

EDMUND GRÖPL



Make

Useful Notes

A SIMPLE GUIDE TO A COMPLEX SKILL BY USING  
SKETCHNOTES, OBSIDIAN AND ZETTELKASTEN



# MAKE USEFUL NOTES

A SIMPLE GUIDE TO A COMPLEX SKILL BY USING  
SKETCHNOTES, OBSIDIAN AND ZETTELKASTEN

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Sketchnote Book  
by Edmund Gröpl

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Cover: Sketchnote inspired by Graham Shaw at TEDx, 2015  
[https://lnkd.in/eC\\_7RRjy](https://lnkd.in/eC_7RRjy)

To  
THIES, JONAS, URS, KATHARINA, ROGER  
AND URSEL



# Preface

I'm a data scientist and data storyteller. Networked thinking has been part of my job for more than 30 years. Working with sketchnotes is a basic need. But why should I start writing a book about Smart Sketchnotes? The answer is easy.

What I've learned in my digital life:

1. Moments are precious.
2. So, I'm taking photos to remember.
3. Too many photos are overwhelming.
4. So, I love to create Photo Books.

But I needed much longer to understand:

1. Ideas are precious.
2. So, I'm taking sketchnotes to remember.
3. Too many sketchnotes are overwhelming.
4. So, I'm just creating my first Sketchnote Book about Digital Sketchnotes.

Do you already have a photo book? And what about having your own Sketchnote Book collecting Digital Sketchnotes?

If you love the idea, here are some great examples:

- A Simple Guide to Sketchnoting, Alessio Bresciani <sup>1</sup>
- Essentials of Visual Language, Yuri Malishenko<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Alessio Bresciani, *A Simple Guide To Sketchnoting: How To Use Visual Thinking in Daily Life to Improve Communication & Problem Solving*, 2016, <https://www.amazon.de/dp/B01LYP6JWZ/>.

<sup>2</sup> Yuri Malishenko, *Essentials of Visual Language - Workbook* (Leanpub, 2016), <https://leanpub.com/visualthinkingworkbook>.



- The xLontrax Theory of Sketchnote, Mauro Toselli<sup>3</sup>
- Sketchnotes aus Australien, Annelies Schippke<sup>4</sup>
- Collection of 98 Digital Sketchnotes, Chris Spalton<sup>5</sup>

But collecting Digital Sketchnotes is only the first step. In this book about Smart Sketchnotes you will learn how to benefit from networked thinking and visual thinking as well.

Networked thinking and visual thinking are both approaches to organizing and interpreting information that can be used to help you better understand complex ideas and concepts. However, they differ in the way they represent and structure information.

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<sup>3</sup> Mauro Toselli, *The Xlontrax Theory of Sketchnote*, 2016, <https://www.maurotoselli.com/blog/the-xlontrax-theory-of-sketchnote>.

<sup>4</sup> Annelies Schippke, 'Sketchnotes aus Australien', *meisterbar* (blog), 2022, <http://meisterbar.de/australien/>.

<sup>5</sup> Chris Spalton, 'Collected Digital Sketchnotes', Dropbox, 2022, <https://www.dropbox.com/s/cwozl3elf3604pi/Chris%20Spalton%20-%20Collected%20Digital%20Sketchnotes%20.pdf?dl=0>.

Networked thinking<sup>6</sup> is an approach to organizing information that involves creating connections and relationships between different pieces of information. It often involves creating a network or map of interconnected ideas and concepts, which can be visualized in the form of a diagram or other visual representation. Networked thinking is often used to identify patterns and connections between different pieces of information, and to explore the relationships between different ideas and concepts.

Visual thinking<sup>7</sup>, on the other hand, is an approach to organizing and interpreting information that involves the use of visual elements such as images, diagrams, and graphics to represent and communicate information. Visual thinking can be used to create

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<sup>6</sup> Anne-Laure Le Cunff, 'Networked Thinking: A Quiet Cognitive Revolution', *Ness Labs* (blog), 23 September 2020, <https://nesslabs.com/networked-thinking>.

<sup>7</sup> Willemien Brand and Pieter Koene, *Visual Thinking - Empowering People and Organizations Through Visual Collaboration* (Bis B.V., Uitgeverij (BIS Publishers), 2017), [https://openlibrary.org/books/OL28622690M/Visual\\_Thinking](https://openlibrary.org/books/OL28622690M/Visual_Thinking).

visual summaries of complex ideas, to convey information in a more memorable and engaging way, and to facilitate the process of problem-solving and decision-making.

In summary, networked thinking involves creating connections and relationships between different pieces of information, while visual thinking involves using visual elements to represent and communicate information. Both approaches can be useful tools for organizing and understanding complex ideas and concepts.

We will start taking notes and taking sketchnotes as well. Linked together we can see almost hidden structures. That's the stuff Smart Sketchnotes are made of.

Start reading to discover your new world of thinking.



# Contents

INTRODUCTION	20
Understand Note-making	26
Why Making Notes	30
Why Making Sketchnotes	34
Connect Your Notes	38
Choose the Right Tools	43
Learn from the Best	45
START FROM PROVEN CONCEPTS	47
Understand Zettelkasten Framework	52
Be Aware of Your Networked Mindset	57
Appreciate 4 Zettelkasten Values	60
Know 12 Zettelkasten Principles ***2.7k	63

Use Unlimited Zettelkasten Practices ***29.1k	67
1. Fleeting Notes	72
2. Literature Notes	75
3. Permanent Notes	78
4. Bibliographical Notes	81
5. Structure Notes	83
6. Project Notes	85
BUILD UP YOUR WORKFLOW	86
Start with Three Steps	87
Understand Your Flow of Knowledge	91
Build it up on 4 Cornerstones	94
Focus on Creating Output	96
Make it a Habit	99
REMEMBER 12 PRINCIPLES	100
1. Start With Clear Goals	102
2. Use Templates ***14.9k	106
3. Use Links ***0.8k	109
4. Use Tags ***12.3k	113

5. Use for creative thinking	115
5. Review and Revise Your Notes	117
7. Keep up to date	119
8. Inspect and Adapt Your Process ***2.8k	121
9. Use for learning	125
10. Encourage collaboration	126
11. Support your work	127
12. Have Fun with Your Zettelkasten	128
USE TOOLS TO SUPPORT YOUR WORKFLOW	129
1 Collect Ideas	131
2 Reference Ideas	132
3 Visualize Ideas	133
4 Connect Ideas	135
5 Combine Ideas	136
6 Communicate Ideas	138
7 Outline Ideas	139
8 Publish Ideas	140
9 Backup Ideas	141

BENEFIT FROM UNLIMITED PRACTICES	142
1 Avoid Pitfalls	144
2 Inspect Process with Dataview ***2.5k	146
3 Review Notes with Dataview ***0.6k	147
4 Re-visit lost ideas	148
5 Re-visit old ideas	149
6 Discover with Graph View	151
7 Develop Your Ideas with Canvas	153
8 Use a Bullet Journal ***1.4k	157
9 Use a Kanban Board	160
10 Use an Outline Wall	162
11 Ask Questions *** 1.6k	164
CONNECT WITH LEARNING COMMUNITIES	165
Working Out Loud Circles	166
LernOS Circles	167
BE OPEN FOR EXPERIMENTS	168
Draw Ideas	170



Play with Quotes	172
Unlock Your Creative Potential	174
Create Multiple Posts	177
Share Templates	178
Share Starter Kit	179
Re-use Posts for Newsletters	180
Create Storylines with Canvas	181
Use AI	182
APPENDIX	183
Zettelkasten Books	184
Sketchnote Books	186
Communities	195
Inspiring People	197
Newsletters	200
Meetups & Online Meetings	202
Podcasts	203
Social Media	207
Tools	208

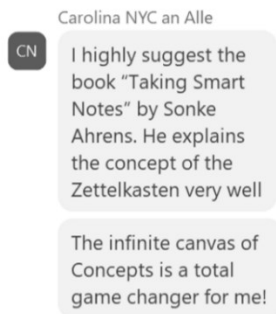
Concepts	209
Obsidian	211
Procreate	214
SimpleMind	215
Zettelkasten Videos	217
Sketchnote Videos	220
References	221
The Author	227



# INTRODUCTION

It was on March 2nd, 2022, when I attended the Eventbrite event "Sketchnoting with Mike Rohde"<sup>8</sup>. Therefore, it was an intense pleasure for me to have a live online workshop together with him and more than a hundred participants.

As I listened to his voice and watched his live presentation, I also watched the chat stream powered by some of the most active visitors. Some of these were questions for Mike, some were answers to questions Mike asked the audience. Suddenly I stopped



*FIG. 1: CHAT STREAM EVENTBRITE WITH MIKE ROHDE*

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<sup>8</sup> Mike Rohde, 'Sketchnoting with Mike Rohde', Eventbrite, 2 March 2022, <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/269815965817?aff=efbneb>.

reading: A few keywords with the phrase "Zettelkasten" appeared on the screen.

Never heard the word "Zettelkasten" in connection with sketchnoting. Long story short, I bought the book the next day and was intrigued from the start. The book opened a door for me to solve my personal problem of organizing my notes and also my sketchnotes.

Yes, that is how the story of Zettelkasten and sketchnotes starts for me. But what are your questions you might have when reading this book about using sketchnotes and Zettelkasten to improve visual and networked thinking with Obsidian? Questions I would be happy to answer for you in the following chapters:

- What is a Zettelkasten and how does it work?  
*See chapter: Understand Zettelkasten (p. 52)*
- What are sketchnotes and how can they be used to improve visual thinking?  
*See chapter:*

- How can the combination of sketchnotes and a Zettelkasten be used to improve networked thinking and knowledge management?

*See chapter:*

- BUILD UP YOUR WORKFLOW (p. 86)
- How can Obsidian be used to create and organize a Zettelkasten?

*See chapter: USE TOOLS TO SUPPORT YOUR WORKFLOW*  
(p. 129)

- What are some best practices for using sketchnotes and a Zettelkasten with Obsidian?

*See chapter: 9 Backup Ideas*

-

- *BENEFIT FROM UNLIMITED PRACTICES* (p. 141)
- Are there any specific challenges or pitfalls to be aware of when using this approach?

*See chapter: 1 Avoid Pitfalls* (p. 144)

- What are some examples of how others have used sketchnotes and a Zettelkasten with Obsidian to improve

their thinking and knowledge management?

*See chapter: Learn from the Best (p. 45)*

Overall, you will learn about the specific techniques and tools involved in using sketchnotes and a Zettelkasten with Obsidian, as well as how to apply these techniques and tools in a practical way to improve your own visual and networked thinking.

So now, let's start with the first chapter.



IT IS NOT POSSIBLE TO  
THINK  
SYSTEMATICALLY  
WITHOUT WRITING  
(LUHMANN 1992, 53).



SKETCHNOTING

**Sönke Ahrens**

*How to Take Smart Notes: One Simple Technique to Boost  
Writing, Learning and Thinking*

#kindlequotes



#EDMUND 2022

# Understand Note-making



**What are we to do with what we have written down?**

**Certainly, at first we will produce mostly garbage.**

**But we have been educated to expect something useful from our activities and soon lose confidence if nothing useful**

**seems to result. We should therefore reflect on whether**

**and how we arrange our notes**

**so that they are available for later access.**

**– Niklas Luhmann**

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<sup>9</sup> Manfred Kuehn, *'Learning How to Read by Niklas Luhmann'*,  
<https://luhmann.surge.sh/learning-how-to-read>.

I love reading and learning. But reading books is not enough. To find new insights note-taking is essential. Here is one of my personal insights I found when working with my Zettelkasten:



**It is not possible  
to think systematically  
without sketchnoting.<sup>10</sup>**

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<sup>10</sup> Edmund Gröpl, '*It Is Not Possible to Think*', 2022,  
[https://www.linkedin.com/posts/groepl\\_procreate-lernos-lernossketchnoting-activity-7002979335590576128- ocZ](https://www.linkedin.com/posts/groepl_procreate-lernos-lernossketchnoting-activity-7002979335590576128- ocZ).

My connected notes that led me to this insight relate to my two most valuable note-taking books:

- How to take Smart Notes [178 p.] - Sönke Ahrens<sup>11</sup>
- The Sketchnote Handbook [224 p.] - Mike Rohde<sup>12</sup>

But before we read these books chapter by chapter and page by page, let's get an introductory overview and start with two motivational videos on YouTube, one about Zettelkasten:

- Zettelkasten Method Explained: A Beginner's Guide [9:20] - Vicky Zhao<sup>13</sup>

and one about sketchnoting:

---

<sup>11</sup> Sönke Ahrens, *How to Take Smart Notes: One Simple Technique to Boost Writing, Learning and Thinking*, 2022.

<sup>12</sup> Mike Rohde, *Sketchnote Handbook: The Illustrated Guide to Visual Note Taking* (Milwaukee: Peachpit Press, 2012).

<sup>13</sup> *Zettelkasten Method Explained: A Beginner's Guide*, 2021.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GpV47rUYk8I>.

- Sketchnote Mini Workshop [32:29] - Mike Rohde<sup>14</sup>

I hope you enjoyed the short videos and found time to leaf through the two books. Some concepts may be familiar to you, others may be new.

We now want to have a closer look on taking notes and sketchnotes on the next pages. What are the similarities here, but also the differences between the two options.

---

<sup>14</sup> *Mike Rohde: Sketchnote Mini Workshop*, 2017,  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=39Xq4tSQ31A>.

# Why Making Notes

As I have learned there are five benefits to making notes:

**Improved understanding and retention of information:** Making notes helps you process and understand the material you are learning and makes it easier to review and recall later.

**Increased focus and concentration:** Making notes can help you stay engaged and focused during a lecture or meeting, as it requires you to actively listen and pay attention to what is being said.

**Better organization and clarity:** Notes can help you organize your thoughts and ideas and can serve as a helpful reference when you need to review the material later.

**Enhanced problem-solving and critical thinking skills:** Note-making can help you analyse and evaluate information, as you must decide what is most important and relevant to include in your notes.

**Preparation for future use:** Notes can be a useful resource when preparing for exams, projects, or presentations. They can also serve as a valuable reference when you need to revisit the material in the future.



**Note-making mindfully made your words active.**

*– Nick Milo*

Learn more about making notes by watching Nick Milo<sup>15</sup> on YouTube.

---

<sup>15</sup> Stop Note Taking. Start Note Making: Learn the NoMa Method, 2022. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SA5ZDg2l1R0>.





#1

Ideas,  
not  
Art

- MIKE ROHDE



#EDMUND'2021

# Why Making Sketchnotes



**Sketchnotes are rich visual notes created from a mix of handwriting, drawings, hand-drawn typography, shapes, and visual elements like arrows, boxes, and lines.**

*– Mike Rhode*

Sketchnoting, also known as visual notetaking, is a way of creating visual summaries of information. It involves combining drawings, text, and symbols to capture the essence of a meeting, lecture, or presentation in a way that is more engaging and memorable than

traditional note-taking methods. There are several benefits to sketchnoting:

**Improved retention:** Studies have shown that people tend to remember information better when it is presented visually. Sketchnoting allows you to create a visual representation of the information, which can help you remember it more effectively.

**Increased engagement:** Sketchnoting requires you to actively process and synthesize information as you create your visual summary. This can help you stay more engaged with the material and better understand the key points.

**Enhanced communication:** Sketchnotes can be shared with others, making them a powerful tool for communication and collaboration. They can be used to summarize meetings, lectures, or presentations, or to explain complex concepts to others in a more accessible way.

**Greater creativity:** Sketchnoting encourages creativity and allows you to express your understanding of the material in your own

unique way. This can make the learning process more enjoyable and rewarding.

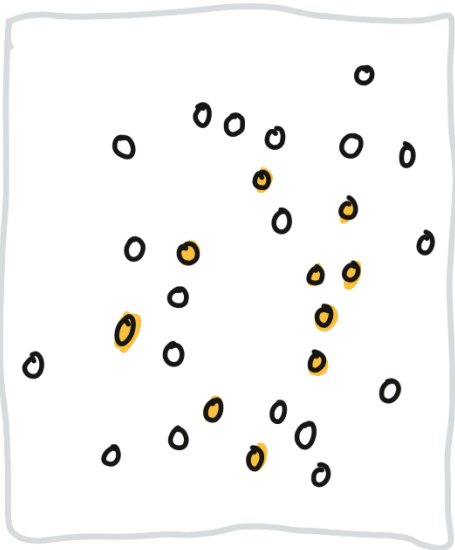
Overall, sketchnoting is a powerful tool for learning, retention, engagement, communication, and creativity.

And I would not leave you alone with this written text. Here is an introduction to visual note-taking from Doug Neill<sup>16</sup> on YouTube.

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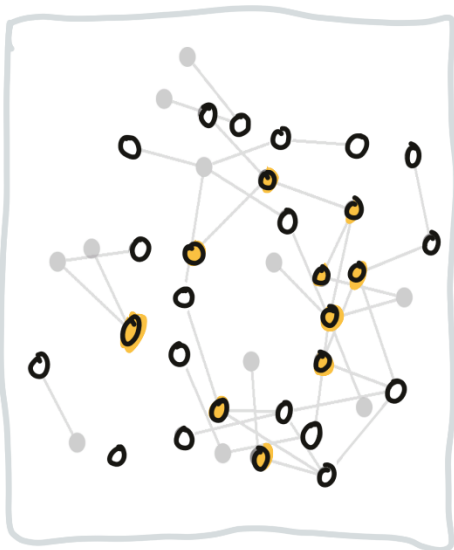
<sup>16</sup> An Introduction To Visual Note-Taking. Verbal to Visual, 2016.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eZQ7ILUAsek>.

## SKETCHNOTES



IDEAS

## SMART SKETCHNOTES



NETWORKED IDEAS

FIG. 2: IDEAS VS NETWORKED IDEAS

# Connect Your Notes



**Write exactly one note for each idea  
and write as if you were writing for someone else.**

**— Niklas Luhmann**

What is the difference between a sketchnote and a smart sketchnote? It is the same as between ideas and networked ideas. Such easy.

---

<sup>17</sup> Ahrens, *How to Take Smart Notes*. p. 34



SMART

SKETCHNOTES

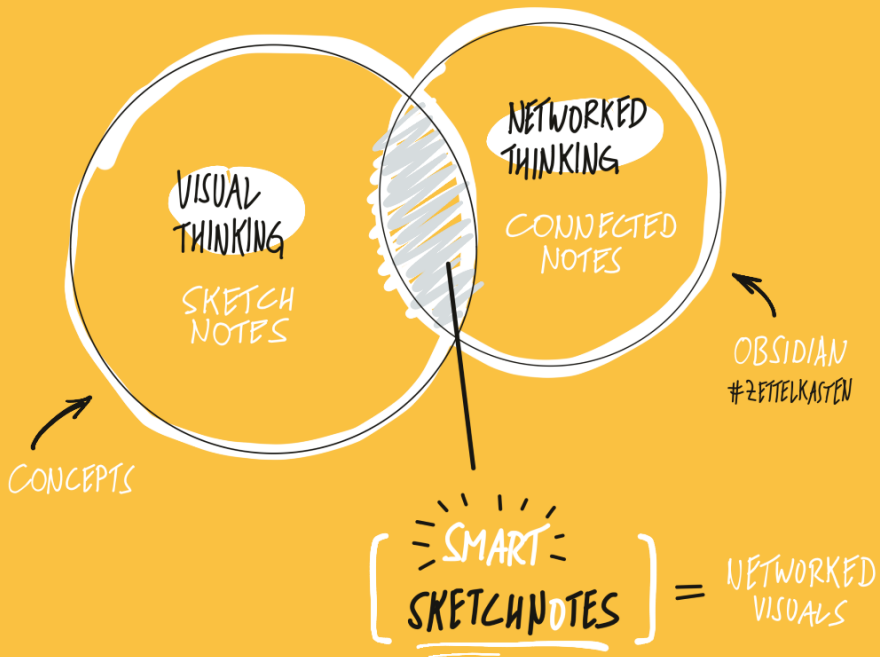


FIG. 3: SMART SKETCHNOTES ARE NETWORKED VISUALS



Smart Sketchnotes are Networked Visuals<sup>18</sup>:

- Visual Thinking creates Sketchnotes.
- Networked Thinking creates Connected Notes.

It is like connecting Mike Rohde and Niklas Luhmann. The only tools you need are Concepts app and Obsidian with Luhmann's Zettelkasten.

Try it your own: Start reading the next chapter.

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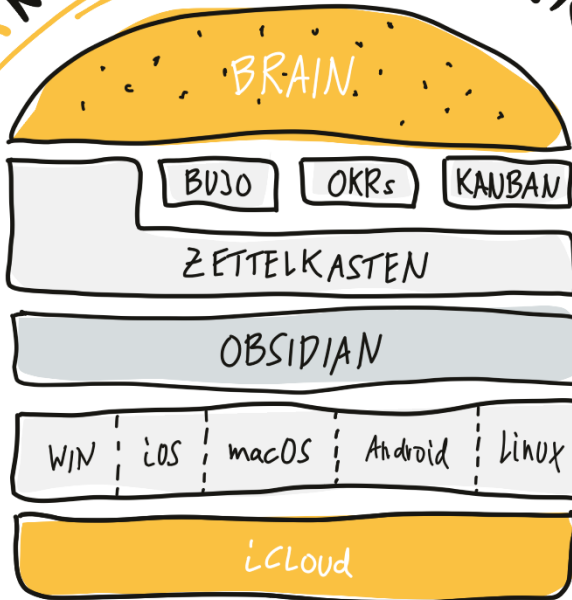
<sup>18</sup> Edmund Gröpl, 'Smart Sketchnotes Are Networked Visuals', 2022, [https://www.linkedin.com/posts/groepl\\_zettelkasten-procreate-procreatesketchnote-activity-6909149379492769794-018A/](https://www.linkedin.com/posts/groepl_zettelkasten-procreate-procreatesketchnote-activity-6909149379492769794-018A/).

WOL CIRCLE

# ZETTELKASTEN

WEEK 2

## KNOWLEDGE BURGER



METHODS

KM TOOL

OS



#EDMUND 2022

# Choose the Right Tools



*Nowadays, I use and value Roam Research,  
but would probably go with Obsidian  
if I had to start over today.<sup>19</sup>*

— Sönke Ahrens

---

<sup>19</sup> Ahrens, Sönke. 'Take Smart Notes', 2022,  
<https://www.soenkeahrens.de/en/takesmartnotes>.

This useful tip from Sönke Ahrens saved me hours and days. More time than it took me to read his great book. And it helped me to get an easy start.

Later, when I was more experienced with Zettelkasten I started some research and experiment with different software. But I was not successful. My first-choice seems to be the best.

My tip for you to start with Obsidian as a tool for Zettelkasten is a short set of six tutorials from Nick Milo<sup>20</sup> on YouTube. And it will save a lot of your precious time too.

More about choosing the right tools you'll find later in the chapter "USE TOOLS TO SUPPORT YOUR WORKFLOW" (p. 129).

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<sup>20</sup> Obsidian for Beginners: How to Use the Obsidian App for Notes. Linking Your Thinking, 2020.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QgbLb6QCK88>.

# Learn from the Best

For me, the best sources of value are the great authors and also the many talented and influential experts on personal knowledge management and sketchnoters as well who use social media to share their work and connect with their audiences.

Some of the most well-known and influential experts I know you will find in this book at:

- Inspiring People (p. 197)

-

Learn more about note-making by watching:

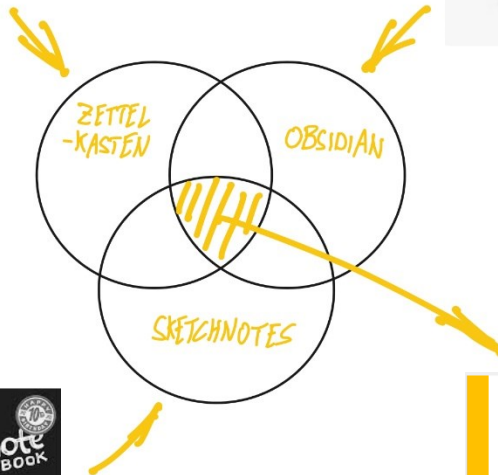
- Zettelkasten Videos (p. 217)
- Sketchnote Videos (p. 220)

Learn more about note-making by reading:

- Zettelkasten Books (p. 184)
- Sketchnote Books (p. 186)

Feel free to use all the supported links to watch their amazing tutorials on YouTube and also read their books.

START FROM  
PROVEN  
CONCEPTS





Surely you will find an unlimited number of books about taking notes. I found two of them that inspired me the most. One about:

- **Zettelkasten** from Sönke Ahrens<sup>21</sup> and one about
- **Sketchnotes** from Mike Rohde<sup>22</sup>

Apparently, these books inspired others as well. The book from Sönke Ahrens first published in 2017 has already been translated into 10 languages. Mike Rode's 2012 book is now available in 5 languages.

- **Obsidian**<sup>23</sup> is my preferred note-taking and knowledge management app.

---

<sup>21</sup> Ahrens, Sönke. How to Take Smart Notes: One Simple Technique to Boost Writing, Learning and Thinking, 2022.

<sup>22</sup> Rohde, Mike. Sketchnote Handbook: The Illustrated Guide to Visual Note Taking. Milwaukee: Peachpit Press, 2012.

<sup>23</sup> Obsidian: A knowledge base that works on local Markdown files. 'Obsidian', 2022. <https://www.obsidian.md>.

With more than 70,000 members in its Discord chat and 35,000 members on its forum, Obsidian has one of the largest note-taking communities.

But isn't it too complex to learn all these skills just for note taking? No, it isn't. As an experienced note-taker you already know about the complexity of writing useful notes. You've learnt from practice:



**Complex skills are built up by complex activities.**

— Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi <sup>24</sup>, 1993

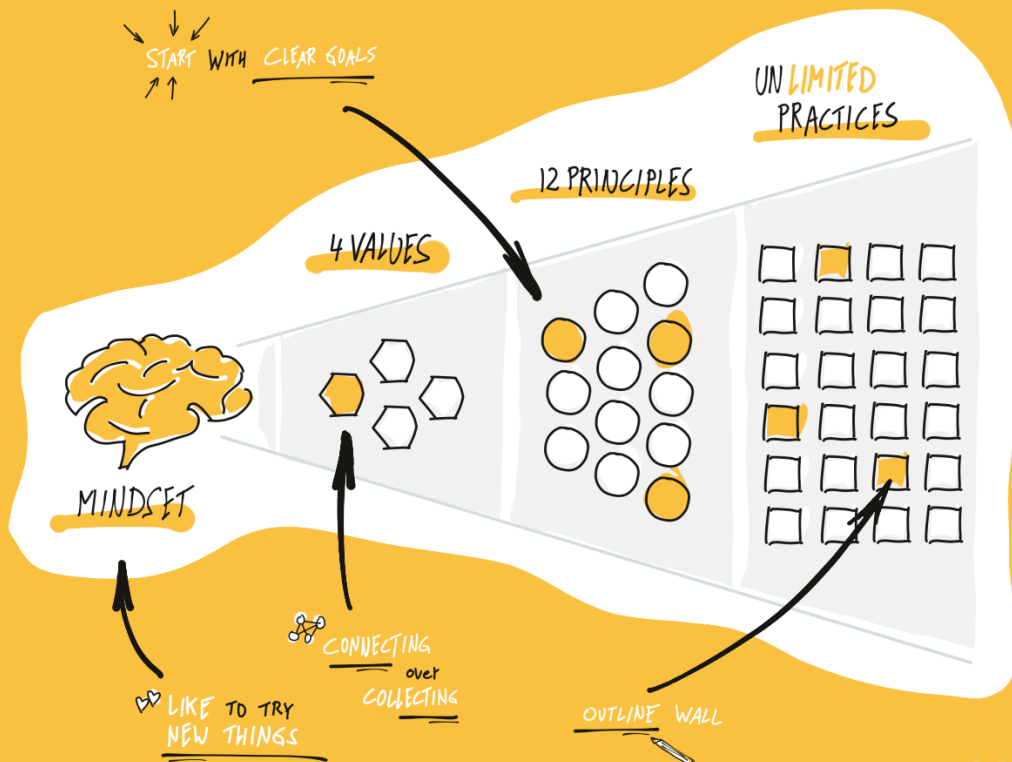
And it's not only a promise: You now have “A simple guide to a complex skill by using Sketchnotes, Obsidian and Zettelkasten”.

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<sup>24</sup> Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *The Evolving Self: A Psychology for the Third Millennium*, 1st HarperPerennial ed (New York, NY: HarperPerennial, 1994). p. 170

# ZETTELKASTEN

## FRAMEWORK



# Understand Zettelkasten Framework

Let me give you an overview: Niklas Luhmann's Zettelkasten is a method of note-taking and organization that he developed over the course of his career as a sociologist and philosopher. The following are some of the basic concepts that are central to the Zettelkasten method:

**Interconnectedness:** One of the key principles of the Zettelkasten method is the idea of interconnectedness, or the creation of

connections and relationships between different pieces of information. Luhmann believed that by linking related ideas together, it was possible to create a deeper understanding of complex concepts and to generate new ideas.

**Cross-referencing:** The Zettelkasten method involves the use of cross-references, or connections between different notes or slips, to create a network of interconnected ideas. Cross-references are used to link related ideas together and to facilitate the development of new connections and relationships between different pieces of information.

**Modularity:** The Zettelkasten method is based on the idea of modularity, or the organization of information into smaller, more manageable units. By breaking ideas down into smaller, more manageable chunks, it is easier to identify patterns and connections between different pieces of information, and to rearrange and reorder them as needed.

**Hierarchy:** The Zettelkasten method involves the creation of a hierarchy of ideas, with more general concepts at the top and more specific concepts below. This hierarchical structure helps to create a clear and organized overview of the information and allows for the easy identification of relationships between different ideas.

**Flexibility:** The Zettelkasten method is designed to be flexible and adaptable, allowing users to rearrange and reorder their notes as needed to reflect new insights and connections. This flexibility helps to facilitate the ongoing process of learning and idea development.

To understand the concept of Zettelkasten in detail the framework shown in the sketchnote above will give us some orientation:

- Networked Mindset (p. 57)
- 4 Zettelkasten Values (p. 60)
- 12 Zettelkasten Principles (p. 63)
- Unlimited Zettelkasten Practices (p. 67)

So let us start from top level and begin with our mindset in the next chapter.





# Be Aware of Your Networked Mindset

Let me assume you are a networked thinker like Niklas Luhmann.  
Then you will have a mindset characterized by the following traits:

- Open-mindedness
- Collaboration
- Connectedness
- Flexibility
- Continuous learning
- Systems thinking
- Embracing diversity and multiple perspectives.

You approach problem-solving by seeking diverse perspectives and drawing connections between seemingly disparate ideas. You view knowledge as decentralized and strive to build relationships and networks to access information and resources.

# ZETTELKASTEN

# VALUES

VALUES

- CONNECTING OVER COLLECTING
- FLEXIBILITY OVER STRUCTURE
- TAGS OVER FOLDERS
- WRITING OVER COPYING

# Appreciate 4 Zettelkasten Values

When starting to understand Zettelkasten I asked Google to find a “Zettelkasten Manifesto” for me. As I learned from agile projects, you always need a “Manifesto”<sup>25</sup> before to start working.

---

<sup>25</sup> Ken Schwaber et al., ‘Manifesto for Agile Software Development’, n.d., <https://agilemanifesto.org/>.

After more than 15 minutes of unsuccessful search I remembered an old saying: “If you can’t find it, create it.”

So, here is my first draft:

## **4 ZETTELKASTEN VALUES**

We are uncovering better ways of notetaking by doing it and helping others do it. Through this work we have come to value:

- Connecting over Collecting
- Flexibility over Structure
- Tags over Folders
- Writing over Copying

That is, while there is value in the items on the right, we value the items on the left more.

# ZETTELKASTEN

## PRINCIPLES



### 12 PRINCIPLES

- 1 START WITH CLEAR GOALS
- 2 USE TEMPLATES
- 3 MAKE CONNECTIONS
- 4 USE TAGS
- 5 USE FOR CREATIVE THINKING
- 6 REVIEW AND REVISE
- 7 KEEP UP TO DATE
- 8 INSPECT AND ADAPT
- 9 USE FOR LEARNING
- 10 ENCOURAGE COLLABORATION
- 11 SUPPORT YOUR WORK
- 12 HAVE FUN

# Know 12 Zettelkasten Principles \*\*\*2.7k

There are 12 basic principles for working with a Zettelkasten:

1. **Start with clear goals.** Determine what you want to achieve with your Zettelkasten and use this to guide your note-taking and organization. (p. 102)
2. **Use templates.** Consistently use a consistent format for your notes to make them easy to read and navigate. (p. 106)

3. **Make connections.** Link related notes together to create a web of interconnected ideas. (p. 109)
4. **Use tags.** Use tags to categorize and organize your notes and make it easier to find related information. (p. 113)
5. **Use for creative thinking.** Allow the connections between your notes to spark new ideas and facilitate creative thinking.
6. **Review and revise.** Regularly review and revise your notes to ensure they are up to date and accurate.
7. **Keep up to date.** Consistently add new notes and make connections between them to keep your Zettelkasten current and valuable.
8. **Inspect and adapt.** Continually evaluate and refine the organization and use of your Zettelkasten to maximize its effectiveness and efficiency.
9. **Use for learning.** Use your Zettelkasten to capture and organize new information as you learn, and to facilitate lifelong learning.
10. **Encourage collaboration.** Invite others to contribute to and review your Zettelkasten to facilitate collaboration and shared learning.



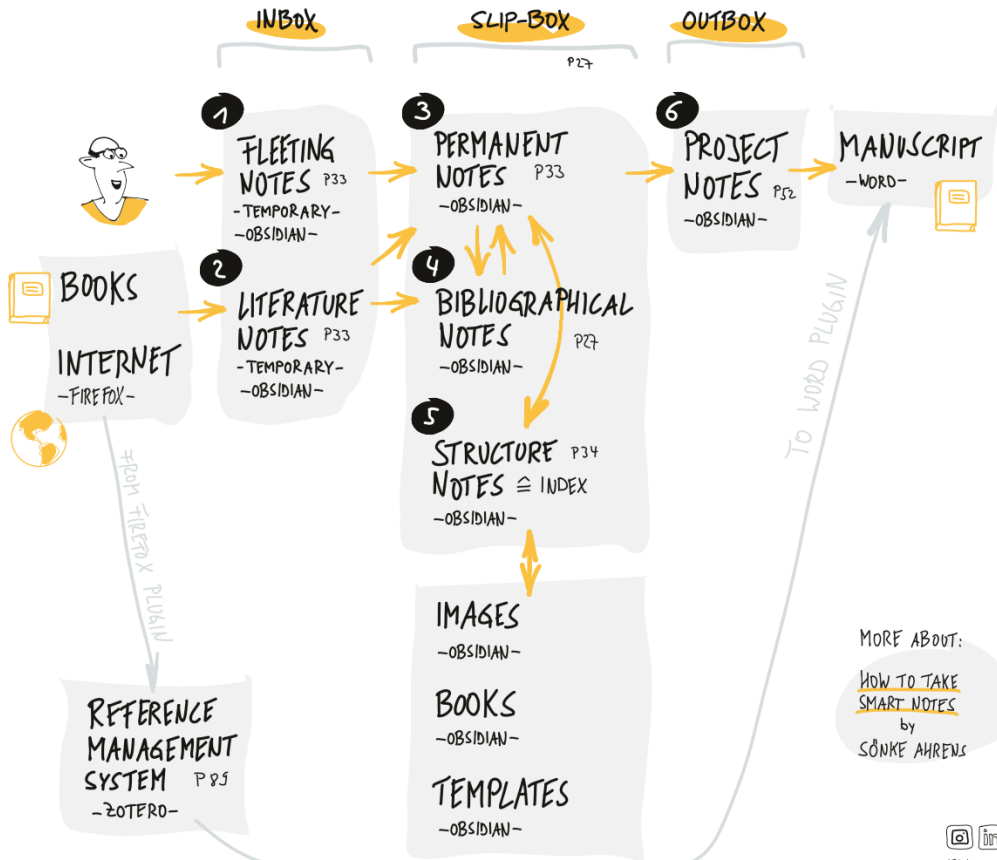
11. **Support your work.** Use your Zettelkasten as a tool to support and enhance your work, whether that's writing, research, or something else.
12. **Have fun.** Enjoy the process of building and using your Zettelkasten!

HOW  
TO  
USE

# ZETTELKASTEN

IN

# OBSIDIAN



MORE ABOUT:

HOW TO TAKE  
SMART NOTES  
by  
SÖNKE AHRENS



#EDMUND 2022

# Use Unlimited Zettelkasten Practices \*\*\*29.1k

Just finished reading the amazing book “How to take Smart Notes” from Sönke Ahrens<sup>26</sup>. As a visual thinker and sketchnoter my first idea was to use this method to combine visual thinking with

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<sup>26</sup> Ahrens, Sönke. How to Take Smart Notes: One Simple Technique to Boost Writing, Learning and Thinking, 2022.

networked thinking. Taking smart notes is great but taking smart sketchnotes would be even greater.

To summarize the content of a book like this within one sketchnote is not that easy. So, I started to summarize one main aspect which is important for a reader of Ahrens' book to work with the Zettelkasten method<sup>27</sup>.

It is the major workflow starting with filling the inbox till using the content of the growing slip-box to produce an output of higher value. I added the tools I'm using in this process (Obsidian, Zotero, Firefox and Word) and also the page numbers from the book as a reference for further reading and understanding the underlying method.

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<sup>27</sup> Edmund Gröpl, 'How to Use Zettelkasten in Obsidian - Forum Obsidian', *Obsidian Forum*, 31 March 2022, <https://forum.obsidian.md/t/how-to-use-zettelkasten-in-obsidian/35008>.

You see, there are several types of notes that are relevant for a Zettelkasten system. These are the types of notes that you might use in your Zettelkasten:

1. Fleeting Notes (p. 72)
2. Literature Notes (p. 75)

3. Permanent Notes (p. 77)

4. Bibliographical Notes (p. 81)

5. Structure Notes (p. 83)

6. Project Notes (p. 85)

Let's have a look on the details.

# ZETTELKASTEN PRACTICES



# 1. Fleeting Notes

Fleeting Notes<sup>28</sup> are brief notes that we can use to capture ideas or information that may not be relevant in the long term but need to be recorded quickly. They can be thought of as temporary placeholder notes that can be reviewed and either incorporated into the Zettelkasten or discarded later.

The purpose of Fleeting Notes is to allow you to quickly capture and record ideas or information as they occur to you, without the need to spend a lot of time organizing or categorizing them. This can be especially useful when you are working on a project or engaged in creative thinking, as it allows you to quickly capture and save ideas without interrupting your workflow.

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<sup>28</sup> Ahrens, *How to Take Smart Notes*, 33, 52.



By creating Fleeting Notes, you can ensure that you don't forget important ideas or information, and you can also use them as a starting point for more in-depth analysis or research later. Ultimately, Fleeting Notes are an important tool for helping you to stay organized and focused and can be an integral part of your successful Zettelkasten system.

**Take Fleeting Notes wherever you are.**

**The best tool for this is what you have with you,  
maybe a pencil and a piece of paper.**

# LINKING NOTES

- ① LITERATURE NOTES HAVE ONLY ONE CONNECTION TO THE SOURCE THEY CAME FROM.



PERMANENT NOTES



SOURCES

LITERATURE NOTES

STRUCTURE NOTES

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- ② A BACKLINK CONNECTS WITH THE CHAPTER THE IDEA CAME FROM



BOOK

AUTHOR

QUOTE

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTES



#EDMUND 2022

## 2. Literature Notes

Literature Notes<sup>29</sup> are the second type of note used in the Zettelkasten. In a Zettelkasten, notes are organized into a network of interconnected ideas, with each note representing a single thought or concept. Literature notes are used to capture information from external sources, such as books, articles, or lectures, and to integrate it into your own thinking and work.

The purpose of literature notes is to help you to extract and summarize the key points and ideas from external sources, and to relate them to your own thinking and work. By creating literature notes, you can more easily incorporate new information into your Zettelkasten and use it to build upon or challenge your existing ideas. Literature notes can also help you to access and retrieve

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<sup>29</sup> Ahrens, 33, 35, 90.

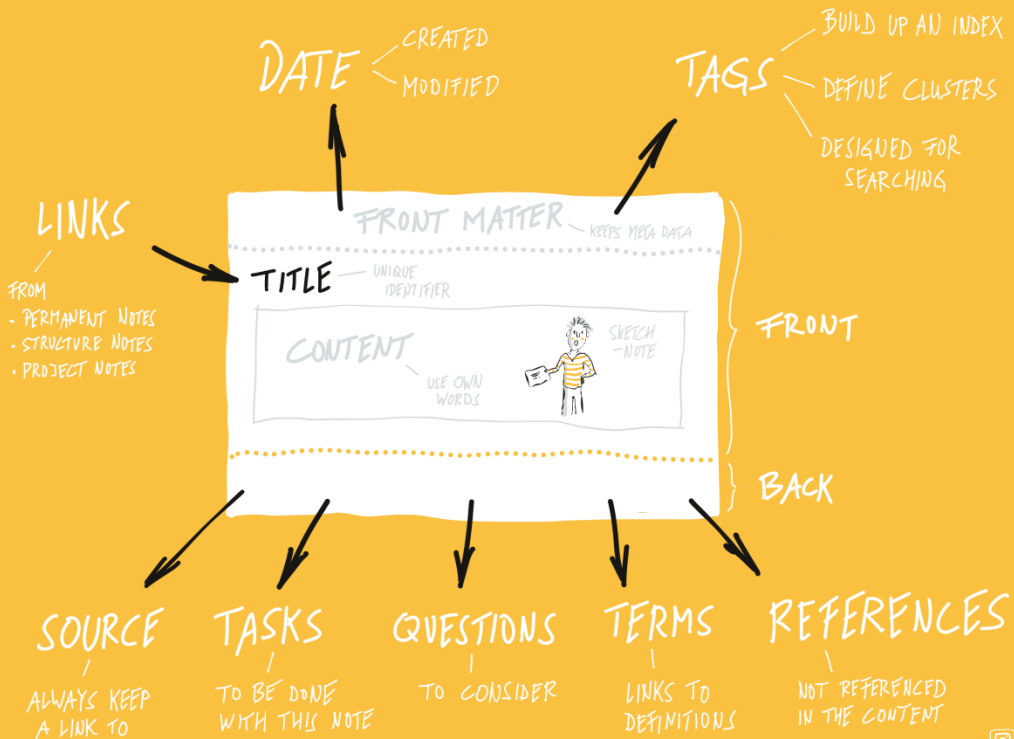
information from external sources, as they provide a structured way to capture and organize the relevant information more easily.

Using literature notes in a Zettelkasten can be especially helpful for you to keep track of a large volume of information from various sources. It can also be useful to more effectively incorporate new information into your thinking and work.

**Every Literature Note needs a link back to its source.**

**It is not an option. It is a must.**

# TEMPLATES for ~~OBSIDIAN~~ ZETTELKASTEN



### 3. Permanent Notes

Permanent Notes<sup>30</sup>, also known as atomic notes, are the central type of note used in the Zettelkasten. They are organized into a network of interconnected ideas, with each note representing a single thought or concept. Permanent notes are the central ideas that form the backbone of this network and are used to connect and relate other notes to each other.

The purpose of permanent notes is to provide a stable foundation for the rest of the notes in the Zettelkasten. They are meant to be long-lasting and not subject to frequent change, in contrast to temporary or working notes (Fleeting notes and Literature notes), which are more focused on capturing and organizing information in the short term. Permanent notes are typically used to represent key

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<sup>30</sup> Ahrens, 34, 52.

concepts, ideas, or themes that are central to your thinking and work.

Using permanent notes in a Zettelkasten can help you to better structure and organize your thoughts and ideas, as well as to identify connections and relationships between different pieces of information.

My most important take away:



**A reader of your permanent note should understand it  
without reading the source that led to your idea**

— Eva Keiffenheim<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Keiffenheim, Eva. 'Zettelkasten's 3 Note-Taking Levels Help You Harvest Your Thoughts'. <https://learntrepreneurs.com/books-reading-better-learning-more/zettelkastens-3-note-taking-levels-help-you-harvest-your-thoughts/>.





## 4. Bibliographical Notes

Bibliographical Notes<sup>32</sup>, also known as Reference Notes, are an additional type of note used in the Zettelkasten. They are used to capture and store information about external sources, such as books, articles, or lectures, which are relevant to your thinking and work.

The purpose of bibliographical notes is to provide a central location for storing and organizing information about external sources that you have used or want to use in your work. By creating bibliographical notes, you can more easily keep track of the sources you have consulted and quickly retrieve them when needed. Bibliographical notes can also help you to cite your sources more easily in your own work, as they provide a structured way to capture and store the necessary information.

---

<sup>32</sup> Ahrens, *How to Take Smart Notes*, 27.

Using bibliographical notes in a Zettelkasten can be especially helpful for you if you need to keep track of a large volume of information from various sources.

## 5. Structure Notes

Structure Notes<sup>33</sup> are notes that are used to organize and structure the other notes in the system. They are typically used to create relationships between different notes and to establish the overall structure of the Zettelkasten.

There are several different types of Structure Notes that you might use in your Zettelkasten, including:

- **Maps of Content (MoC)** provide a high-level overview of a particular topic or idea and can help to give context to the other notes in the system.
- **Summary Notes** summarize the main points or key takeaways from a particular note or group of notes. Examples are meeting notes or collections from a bullet journal.

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<sup>33</sup> Ahrens, 34.

- **Index Notes** are used to create an index or table of contents for the Zettelkasten and can help you to quickly find and access specific notes. Examples are sorted lists, glossaries and bibliographies.
- **Minds Maps and Concept Maps** are used to create connections between different notes in the Zettelkasten and can help to establish relationships between different ideas or concepts.

By using Structure Notes, you can create a logical and coherent structure for your Zettelkasten and make it easier to find and access the information that you need. This can be especially useful when working on a complex project or when trying to make connections between different pieces of information.

**Structure notes are notes about notes,  
and therefore they map structures in my slip-box.**

## 6. Project Notes

Project Notes<sup>34</sup> are notes that are related to a specific project or task. The purpose of Project Notes is to help you stay organized and on track while working on a specific project. By creating Project Notes, you can keep all the relevant information for a particular project in one place, and easily reference it as needed. This can help you to stay focused and avoid becoming overwhelmed by the details of the project.

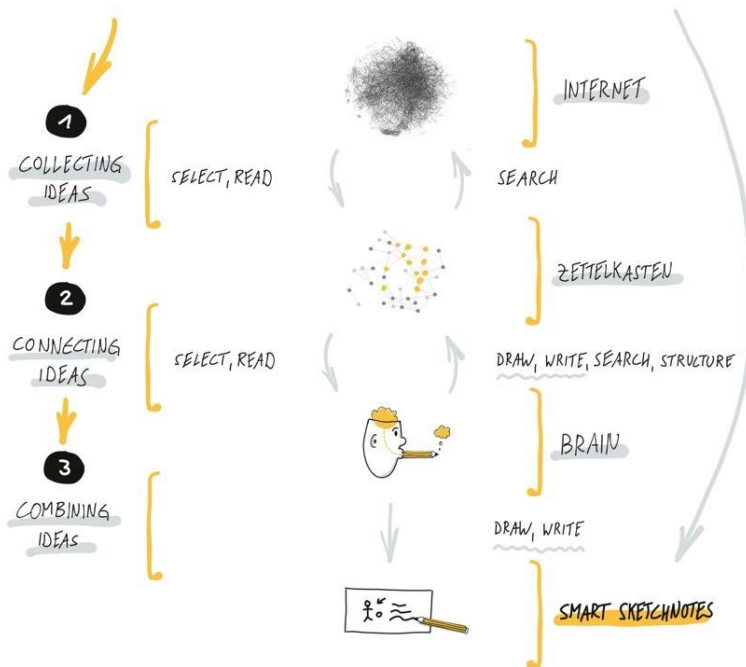
Overall, Project Notes are a valuable tool for helping you to stay organized and focused.

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<sup>34</sup> Ahrens, 53.

BUILD UP YOUR  
WORKFLOW

# WORKFLOW for SMART SKETCHNOTES



  
#EPH4MIND 2022

# Start with Three Steps



**YOU CANNOT THINK WITHOUT SKETCHNOTING.**

To create Smart Sketchnotes you will need three steps for:

1. collecting ideas,
2. connecting ideas and
3. combining ideas.

Compared with the well know process of sketchnoting there is one element in between: It is the “magic” Zettelkasten, something like a



second brain, where you can store and most important connect your selected ideas of value.



#EDMUND 2022

# Understand Your Flow of Knowledge

My first idea was to visualize the “Flow of Notes” within Zettelkasten. Based on a discussion with Sascha Fast on Zettelkasten.de<sup>35</sup> I changed the perspective. Now the “Flow of Knowledge” is in focus.

It shows the four areas of knowledge management:

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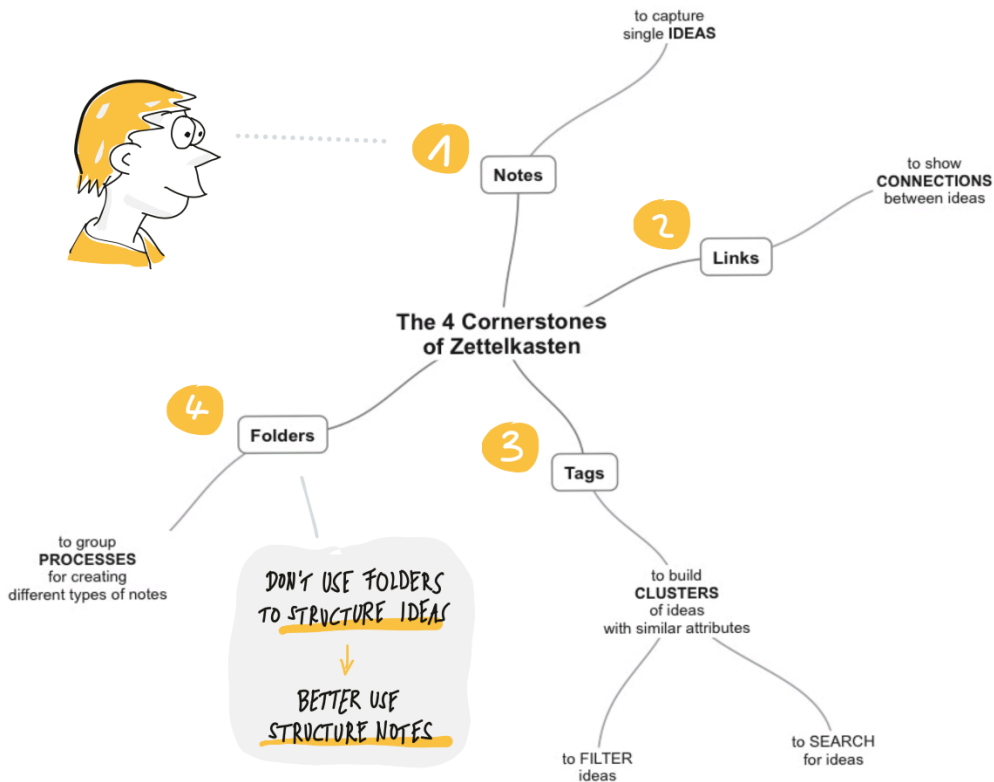
<sup>35</sup> ‘What’s Your Preferred Workflow for Using Zettelkasten?’, Zettelkasten Forum, accessed 3 January 2023, <https://forum.zettelkasten.de/discussion/2217/what-s-your-preferred-workflow-for-using-zettelkasten>.

- Data,
- Information,
- Knowledge and
- Wisdom

A great benefit is the step inside a Zettelkasten where information is prepared for re-use.

# THE 4 CORNERSTONES

OF  
ZETTELKASTEN



# Build it up on 4 Cornerstones

Using Note-taking methods could be the first step to extend your mind. Using Zettelkasten as a tool for Personal Knowledge Management may be the next. But there you will have some more dimensions to keep in mind. Here are the four cornerstones of Zettelkasten:

- Notes - to capture single ideas
- Links - to show connections between ideas
- Tags - to build clusters of ideas with similar attributes. Used for filtering & searching of ideas
- Folders - to group processes for managing different types of notes

For me it was hard to learn how to use tags efficiently as well as to un-learn my „classic“ use of folders. Folders are not for structuring ideas but a concept to manage the process and workflow for different types of notes.

Tell me about your own experiences. I want to learn more about Zettelkasten and it's amazing insights<sup>36</sup>.



**DON'T USE FOLDERS TO CLUSTER IDEAS.**

**BETTER USE TAGS AND STRUCTURE NOTES INSTEAD.**

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<sup>36</sup> Gröpl, 'How to Use Zettelkasten in Obsidian - Forum Obsidian'.  
<https://forum.obsidian.md/t/how-to-use-zettelkasten-in-obsidian/35008/6>

# Focus on Creating Output

Here are my personal strategies for you to focus on creating output:

**Set specific goals<sup>37</sup>:** Identify what you want to accomplish and create specific, measurable goals to help guide your efforts. This will help you stay focused and motivated.

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<sup>37</sup> Doerr John, *Measure What Matters : OKRs - The Simple Idea That Drives 10x Growth* (Portfolio Penguin, 2018), [https://openlibrary.org/books/OL27371716M/Measure\\_What\\_Matters\\_OKRs](https://openlibrary.org/books/OL27371716M/Measure_What_Matters_OKRs).



**Eliminate distractions:** Remove any unnecessary distractions from your work environment. This could include turning off notifications on your phone or computer or finding a quiet place to work.

**Use time-blocking:** Schedule specific times for working on specific tasks or projects. This can help you stay on track and avoid getting side-tracked.

**Take breaks:** It is important to take breaks to rest and recharge. Set aside time for breaks and use them to refocus your energy and get back to work with renewed focus.

**Use tools to help you stay on track:** There are many tools and techniques that can help you stay focused and on track. For example, you might use a timer to break your work into manageable chunks, or you might use a productivity app to help you prioritize tasks and stay organized.

**Get feedback:** Seek feedback from others on your work to help you stay motivated and focused. This can help you identify areas where you can improve and stay engaged in your work.

Overall, the key to focusing on creating output is to set clear goals, eliminate distractions, use time-blocking and other productivity techniques, and seek feedback from others to stay motivated and on track.

Make it a Habit

REMEMBER 12  
PRINCIPLES

WITH  
ZETTELKASTEN

OBJECTIVES &

KEY RESULTS

START WITH  
WHY

OUR PERSONAL <sup>1</sup>  
WISHES WHY WE SET  
OUR OBJECTIVES

#OKR / WISH

OBJECTIVES ARE

WHAT WE WANT TO HAVE  
ACCOMPLISHED <sup>2</sup>

- SIGNIFICANT
- CONCRETE
- ACTION-ORIENTED
- INSPIRATIONAL

#OKR / OBJECTIVE

KEY RESULTS SHOW  
HOW WE CAN GET THAT DONE <sup>3</sup>

- SPECIFIC
- TIME BOUND
- AGGRESSIVE YET REALISTIC
- MEASURABLE
- VERIFIABLE

#OKR / KEY RESULT

OUR IDEAS  
FOR THE FUTURE

#OKR / IDEA

MOST IMPORTANT  
KEY ACTION TO  
START WITH <sup>4</sup>

#OKR / KEY ACTION

TED JOHN DOERR

WHY THE SECRET TO SUCCESS  
IS SETTING THE RIGHT GOALS

# 1. Start With Clear Goals



**Goals are Experiments – Ryder Carroll**

“What is my goal?” was my first question. And I found a lot of answers or better to say a lot of ideas for the future. But a list of ideas isn’t a clear goal. John Doerr the author of “Measure what

matters”<sup>38</sup>, the famous book about goal-setting, helped me to sort my ideas with his amazing TED talk: „Why the secret to success is setting the right goals“<sup>39</sup>.

My personal wish to set a goal for this year is to fully understand the principles of using a Zettelkasten.

Knowing my "why," I want a book written about "Taking Useful Notes." Framing the work of writing as a learning problem and use it for teaching will improve my effectivity of learning.

What are your wishes and objectives? Writing a weekly newsletter, a blog post or preparing a business presentation? Or do you want start with your master thesis?

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<sup>38</sup> John, Doerr. Measure What Matters: OKRs: The Simple Idea That Drives 10x Growth. Portfolio Penguin, 2018.

<sup>39</sup> Why the Secret to Success Is Setting the Right Goals | John Doerr | TED, 2018. <https://youtu.be/L4N1q4RNI9II>

My Zettelkasten hint: Use templates and tagging to organize your goal related notes. But first, read more about these principles in the next chapters.





16

OBSIDIAN  
TEMPLATES

FOR

ZETTEL  
KASTEN

5  
TAGS

#### Metadata

Tags

#type/quote

#theme/zettelkasten

1

TITLE

**One cannot think without writing.**

2

QUOTE

Quote

One cannot think without writing.

— [Niklas Luhmann](#)

3

REFERENCES

⇒ LINKS

#### References

- [How to take Smart Notes](#) by [Sönke Ahrens](#)
- [Kommunikation mit Zettelkästen](#) by [Niklas Luhmann](#)

4  
BACKLINKS

Linked mentions 2



> Kommunikation mit Zettelkästen

1

> Start here

1

YES, IT IS  
A BIBLIOGRAPHICAL  
NOTE



#EDMUND 2022

## 2. Use Templates

\*\*\*14.9k

Templates are the best way to save your time and reduce errors while maintaining the structure of your Zettelkasten system. They quickly customize your notes with pre-defined text, formatting, links, tags, and other customizable content like date, time and note title. This allows you to keep your notes consistently structured, as well as speed up your workflow.

I started with a list of two templates at the beginning: one for notes and one for sketchnotes. But with a growing Zettelkasten, I had to extend this list step by step. About 12 months later here is my

repository on GitHub<sup>40</sup> containing templates and scripts for Obsidian to support the Zettelkasten method for note-taking.

If you like, copy these templates to your Obsidian template folder location to make them available as templates within Obsidian. Also visit Obsidian Forum<sup>41</sup> where you may discuss your own experiences with these templates.

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<sup>40</sup> Gröpl, Edmund. 'Obsidian-Templates for Zettelkasten'.  
<https://github.com/groepl/Obsidian-Templates>.

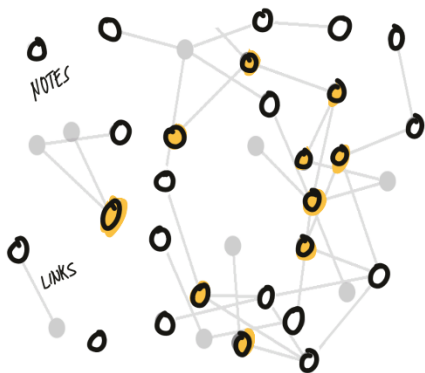
<sup>41</sup> Gröpl, Edmund. '16 Obsidian Templates For Zettelkasten To Start With'. Obsidian Forum. <https://forum.obsidian.md/t/16-obsidian-templates-for-zettelkasten-to-start-with/49098>.

# 2 TYPES of STRUCTURE

BALANCE



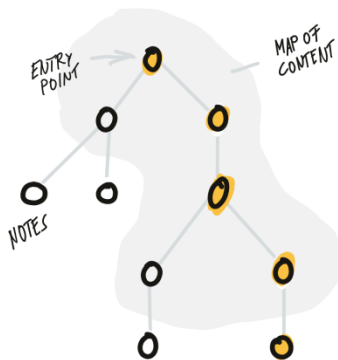
SERENDIPITY



BOTTOM-UP

NETWORKED

LOGICAL ORGANIZATION



TOP-DOWN

HIERARCHICAL

3. PERMANENT NOTES

5. STRUCTURE NOTES

### 3. Use Links \*\*\*0.8k

Creating and maintaining links between related notes is a key aspect of the Zettelkasten method<sup>42</sup>. Linking notes to each other helps to uncover new insights and connections and improves the organization of my Zettelkasten. But how to find the best strategy for linking?

I choose using links for Zettelkasten with two different goals in mind:

- to build up a network of ideas
- to define a hierarchical structure

---

<sup>42</sup> Ahrens, *How to Take Smart Notes*.

Both linking methods support the further access of ideas:

- The links in my network of ideas are leading me to hidden connections in the slip-box and support serendipity.
- The links which define hierarchical structures are leading me to often visited notes that belong together.

A folder structure with separated "Permanent Notes" and "Structure Notes" helps me to distinguish between the two structures.

Here's my collection of concepts for linking notes:

**Move forward. Link backward.**

**Always keep a link to the source.**

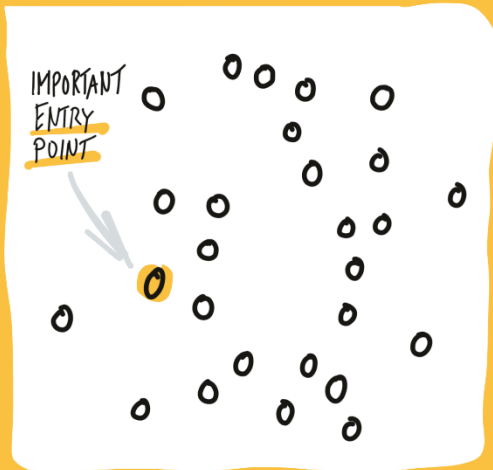
What's your preferred strategy for linking? And what's your benefit from using?<sup>43</sup>

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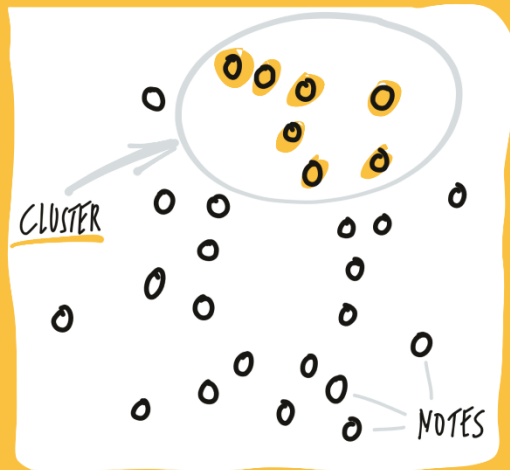
<sup>43</sup> 'How to Use Links', Obsidian Forum, 29 April 2023, <https://forum.obsidian.md/t/how-to-use-links/58831>.



# 2 TYPES + TAGGING



BUILDING AN INDEX



DEFINING A CLUSTER



WHY DO YOU  
NEED TAGS?

MY TAGS ARE  
DESIGNED FOR  
SEARCHING



#EDMUND 2022



## 4. Use Tags

\*\*\*12.3k

I've learned that tags are best thought of as specially designated search terms<sup>44</sup>. I choose using tags for Zettelkasten with two different goals in mind:

- to build up an index
- to define clusters

Both methods of tagging support further searching:

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<sup>44</sup> Gröpl, Edmund. 'How to Use Tags'. Obsidian Forum, 5 April 2022. <https://forum.obsidian.md/t/how-to-use-tags/35320>.

- The terms in my index are leading me to important entry points in the slip-box.
- The terms which define clusters are leading me to a number of similar notes that belong together.

While tags for indexing should link only a few important notes, the entry points for further investigation, the tags for clustering connect larger groups of notes with similar focus.

What's your preferred strategy for tagging? And what's your benefit from using it? If you like to share your insights or questions, please join the discussion at Forum Obsidian.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Obsidian Forum. 'Forum Obsidian', 2022.  
<https://forum.obsidian.md/>.

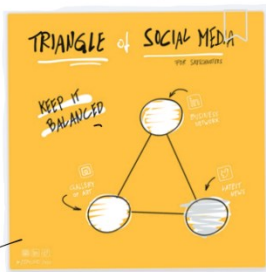
5. Use for creative  
thinking

# HOW TO CREATE SMART SKETCHNOTES

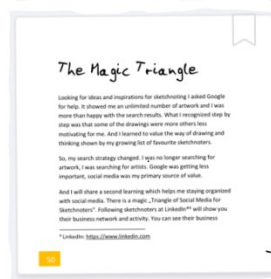


CHECK  
COHERENCE

CHECK YOUR IDEAS  
 ■ SKETCH WHAT YOU WRITE  
 ■ WRITE WHAT YOU SKETCH



SMART  
SKETCHNOTE



NOTE IN  
ZETTELKASTEN

RE-SKETCH

RE-WRITE



#EDMUND 2022

# 5. Review and Revise Your Notes

For me Smart Sketchnotes are networked visuals. I use my notes from Zettelkasten and extend them with sketchnotes. As I learned from Niklas Luhmann, it is best practice to write my notes down in my own words. But why not use sketchnotes for capturing ideas? Visual thinking always provides an additional perspective for my personal understanding of the idea in focus.

„Surprisingly,” while using this method I could see a gap between note and sketchnote in a first draft.

So, I established a small process to build up coherence:

1. Review your ideas.  
    Sketched what you wrote? Wrote what you sketched?
2. Check Coherence.
3. Re-sketch and re-write.

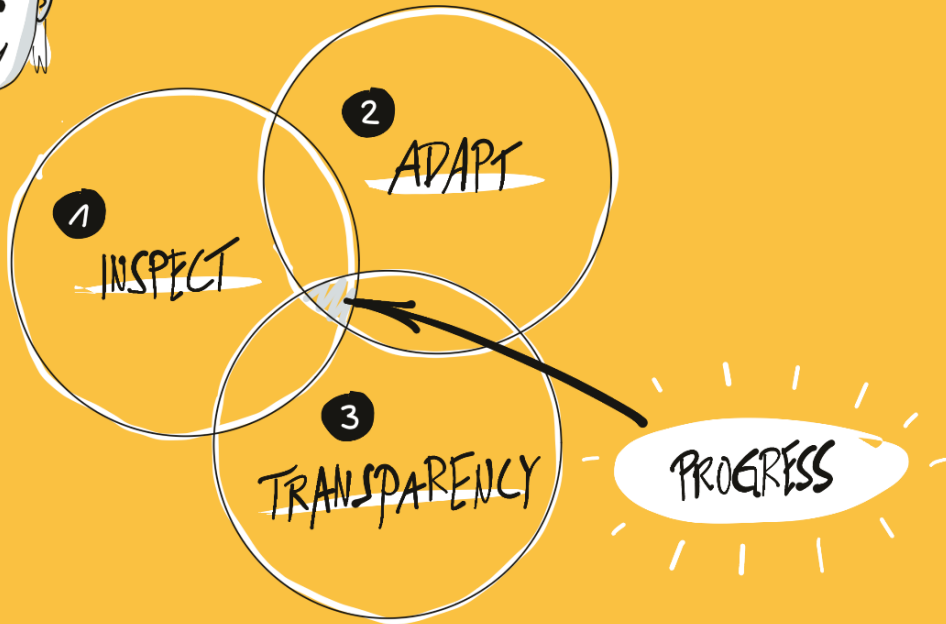
The result is an even better note and also sketchnote. The dual view brings value to my slip-box with permanent notes.

What's your strategy to improve your own writing?

7. Keep up to date

# EMPIRICAL PROCESS CONTROL

## FOR ZETTELKASTEN





# 8. Inspect and Adapt Your Process \*\*\*2.8k

Empirical process control<sup>46</sup> is a quality control method that involves continuously collecting data and using it to monitor and improve a

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<sup>46</sup> Ken Schwaber, *Agile Project Management with Scrum* (Microsoft Press, 2004),

process. In the context of a Zettelkasten system, empirical process control could be used to continually evaluate and refine the organization and use of the system in order to maximize its effectiveness and efficiency.

Some potential benefits of using empirical process control for a Zettelkasten system include:

**Improved organization:** By continuously collecting and analyzing data on how the Zettelkasten system is being used, it may be possible to identify patterns and trends that can be used to improve the organization of the system. This could involve reorganizing existing notes, creating new connections between notes, or adding new categories or tags to help with navigation and search.

**Increased efficiency:** Empirical process control can help identify bottlenecks or inefficiencies in the Zettelkasten system, allowing

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[https://openlibrary.org/books/OL34458178M/Agile\\_Project\\_Management\\_with\\_Scrum](https://openlibrary.org/books/OL34458178M/Agile_Project_Management_with_Scrum).

you to make adjustments and improvements to streamline the process.

**Enhanced knowledge management:** By continuously collecting data on the use of the Zettelkasten system, it may be possible to identify areas where the system could be used more effectively to manage and share knowledge within an organization.

**Greater transparency**<sup>47</sup>: Empirical process control can provide a clear and objective view of how the Zettelkasten system is being used, which can help to build trust and increase transparency within an organization.

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<sup>47</sup> Gröpl, Edmund. 'How to Use Zettelkasten Analytics - Knowledge Management'. Obsidian Forum. Accessed 24 July 2023. <https://forum.obsidian.md/t/how-to-use-zettelkasten-analytics/36799>.

Overall, the use of empirical process control can help to optimize the use of a Zettelkasten system and ensure that it is being used effectively and efficiently to support knowledge management and learning.

My question: What are your preferred tools and workflows to support this process?

9. Use for learning

10. Encourage  
collaboration

11. Support your  
work

12. Have Fun with  
Your Zettelkasten



USE TOOLS TO  
SUPPORT  
YOUR  
WORKFLOW



**YOU ARE YOUR MOST IMPORTANT TOOL - MARTINA GRIGOLEIT**

# 1 Collect Ideas

Obsidian

## 2 Reference Ideas

Obsidian

Zotero

# 3 Visualize Ideas

Concepts

Paper 53

PowerBI

Procreate

SimpleMind

Obsidian Canvas

## Ebenen



## Präzision

- ☒ Gitter ☐ Punktraster
- ☐ Einrasten ☐ Optionen
- ☐ Messen ☐ 1:1 mm
- ☐ Hilfslinie ☐ Bogen

MISTER MAIKEL

# SKETCHNOTE

WORKSHOP

STRICHSTÄRKE

0,2mm | 0,3mm | 0,5mm | 0,6mm

SONNE



EINFAMILIENHAUS



LASTWAGEN



APPEL

SMARTPHONE



DIAMANT



GLÜHBIRNE



KAFFEE

HOCHHAUS



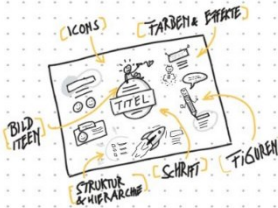
KAFFEE



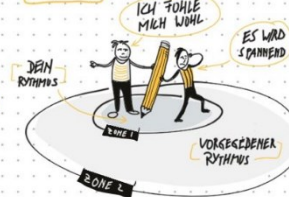
ODER TEE



WASSER



PERSÖNLICHE HIGHLIGHTS ERSTE WOCHE



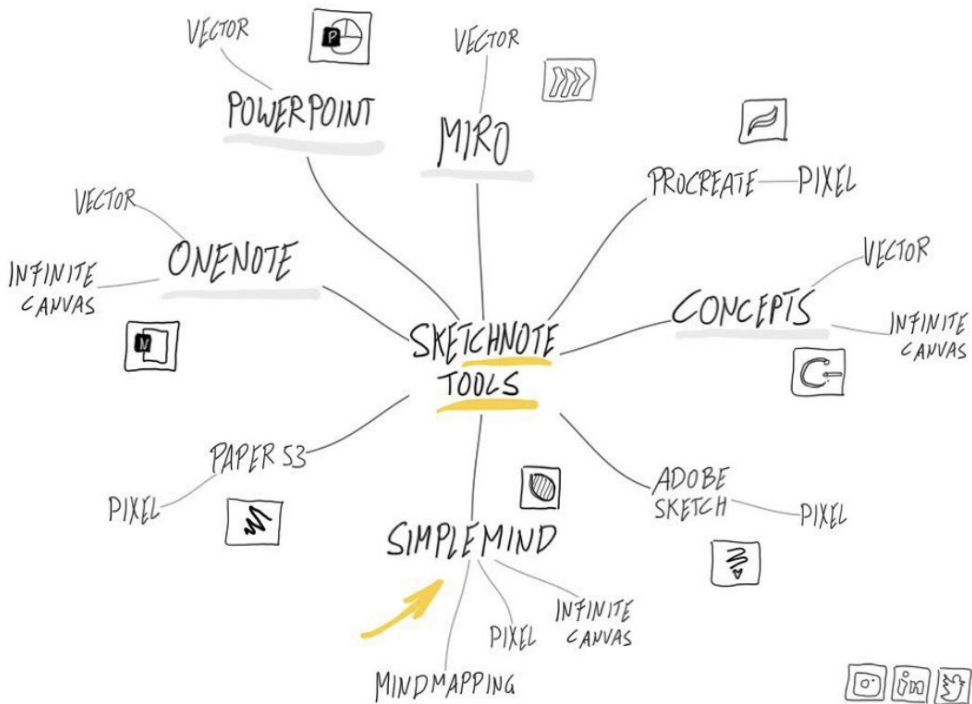
# 4 Connect Ideas

Obsidian

# 5 Combine Ideas

Obsidian Canvas





#EDMUND2021

# 6 Communicate Ideas

Social Media

Miro

# 7 Outline Ideas

Word

Social Media

Obsidian

# 8 Publish Ideas

Obsidian

# 9 Backup Ideas

BENEFIT  
FROM  
UNLIMITED  
PRACTICES

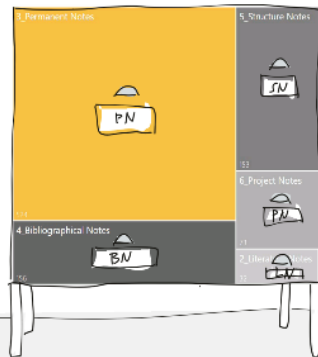
# 5 MISTAKES

TO AVOID

WHEN STARTING YOUR  
ZETTELKASTEN

USING OBSIDIAN WITHOUT

- TEMPLATES
- RULES FOR TAGGING
- FRONTMATTER
- TIMESTAMPS IN MD
- DATAVIEW FOR GARDENING



# 1 Avoid Pitfalls

When I started to write my first notes with Obsidian, I followed the rule “Start early and learn by experiment.”

But I also learned: Experiments took a lot of my precious time. Here are my top mistakes to avoid<sup>48</sup>. when starting your first Zettelkasten:

- **Starting without templates** - so it was hard to build up a consistent note structure I needed later for effective searching.

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<sup>48</sup> Edmund Gröpl, ‘5 Mistakes to Avoid When Starting Your First Zettelkasten’, *LinkedIn* (blog), 2023, [https://www.linkedin.com/posts/groepl\\_procreate-lernos-lernossketchnoting-activity-7008062279384465408-85vF/](https://www.linkedin.com/posts/groepl_procreate-lernos-lernossketchnoting-activity-7008062279384465408-85vF/).



- **Using tags without rules for tagging** - so that building clusters for searching was not highly effective.
- **No use of frontmatter** - so that meta data and content of notes became inconsistent and confusing.
- **No use of time stamps** like “created” and “modified” within frontmatter - so that using backups and changing cloud spaces caused a loss of time information connected with my notes.
- **No use of Dataview** plugin as a tool for gardening - so that inconsistencies in my Zettelkasten were growing and growing.

All these mistakes lead to intensive re-work of my notes later.

# 2 Inspect Process with Dataview \*\*\*2.5k

Export data as CSV

3 Review Notes  
with Dataview  
\*\*\*0.6k

4 Re-visit lost  
ideas

5 Re-visit old  
ideas

```
```dataview
TABLE WITHOUT ID
    file.link AS "One Week Ago",
    created AS Created
FROM ""
WHERE ((file.ctime >= date(today) - dur(7 day)) AND
        (file.ctime <= date(today) - dur(6 day)))
SORT created DESC
```
```

# 6 Discover with Graph View



DEVELOP

YOUR

IDEAS

WITH

OBSIDIAN CANVAS

Just look into your slip-box and see where clusters have been built up. These clusters are what caught your interest again and again, so you already know that you have found material to work with. Now you can spread out these notes on your desktop, outline your argument and construct a preliminary order of sections, chapters or paragraphs.

#ZETTELKASTEN

**Sönke Ahrens**

*How to Take Smart Notes: One Simple Technique to Boost Writing, Learning and Thinking*

[#kindlequotes](#)



#EDMUND 2022



# 7 Develop Your Ideas with Canvas

The basic workflow for working with Zettelkasten from Niklas Luhmann consists of three phases:

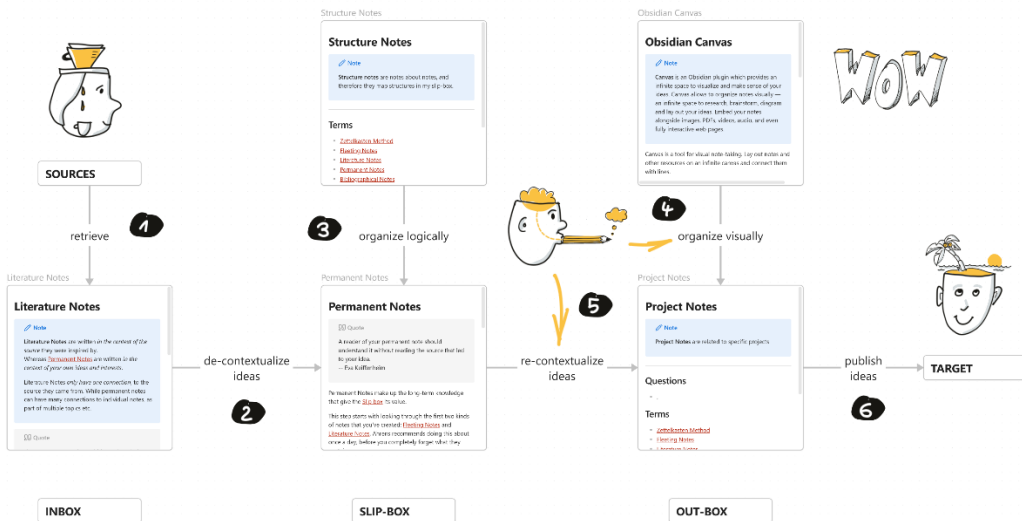
- De-contextualize ideas from your sources by creating **Literature Notes** for your inbox
- Organize these ideas as **Permanent Notes** in your slip-box
- Re-contextualize ideas from your slip-box by creating **Project Notes** to generate output

HOW  
TO  
USE

# ZETTELKASTEN IN OBSIDIAN

WITH

CANVAS



Obsidian

V1.1



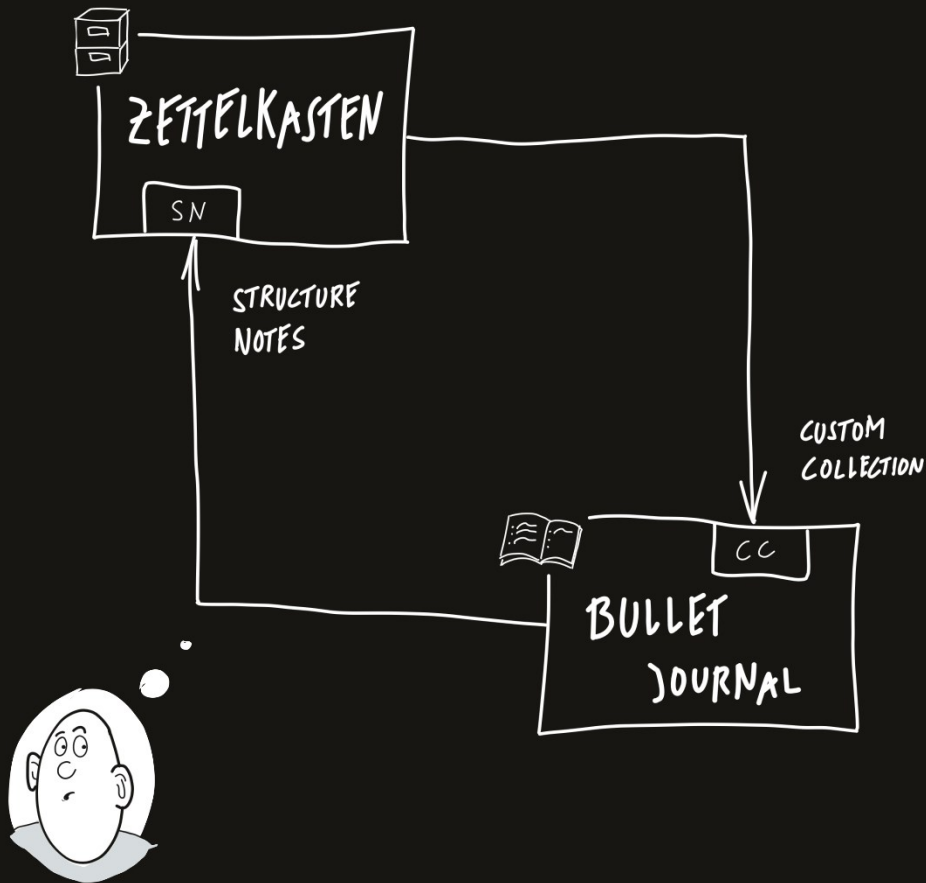
#EDMUND 2022

Now you have an amazing plugin available for Obsidian: It is an infinite canvas where you can lay out and re-arrange notes visually, similar to laying out a bunch of index cards on a table. You are now able to work with notes as pseudo-physical objects, as Niklas Luhmann might with physical notecards.

Learn more about Obsidian Canvas<sup>49</sup> from Nick Milo on YouTube.

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<sup>49</sup> *Obsidian Canvas*, 2022. [https://youtu.be/vLBd\\_ADeKlw](https://youtu.be/vLBd_ADeKlw).



# 8 Use a Bullet Journal \*\*\*1.4k

Years ago, my personal note taking was no longer based on trial and error but on a solid concept called Bullet Journaling. It started on paper with a lovely Moleskin® book and a black fine liner from Neuland®. Going digital with my Bullet Journal I decided to use a brilliant tool for note taking named OneNote. But time went by. In March 2022 I got my first contact with Obsidian and at the same time with the Zettelkasten method from Niklas Luhmann explained in the mind-blowing book from Sönke Ahrens about “How to take Smart Notes”.

Migration from OneNote to Obsidian was a migration from structured notes to networked notes. But how to migrate a Bullet

Journal to a Zettelkasten? Difficult to switch from one concept to another? No, it's amazingly easy. The Bullet Journal is now a set of Structure Notes in my Zettelkasten. Also, Zettelkasten is a Custom Collection in my Bullet Journal.

In other words:

- my Zettelkasten is a Bullet Journal and
- my Bullet Journal is a Zettelkasten.

The best of all: I did not need to change the basic concepts from Ryder Carroll (Bullet Journal<sup>50</sup>), neither the concepts from Niklas

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<sup>50</sup> Carroll, Ryder. The Bullet Journal Method - Track the Past, Order the Present, Design the Future, 2018.

[https://openlibrary.org/books/OL26977772M/The Bullet Journal method](https://openlibrary.org/books/OL26977772M/The_Bullet_Journal_method).

Luhmann (Zettelkasten<sup>51</sup>). Both concepts support each other in a perfect manner.

What about your experiences with these methods? Do you use the Dataview plugin to support your Bullet Journal collections?

Learn more about at Forum Zettelkasten<sup>52</sup>.

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<sup>51</sup> Ahrens, Sönke. How to Take Smart Notes: One Simple Technique to Boost Writing, Learning and Thinking, 2022.

<sup>52</sup> Gröpl, Edmund. 'Migration from Bullet Journal to Zettelkasten'. Zettelkasten Forum, 17 July 2022.  
<https://forum.zettelkasten.de/discussion/2333/migration-from-bullet-journal-to-zettelkasten>.

I Use a  
Kanban Board





ROBERT CARO, 1975

OUTLINE  
WALL



#EDMUND 2023

# 10 Use an Outline Wall



**I can't start writing until I've thought it through  
and can see it whole in my mind. — Robert Caro**

The Outline Wall is a technique used by historian Robert Caro<sup>53</sup>, to organize and make sense of large amounts of information. He would create an outline of the main ideas and concepts of a

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<sup>53</sup> Paul, Annie Murphy. The Extended Mind - The Power of Thinking Outside the Brain. Mariner Books, 2022.

historical event or period and post it on a wall. Then, he would add all the research materials he gathered, such as documents, images, and notes, and pin them around the outline.

The idea behind it is that by visually organizing the information and seeing it in front of him, he can easily identify patterns and connections between the different pieces of information. The outline serves as a structure, helping him to see the big picture and understand how all the pieces fit together, also allowing him to change the structure as he gathers new information. This way, he can think more clearly and make connections between different pieces of information.

Obsidian offers the option to create infinite outline walls with its amazing Canvas plugin. Watch Nick Milo and his introductory tutorial about Obsidian Canvas on YouTube<sup>54</sup>.

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<sup>54</sup> Obsidian Canvas, 2022.

[https://youtube.com/watch?v=vLBd\\_ADekIw](https://youtube.com/watch?v=vLBd_ADekIw).

11 Ask Questions

\*\*\* 1.6k

CONNECT  
WITH  
LEARNING  
COMMUNITIES

# Working Out Loud Circles

# LernOS Circles

BE OPEN FOR  
EXPERIMENT  
S



#2

Everybody  
can  
draw

- NADINE ROßA



#EDMUND'2021

# Draw Ideas



**Creative work is basically like breathing.**

**We take in information and emit new ideas.**

— RALPH AMMER<sup>55</sup>

Ralph Ammer is a professor at the Munich University of Applied Sciences and teaches Biophilic Design, which aims to create life-friendly objects, images, and services based on nature. In one of his

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<sup>55</sup> Ralph Ammer, 'A Lightbulb Is Not an Idea!', *Ralph Ammer* (blog), 22 September 2018, <https://ralphammer.com/a-lightbulb-is-not-an-idea/>.

amazing blog posts with animated sketchnotes he proposed four simple steps to draw any idea<sup>56</sup>:

- **Study.** Fill your mind by drawing what you want to think about.
- **Explore.** Let the magic happen by drawing as many ideas as possible.
- **Develop.** See how it works by arranging ideas spatially, grouping them into similar ideas and maybe adding some annotations.
- **Show.** Share what matters by focusing on the essential. One headline, one image and one sentence.

Why not use it as a little exercise to draw one of your own ideas? Take a break and visit his web page.

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<sup>56</sup> Ammer, Ralph. '*How to Draw Ideas*', 1 December 2022.  
<https://ralphammer.com/how-to-draw-ideas/>.

# Play with Quotes

UNLOCK  
YOUR CREATIVE  
POTENTIAL



    
#EMUND 2123

FIG. 4: UNLOCK YOUR CREATIVE POTENTIAL

# Unlock Your Creative Potential

Mindfulness is the mental state of focusing your awareness on the present moment. Meditation as a practice is something everyone can do. It clears the mind and calms the soul, allowing for boundless creativity to flow through you like never before.

Here is how you can unlock your creative potential through meditation with your Zettelkasten:

1. Find a quiet, comfortable place to sit. Close your eyes and take a few deep breaths.
2. Visualize your mind as a vast and spacious room. Imagine a desk in the center of this room, with a stack of index cards in front of it. This is your Zettelkasten.
3. As you begin to focus on your breathing, allow your mind to quiet down and become more peaceful.
4. Now, imagine that you are holding a new index card in your hand. On this card, you will write down a thought, idea, or concept that you would like to capture and organize.
5. Take a moment to think about what you would like to write down on this card. When you have a clear thought, take a deep breath and begin to write it down in a clear and concise manner.
6. Now, imagine that you are placing this card in the appropriate place within your Zettelkasten. As you do this, visualize the

connections that you are making between this card and other cards within your system.

7. Take a moment to reflect on the connections that you have made. Allow your mind to expand and broaden as you consider the new insights and perspectives that these connections may bring.
8. As you continue to add new cards to your Zettelkasten, imagine that you are expanding your understanding and deepening your knowledge of the topic.
9. When you are ready, slowly open your eyes and return to your physical surroundings. Take a few deep breaths and feel the calm and clarity that you have brought into your mind through this meditation.
10. Use this state of mind and the connections that you have made within your Zettelkasten to continue your creative output and exploration of new ideas.



# Create Multiple Posts

Share Templates

# Share Starter Kit

Re-use Posts for  
Newsletters

# Create Storylines with Canvas

Use AI

# APPENDIX

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# Tools

Obsidian: A knowledge base that works on local Markdown files.

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# Concepts

Why not start from scratch? Also, if you have some experience in sketchnoting there is always the chance to learn and improve. Idea is to restart with the new book<sup>57</sup> from Michael Geiß-Hein (a.k.a. as Mister Maikel) and with the drawing tool Concepts app . As Maikel suggests: It will take no longer than 6 weeks. So, let us start.

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<sup>57</sup> Michael Geiß-Hein, *Sketchnotes - Dein Workshop mit Mister Maikel - In 6 Wochen Sketchnotes lernen*, 2021,  
[https://books.google.com/books/about/Sketchnotes\\_Dein\\_Workshop\\_mit\\_Mister\\_Mai.html?hl=&id=VQluzgEACAAJ](https://books.google.com/books/about/Sketchnotes_Dein_Workshop_mit_Mister_Mai.html?hl=&id=VQluzgEACAAJ).



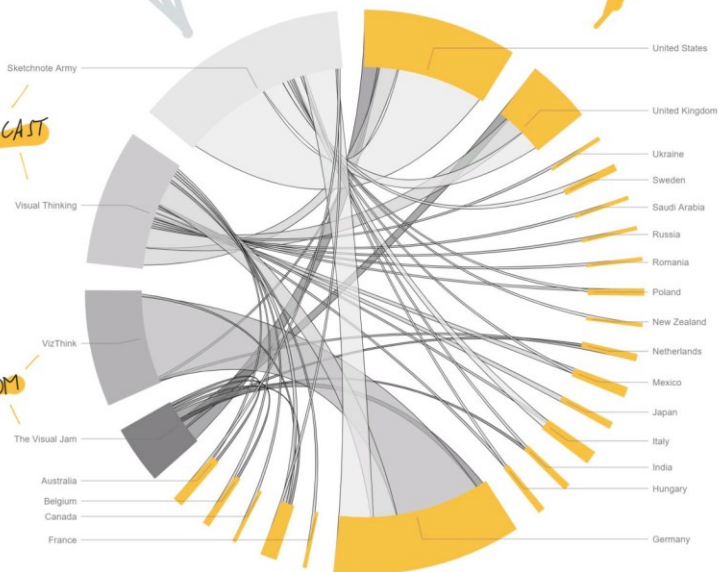
## 4 PLACES TO MEET

GREAT VISUAL THINKERS

FROM MORE THAN  
25 COUNTRIES

PODCAST

ZOOM



#EWMVD 2022

# Obsidian

Obsidian<sup>58</sup> is a notetaking and knowledge management app on top of a local folder of plain text markdown files. It lets you turn a collection of plain text files into a rich network of linked thoughts.

## Pros

- Incredible graph view. Not only is it super-fast, but you can apply filters, create groups, and even change the look and functionality of the graph itself.
- Cross-platform app available for iOS (iPhone, iPad), MacOS, Windows, Linux
- No account or sign up required.
- Community support
- No need for an active internet connection.

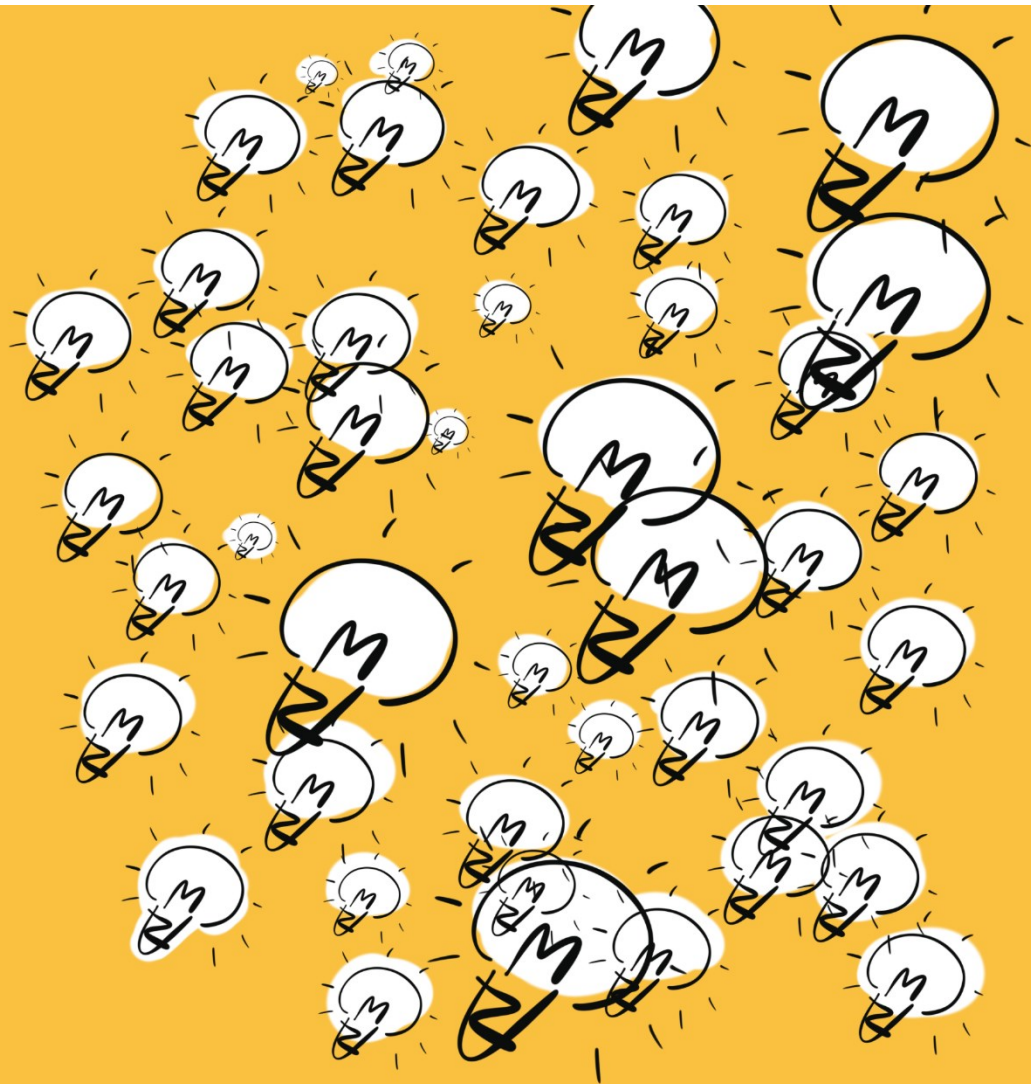
---

<sup>58</sup> 'Obsidian'.

- Obsidian is a fast-growing platform with new tools added regularly.
- Pricing: 100% free for personal use

### **Cons**

- iOS version works only with iCloud



Procreate

# SimpleMind

SimpleMind is a cross-platform Mind Mapping tool with more than ten million users worldwide. It is my preferred tool to create structure notes for my Zettelkasten.

It now offers an integrated drawing editor. Combining mind mapping and sketchnoting is a great idea for brainstorming.

Learn more about this feature by watching SimpleMind <sup>59</sup> on YouTube.

Here are my pros and cons from this use case.

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<sup>59</sup> 'Add Apple Pencil Drawings on iPad', 2021,  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i79VqhShVww>.

**Pros**

- HTML export as an input for structure notes in Zettelkasten
- PNG export
- Cross-platform app available for iOS (iPhone, iPad), MacOS, Windows, Android
- Infinite canvas
- Use of Apple pencil to add drawings as images

**Cons**

- Drawings with pencil are pixel based, no vector drawing



# Zettelkasten Videos

*Analog vs. Digital Zettelkasten with Sascha Fast (From Zettelkasten.De), 2022.*

<https://youtube.com/watch?v=XgMh6iuFbT4>.

*Beyond the Pressure: Finding Joy in Note-Taking, 2022.*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yuzDQSIEK-I>.

*Does My Zettelkasten Make Writing Harder? morganeua, 2023.*

<https://youtube.com/watch?v=wQPvrcksjUA>.

*How To Take Smart Notes*, 2020.

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*Neurographic Art Tutorial: Mindfulness In Art, 2020.*

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*SimpleMind - Add Apple Pencil Drawings on iPad, 2021.*

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# lernos® SKETCHNOTES

WEEK 6 - KATA 15: SKETCHNOTE-SELFIE

EDMUND GRÖPL

@edmund-groepl



DATA  
SCIENTIST

2021



SENIOR  
CITIZEN



MARRIED

2 CHILDREN



SKETCHNOTE  
Selfie



EDMUND

3 Facts  
about me



CLIMBING



SWIMMING

LEARNING



Tools



PROCREATE

PAPER 53



Pencil



iPAD

TIPPS



- LEARN BY COPYING
- ADVANCE THROUGH INTEGRATION

# The Author

First things first I am a huge fan of data analysis and data discovery. It is more than an interest for me to make relations between numbers and produce meaningful results. I have a passion for helping teams to become more data-driven and embracing the power of data storytelling.

I have experience more than 7 years on data analysis, reporting, dashboards and more than 20 years on software development, project management and corporate strategy on biggest companies including research, automation and telecommunications industries in Germany.

In my free time you can find me at the climbing gym, swimming long distances and spending quality time with my wife and my family.

So now I combine these experiences with my math and engineering background here and I am looking forward to sharing my passion and knowledge with you.

Finally, I love Visual Thinking and Digital Sketchnoting!



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## ABOUT THE BOOK

*MAKE USEFUL NOTES* is a book full of insights for note makers of all proficiency levels. It covers a large scale of concepts useful for note-making on digital devices.

We are learning from great networked and visual thinkers about their almost hidden secrets. Understanding the overall context helps to navigate in this field of learning. Going in detail will be the next step. The book provides numerous links to valuable resources you need to keep growing.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



EDMUND GRÖPL is an enthusiast of digital sketch-noting. He is an engineer working as a data scientist and storyteller. Visual thinking is part of his job. Working with sketchnotes and learning from experts is an intense pleasure for him.