

IdeaMap: A sophisticated graphical idea processor

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IdeaMap is an idea processor built upon modern principles of cognitive science. It comprises four integrated idea-composing and idea-organizing environments as well as a kit of useful tools for manipulating mental maps of idea spaces.

The main environment in IdeaMap is a mapping screen. As ideas are generated or collected, the user creates a box on the map screen using a mouse, and writes the idea name inside the box. Ideas can be moved around the screen, and lines of user-defined colour and texture can be drawn between ideas to show any kind of connection.

Each idea on the map screen can be selected and blown up into a screen of its own, which in turn contains ideas and linkages.

As ideas are stored on the map, an outline is simultaneously generated from them. This outline can be called up into a window and edited in the usual ways.

Ideas may have attached screens of content: either graphical or textual or both. Simple text and graphics editors are provided to generate and edit this content. A citation screen may also be attached to an idea to provide a reference to its source. Ideas may also have keywords attached to them for quick reference, and search tools are provided to retrieve ideas by using Boolean search operators.

Two other map tools are provided. One is a small scale map of the entire three-dimensional structure of ideas. This may be used to navigate around the idea structure. The second is a trail of the path taken through the idea structure. A user can call either of these up into a window as required.

IdeaMap promotes metacognition through its ability to present a visual model of thought, as well as a visual display of how the thought structure has been used. This program presents exciting opportunities for metacognitive study through the sharing and examination of others' idea maps.