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FREE RESOURCE — GUIDE

Sketchnoting Starter Pack

Visual note-taking for people who cannot draw: a small visual vocabulary, four page layouts and practice pages to build the habit.

20	4	3	0
SHAPES	LAYOUTS	STROKES PER SHAPE	DRAWING SKILL NEEDED

VISUAL VOCABULARY · LAYOUTS · HIERARCHY · PRACTICE

PREPARED BY
BrightStudy

CATEGORY
Note-taking

EDITION
2026, A4 PDF

LATEST VERSION
brightstudy.ai/resources/sketchnoting-starter-pack

What is inside

Sketchnotes combine words, simple shapes and structure so that a page of notes is memorable at a glance. You do not need to draw well; you need about twenty shapes (containers, arrows, people, icons) and a layout. This pack teaches that vocabulary on one page, shows four layouts (linear, radial, path and grid) with when to use each, works through a sketchnoted topic step by step, and gives you practice pages for copying the vocabulary and for your first three topics.

SECTIONS

1. The visual vocabulary
2. Layouts, hierarchy and an example
3. Vocabulary practice
4. Linear layout page
5. Radial layout page
6. Path layout page

WHO IT IS FOR

Students who remember what they see better than what they read, and anyone whose written notes feel like a wall of text.

WHAT IS INCLUDED

- A twenty-shape visual vocabulary with how to draw each in three strokes
- Four page layouts and which subjects suit each
- Step-by-step example: a History topic turned into a sketchnote
- Lettering and hierarchy rules for titles, headings and body text
- Vocabulary practice page and three blank layout pages

01

The visual vocabulary

Twenty shapes cover almost everything. Draw each one three times on the practice page until it is automatic.

SHAPE	DRAW IT	USE IT FOR
Container (box, cloud, banner)	Rectangle; bumpy oval; rectangle with notched ends	Grouping related points; titles
Arrow (straight, curved, double)	Line with a V head	Sequence, cause, two-way relationships
Person	Circle on a line, two short legs	People, roles, "who"
Group	Three overlapping people	Populations, teams, society
Lightbulb	Circle on a small rectangle	Idea, insight, "key point"
Star	Five-point, or an asterisk	Important, exam favourite
Question mark in a circle	As written	Unsure, look up
Tick and cross	As written	For and against, right and wrong
Speech bubble	Oval with a tail	Quotes, definitions
Clock	Circle with two hands	Time, dates, duration
Book	Two rectangles with a spine	Source, reading, theory
Scales	A T with two pans	Balance, evaluate, compare
Flag	Line with a triangle	Milestone, turning point
Eye	Pointed oval with a circle	Observation, evidence
Graph	L-shape with a line	Trend, increase, decrease
Gear	Circle with bumps	Process, mechanism, how
Heart	As drawn	Values, motivation, attitude

01

The visual vocabulary (continued)

SHAPE	DRAW IT	USE IT FOR
Warning triangle	Triangle with an exclamation	Risk, limitation, caution
Link (chain)	Two ovals joined	Connection, dependency
Number badge	Circle with a number	Steps, rankings, lists

02

Layouts, hierarchy and an example

FOUR LAYOUTS

LAYOUT	SHAPE OF THE PAGE	BEST FOR
Linear	Top to bottom, like a column	Lectures, lessons, anything delivered in order
Radial	Centre with spokes	A topic with themes (a character, a system, an era)
Path	A winding line with stops	Processes, timelines, narratives
Grid	Rows and columns	Comparisons, pros and cons, several cases

HIERARCHY RULES

- Three text sizes only: title (big, boxed), headings (capitals), body (small, normal).
- One accent colour for the five most important things on the page, grey or black for everything else.
- Space is information. Leave gaps between groups; cramming kills readability.
- Containers group; arrows connect; icons anchor. Use each for its job.

EXAMPLE: "CAUSES OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR" AS A RADIAL SKETCHNOTE

1. Title in a banner at the centre: WW1 CAUSES, 1914.
2. Four spokes: Militarism (gear), Alliances (chain), Imperialism (globe), Nationalism (flag). Capitals, accent colour.
3. Under each spoke, two or three body-text facts: naval race figures, Triple Entente 1907, Morocco crises, Balkans.
4. A path across the bottom: Sarajevo (star) → ultimatum → mobilisation (clock) → declarations.
5. A scales icon in a corner: "long-term vs trigger" with a one-line judgement.
6. Review: cover it, redraw the four spokes from memory, compare.

03

Vocabulary practice

Draw each shape three times. Speed matters more than neatness.

	ATTEMPT 1	ATTEMPT 2	ATTEMPT 3
Container			
Arrow			
Person			
Group			
Lightbulb			
Star			
Speech bubble			
Clock			
Book			
Scales			
Flag			
Graph			
Gear			
Warning			
Chain			
Number badge			

04

Linear layout page

Topic _____. Title at the top, flow downwards, containers for groups, arrows for links.

LINEAR SKETCHNOTE

05

Radial layout page

Topic _____. Title in the centre, four to six spokes, facts under each.

RADIAL SKETCHNOTE

06

Path layout page

Process or timeline _____. Winding path with numbered stops; icons at the turning points.

PATH SKETCHNOTE

Keep going

BRIGHTSTUDY

This resource covers the part of studying that happens away from a screen. BrightStudy does the rest: upload your notes, slides or recordings and it turns them into Study Docs, flashcards and exam-style questions, then schedules your reviews with spaced repetition. There is a free plan to get started.

PAIRS WELL WITH NOTE-TAKING

FEATURE	WHAT IT DOES	LINK
Study Docs	Structured notes you can read, edit and study from.	brightstudy.ai/features/study-docs
Document Uploads	PDFs, slides and typed or handwritten notes.	brightstudy.ai/features/upload
Recordings	Record or upload audio for your learning.	brightstudy.ai/features/recordings
Image Extraction	Bring the figures from your documents into your notes.	brightstudy.ai/features/image-extraction

RELATED RESOURCES

RESOURCE	LINK
Cornell Notes Template	brightstudy.ai/resources/cornell-notes-template
Lecture Capture Sheet	brightstudy.ai/resources/lecture-capture-sheet
Textbook and Reading Notes Template	brightstudy.ai/resources/reading-notes-template



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