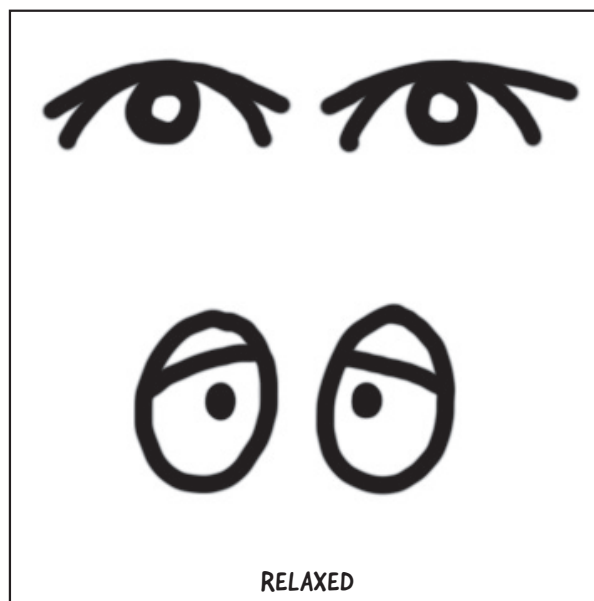
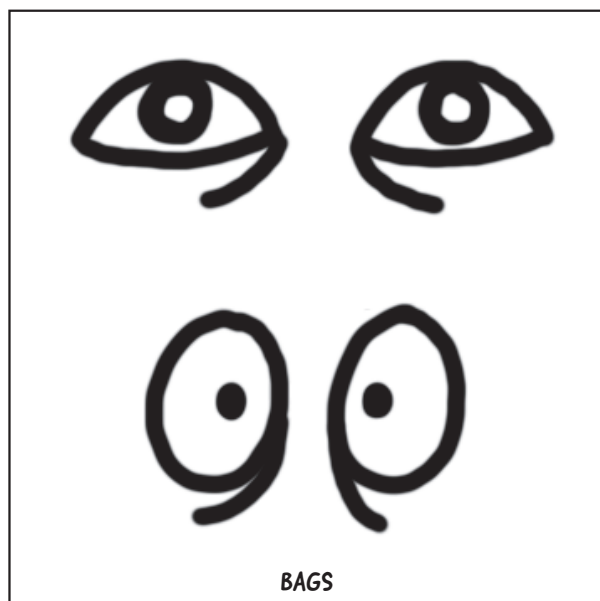


VERTICAL OVALS

ADD-ON

- Eyebrows
- Eyelids
- Eyelashes
- Glasses (can also BE the eyes)

If you're drawing an elderly person, there are a few ways to tastefully add age in the eyes. You can add slight bags below, draw crow's feet on the side, or add relaxed eyelids.



THINGS TO TRY

- Change the distance between the eyes
- Change the size of the eyes
- Change the size of the pupils
- Change the placement of the eyes on the head (high, middle, or low)
- Rotate the eyes in their place

NOSES

There are many ways to draw noses, and these examples are the quickest and simplest. As you grow in confidence and speed, level up!



THREE BUMPS



HALF CIRCLE



SIDEWAYS C



ALMOST 6



U SHAPE



UPSIDE-DOWN 7

THINGS TO TRY

- Change from front view to side view
- Change the position on the head
- Change the size
- Try straight, curvy, and crooked lines



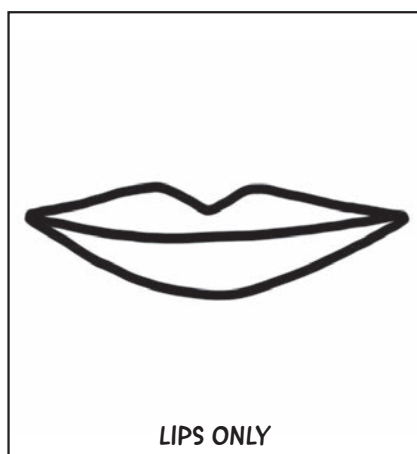
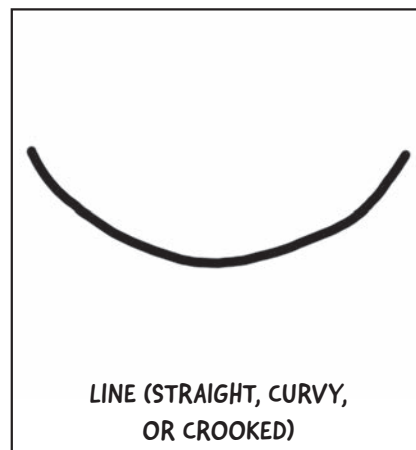
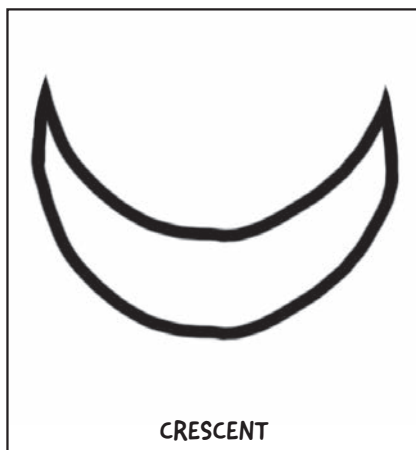
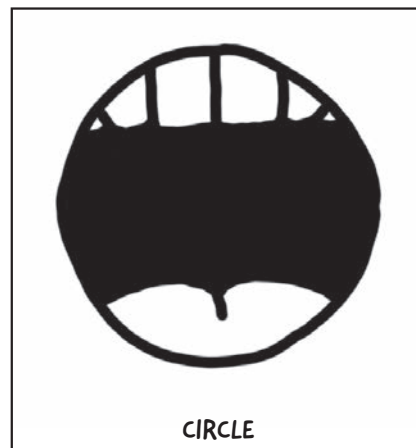
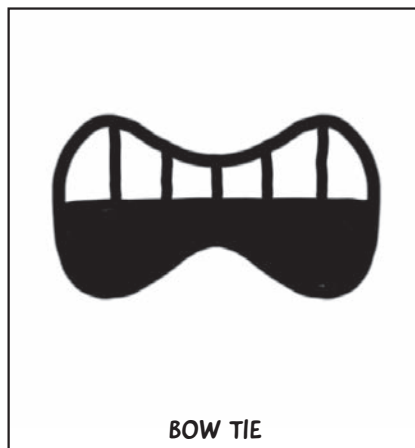
V NOSE



One of the quickest ways I tend to mess up my drawings is by adding nostrils to the nose. Whenever I add them, it ends up looking like a pig nose. My solution? I don't draw them!

MOUTHS

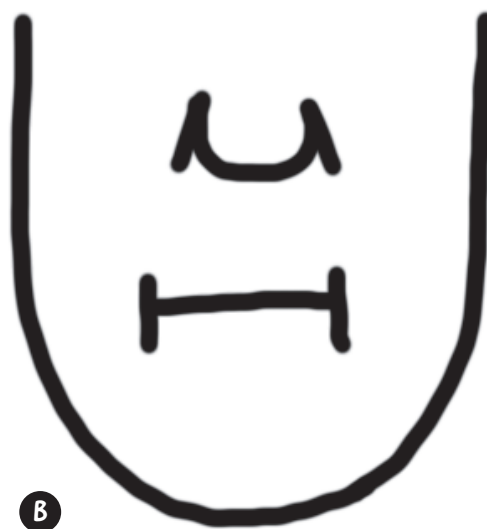
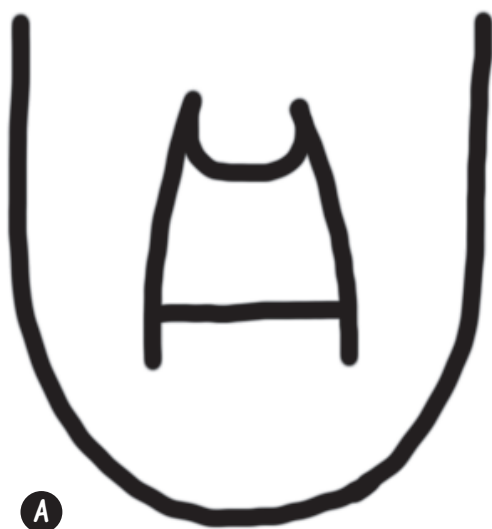
Mouths also convey a lot of emotion and action, and the shapes vary widely for what you want to convey. Look in the mirror. Make faces for different emotions and see what your mouth looks like. When you draw it in a cartoon style, exaggerate it further for clarity.



ADD-ON

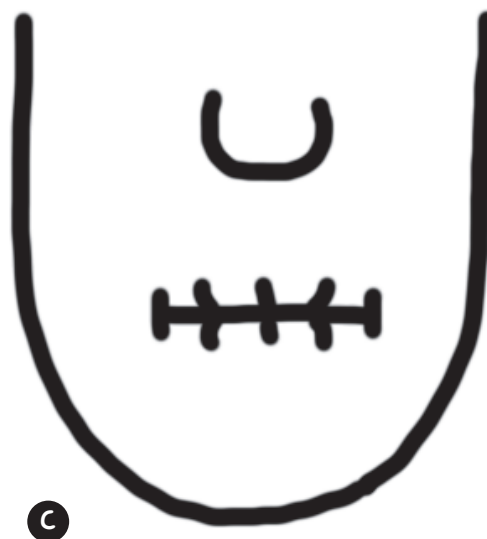
- Lips
- Teeth
- Tongue
- Facial hair

If you're drawing an elderly person, the mouth is another area where you can show age. You can add lines that go directly from the sides of the nose to the sides of the mouth (A), add straight lines on the sides of the mouth (B), and even small wrinkle lines on the lips (C).



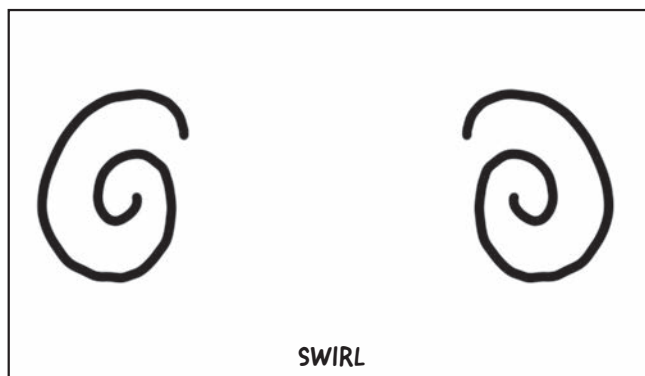
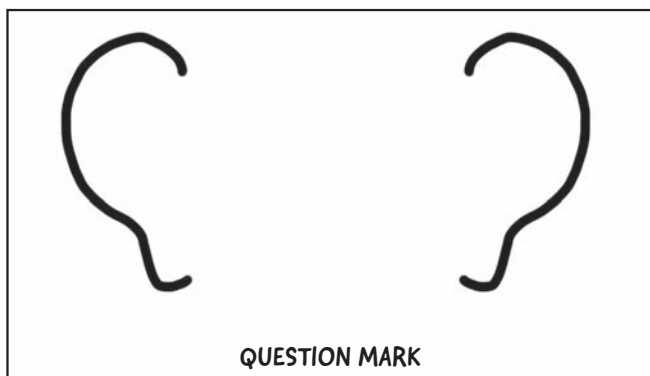
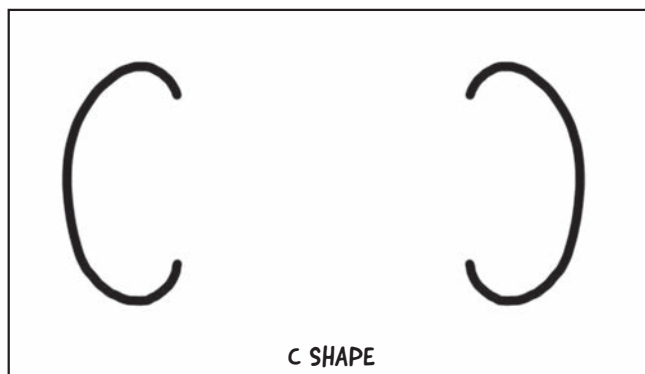
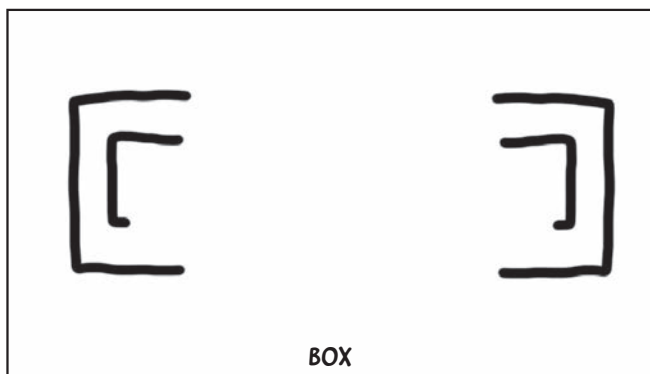
THINGS TO TRY

- Change from front view to side view
- Change the position on the head
- Change the size
- Try open and closed mouths



EARS

Ears are naturally positioned on the side of the head between the tops of the eyes and the bottom of the nose, but since we're cartooning, you can move them around a little.



If you're drawing ears from a front view of the face, simply add some shapes on the side of the head. If you're drawing a side view, you can add a few details, but don't overcomplicate. If I'm drawing a detailed ear, I only draw the top ridge (the helix) and the little bump next to the opening (the tragus). Any more than that is often too much detail for a cartoon.

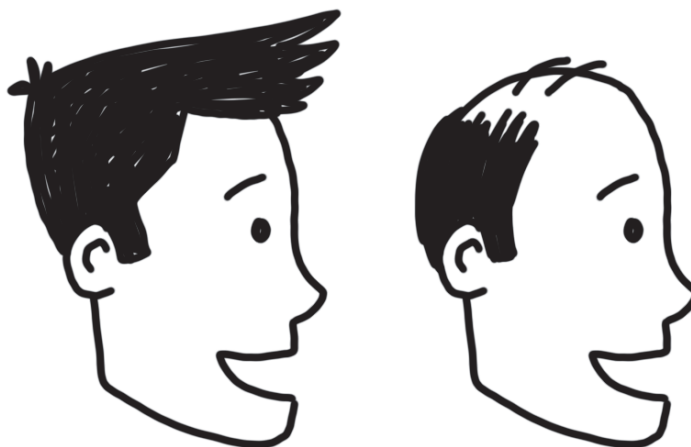
THINGS TO TRY

- Add earrings
- Change the position on the head
- Change the size
- Change how much they stick out

HAIR

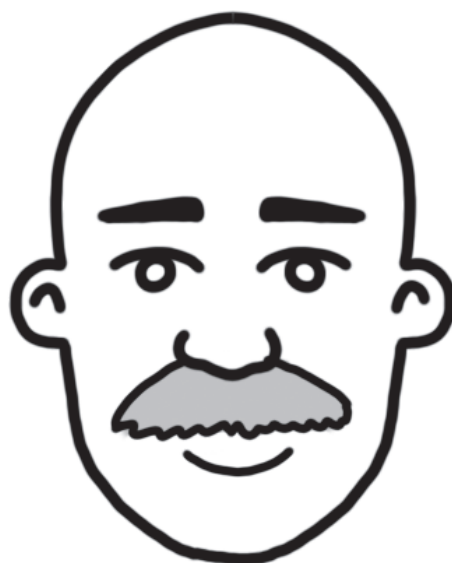
Hair is one of the most defining features of a cartoon character. Even if every facial feature you draw looks the same, changing the hair will make each face look completely different.

There are infinite ways to draw hair. To get started, look at the examples here and try to replicate them. Next, observe the people around you and try to draw those styles.



FACIAL HAIR

I enjoy drawing characters with facial hair, because it creates good visual interest and contrast. Facial hair is also often in style, so drawing characters with crazy mustaches or big beards isn't far from reality! Look at the facial hair examples here and try to replicate them. Next, observe the people around you and try to draw those styles.



THINGS TO TRY

- Mustaches
- Beards at different stages of growth
- Goatees
- Making the beard and mouth work together (i.e. making a mustache the top line of the mouth)

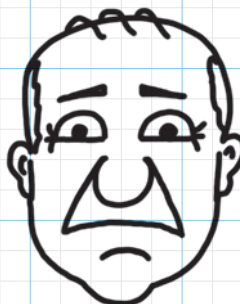
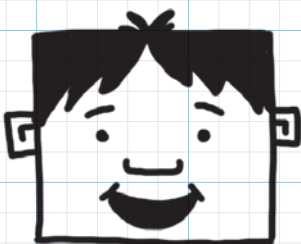
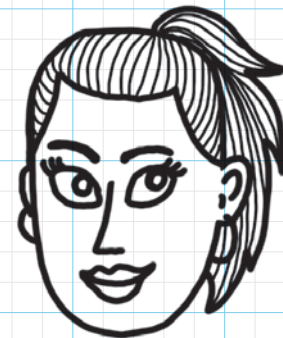
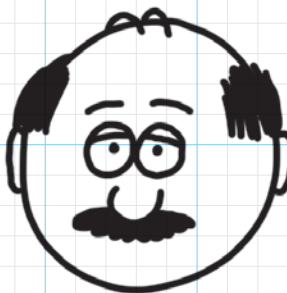
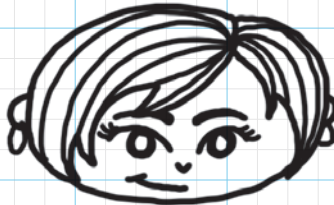
PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

Now that you've practiced drawing different head shapes, eyes, noses, mouths, ears, and hair, it's time to put it all together in one drawing.



EXERCISE

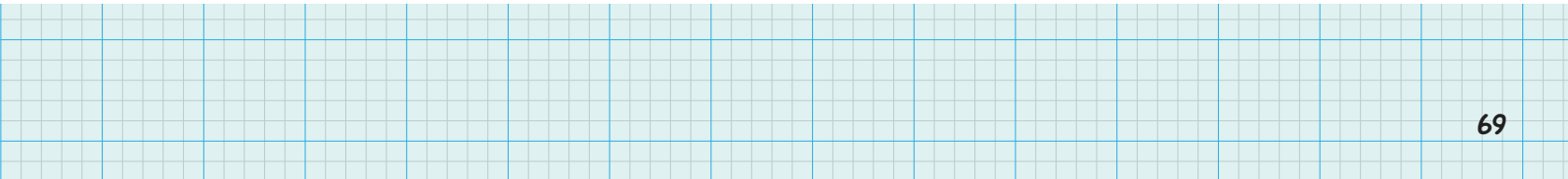
Draw eight different head shapes, either front or side views. Next add eyes for each; then add the nose, mouth, ears, and hair. Mix and match different styles of each feature to find what works best for you. When you finish, look at each character you've drawn and write down what you do and don't like about each one. As you narrow your preferences, you'll begin to find your own unique cartooning style.





PRACTICE HERE

Use these pages to complete the exercise described on page 67.



VISUAL DIRECTION

As you take visual notes, you need to include elements that help with the way your notes are read—in other words, the visual direction. You don't want the notes to look overwhelming, and these tools help create balance by distinguishing the path of content and signaling to the reader where to look next.

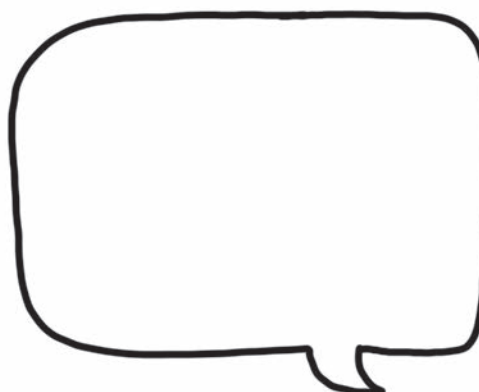
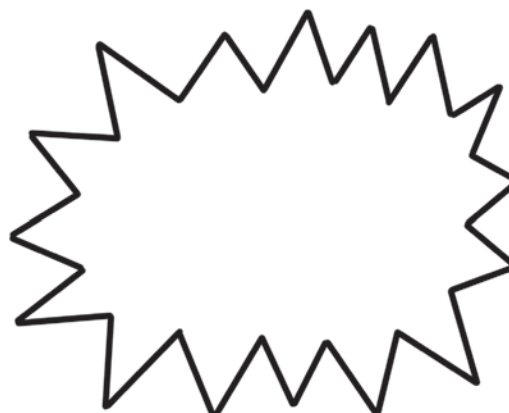
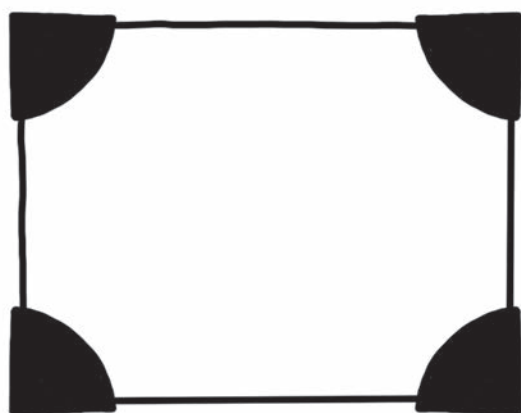
CONTAINERS

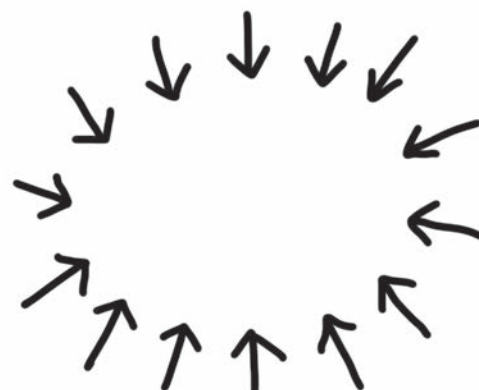
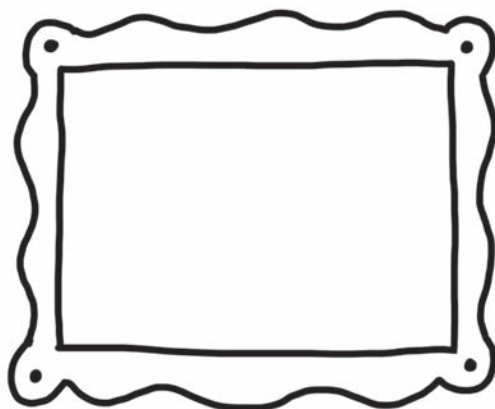
Picture this: You're taking visual notes during a lecture. The presenter gave a recommendation, said something profound, shared a quote, or made a related side-comment. You want to capture it in a special way, but what to do? Use a container!

Containers help separate content in your visual notes. They can draw attention to big ideas, or they can separate the lesser points from the larger flow of information. Containers can be subtle, or they can be big and bold.

EXERCISE

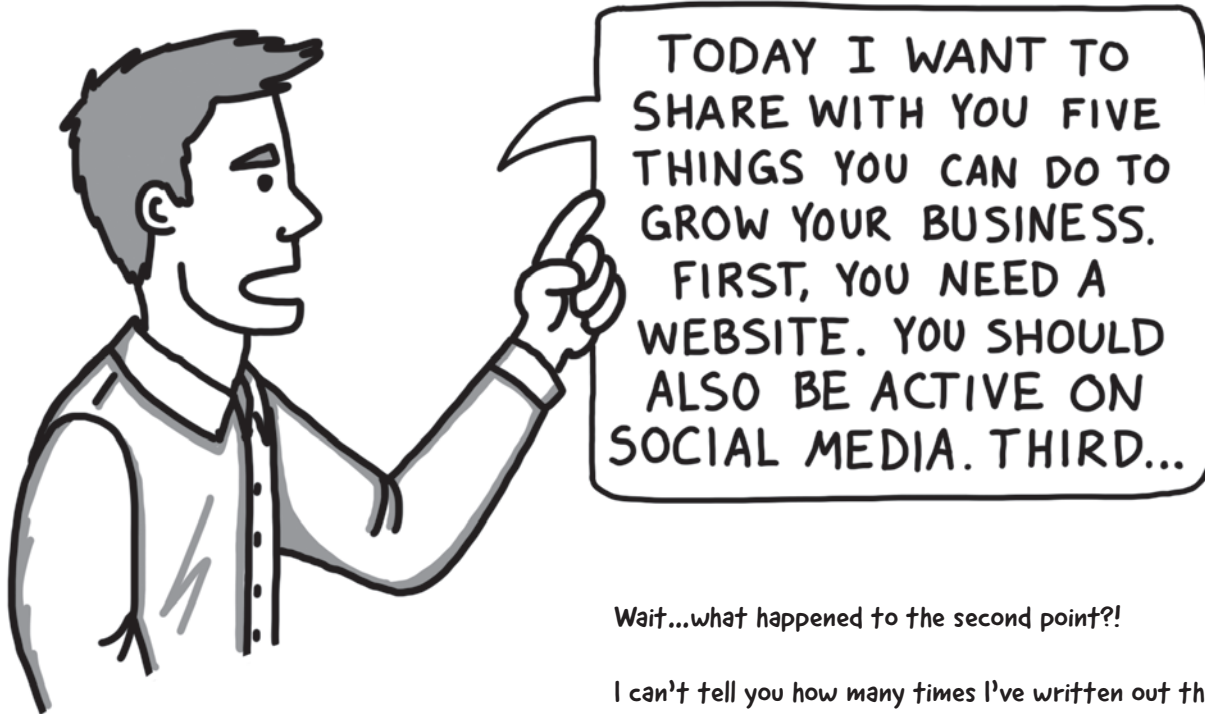
In your notebook or on a piece of paper, copy the container examples shown here; then think of 10 new container styles and draw them on your own.





NUMBERS

If the content you're listening to is delivered in a list format, such as "5 things to do to grow your business," you'll want to include numbering. Though it's obvious how numbering helps visually direct, it can be difficult to accurately capture the numbers. In my experience, presenters often forget to specify the number they are on, but will continue to list their points. Here's what I mean:



Wait...what happened to the second point?!

I can't tell you how many times I've written out the numbers first, ready for the presenter to list off each point...only for the list to get jumbled up or for something to get missed. To combat this problem, I recommend not writing any numbers down until the list has been captured in full—or jot them down in pencil as you go. This way you can go back to any block of text and add the appropriate number. If the numbers don't add up with what you've written, just don't add them at all!

Here are a few numbering examples.

1. THIS IS WHERE
THE FIRST POINT
IS WRITTEN.

1. THIS IS WHERE
THE FIRST POINT
IS WRITTEN.

1. THIS IS WHERE
THE FIRST POINT
IS WRITTEN.

2. THIS IS WHERE
THE SECOND POINT
IS WRITTEN.

2. THIS IS WHERE
THE SECOND POINT
IS WRITTEN.

2. THIS IS WHERE
THE SECOND POINT
IS WRITTEN.

3. THIS IS WHERE
THE THIRD POINT
IS WRITTEN.

3. THIS IS WHERE
THE THIRD POINT
IS WRITTEN.

3. THIS IS WHERE
THE THIRD POINT
IS WRITTEN.

ARROWS

Using arrows in your visual notes is one of the easiest and clearest ways to visually direct people and call special attention to information. Arrows don't have to be plain though! Use an arrow as a title, to contain blocks of text, or even to subtly guide your viewer to the next place you want them to look.



EXERCISE

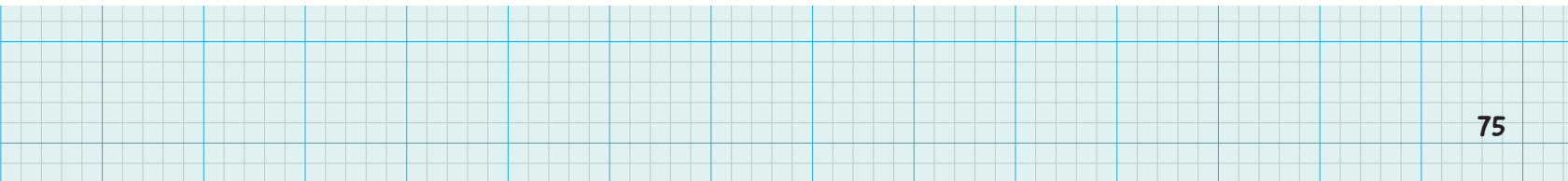
Draw 10 different types of arrows. Next find some old notes you've taken and use arrows to connect blocks of text and visually direct your reader to the next point.





PRACTICE HERE

Use these pages to practice drawing containers, numbers, arrows, or anything else you've learned so far.

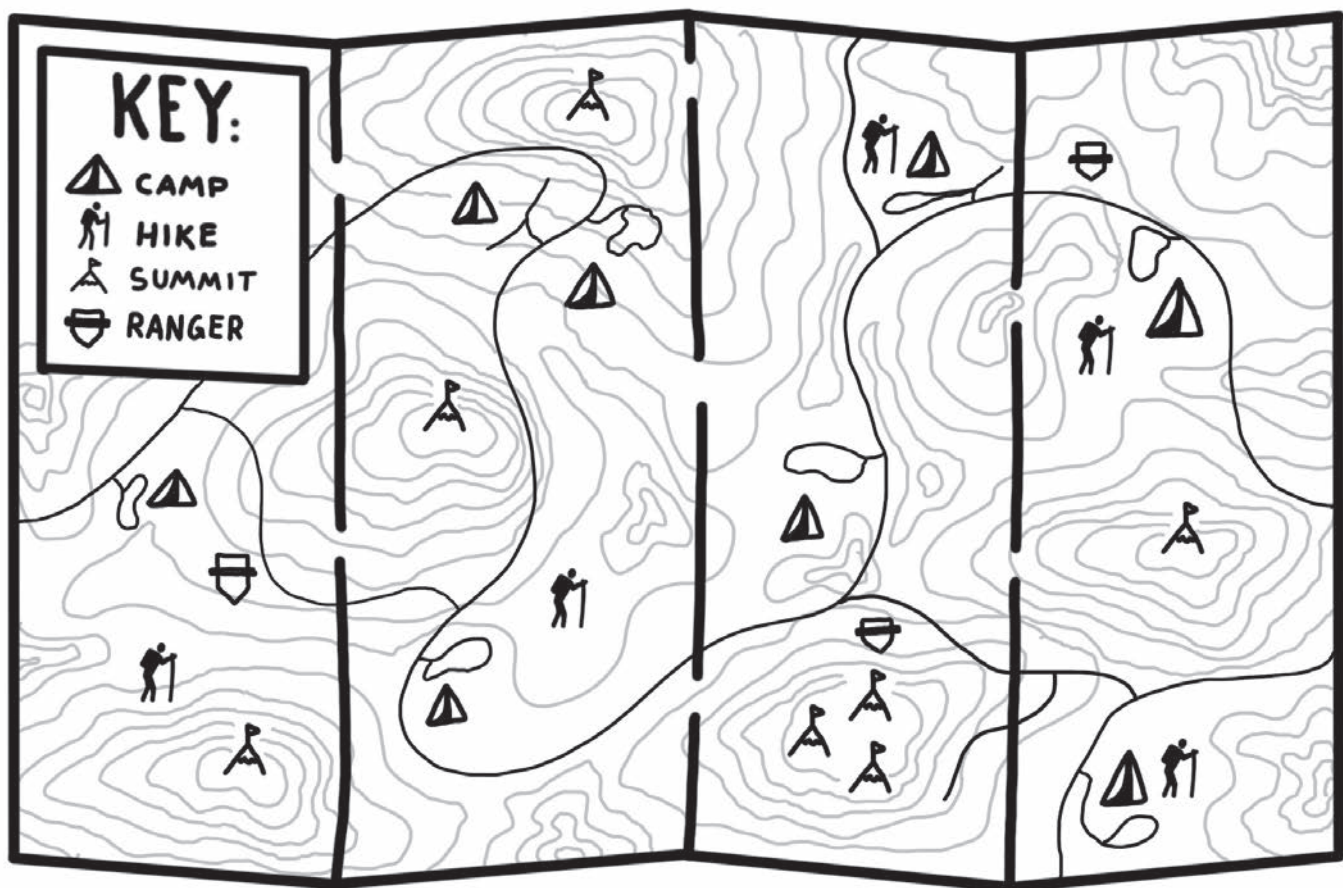


FINDING INFORMATION FAST

You might ask, “What do I do with my visual notes after I take them?” Even if you never show your visual notes to anyone else, it’s still a good idea to revisit what you captured for your own retention. Visual notes are much easier to read than traditional written or typed notes, and there are two methods you can use to find information in your notes faster. The first method is the use of **icons** and the second is **indexing**.

ICONS

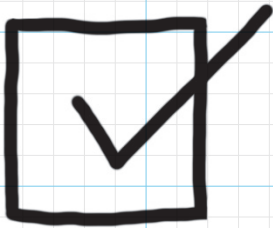
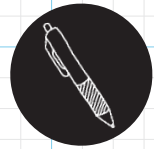
Consider the map. A map is host to a lot of information and uses small graphics (icons) to indicate specific things that might be of importance. Those icons are displayed together in the map key to tell you what each one means. When you take visual notes, you can do the same thing!



Icons are simple, small drawings that bring clarity and help visualize common concepts, categories, or actions. If you’ve tried bullet journaling, the use of iconography will be familiar to you.

EXERCISE

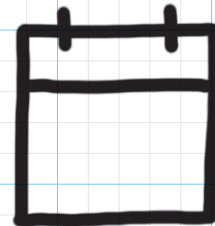
Practice the examples of common icon categories shown here. Come up with your own way to draw each one. Then consider what other icons you might use in your visual notes and practice drawing them.



ACTION ITEM



DEADLINE



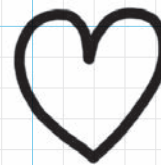
EVENT



IDEA



LOCATION



PERSONAL



QUOTE



READING/SCHOOL



WORK



In my visual notes, I don't want the icons to draw focus away from the information, but I also want to visually link the information together. I keep them easy to recognize and relatively small.

INDEXING

After taking visual notes for several years, I found myself with a stack of sketchbooks full of great information. Unfortunately, when I wanted to look back on a specific page of visual notes, it took a long time for me to find them. I decided to try creating an index to keep track of my visual notes. Here's how it works:

1. When you start a new sketchbook, write the date of the first notes you take on the inside cover or the first page. I write only the month and year.
2. As you take notes, write the title or event name of each note in a single column in your index. You can be as specific or general as you'd like—just be sure to create an index you'll understand later. If your sketchbook has page numbers, include those!
3. When you fill the last page in your sketchbook, write the date of the last notes you took on the inside cover or first page after the date of the first notes. Now you have a timeline for how long your sketchbook spans! If you knew you took visual notes in April 2018, all you have to do is find the notebooks with that date in the timeline. Look down your index to see where it might be in the sketchbook and flip to it fast!

OTHER WAYS TO INDEX

Another method for indexing is to purchase thin sticker labels and place them on the spines of your sketchbooks. This way you can see the dates without having to remove it from your shelf. If your sketchbooks are spiral-bound or too thin for a sticker, place the label on the front cover instead. You could also use white or metallic pens to write date ranges on black sketchbooks.



LEVEL UP YOUR INDEX

One way to level up your index is to use icons. You can draw the icon next to what you wrote in the index to indicate where the notes are from.

- ✝ THEOLOGY NOTES
- ♥ CREATIVE MISSIONS
- ✝ IMMANUEL
- 📅 I.F.V.P. CONFERENCE
- 📅 ELLIOT CONFERENCE
- 📖 BOOK REVIEW
- 📅 ACUFF EVENT

EXERCISE

If you have an old sketchbook you can index, create one now. If you haven't filled a sketchbook yet, create a mock index using the space below, describing at least eight things you'd like to take visual notes for. Maybe you have a favorite podcast, a conference you'll be attending, or a dream client. Next create some icons to help categorize your index. Some categories to get you thinking: event, conference, sermon, lecture, podcast, book, or personal. The possibilities are endless!

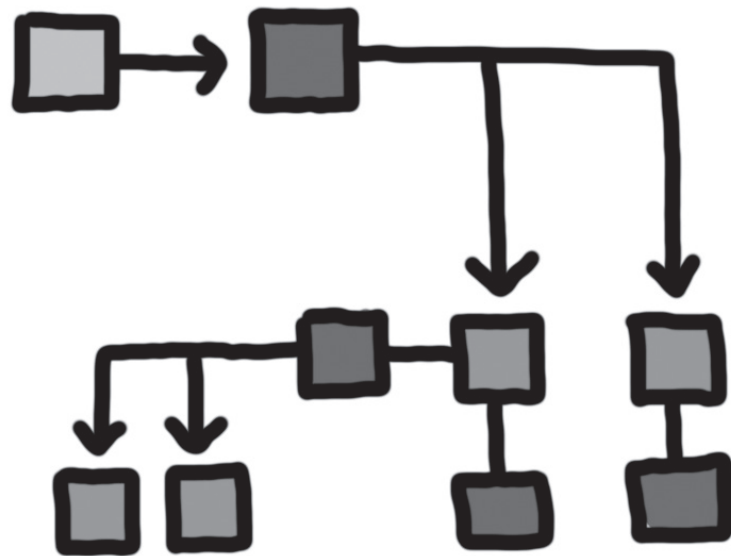


VISUALIZING INFORMATION IN DIAGRAMS

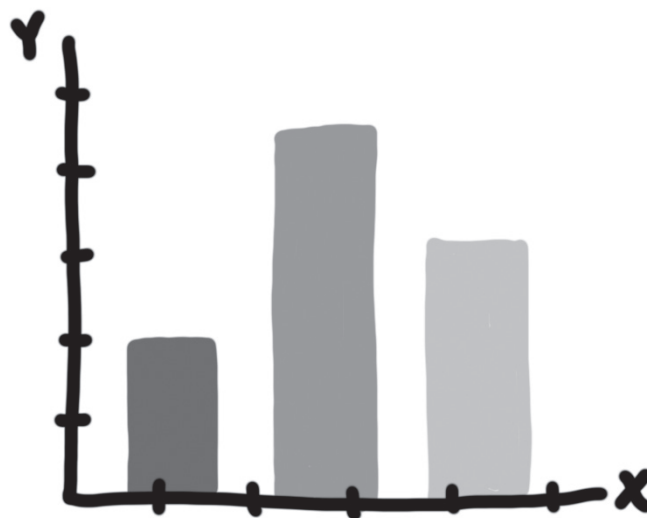
When it comes to lecture-based visual notes, it's rare that I capture an entire diagram. Diagrams are full of complex information that takes time and focus to draw accurately, and I'd rather focus on listening for big ideas than capture details. Diagrams typically have an overall message, such as "sales are increasing" or "it took three years to recover from the recession." In my opinion, it's better to capture the overall messages found by looking at diagrams, rather than capturing the diagrams themselves.

However, there are instances where it's helpful and even necessary to visualize information using diagrams. The goal with visual notes is to increase retention, so anything you can do to help the information be understood is a win.

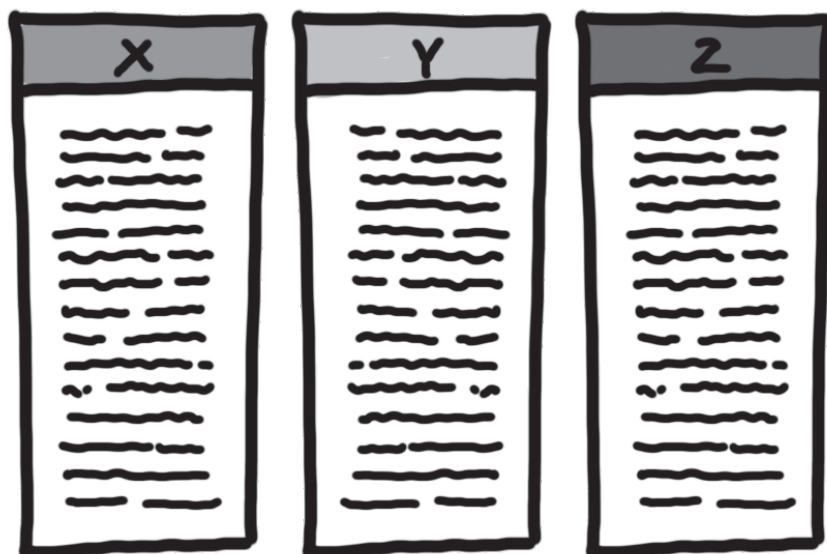
I've found there are five main types of diagrams. There are other methods of charting data, but these are the most common and effective methods for visual notes.



FLOWCHART/MAP Often used for mapping organization, processes, actions, or journeys.

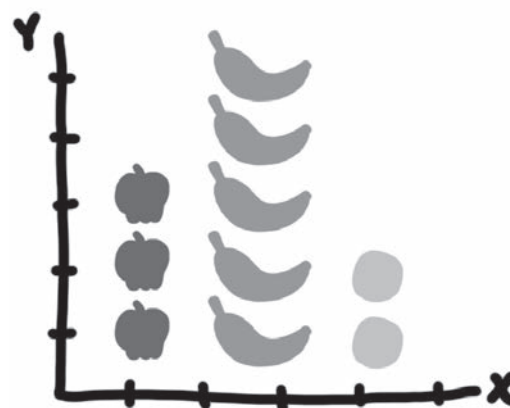
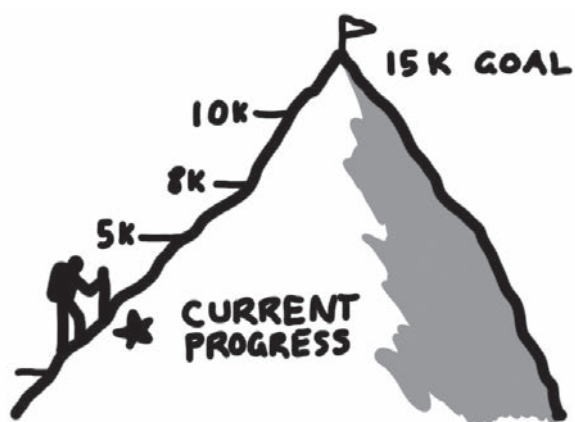


GRAPH Can be line, bar, or scatter. Best if you have X and Y axis information, such as "revenue (x) over time (y)."

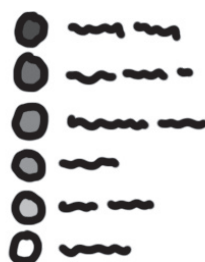
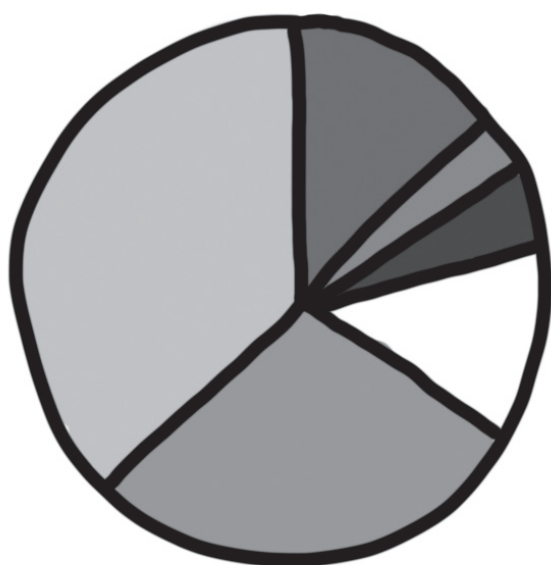


LISTS/CATEGORIES

Groupings of data under specific categories.



PICTORIAL Often metaphorical, like filling a thermometer. Images are also used to represent different amounts of data.



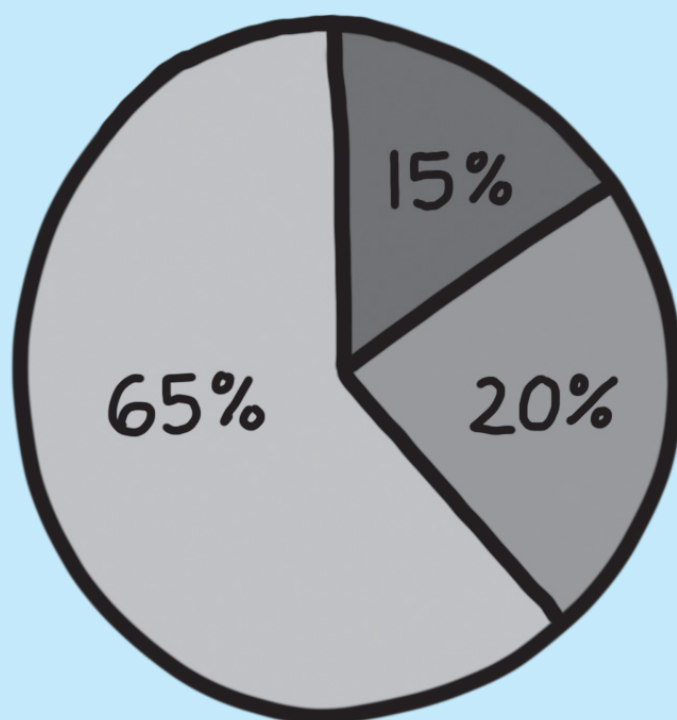
PIE CHART

Most often used to show allocations of a larger whole.

TIPS FOR LECTURE-BASED SCENARIOS

If you're taking experience-based visual notes, capture as many diagrams as your time allows. Remember not to get too detailed—your visual notes should highlight only the main ideas. Lecture-based scenarios are different. Here are a few tips:

- If the presenter moves quickly through diagrams, don't panic! They probably don't need the audience to remember each one in detail, and you don't need to copy each diagram.
- If the presenter spends a long time explaining one diagram, take a picture of the slide on your phone and leave some space in your notes, just in case you decide to capture it later. You may find that you don't need to capture the diagram at all because the overall message is made clear in the rest of the presentation.
- If the presenter shares a lot of different numbers, try to give those numbers a matching visual to help the audience comprehend the information. The presenter is telling, but you have the opportunity to show.



SHOW VS. TELL

Hearing a string of statistics like "65 percent of our web traffic came from mobile, 20 percent from desktop, and 15 percent from tablets" is easy to forget. But a pie chart showing just how much more web traffic came via mobile than desktop or tablet makes a difference in how it is remembered.

- A "worst-case scenario" is that the presenter shares a ton of specific data, and it is important to capture it all. This is common for sessions like financial reports or annual reviews. Have your phone handy to snap pictures of the slides, and keep up as best you can. Jot down numbers quickly in pencil if you need to, and revisit after the session is over when you refine your notes. If you know you need to capture diagrams, be sure to leave plenty of space.

HOW TO CHOOSE A DIAGRAM

It's easy to capture a diagram given to you by the presenter, but sometimes you have to come up with the right one on your own. Like most skills, this comes with practice. Follow the process below as you figure out what type of diagram is best to use.

1. Identify goals for the diagram. What is the message? What type of diagram will show it best?
2. Figure out what data needs to be shown and the amount of detail needed.
3. Organize and categorize the data.
4. If a diagram is not immediately obvious, try different kinds. Edit, refine, or simplify if needed.

EXERCISE

Come up with the best diagram for the following pieces of information. After you finish, try a different type of diagram to see if another format is more clear.

1

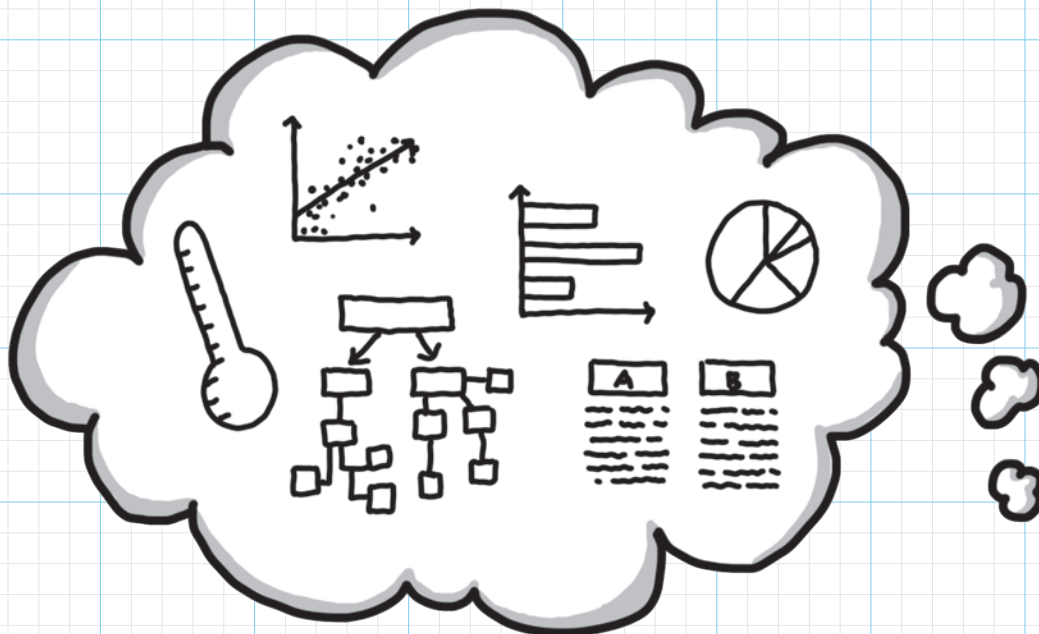
- Customer enters website
- Customer clicks "A" or "B"
- "A" customers have a choice of product 1 or 2. "B" customers have a choice of 3, 4, or 5.
- Product 2 is 20% off
- Product 4 is 30% off

2

- For every paycheck I receive, 50% goes to mortgage, 10% goes to charity, 15% is saved, and 25% is for my other bills and expenses.

3

- People with red shirts: Dave, Sue, Bill, Jane, Karen
- People with blue shirts: Tim, Evan
- People with gray shirts: Allison, Mike, David, Jeff



YOUR VISUAL LIBRARY

When you regularly take visual notes, you may notice some of your drawings repeat themselves because they apply to a lot of different situations. This is called your visual library—it's a mental bank of all the images you know how to draw and use on a regular basis.

Maintaining a visual library is helpful because you never know when you'll need to draw something completely out of the blue! When you already know how to draw something, you don't have to waste time looking up reference images in the moment to make sure you get it right.



BUILD YOUR LIBRARY

"How do I know what to fill my visual library with if I never know what I'm going to need to draw?" The more you learn how to draw in general, the easier visual notetaking will become. Remember to start with the basics—dots, lines, and shapes—and level up as you gain confidence. Go for recognizable over realistic!

EXERCISE

As you build your visual library, start by drawing things around you. Wherever you are, draw the 10 things closest to you. Draw objects from home, work, and other places you frequent. After you've drawn everything around you, draw for specific industries. What would you draw for Science? Healthcare? Military? Arts? Marketing? You can never run out of things to draw.



PRACTICAL TIPS

- **Capture your visual library in once place.** Your visual library is already building itself into your memory, but it's also a good idea to make a tangible library, as well. You can keep a few blank pages in a notebook, snap pictures and keep them in a digital folder, or create a set of index cards. It's unlikely that you'll completely forget how to draw something, but it's a good idea to have your drawings in one place so you can review and add to your library.
- **Update your library.** Ask if there are things you can do to make a drawing better or more clear. If so, level up your drawing. Also, check if your drawings are still relevant. For example, everyone used to have flip-style mobile phones, and now everyone has a mobile phone that looks like a flat rectangle. Watch for rapid changes in things like hairstyles, technology, fashion, or city skylines.
- **Practice regularly.** Keep your drawings fresh by changing them up and trying to improve them each time. This is especially important for anyone taking visual notes professionally! Your clients won't want their notes to look like what you've done for everyone else. There are easy changes you can make, such as size, proportions, direction, perspective, style, or color. Know how to draw something, and know how to draw it several different ways.

Here are a few of the most-used images in my visual library:

BOOKS

BRAIN

CITIES/BUILDINGS

CLOCK

COMPASS

COMPUTER

CONSTRUCTION

DOORS/DOORWAYS

HANDS

HOURLASS

KEY

LIGHT BULB

MAGNIFYING GLASS

MARKER

MEGAPHONE

MONEY

PEN

PENCIL

PEOPLE/FACES

PHONES

ROAD SIGNS

ROCKET

TROPHY OR AWARD



EXERCISE

If you've been taking visual notes for a while, make a list of the 10 most-used images in your visual library. If you're new to taking visual notes, create a list of 10 things you think you'll be drawing frequently. Draw each item once. Then draw each item again, but try to improve it or make it different. Repeat this process until you have five versions of each drawing.

VISUAL METAPHORS

In art school, you're taught that your first idea is never your best idea, because the whole point of creating art is to create something unique. With visual communication, it's the opposite. You aren't trying to create something unique, you're trying to communicate clearly. Your first idea is usually your best idea, because visual communication is about finding common ground. One way to find this common ground is to use a concept called "visual metaphors."

Visual metaphors create a more relatable and understandable scenario with pictures. These can be drawings of metaphors shared by the presenter, or drawings that you come up with to more clearly communicate the idea being shared.

WHY USE VISUAL METAPHORS?

You might be asking, "Why should I create visual metaphors? Can't I just capture what's being shared? Why do I have to do this extra work?" Truthfully, you DON'T have to create visual metaphors. You can capture what is being said exactly as is, but think of visual metaphors as a way of leveling up your notes. As a visual notetaker, you have a unique opportunity to help people make sense out of information. You're not adding to the content being shared, like writing in your own quotes, thoughts, or bullet points. Instead, you're arranging the information with images that create higher understanding. Humans love metaphors because they simplify complex information. Every time you use a metaphor—spoken, written, or visual—you're doing your audience a big favor in the comprehension department.



Another way to think about visual metaphors is to ask yourself: "What would I draw to represent this topic?" That question helped me understand how visual metaphors don't have to be complex—just a pictorial representation.

Presenter: "At MegaCorp, we cultivate and invest in our team. We hire only the best, and we quickly get rid of people that are toxic to our work environment. We have a great company culture fueled by happiness and helpfulness."

Consider the example below. On the left are visual notes captured from what the presenter shared as-is. On the right, the notes were captured using a visual metaphor.



See the difference? Both sets of visual notes are clear and effective. Visual metaphors might be more challenging, but they're often more memorable than a simple pairing of words and pictures. Don't worry if you can't master this concept right away. This takes intentional practice with your creative imagination.

DEVisING USEFUL VISUAL METAPHORS

- Your first idea is usually your best idea.
- Pick key words that might inspire a visual metaphor. In the example, I focused on the word "cultivate" because it reminded me of a garden.
- Try word associations or synonyms.
- Don't force a visual metaphor to work. Visual metaphors should be obvious and simple.
- Don't distract yourself from actively listening.



EXERCISE

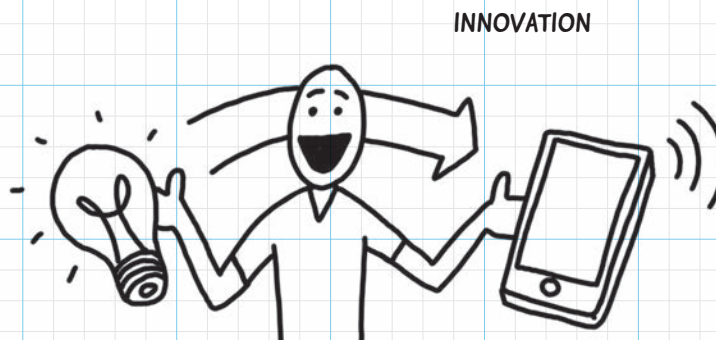
Look at the list below and come up with a visual metaphor to represent each one. Use the blank space on the following page to sketch your ideas.

Here are a few examples to get you started:

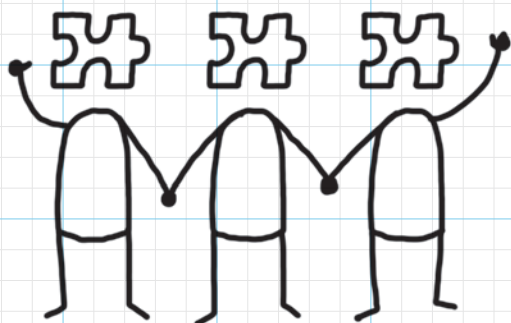
- Courage
- Passion
- Community
- Leadership
- Innovation
- Empathy
- Creativity
- Failure
- The team must solve this problem together
- Relax! Let your mind drift
- It's important to find a work/life balance



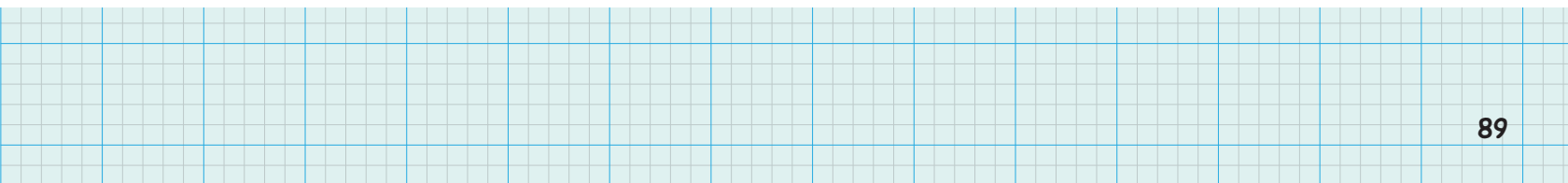
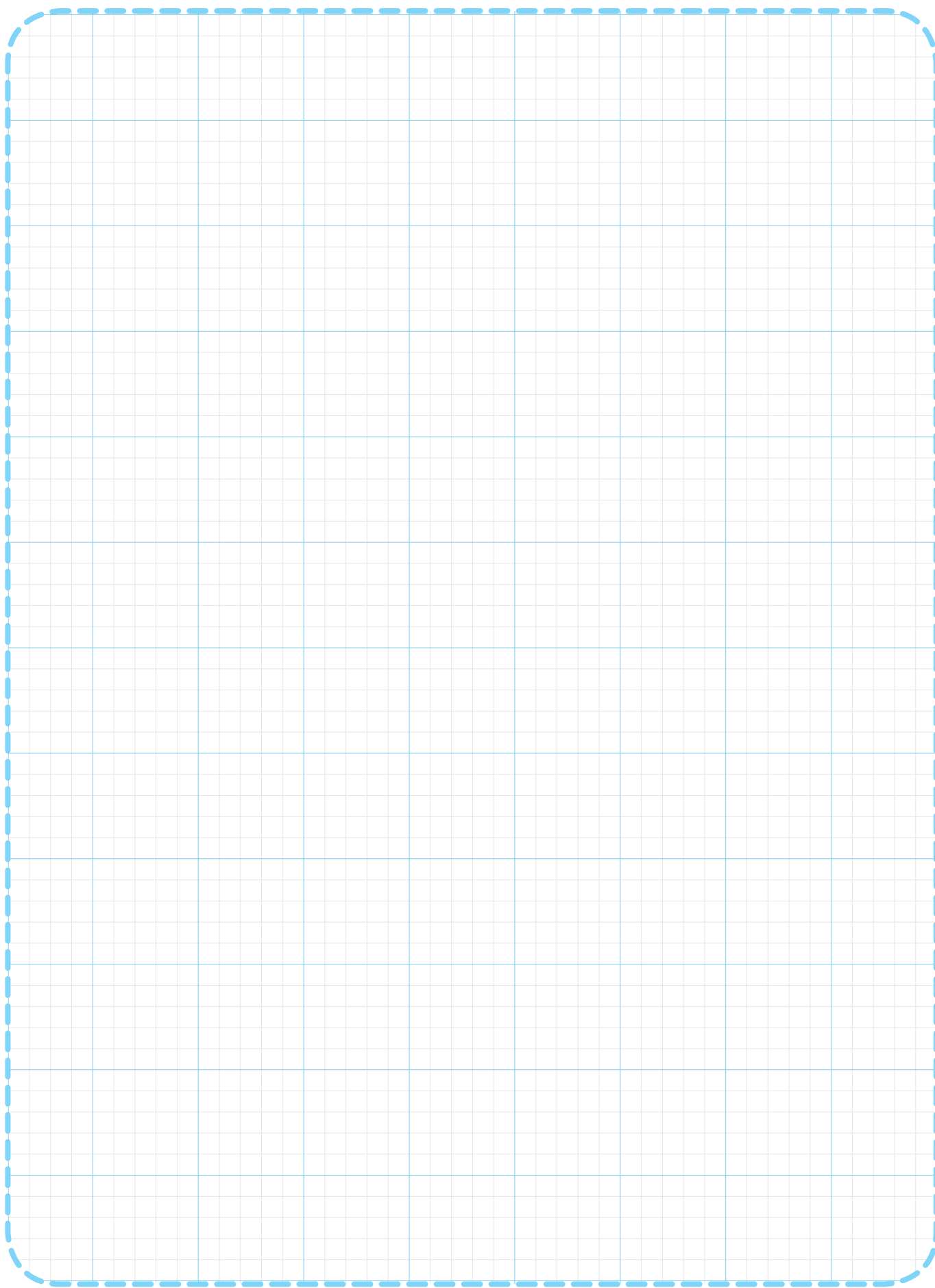
COURAGE



INNOVATION



TEAM PROBLEM-SOLVING



HEADERS

Headers are the areas at the top of the visual notes canvas, and they're a perfect way to introduce the concepts. Headers give the viewers more context, so put them where they'll be read first. Putting a header at the end of a sketchnote is like putting the cover of a book on the last page!

Headers include a combination of things. Because each situation is different, you'll need to decide what to include in your headers.

A header can include a combination of any of the following:

- Name and title of the presenter
- Title of the presentation
- Event name
- Presenter portrait
- Event logo
- Date



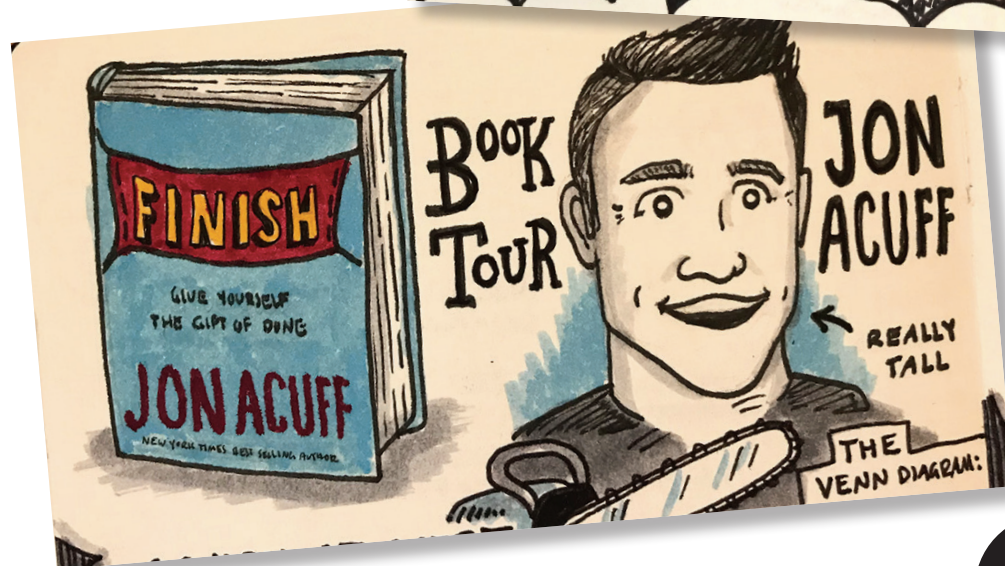
If you have the event information ahead of time, it's helpful to sketch headers beforehand. I'm borrowing the word "header" from a term used in web design. I call the beginning of my sketchnotes "headers," because it's where all the important introductory information lives.





HOW MUCH SPACE SHOULD A HEADER TAKE UP?

There is no one right way to do a header, and the spacing depends on your canvas size and the length of the presentation. Don't use up a lot of space if you're worried about running out of room. When in doubt, keep your header simple.



HOW MUCH TIME SHOULD YOU SPEND CREATING A HEADER?

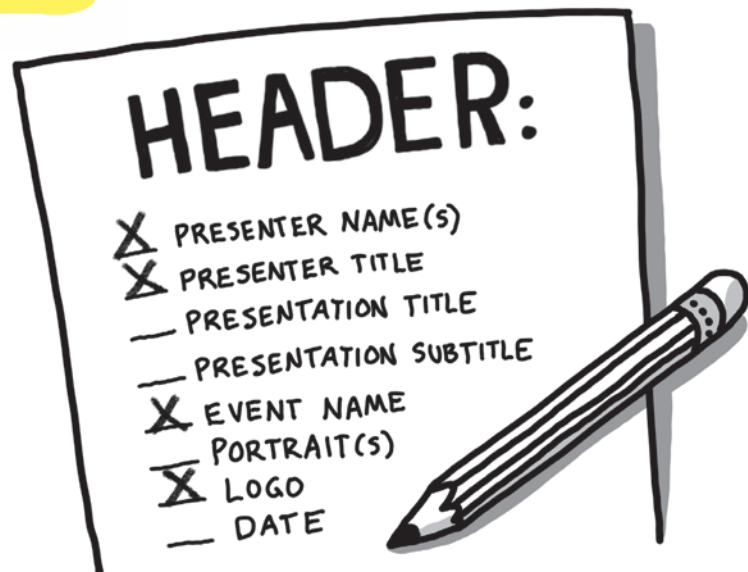
Again, there is no right answer here. If you're just learning, give yourself some extra time to get used to creating headers. With practice, you'll get faster. A header is a great outlet for creativity, but if you're in a time crunch, there's nothing wrong with a simple, quick header.



If you're capturing a quick talk (under 20 minutes), rendering a larger header is a good way to compensate for the minimal content.

HOW TO CREATE A HEADER

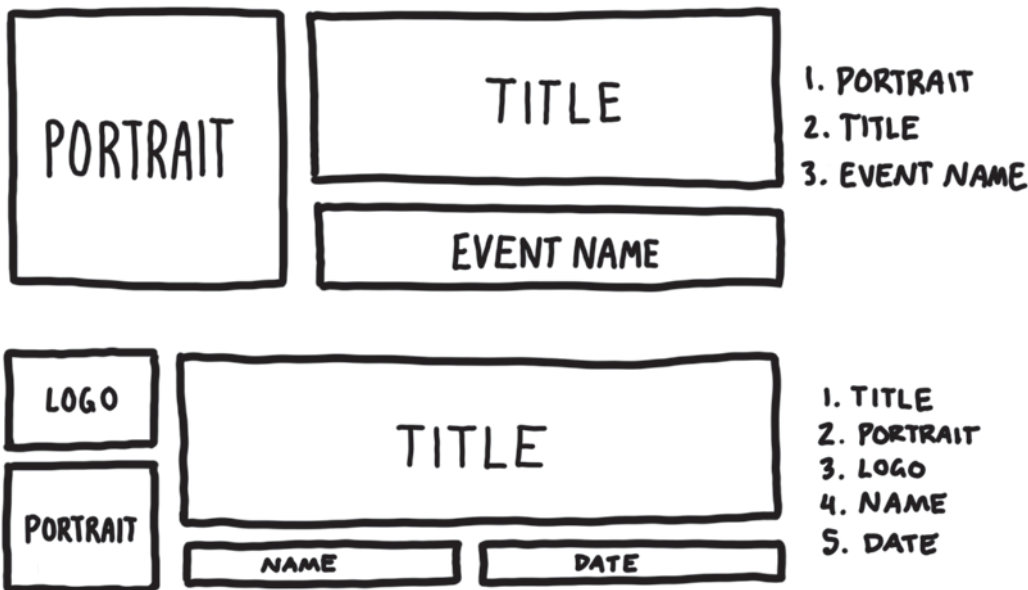
CONTENTS Headers should be constructed with context in mind, so first you need to decide what will be in the header. What is essential for viewers to know about the presentation? If you're taking visual notes professionally, ask your client what information they want included.



HIERARCHY Next determine the hierarchy. What's the importance of each item in the header? List them in numerical order if you need to.

1. PORTRAIT
2. TITLE
3. EVENT NAME

1. TITLE
2. PORTRAIT
3. LOGO
4. NAME
5. DATE



LAYOUT Determine the amount of space your header will take up and block it off in pencil. Knowing what the hierarchy is, arrange each header element within the space. Think of this as putting puzzle pieces together to fit the space. Use a pencil to try different formats if you need to.



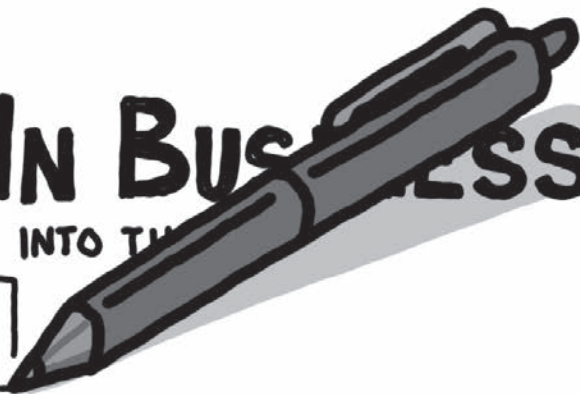
If you don't have time to do headers before the presentation begins, leave yourself an empty block of space to go back and fill in afterwards.



WOMEN IN BUSINESS

AN HONEST LOOK INTO THE

SYLVIA SMITH:
BUSINESSCORP CEO



INKING Once everything is arranged, it's time to ink your header. Before you do, double-check all the names and titles for accuracy. If you're drawing a portrait, you can usually find professional head shots to reference on the event or presenter's website.

EXERCISE

Put yourself in a presenter's shoes and pretend you're about to give a speech. What is it about? Where are you? What is the most important part of your header? What would you want to see in your own header? Create three different headers for yourself that include:

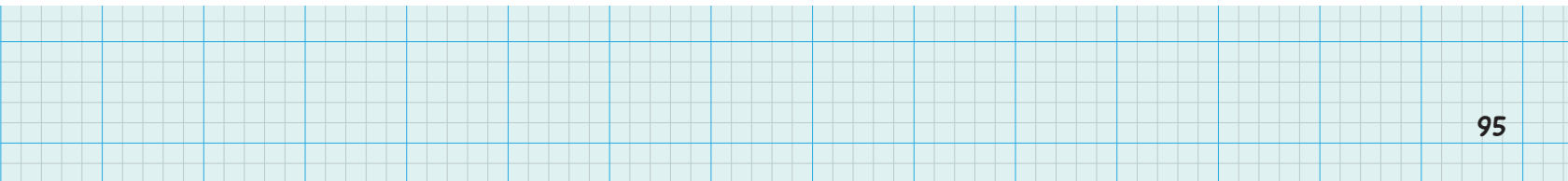
- Your name, your title, the title of your presentation, your portrait, and the event name
- Your portrait, your name, the title of your presentation
- Your name, the title of your presentation





PRACTICE HERE

Use these pages to practice creating headers.



LAYOUTS

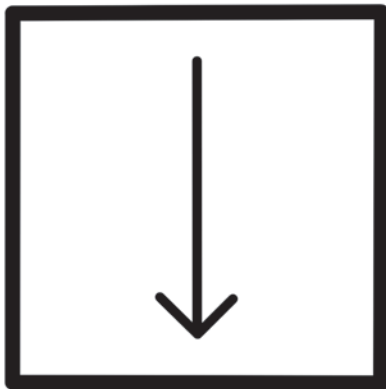
Layouts are the road map of your visual notes. Before you begin, you should have a layout in mind. When you define your space beforehand, you feel more freedom and confidence while you capture your visual notes in the moment. If you don't know where your visual notes are headed, you create opportunities for indecision and not using the space well.

TYPES OF LAYOUTS

Don't make it hard for anyone to read your visual notes. If you're just beginning to learn visual notetaking, it's a good idea work from left to right, top to bottom. As you get used to taking visual notes and practice visual direction, start experimenting with different layout styles that may be contrary to the traditional path of reading.



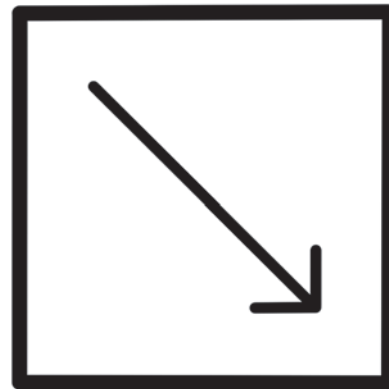
Don't make your viewers work hard to understand the information you capture! I never recommend a random approach to filling a page—writing and drawing wherever there is white space. People like to know where to begin and when they're done.



TOP TO BOTTOM

TOP TO BOTTOM

If you don't know what or how content will be shared, this layout is always a safe bet.



TOP TO BOTTOM,
LEFT TO RIGHT

TOP TO BOTTOM, LEFT TO RIGHT

Similar to top to bottom, this layout offers a bit more visual interest with a diagonal flow.

CHOOSING THE BEST LAYOUT

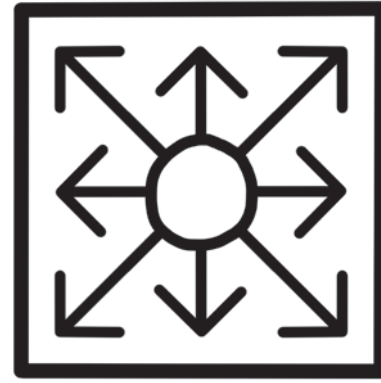
It's important to note that not every layout works well with every type of information. Depending on the information being shared and the way it's shared, certain layouts work better than others. No matter which layout you choose, remember to use good hierarchy, arrows, and labels to direct the viewer. The most important thing to focus on is the information!



ZIGZAG

ZIGZAG

In the zigzag layout, you take notes until you hit the edge, and then move back to the other edge, and so on, until the page is filled in a back-and-forth pattern. This layout is perfect for storytelling, lectures, and journey mapping.



CENTRAL

CENTRAL

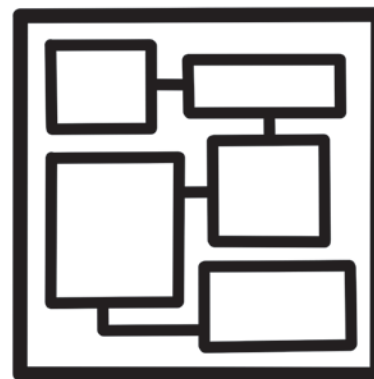
This layout is best for fast-paced brainstorming sessions. Each topic of discussion is placed in the center, and supporting discussion is placed around it. Draw lines between ideas and topics to make visual connections.



SPIRAL

SPIRAL

This layout works best on wide formats. But be careful! With a spiral, you run out of room in the center of the page and there's no flowing onto the next page. You might also be left with a large blank spot in the middle if the timing is off.



MODULAR

MODULAR

Similar to a central layout where supporting discussion can be placed around big ideas, the modular has flow capability. Modular is great for instances in which several unrelated topics are shared in one sitting. Each topic may not relate, but they're all part of the flow.



EXERCISE

Read the following examples. First determine the best layout to use based on your paper size/ orientation and the type of information being shared. If you need to, draw an arrow in pencil in your chosen layout direction. Then create visual notes from each example. Give yourself a 10-minute time limit.

LAYOUT 1

Ideas for Getting to Work on Time

- Go to bed earlier
- Set alarms for ending evening activities
- Create a bedtime regiment
- Learn how to fall asleep faster. Meditation? Reading? Prayer?
- Resolve to never hit “snooze”
- Improve “Getting Ready” time
- Set out clothes the night before
- Look over schedule for next day and pick clothes accordingly
- Start laundry earlier in the evening
- Stay aware of the time
- Get more clocks in home
- Use shower timer
- Set clocks 5 minutes fast
- Choose breakfast based on time needed to prepare and eat
- Discover different routes to work
- Communicate your need to leave on time with family/roommates

LAYOUT 2

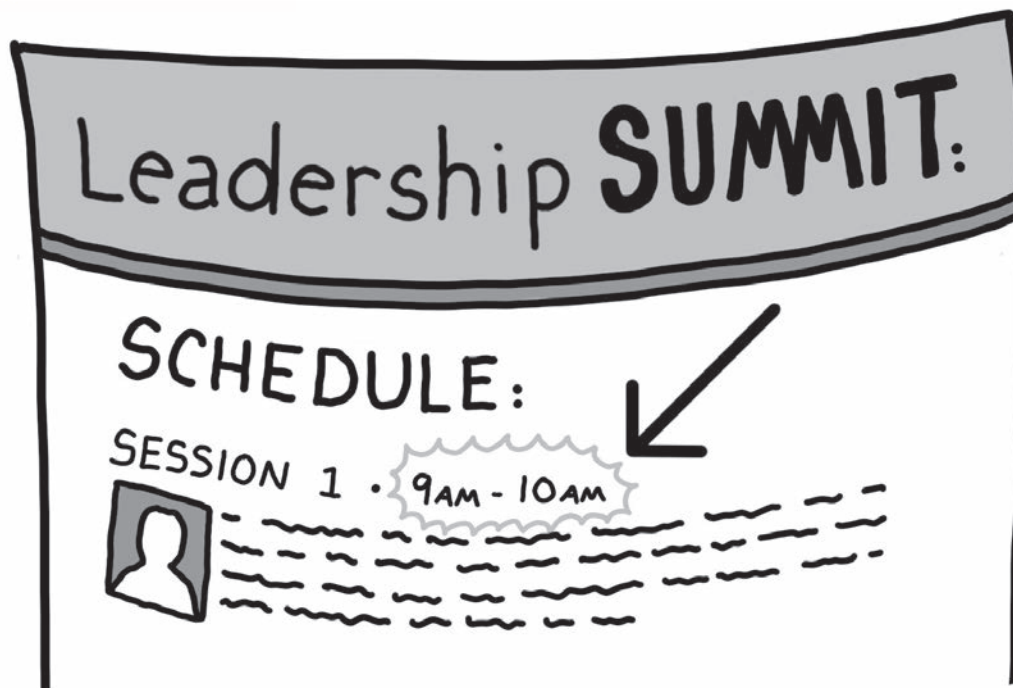
“I was shy when I was a kid and making friends was hard—especially at church. I went to a different school than all the other kids in my youth group, so it was hard to break into their established groups. I often went on youth group seasonal outings hoping to make some friends through shared experiences—trips to water and amusement parks, summer camping trips, and winter lodge retreats. Unfortunately, I was ditched by the other kids every single time, year after year. One year during free time at a winter retreat, I was hanging around the lodge where groups of kids were talking and playing games. I, of course, was by myself figuring out how I was going to spend my day because I couldn’t bring myself to talk to anyone. Suddenly, I discovered a chalkboard in the corner! I knew I could pass the time with drawing and started sketching a winter scene with snowboarders doing tricks. As my pictures began to take shape, kids started noticing and came over to look. To my surprise, THEY wanted to talk to ME! I started to connect with others, and by the end of the retreat, I was known by everyone as the girl who drew the cool pictures in the lodge. I went from being an invisible nobody to someone everyone recognized. It’s funny how the very thing I was using to escape my social anxiety became the thing that helped me connect with others.”

TIME BLOCKING

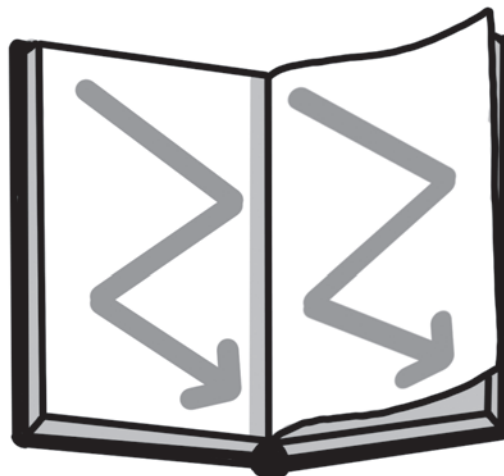
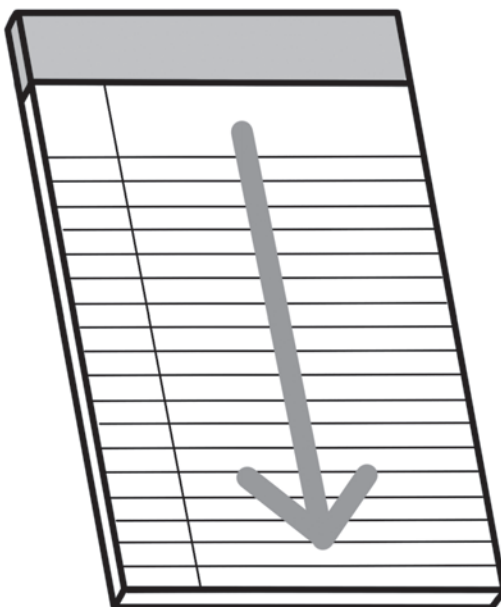
Another common question I get when people see my visual notes is, “How do you know how to space everything out so perfectly? There’s no room left on your page! Did you get the notes ahead of time?”

I never get the notes, slides, or outline beforehand (wouldn’t that be nice?), but I always try to get a schedule ahead of time. If I know how long the presenter is speaking, I can plan my layout accordingly. One of the easiest ways to make sure your notes stay on track is to block out sections in pencil and write the time stamps along the way. I call this Time Blocking.

HOW TO DO IT

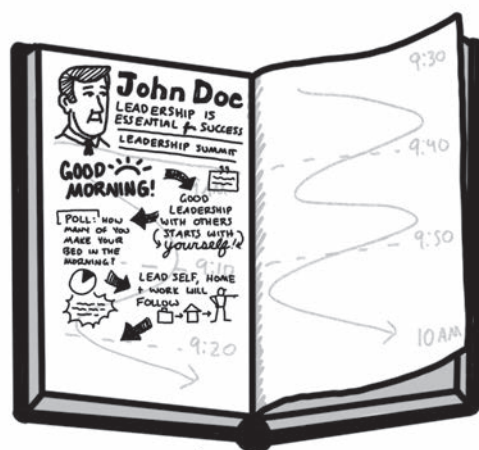
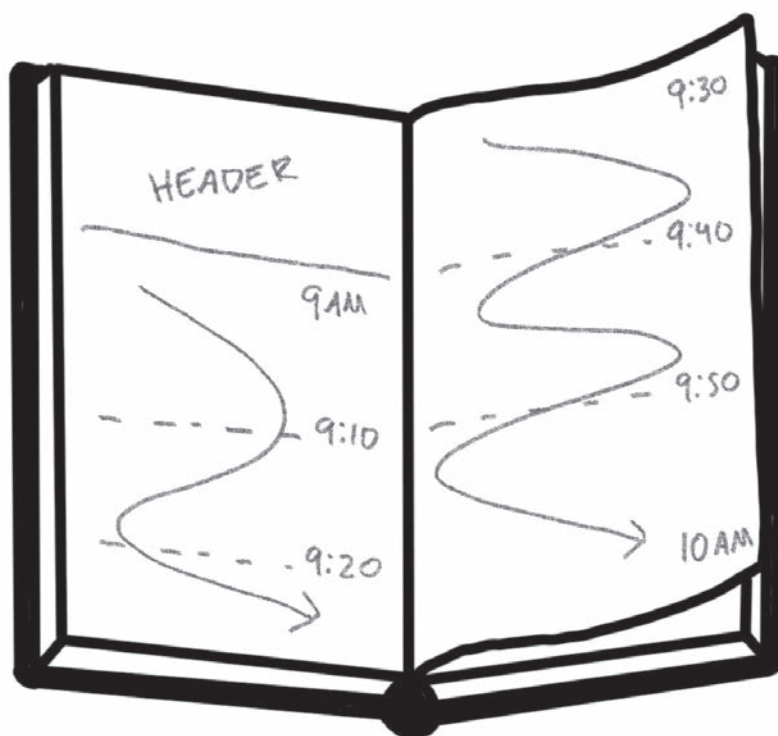


1. Consult your schedule or ask someone how long the presenter will be speaking.



2. Next look at your paper and determine a layout type.

Increments can be determined after some practice. I typically use 8- to 10-minute time blocks for most of the events I go to. For longer presentations, I like to use 15-minute increments.



3. Divide the time frame of the talk into increments, and write the times in pencil along your layout. Leave room for a header if you don't do one ahead of time. The first time block should be after the header.



Many presenters share a lot of information at the end. Sometimes it's because they run out of time and rush their last points; sometimes it's because they have slowly built up their ideas, saving the most important points for last. To prevent overcrowding the last part of your visual notes, give yourself extra space for your final time block.



5 MINUTES
INTO THE
PRESENTATION

VS.



LAST 5 MINUTES
OF THE
PRESENTATION



EXERCISE

1. Find a 15- to 30-minute podcast or video you want capture visual notes for.
2. Determine the type of content. Is it a lecture? Interactive? Brainstorm session?
3. Choose a layout that works best for the content. If you need to, draw an arrow in pencil in your chosen layout format.
4. Use time blocking. Determine the length of the presentation, and break it into time increments. Pencil the increments in your layout.
5. Capture your visual notes.

TROUBLESHOOTING

How did the exercise go? Were you able to stay on track and space out your notes perfectly? If you had some trouble, don't get discouraged. It takes practice! If you're having some trouble, consider the solutions below:

You ran out of space before you hit the next time block.

- You could be doing okay! Some parts of presentations can be more dense with ideas than others. If you go past one time block, don't worry—your notes might even out on their own through the presentation.
- You might be capturing too much information. Focus solely on the main ideas and takeaways.
- Your time increments might be too long. Try decreasing your time per block.
- You might be writing/drawing larger and need more space. Increase the space each block of time gets or use a larger canvas.

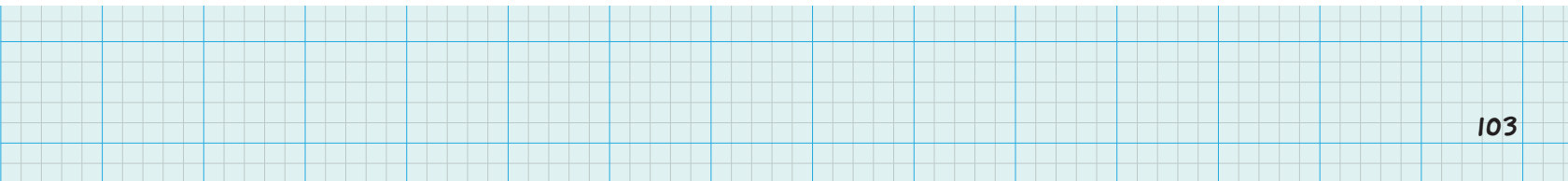
You haven't filled the space in your current time block before it's time to move to the next one.

- You could be doing okay! If your notes are on the light side, don't worry—they might even out on their own through the presentation.
- You might not be capturing enough information. If you've already captured the main ideas, get a few supporting details, draw pictures, or write/draw larger.
- Your time increments might be too short. Try increasing your time per block.
- You might be writing/drawing too small and don't need as much space. Write/draw larger, adjust your time blocks, or use a smaller canvas.



PRACTICE HERE

Use these pages to complete one or all of the exercises described on pages 98 and 101.



REFINING

As you've learned, when taking lecture-based sketchnotes, you must be quick to capture all the main ideas. Often, being fast means there may be gaps in your notes, missing drawings, unfinished words or thoughts, and little to no color or shading. What you need to do next is refine.

Refining is about **improving your visual notes** to be the best they can be, especially if you're in a professional setting or being paid to create them. Refining your visual notes isn't about "making them pretty," but making sure the information is clear. Everything you refine should help the information stand out and be more memorable.

MY REFINEMENT TIMES:



If you're capturing multiple sessions at an event, use breaks to catch up on refining or refine your notes once you get home. Do not put off this process! The information and experiences should be fresh in your mind. The more you practice, the more you'll learn to refine as you go, and the less time it will take.

WHAT TO REFINE

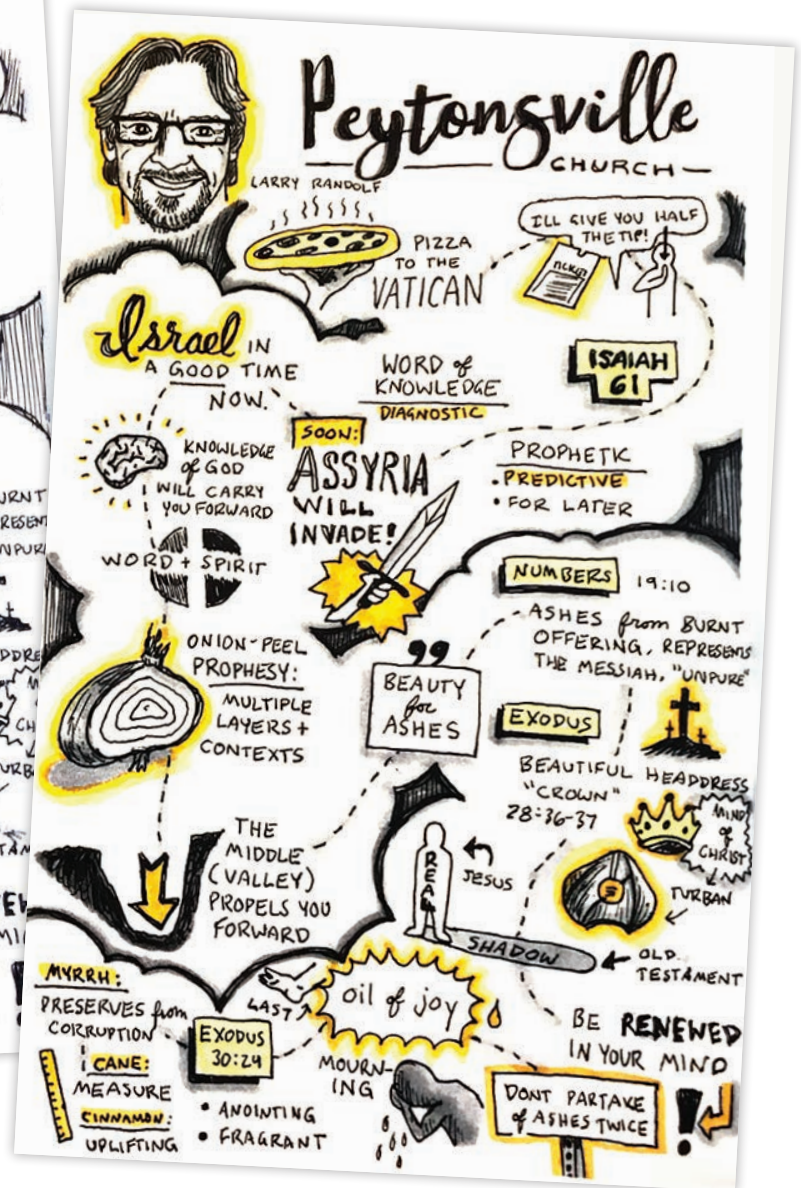
Every visual notetaking experience is different, so the refinements needed will vary each time. Below are some common things I refine.

- Make key words bolder
- Underline or highlight words for emphasis
- Write anything important not captured in the moment
- Add containers
- Complete pictures
- Add shading
- Add color
- Add arrows and guiding shapes
- Add a header

PRE-REFINING



POST-REFINING



SPELLING ISSUES

At almost every workshop I teach, someone says “You advocate for taking notes in pen, but what if you’re a bad speller?”

If you’re sharing your notes with others, you want the information to be accurate and memorable, and bad spelling and grammar can be a big distraction. It’s important to master both so the information can shine! Below are some of the most commonly misspelled and misused words.



COMMONLY MISSPELLED WORDS:

Gauge, Grateful, License, Maintenance, Deductible, Caribbean, Millennial, Millennium, Noticeable, Possession, Definitely, Questionnaire, Relevant, Schedule, Vacuum, Broccoli, A lot, Sincerely, Hors d'oeuvres, Entrepreneur, Accommodate, Recommend, Indict, Rhythm, Embarrass, Liaison, Supersede, Business, Subtle, Canceled, Schedule, Pregnant, Apparel, Fiancé, Permanent, Rudimentary, Convenience, Banana, Mississippi, Bureau, Raspberry, Jewelry, Library, Camaraderie, Odyssey, Scissors, Changeable, Exercise, Pumpkin, Separate, Decision, Restaurant, Conquer, Conqueror, February, Acknowledge, Amateur, Chauffeur, Lieutenant, Hallelujah, Pharaoh, Decision

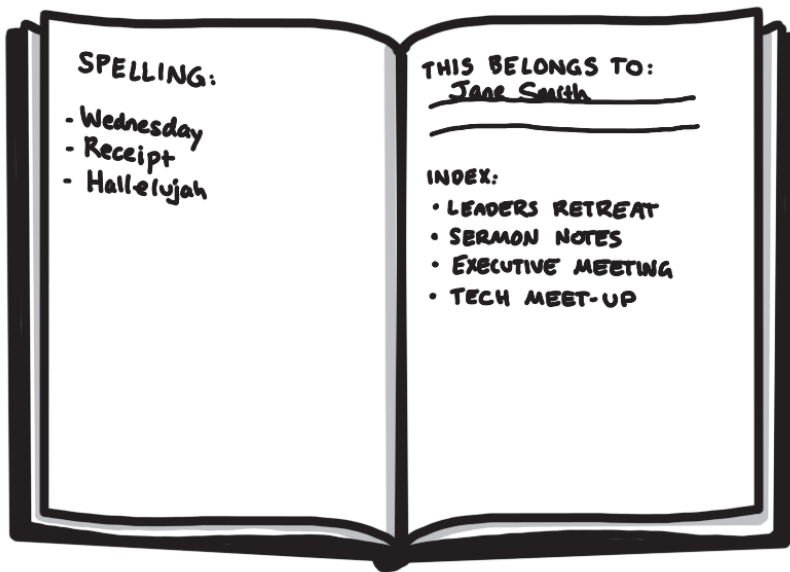
COMMONLY SWITCHED/MISUSED WORDS:

Capital/Capitol, Principal/Principle, Cite/Sight/Site, Compliment/Complement, Conscious/Conscience, Council/Counsel, Eminent/Immanent/Imminent, Lose/Loose, Sell/Sale, Passed/Past, Stationary/Stationery, Your/You're, Their/They're/There, Its/It's, To/Two/Too, Threw/Through/Thorough/Thru, Though/Thou, Than/Then, Precede/Proceed, Lead/Led, By/Buy/Bye, Affect/Effect, Descent/Dissent, Customers/Costumers, Vain/Vein/Vane

WORDS WITH “I” AND “E” COMMONLY SWITCHED:

Receive, Ceiling, Deceive, Protein, Sovereign, Forfeit, Foreign, Seize, Neither, Leisure, Science, Height, Receipt, Niece, Efficient, Ancient, Field, Mischievous, Weird, Piece, Lien, Caffeine

If you've had trouble with spelling and grammar in the past, the following solutions will help you manage and overcome it.



PROBLEM WORD LISTS

Even the best spellers have words they get hung up on. (I'll start to write "receive" and end up second-guessing myself every time!) If you know your problem words, write the correct spellings in the front cover or first page of your notebook, or keep a list in a notes app on your phone. Having a list to reference easily is faster than having to look it up in the moment on your phone. Bonus: by repeatedly looking at your word list, you'll learn the correct spelling over time.

WRITE PARTIAL WORDS

If you're writing a word in ink and aren't sure of the spelling, write the parts you DO know and keep going. When you refine later, look up the word and fill in the missing letters. If you aren't sure of most of the word, pencil it in and move on. I don't recommend skipping the word altogether because you could forget what it was. Always write something!

ENTREPRENEUR
OUTCOMES
LEADERSHIP
IS
IMPORTANT

APRICOTT
APRICOT

APRICOT
APRICOT

CORRECT IT

Maybe you already inked a word and only noticed later it was wrong. Consider these options:

1. A white Gelly Roll® pen can correct some minor mistakes.
2. Correction fluid and white paper stickers make it possible to re-do.
3. Black out the word completely by drawing a solid black rectangle over the word; then write the correct spelling with a white pen. Make sure the black ink has dried completely before writing on top.

NIAVE

HAPINESS

~~PIECE~~
PIECE

VACUUM
oops!

ROLL WITH IT

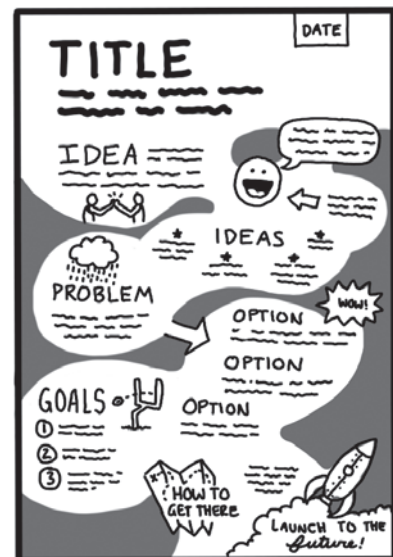
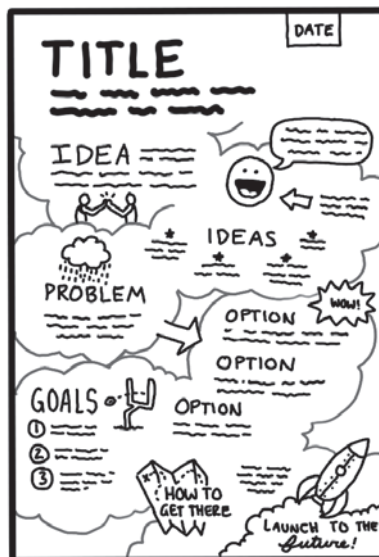
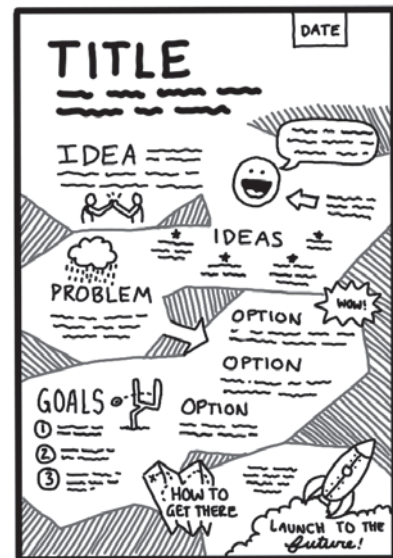
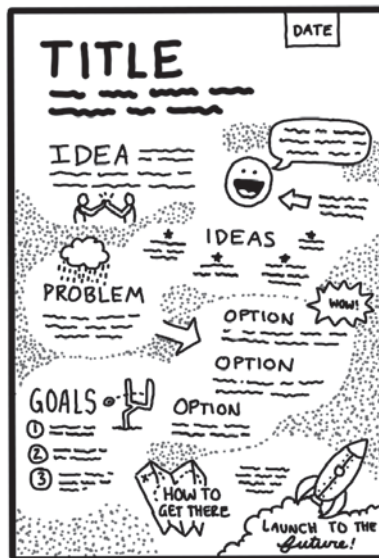
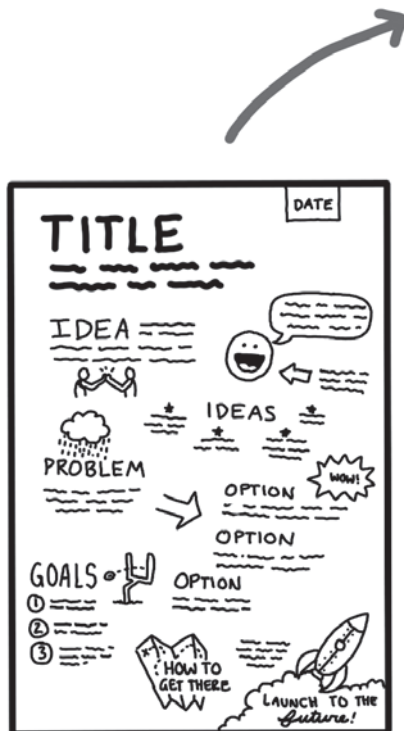
So you've misspelled a word and you don't have a way to correct it. What can you do?

1. Ignore it. You might know something is wrong, but that doesn't mean others will notice. Leave it alone, move on, and resolve to spell it correctly next time.
2. Playfully point it out. You can draw arrows to show how letters should be switched, insert an extra letter with an arrow from above or below, or just write "oops!" with the correct spelling nearby.

GUIDING SHAPES

Earlier you learned how a good layout and visual guiding tools move your reader from start to finish, but there is another method you can use to help readers know where to look next: guiding shapes.

Guiding shapes lead the viewer from each area of information to the next. They help contain the information you've captured by creating borders and pathways that make reading easy. Guiding shapes can be made from dots, lines, textures, shading, or color, and they occupy the negative space (blank white areas) around the visual notes. It's best to add guiding shapes after you finish taking visual notes, but before you refine them.

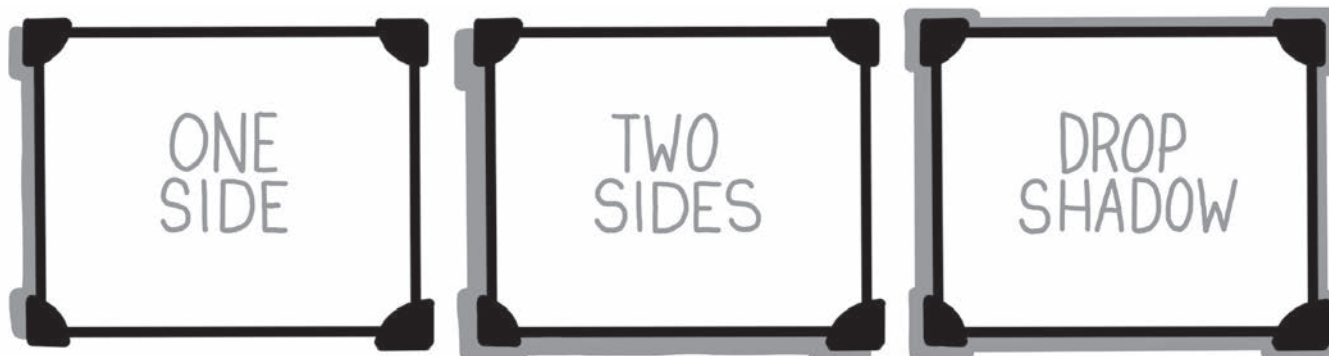


EXERCISE

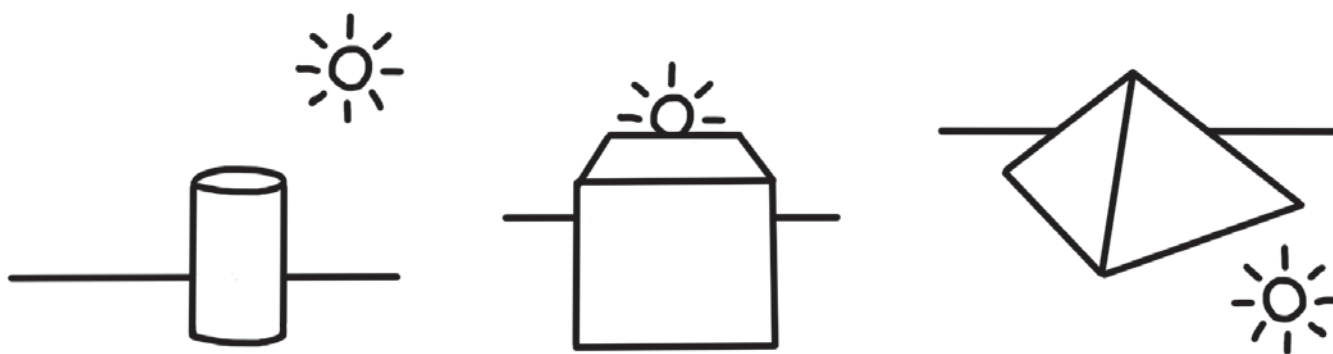
Revisit some of your practice visual notes or take new notes. After you finish, go back and fill in guiding shapes in the negative space around your notes. Be sure to take a before and after picture to see the difference.

SHADOWS

Adding shadows is one of the easiest ways to make information stand out from your pages of visual notes. Here are a few quick ways to add shadows to a container or drawing.



Pick one side or two adjacent sides of your object and add a gray or black shadow behind it. You can also add gray or black all the way around the object like a drop shadow.



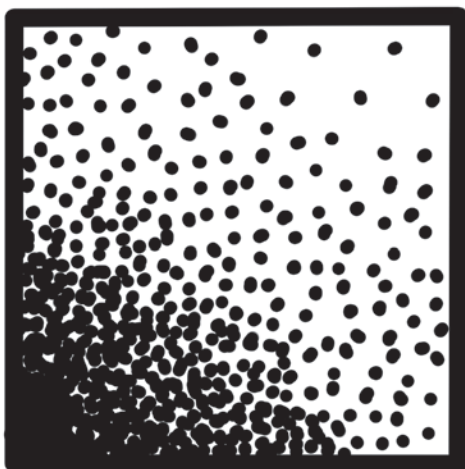
If you want to learn how to accurately add shading, put different objects under a direct light source, like this example. Study where the shadows actually fall.

EXERCISE

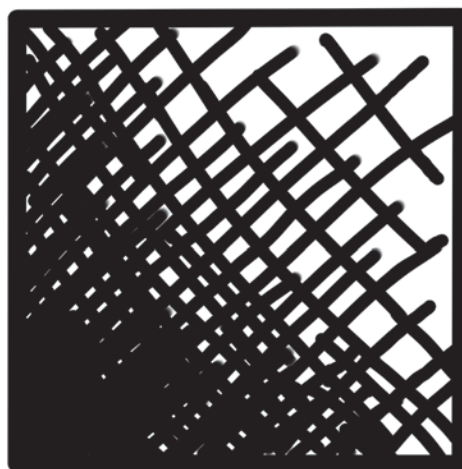
Go back to some of your visual notes and add shadows to text, containers, or drawings. Any changes you make should help the main ideas shine.



SHADING TECHNIQUES



STIPPLING Add lots of dots where it's darkest and fewer dots where it's light.



CROSSHATCHING Use perpendicular lines that overlap closest where it is darkest and farther where it is light.



FILL Use solid color to fill in where the shadow is.



SCRIBBLE A more free-feeling version of crosshatching, scribble tightly where it's dark and loosely where it is light.



CONTOUR Draw lines that follow the curve or shape of the object. The lines visually suggest depth and dimension.

EXERCISE

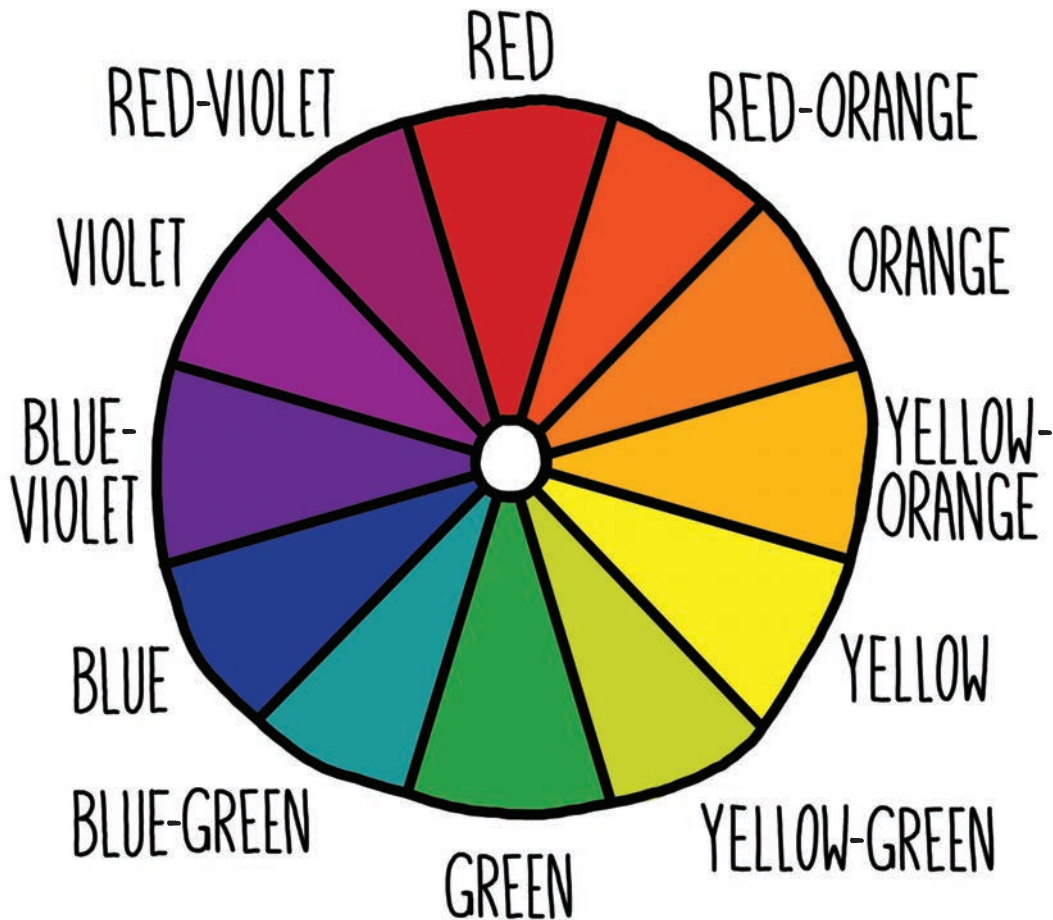
Copy these examples into your sketchbook and practice shading using the different styles.



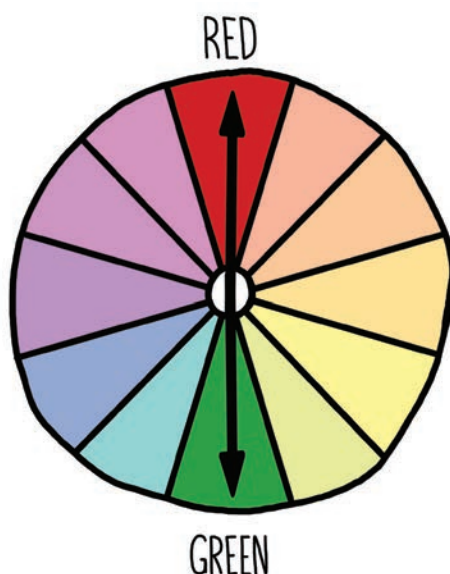
COLOR

The most important thing to remember about color is to keep it simple. It's easy to overdo and it can visually overwhelm viewers. If you're using all the colors of the rainbow, you're probably creating distraction, not clarity. When you start out, try using only black and gray; then add color in small amounts as your confidence increases.

The best way to learn about color is from the color wheel, shown here. The primary colors are red, blue, and yellow.



ONE COLOR If you're a beginner, I recommend using only one color to start. One color forces you to be selective in how you use it, and it's rarely visually overwhelming. Just remember to keep it simple—you don't need to color all your headlines, callouts, quotes, or containers. Use one color like you would a highlighter—to call attention to special points of interest or importance. When you're using only one color, avoid light colors like tan.

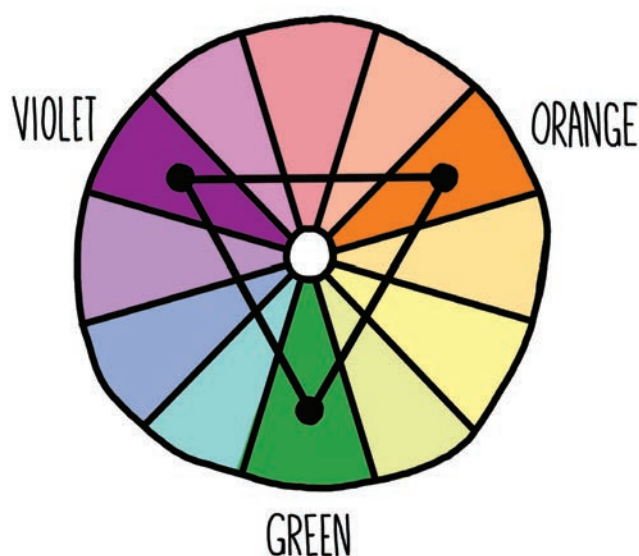
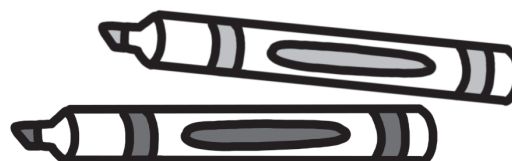


Complementary colors sit directly opposite from each other on the color wheel.



Analogous colors sit next to each other on the color wheel. Analogous colors are a little more subtle and easy to look at because the contrast is lower.

TWO COLORS When you're working with two colors, I recommend using complementary or analogous colors.



Triadic colors are three hues evenly spaced on the color wheel.

THREE COLORS When you're ready to use three colors, try a **triadic scheme**. It's easy—create an even-sided triangle on the color wheel, and the three colors at each point will go together well. I avoid using more than three colors because it creates more chaos than clarity.



HOW TO COLOR YOUR VISUAL NOTES

Think “highlighter,” not “coloring book.” Use color to bring attention to special points of interest or importance. Just because you drew a tree doesn’t mean that you need to color the leaves green. You may choose to use your color selectively, like only on block letters or for arrows. Every color decision should be made keeping the information in mind.

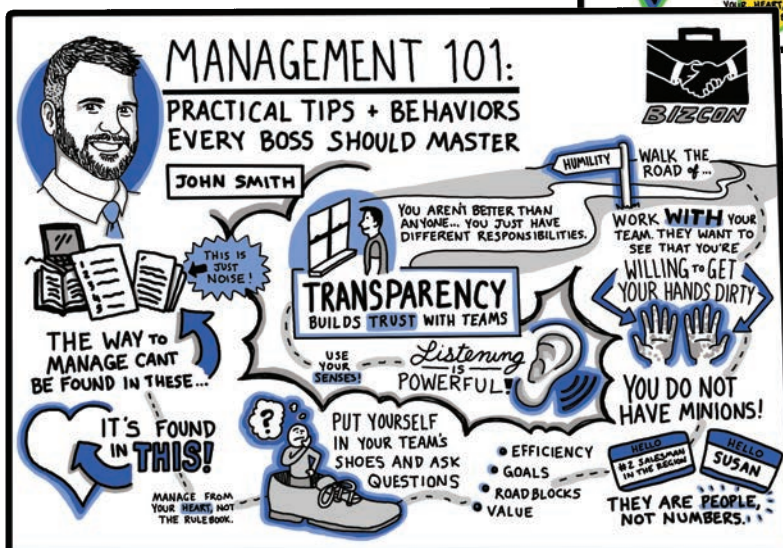
Consider the examples on this page, and remember to keep it simple!



BEFORE COLORING



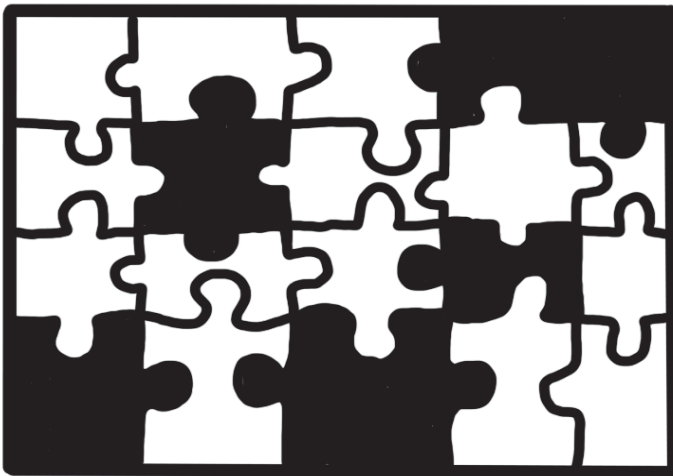
TOO MUCH COLORING



GOOD COLORING

WHAT MAKES VISUAL NOTES "GOOD?"

"Good" visual notes are not based on aesthetic, but rather on content. Information has zero value if you can't remember it or act on it. Visual notes are meant to share information in a way that our brains will remember. Even the simplest visual notes can be extremely effective at getting the information to stay in our heads. That's good news! There's no pressure to be an amazing artist, because visual notes prioritize function over form.



Visual notes are like a puzzle: you can't see the whole picture unless all the pieces are there. Your visual notes should be an accurate summary of the main points that were shared. Only after your notes meet this qualification of accuracy should you focus on improving the aesthetics. If you can't capture an accurate summary of what you hear, no amount of drawing, shading, lettering, or coloring will improve your visual notes. There's a big difference between looking good and being good. Your notes need to BE good before they can LOOK good.

HOW TO KNOW YOU'RE CAPTURING ACCURATE VISUAL NOTES

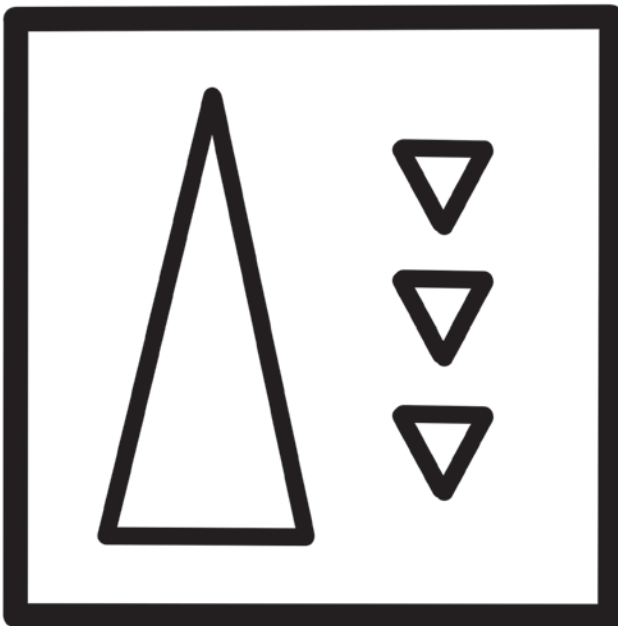
- You don't miss capturing information.
 - You've mastered taking pictures of slides and penciling in quotes to make sure you get what's shared in the moment.
 - People don't tell you, "You missed it when they said..!" and you don't ask your neighbor, "Did you catch what he said just now?"
 - You're able to distinguish main ideas from "fluff."
 - Viewers understand your notes and don't ask many questions like, "What does that mean?" or "Was there more context for this point?"
 - Your notes are easy to read and use hierarchy perfectly.
- If this sounds like you, you're probably ready to level up the aesthetics of your notes!

LOOKING "GOOD"

If you're capturing content consistently well, you're probably itching to get your notes looking better and better. You might even feel like you've hit a plateau of creativity and you're not sure how your notes can get better. Visual notes are an artistic and creative expression of information. To make them look good, we'll reference the basic principles of art and design.

BALANCE

Balance refers to the visual "weight" you see. Our brains love balance in two main ways: symmetry and asymmetry. Symmetry is best described as two halves being mirror images of each other. Asymmetry is two parts of a whole, but each part isn't equal.



ASYMMETRICAL



SYMMETRICAL



One of the easiest ways to create visually compelling notes is to make them high in contrast. One way to do this is using only black and white, which makes a strong visual statement.

EMPHASIS/CONTRAST

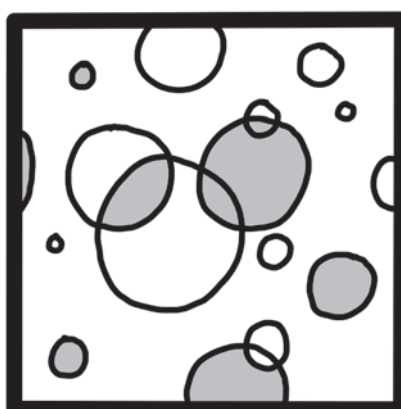
This is often achieved by creating a visually dominant area next to a visually passive one. The juxtaposition of the two areas creates interest and visual tension.





HIERARCHY/PROPORTIONS

This refers to how everything is arranged in terms of size and quantity, and how well each part relates with the others. With visual notes, hierarchy is mostly dictated by the content you're capturing; the emphasis is on main ideas, not small details.



UNITY/HARMONY

This is achieved when everything looks like it belongs together. Be careful though—if everything looks the same, your work will feel boring. Harmonious visual notes are achieved when similar, related pieces logically come together and work well. One way to easily achieve this is to use one color or two analogous colors.



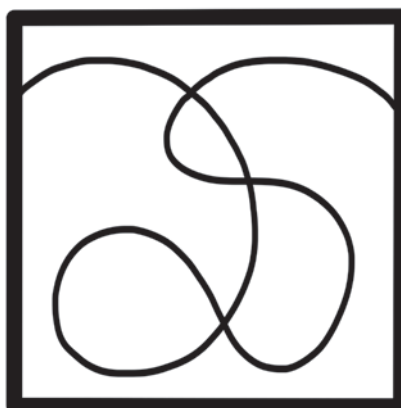
VARIETY

Use different elements to hold visual attention. Be careful though—if everything is too different, your work will feel chaotic. Use variety, but have some cohesion. This is why I advocate for limiting color use.



RHYTHM

Rhythm is achieved through repetition. Use icons and consistent hierarchy and lettering styles to create organized flow.



MOVEMENT

Visual flow is achieved by leading the eyes throughout the piece. Movement is relatively easy to achieve through words and sentences, but there are other creative ways to move the viewer's eye around that may break normal reading patterns.

KEEP IT SIMPLE

If there's one thing to remember about keeping your visual notes looking good, it's this: keep it simple. Go for memorable over masterpiece. Don't get carried away trying to create a work of art when the whole point is to make the information stand out.

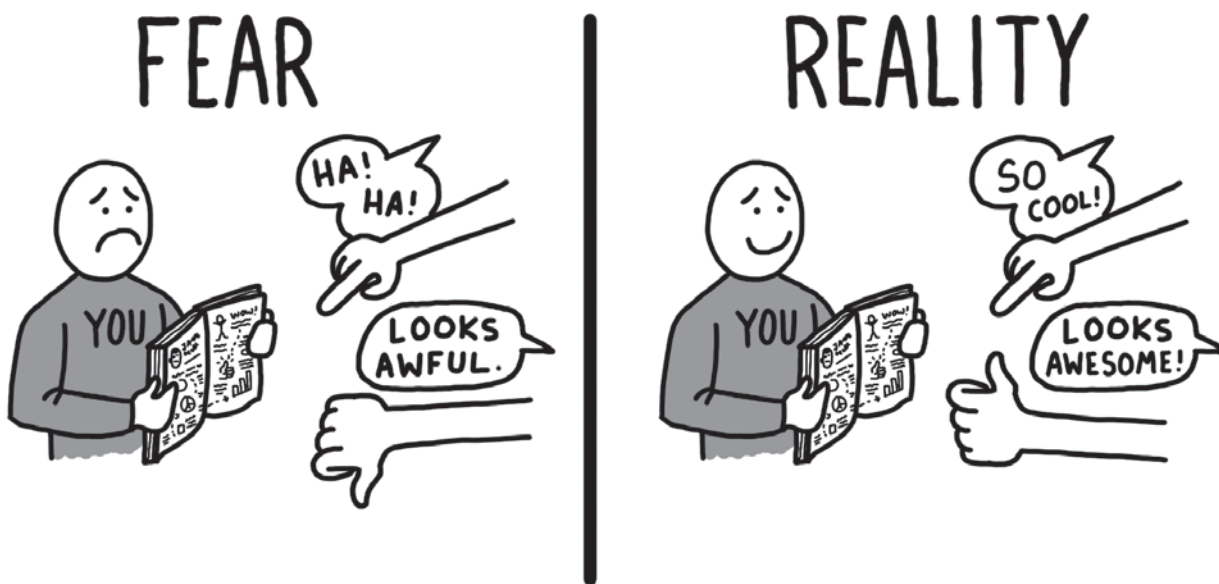
SHARING YOUR VISUAL NOTES

You've finished taking your visual notes and refined them to your liking. You're officially done! Or are you? The last true step of taking visual notes is sharing them with the public.

If you're already thinking of arguments for why you don't want to share your work publicly, let me stop you.

If you don't want to share your work because **it doesn't meet your own standards**, know that **everyone starts somewhere**. There's no shame in the beginning of a journey. In fact, people might really appreciate your vulnerability and courage when you say, "I'm trying something new and I want to share it with the world." There is no place for perfectionism in life and that goes especially for your visual notes.

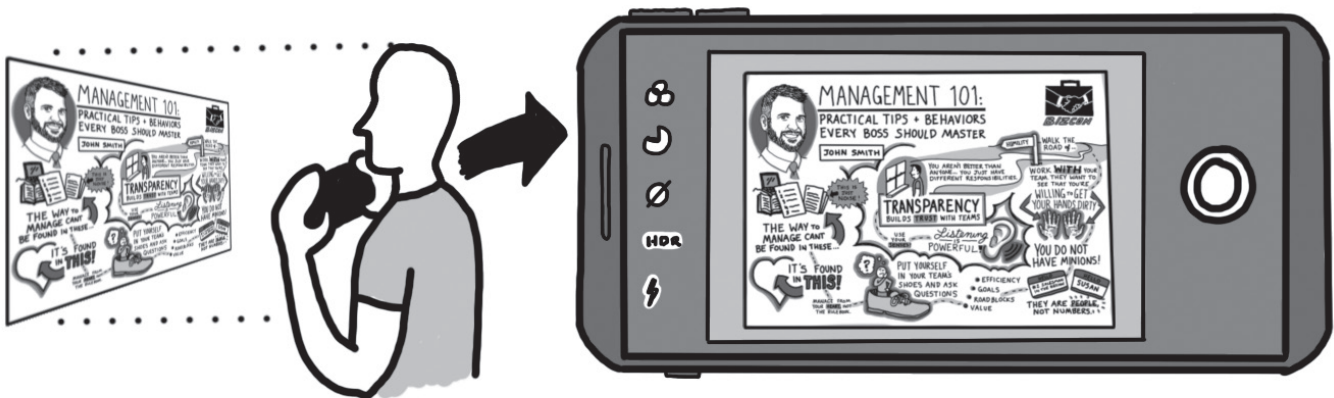
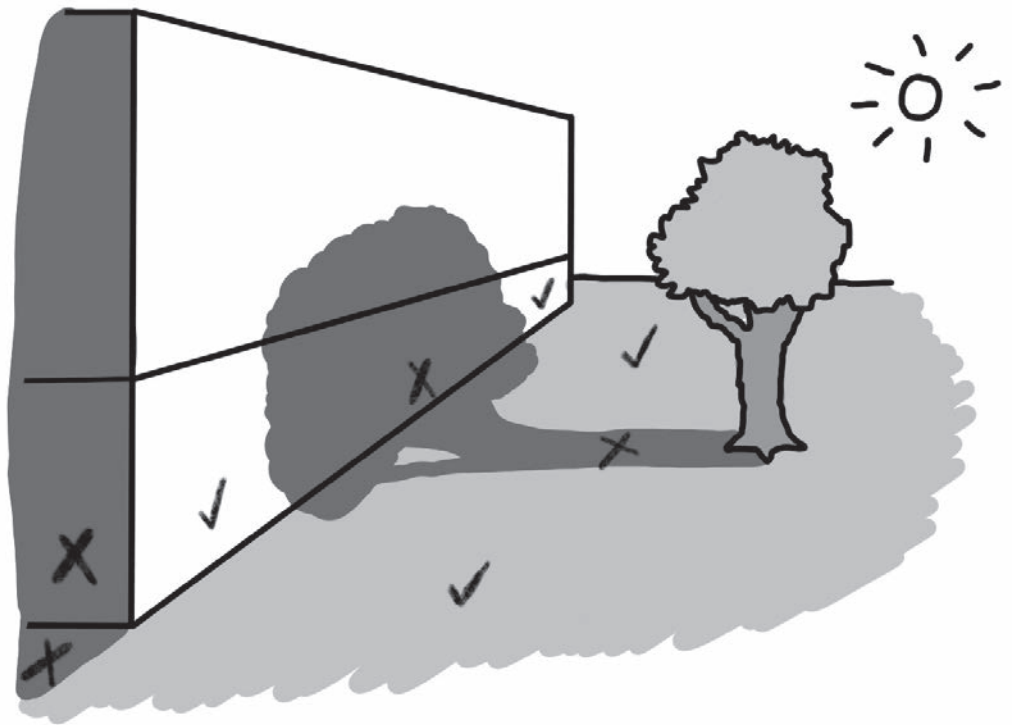
If you're too embarrassed to show your work because **you fear what people will say**, know that **the mean people win when you don't take the risk** of sharing at all. Take a chance on the good you contribute to the world, and don't worry about the haters! You're spending your time contributing to the world and they're spending their time criticizing it. Who's really the winner there? (Hint: it's you.)



If you don't want to share your work because **you don't think it's very good compared to the work of others**, the solution is to **stop comparing!** You can't compare your first attempts with the efforts from a seasoned professional. It's not a competition. Just because you don't like your work doesn't mean someone else won't. Give your work a chance and give others a chance to like it too. I am a professional sketch artist today because I took a risk and drew some silly cartoons on my office whiteboard. I didn't think others would like them, but one thing led to another and now I get to earn my living by drawing full-time. You never know what opportunities could come about from sharing your visual notes!

CAPTURING THE BEST IMAGE

Use a well-lit spot. I like to go outside when possible, because natural sunlight always looks better than indoor lighting. If you can't get to a place with good lighting, take several pictures using the lighting you do have, with and without flash. Compare your photos to see what looks best. Flash has the tendency to wash out notes and colors, but it can also be a lifesaver in a pinch!



Position yourself directly above or in front of your visual notes, making sure all sides of the canvas are as parallel to the edges of the frame as you can make them. Make sure your shadow isn't being cast onto them! The more straight-on you are, the better. Save the artistic angles for other projects. You share visual notes because you want people to read them, so make it easy to see!

Take photos using the normal mode or HD setting. Tap your touchscreen over different parts of your notes to make sure they're in full focus. I recommend taking at least three pictures every time so you can choose the best one and eliminate any crooked or blurry shots. If you used a large canvas for your notes, take several pictures and stitch them together with photo-editing software.



BEST ✓

CROOKED + BLURRY ✗

CUT-OFF ✗

OTHER TIPS:

- Once you have a good photo, use photo-editing software or an app to make slight adjustments, such as brightening or increasing the contrast. Always make sure your notes are easy to read.
- When you're ready, share your images online. If you post on social media, using hashtags like **#sketchnotes** or **#visualnotes** helps other people interested in visual notetaking find your work.



If you took your visual notes on smaller paper, using a scanner is another great way to make a digital copy. If you know how to use editing software, you can easily make changes there too. Once you have your final image, you can crop it to a specific size and share it right from your computer.

THE VALUE OF SHARING

Sharing your work online is a great way to find a community of like-minded visual notetakers, and it provides an opportunity to get valuable feedback on your work. There is a vibrant sketchnoting community made up of people all over the world! Sketchnoters love to learn from and help each other. If you ever feel stuck, sharing your work and asking for help is a great start.

Sharing your work is also an amazing way to **track your growth**. I often don't notice that my visual notes improve from page to page in a sketchbook, but I do notice from sketchbook to sketchbook. When I look at my latest social media post compared to the previous one, I think, "I guess I'm still at the same skill level as before." But then I scroll further back and think, "Nope! I've definitely gotten better since then." Changes can be small and hard for you to notice, but others will notice them! I often receive feedback from my followers saying, "You keep getting better and better!" and it's hard for me to believe them, but they're not as close to my work as I am. Sometimes you need to take a step back to see the big picture.

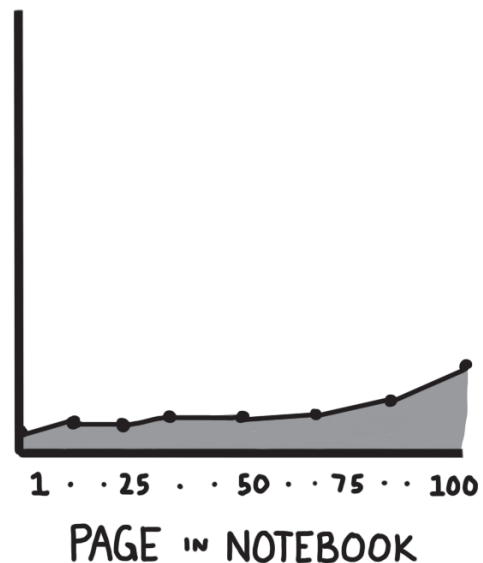
IMPROVEMENT: NOTEBOOKS

CONFIDENCE
+ IMPROVEMENT



IMPROVEMENT: PAGES

CONFIDENCE
+ IMPROVEMENT



WHEN SHOULD YOU SHARE?

Our ability to remember information is low when we're limited to hearing alone. The content people hear in a session fades from memory with every passing minute, so it's important to get visual notes in front of them fast! I like to share my visual notes within 30 minutes of the session's end, if possible. There's nothing more awkward than sharing your notes after the excitement has worn off and everything is back to business as usual. The faster you can share your notes, the better.

If you took visual notes in class, try to post them right after. If you took visual notes during church, try to post them before the end of the day. If you took visual notes at a conference, try to share before the official closing. Don't forget to use relevant hashtags on social media so others can find your work too!



As much as I advocate sharing your visual notes, there are times when it isn't appropriate. If you're capturing notes for an event that would be described as invitation-only, closed-door, internal, or proprietary, the information is not meant for public viewing. Ask the leader or planner if you can share your notes with the event's attendees.



For many of my professional gigs, the information is private. Sometimes I'll share that I'll be sketching for a company and leave it at that, but sometimes clients don't even want me sharing that information. **ALWAYS** clarify what you are and are not allowed to share. Finally, don't put anything online that might compromise the identity or personal safety of yourself or others.

Outside of those obvious situations in which sharing your visual notes isn't appropriate, there are other times when you might not want to share. I once captured visual notes during a medical procedure. I was very proud of the work I did, but I disliked the nature of it. I decided to not share my work to prevent attracting similar clients or projects.

In addition to the above, whenever I'm not sure if I should share my visual notes, I ask myself these questions:

1. Am I proud of the work?

If you're not proud of your work or you have other reasons for questioning whether to share it, I'd say trust your gut and keep your notes private.

2. Do I have any hesitations in sharing about the event, who the presenter is, or the contents of what was shared?

If you disagree with the content of the notes or have strong ethical objections, you might not want to share. By sharing your work, you are associating yourself with that information. (Including a disclaimer is one way around this.)

3. Would my work help others or hurt others?

If your work would help people understand, that's a positive! If the information you share might hurt people, it's best to keep it private.



People value visual notes!
You might find that you can monetize your work, such as making your notes available for purchase after an event.

IMPROVING YOUR CRAFT: TRACK YOUR TRENDS

As you practice visual notetaking, you'll begin to discover your own style. When you're practicing, pay attention to the timing of your notes. Do you tend to take a lot of notes in the beginning and then taper off once you get a feel for the presenter? Or maybe you write really large and use a lot of space? Perhaps you don't write enough, or spend too much time on drawings instead of listening. Self-awareness in noticing these tendencies will help you refine your skills and plan your layouts.

Here some things to keep track of as you practice:

- Pacing
- Balance of drawings and text
- Writing size
- Amount of space used in amount of time (on average)
- Unbalanced notes (too much in one area and not enough in another, blank spots)
- Writing too much or not enough
- Drawing too much or not enough
- Use of color (Overwhelming? Distracting?)



I can easily track my trends because I practice with the same tools and canvas each time. It's okay to experiment with different tools and types of drawing surfaces, but if you're changing it up every time you practice it might be difficult to identify areas you can improve.

PRACTICE If you want to improve, practice regularly—even daily! You may not see a noticeable difference right away, but trust that you are learning and improving. Remember to share your progress publicly too!

Expertise **IS ONLY**
ACHIEVED THROUGH
{ regular } practice!

TIPS FOR LEFT-HANDED PEOPLE

I'm right-handed, but I am very familiar with the writing and drawing frustrations my left-handed friends have shared with me. You might think your left hand will be permanently smudged from your work, but there's hope! If you're a lefty, you CAN be a great visual notetaker—it just takes some effort to learn new habits. Here are a few tips:

USE FAST-DRYING TOOLS Smudging is a reality for lefties, so try to use tools that don't smudge as much. Avoid fountain pens, brush pens, big markers, and gel pens. There are some fast-drying gel pens out there, but they aren't quite as fast as, say, a ballpoint pen.

SIT IN A STRATEGIC PLACE Try to sit in a chair where your left arm won't be bumped by a right-handed person sitting on your left side. You might need to be bold and ask to switch seats with someone.

REFINE FROM RIGHT TO LEFT There's no rule saying you must refine from the beginning. Start on the right-hand side of your canvas and work your way left to lessen the chance of smudging.

ROTATE YOUR PAPER One left-handed friend of mine rotates her paper so smudging is less likely, and it also helps when she wants to do fancy angled lettering. Try rotating your canvas, if you aren't already.

USE A SMUDGE SHEET Many left-handed artists keep a scrap sheet of paper under their hand when working over work already completed to reduce smudges.

LEARN TO WRITE DIFFERENTLY When I write normally, the entire right side of my palm rests on the paper, but even as a right-handed person, I smudge too! I've adjusted how I write while graphic recording so my hand makes as little contact with the surface as possible. The weight of my hand is primarily at the base of my palm, and I use my pinky finger to balance. Notice the difference? Less skin touching paper = less smudging.



Even if this method doesn't work for you, try different angles of resting your hand, or learn to write without resting your hand on the page at all! Hover above the page, or find something else to rest your hand on above the canvas.

There's no denying that it's difficult to learn to write in a new way. It's frustrating to feel like your handwriting isn't very good, and you'll want to go back to what is comfortable, but keep at it! Your faithful practice will ensure success.

PROFESSIONAL & EDUCATIONAL VISUAL NOTETAKING

Many people take visual notes as a personal practice or hobby, but it can also be an enjoyable way to earn money and to learn! If you're interested in turning your hobby into a side job or career, or you want to learn about visual notes in the classroom as either a teacher or student, check out my free bonus guides available for download at www.quartoknows.com/page/notetaking.

GETTING STARTED

SHARE YOUR WORK

Being a professional visual notetaker starts with sharing your work. I talked earlier about the value of sharing your work publicly. No one will be comfortable hiring you unless they can see samples of your work! Whether you share your work on social media or have an online portfolio, your work needs to be publicly available and easy to find.

SEPARATE BUSINESS FROM PERSONAL

If you want to be taken seriously as a professional visual notetaker, separate business from personal, whether your work is on social media or a website. If someone is interested in hiring you to take visual notes, all they're interested in seeing is images of your work, and they don't want to wade through pictures of your vacation or your dog to find it!

TELL PEOPLE YOU WANT TO BE HIRED

People won't know you're available for this kind of work unless you tell them! Position yourself as hireable for this specific service by giving out business cards, telling people you're looking to take visual notes and asking for connections, and sharing online.

GET INVOLVED IN THE VISUAL NOTES COMMUNITY

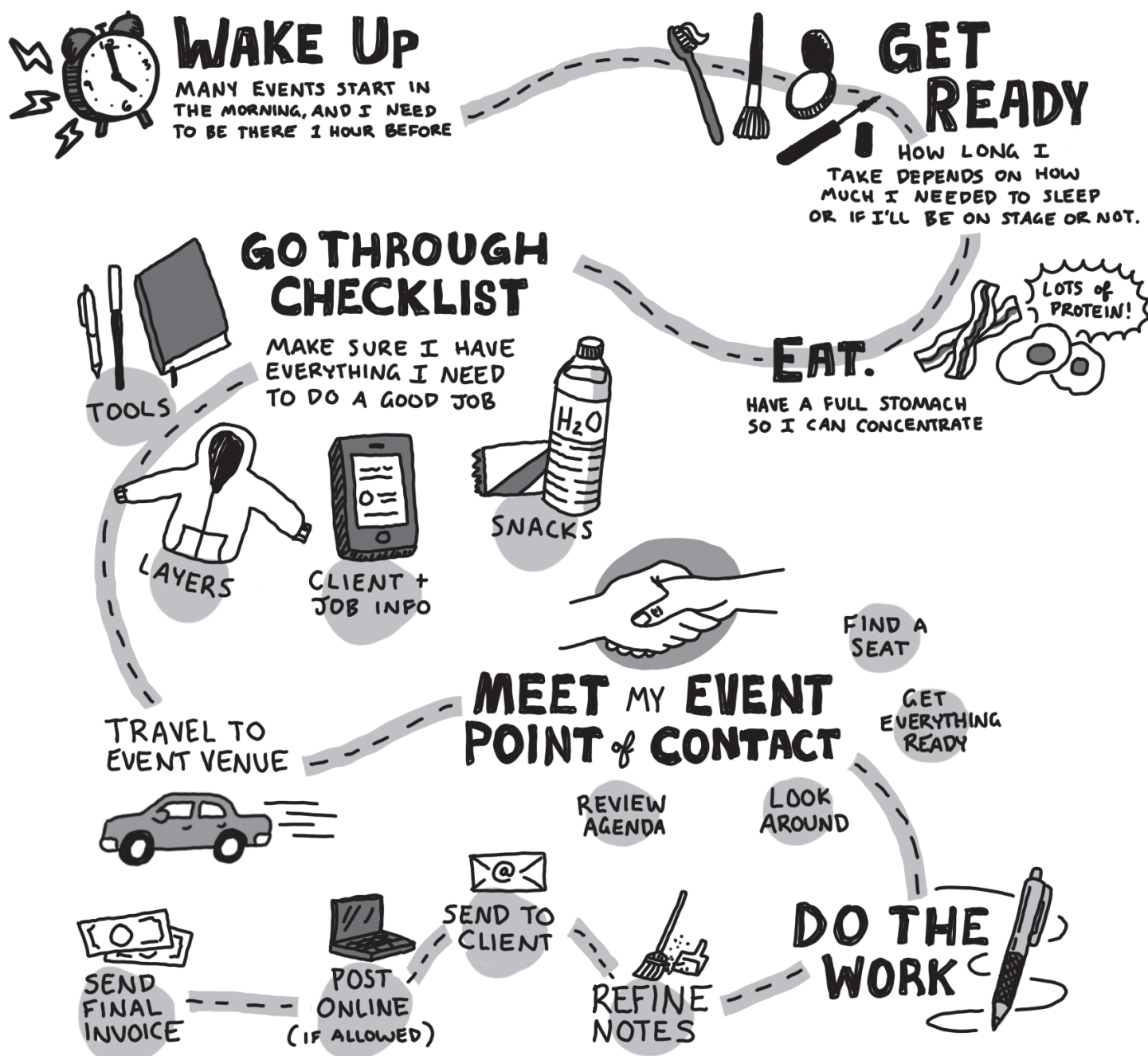
There is a vibrant community of people who love visual notetaking all around the world. There are meet-ups, conferences, groups, interviews, and more. Get involved in this community, and you will improve your craft and be on your way to becoming an expert.

If you're having a hard time finding people to hire you for this kind of work and you're doing everything above, ask yourself the following questions:

- Is your work of consistent quality? (i.e. Can people know what to expect when they hire you, or is every creation unique? Prospective clients may not want to gamble!)
- Have you asked for honest feedback on your work from friends, peers, or mentors?
- Are you easy to get in touch with? Do you check your email and phone messages?
- Do you live in or have access to an area with events and activities conducive to professional visual notetaking? (i.e. conferences, lectures, meetings, events, etc.)
- How long have you been at it? Sometimes it can take years for new endeavors to pay off. Have patience and keep trying!

A WALKTHROUGH

People who want to be professional visual notetakers often ask me what a normal day looks like when taking visual notes for a client. Below is a visual example of a day in the life.



DON'T FORGET TO DOWNLOAD MY BONUS GUIDES FOR PROFESSIONAL AND EDUCATIONAL VISUAL NOTETAKING AT WWW.QUARTOKNOWS.COM/PAGE/NOTETAKING

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Emily Mills is a freelance illustrator and sketchnoting fanatic. When she's not traveling all over the country taking visual notes for The Sketch Effect, you can find her serving her own clients or teaching online classes at SketchnoteAcademy.com. Emily lives just outside Nashville, Tennessee, with her husband, Joseph. Subscribe to SketchnoteAcademy.com for more visual notetaking articles and exercises.

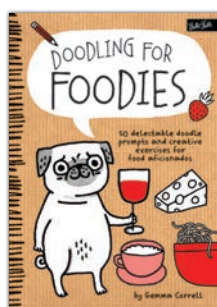
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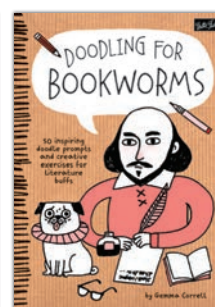
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THE ART OF VISUAL NOTETAKING

An interactive guide to visual communication and sketchnoting

Studies have shown that more than 80 percent of human learning occurs through visual means and that an individual's ability to retain information is six times greater when visuals accompany spoken presentations. Now you can improve your ability to recall information and up your notetaking game with **The Art of Visual Notetaking**: a comprehensive, approachable guide to visual communication.

Ideal for meetings, conferences, and any other event where information retention is desired, visual notetaking—also referred to as “sketchnoting”—is a popular and highly beneficial method of documentation. From recounting lectures and planning projects to chronicling travels and creating lists, visual notetaking is a flexible tool that can be used for virtually any purpose. Best of all, anyone can learn to do it!

Professional sketchnoter Emily Mills guides aspiring visual notetakers through the process of learning how to use this valuable method to maximum effect. Discover how to create and use simple icons, drawings, headers, and embellishments to communicate complex ideas quickly and easily. Whether discussing the different types of visual notes, the process of active listening, or reviewing supplies and tips for sharing your work, Emily leaves no stone unturned in this enjoyable and educational handbook. Resources for becoming a professional notetaker are also included.

With a little time and practice, you too can become a successful and highly effective sketchnoter—let **The Art of Visual Notetaking** show you how!



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