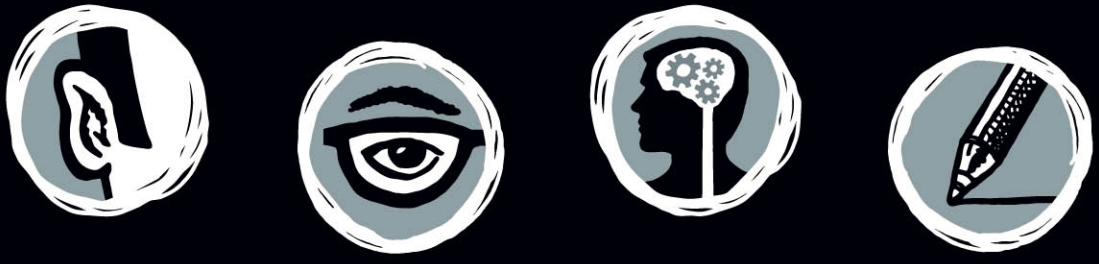
the Sketchnote Handbook

→ THE ILLUSTRATED guide ← to VISUAL NOTE TAKING



by MIKE ROHDE

the illustrator of REWORK

PRAISE FOR *THE SKETCHNOTE HANDBOOK*

"Entertaining and memorable (just like sketchnotes), this fast-reading, fact-packed book by the godfather of sketchnoting provides everything you and your team need to know about the creative, mnemonic, and business benefits of this brilliant new method of note taking."
—Jeffrey Zeldman, author of *Designing with Web Standards*

"Mike Rohde has taken his original, fun, and smart approach to note taking and broken it down into simple, clear steps."
—Chris Guillebeau, author of *The $100 Startup*

"Sketchnotes are a great way to capture the highlights of an idea in a way that will naturally work for your brain. Nobody will teach you how to do it better than Mike."
—David Heinemeier Hansson, co-author of *REWORK*

"*The Sketchnote Handbook* is an informative, hands-on book designed to quickly share the principles of sketchnoting so you can get right to creating sketchnotes for yourself. Mike's fun, illustrative style energizes you to pick up a pen and sketchnote!"
—Nancy Duarte, CEO Duarte Inc.,
and best-selling author of *Resonate* and *Slide:ology*

"Never fear note taking again. Mike Rohde demystifies the practice and makes it accessible to everyone. Your brain will thank him later."
—Sunni Brown, co-author of *Gamestorming* and leader of the Doodle Revolution

"This book is not really a book. It's a tool kit for learning a new and better way of capturing and understanding information, and it's perfectly aligned with the way our brains actually work. If you're a student, teacher, or businessperson, this book has the potential to change the way you learn, and the way you think."
—Daniel Coyle, *The New York Times* best-selling author of
The Talent Code and *The Little Book of Talent*

"The perfect introduction to visual note taking and the most useful how-to guide I've ever read, no contest."
—Josh Kaufman, author of *The Personal MBA: Master the Art of Business*

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the Sketchnote Handbook

→ THE ILLUSTRATED guide ← to VISUAL NOTE TAKING

by MIKE ROHDE
the illustrator of REWORK

THE SKETCHNOTE HANDBOOK:
The illustrated guide to visual note taking

Mike Rohde

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To Gail, Nathan, Linnea, and Landon,
thank you for your support on this
long and challenging journey.

You are the reason I work so hard
to create things and share my ideas.

I love you.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

TAKING ON A PROJECT OF THIS MAGNITUDE is a great reminder of just how valuable my family, friends, colleagues, and community are. Without them, I'm certain *The Sketchnote Handbook* would not have happened.

GAIL, you are the first and most important person on the list. Even though you were expecting a baby, you encouraged and supported me on many late nights and weekends. Thanks for sharing the vision with me. I love you!

NATHAN, LINNEA AND, LANDON, thanks for supporting me during the creation of the book. As your dad, I hope my work makes you proud.

VON GLITSCHKA, you get credit for sparking this book over Thai food in Portland. Thanks for believing in me and pitching my book idea just minutes after dinner.

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DELVE WITHRINGTON, thanks for creating fonts of my hand lettering. Your typefaces have saved me many long hours of drawing every letter by hand.

FEATURED SKETCHNOTERS: Binaebi Akah, Craighton Berman, Boon Chew, Veronica Erb, Jessica Esch, Alexis Finch, Michelle George, Eva-Lotta Lamm, Gerren Lamson, Matthew Magain, Timothy Reynolds, Francis Rowland, Chris Shipton, Paul Soupiset, and Kyle Steed, thanks for your contributions.

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JON MUELLER, thanks for allowing my sketchnotes of your talk to become such a key part of the book. I've been honored to call you a friend and appreciate your guidance in the creation of my first book.

FRIENDS AND COLLEAGUES , thanks for your reviews and feedback about the book in production. This is a better book because of your help.

TO THE SKETCHNOTING COMMUNITY, thanks for your support through the years. I'm excited to see where our community will go and how it will grow once this book reaches new readers and viewers.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

MIKE ROHDE has a passion for simple and usable design solutions. That passion, along with his lifelong habit of recording concepts and observations through sketching and doodling, inspired him to develop sketchnotes—a practical art that translates simple and complex ideas into easily recalled bits of information.

Professionally, Mike focuses on user interface, user experience, visual design, and icon design for mobile and web applications at *Gomoll Research + Design* in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

As a sketchnoter, Mike provides live, real-time sketchnotes of events, meetings, and experiences in venues across the United States.

In his illustration practice, Mike uses his unique drawing style to amplify and clarify ideas. His work has been featured in *REWORK*, the best-selling book by Jason Fried and David Heinemeier Hansson; *The $100 Startup*, a best-selling book by Chris Guillebeau; and *The Little Book of Talent* by Daniel Coyle.

Community and sharing are important cornerstones of Mike's philosophy, as evidenced by the creation of *The Sketchnote Army*, a website dedicated to finding and showcasing sketchnotes and sketchnoters from around the world.

Mike has also shared his thinking, design process, and samples of his design and illustration work at his personal website, rohdesign.com, since 2003.

Mike lives with his wife, Gail, and children, Nathan, Linnea, and Landon, just outside of Milwaukee. He's an avid Green Bay Packers fan.

Learn more about Mike at **rohdesign.com**.

CONTENTS

1 WHAT ARE SKETCHNOTES? 2

- Sketchnotes Were Born of Frustration!
- How Are Sketchnotes Created?
- Can I Create Sketchnotes?
- Ideas, Not Art!
- One Step at a Time

2 WHY SKETCHNOTE? 26

- Sketchnoting Engages Your Whole Mind
- Sketchnoting Creates a Visual Map
- Sketchnoting Helps Your Concentration
- Sketchnoting Taps Your Visual Language
- Sketchnoting Is Relaxing
- Creating Sketchnotes Is Dynamic and Fun!

3 LISTEN UP! 44

- The Keys to Listening
- My Listening Approach
- Practice Your Listening Skills

4 THE SKETCHNOTING PROCESS 56

- Research
- Gather Materials
- Arrive Early
- Create a Title
- Sketchnote
- Photograph
- Scan, Tune & Post
- Anatomy of a Sketchnote
- A Sketchnote from Start to Finish

5 TYPES OF SKETCHNOTES 84

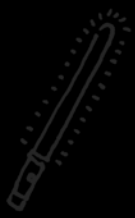
- Style Plus Thinking
- Structure, Then Style!
- The Art & Structure Scale
- Sketchnoting Patterns
  - Linear
  - Radial
  - Vertical
  - Path
  - Modular
  - Skyscraper
  - Popcorn
- Patterns Are Starting Points

6 SKETCHNOTING APPROACHES, HIERARCHY, AND PERSONALIZATION 122

- Real-time Sketchnoting
- Two-stage Sketchnoting
  - Two-stage Pencil to Ink Approach
  - Two-stage Rough to Refined Approach
- Creating a Hierarchy
- Personalization
  - Commentary
  - Humor
  - Whimsy

7 SKETCHNOTING SKILLS & TECHNIQUES 146

- Skills & Techniques
- The 5 Basic Elements of Drawing
- 5 Basic Elements Exercise
- Drawing People
- Drawing People Exercise
- Drawing Faces
- Drawing Faces Exercise
- Drawing Type
- Drawing Type Exercise
- Penmanship
- Drawing Visual Elements
- Build a Visual Library
- Visual Library Exercise
- Drawing Metaphors
- Tools for Sketchnoting
- Sharing Sketchnotes



INTRODUCTION

IT WAS THE WINTER OF 2006 AND I COULDN'T TAKE IT ANYMORE.
I was done. Fed up. I vowed not to take another note with a mechanical pencil or with a giant notebook until I'd found a better way to take notes.

Thinking back, I'm not sure how note taking had become such a burden. In high school and college, I enjoyed expressing ideas visually—easily blending words with drawings, diagrams, and typography in my notebooks.

Somewhere in the process of growing up and getting a job, I lost my way. The relaxed, visual note-taking approach from my college days had morphed into a fanatically detailed, text-only death march. Ironically, I became a great note taker who couldn't stand taking notes.

The solution to my note-taking problem was a blank pocket Moleskine, stacked neatly on my bookshelf. I'd bought it on a whim a few months before and I realized that its small size, paired with an unerasable pen, could be a perfect way to challenge my overly detailed, note-taking mind-set.

In January 2007, I brought my Moleskine and a gel pen to Chicago for a conference to try sketchnoting. Could I take fewer but better notes? If I focused on quality, could I live with seeing my mistakes in pen? Would adding drawings to my notes bring back my joy of note taking? Could taking notes become fun again?

The answer to these questions was a resounding yes! As I captured my first sketchnotes, I was able to slow down and listen for big ideas. I loved the no-turning-back attitude of using a pen. Best of all, I had a great time taking notes again.

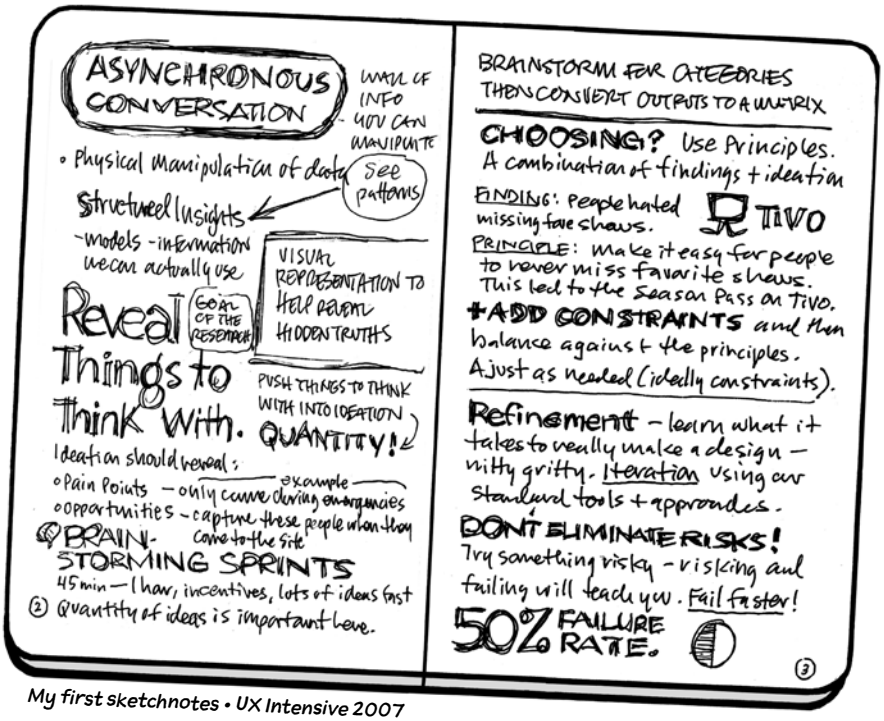
Ever since that mind-altering experience, I've been working hard through my blog, *The Sketchnote Army*, and at live presentations and workshops to share my passion for sketchnoting. I take great pleasure in talking about why sketchnoting enables you to take better notes, explaining how to create sketchnotes, and persuading people to give sketchnoting a try. This passion for sketchnoting is

what drove me to spend hundreds of hours writing, illustrating, and designing this book. I want you to enjoy taking notes as much as I do, and I hope that by the end of this book you will.

WHO IS THIS BOOK FOR?

Whether you believe you can or can't draw, I'm here to tell you that anyone who can make marks on paper can benefit from this book. Sketchnotes are about hearing and capturing meaningful ideas, not how well you draw.

Take it from me, you can create sketchnotes. In this book, I will show you how to draw simple objects, create custom lettering, and use other hand-drawn elements to help you express your thoughts visually. Even if you can't draw a straight line, you can learn to sketchnote with a little practice.

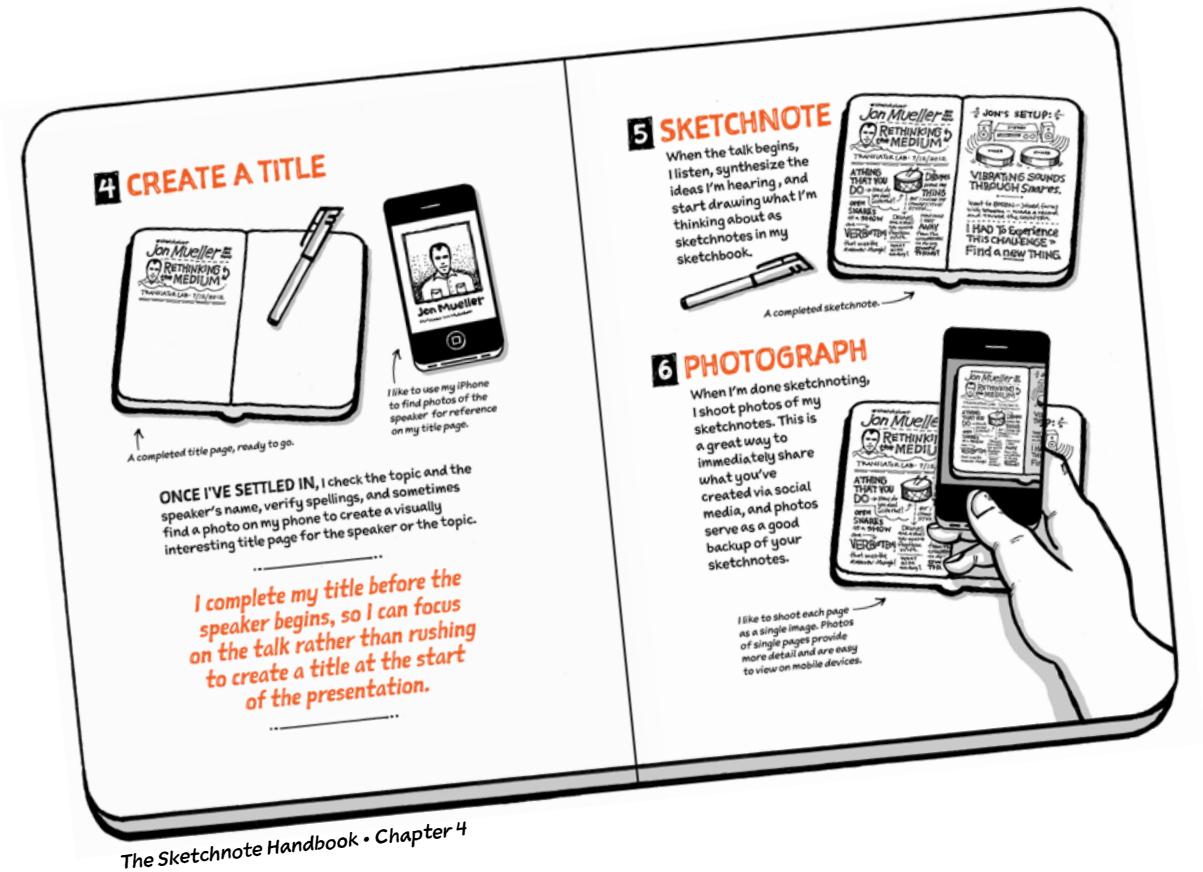


My first sketchnotes • UX Intensive 2007

WHAT IS *THE SKETCHNOTE HANDBOOK?*

The Sketchnote Handbook is a simple, visual manual designed to teach you basic sketchnoting concepts, approaches, and techniques quickly, so you can start creating sketchnotes immediately.

Each page of this book has been lovingly hand-sketched to show you how much fun it is to learn from notes that incorporate pictures and words equally. Rather than write a lot of words about sketchnoting, I decided that if I was going to talk the talk, I'd better walk the walk (or, maybe, sketch the sketch?). So, I created the entire book as one, long, fun—hopefully inspiring—illustration.



The Sketchnote Handbook • Chapter 4

THE SKETCHNOTE COMMUNITY

Of course, I'm not the only person in the world who sketchnotes. I'm amazed and energized by the wide variety of people all over the world who create and actively share their sketchnotes. I love the sense of community that has sprung up around this process, and I've made a great many friends through sharing and discussing sketchnotes online and at conferences.

I invited 15 of these friends—leading sketchnoters from around the world—to each create a two-page spread for this book that shares a bit about who they are, how they came to sketchnoting, and a tip or two to help you take better notes.

What I hope you'll notice from looking at their work at the end of each chapter is that everyone sees the world differently; everyone processes information differently; everyone has their own, unique style, and that's part of what makes sketchnoting so much fun! There's no right way or wrong way to do it.

I will teach you the basic principles of sketchnoting, but the real joy will come when you start creating sketchnotes and discover how taking notes can unleash your creativity and make paying attention, even at the most boring meetings, something you look forward to doing.

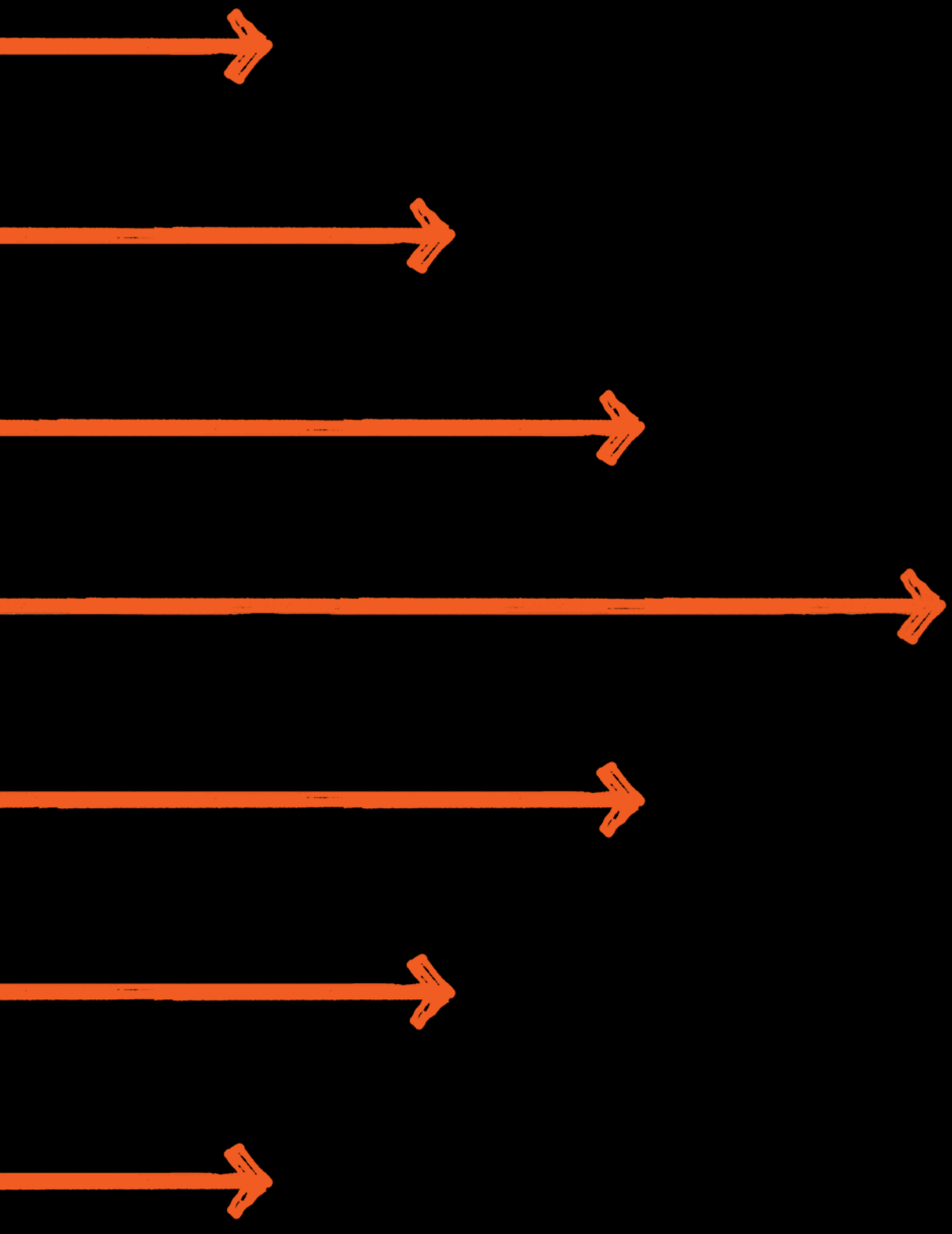
REACH OUT

As you learn from this book, I encourage you to share your own sketchnotes at *The Sketchnote Handbook* Flickr group (**www.flickr.com/groups/thesketchnotehandbook**). I plan on hanging out there a lot, and I'd love to see how you've taken this process and made it your own.

You can view more of my work and contact me through my personal website at **rohdesign.com** or on Twitter at **twitter.com/rohdesign**. I look forward to hearing what you think of the book and learning about your sketchnoting experiences.

IT'S TIME TO GET STARTED. GRAB A NOTEBOOK AND A PEN. LET'S GO TAKE SOME NOTES!

LET'S GO!



CHAPTER 4

the Sketchnoting PROCESS

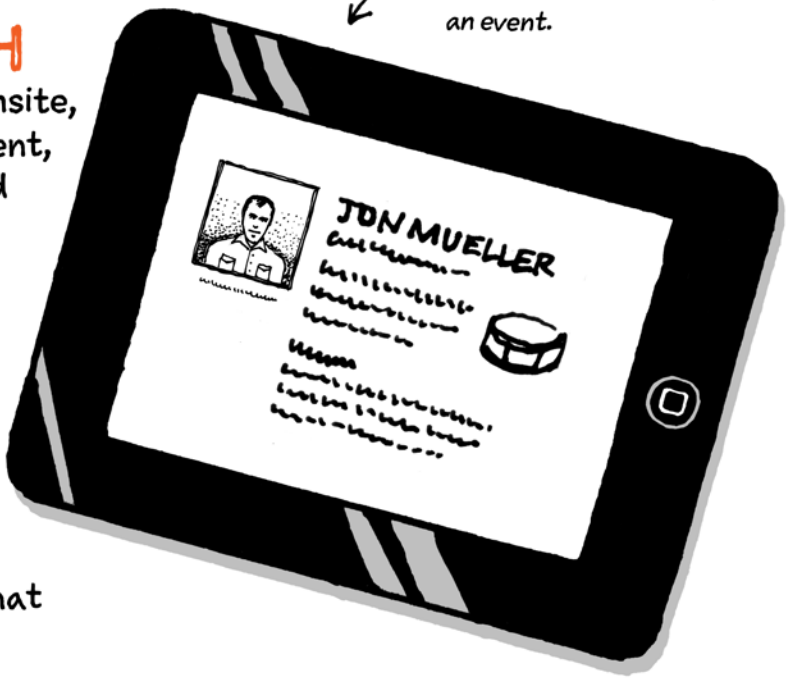
AFTER YEARS OF EXPERIENCE I'VE DEVELOPED MY OWN SKETCHNOTING PROCESS THAT WORKS WELL FOR ME AND CAN HELP YOU CREATE A PROCESS OF YOUR OWN.

HERE ARE THE STEPS I FOLLOW WHEN SKETCHNOTING EVENTS:

1 RESEARCH

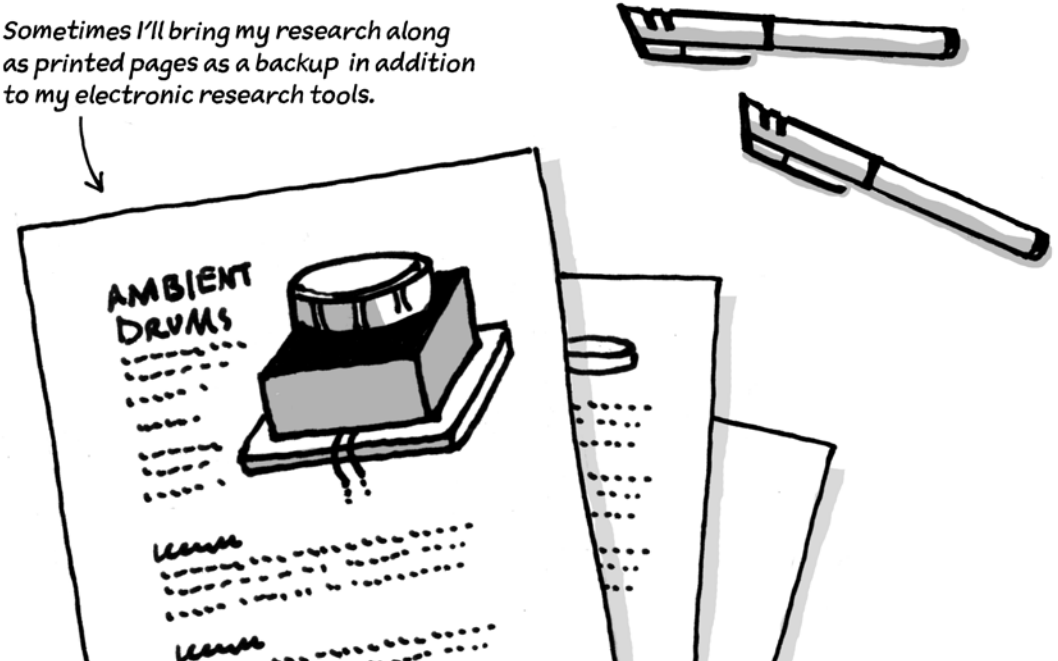
Before I arrive onsite, I research the event, the speakers, and the topic.

iPads are great tools for research before and at an event.

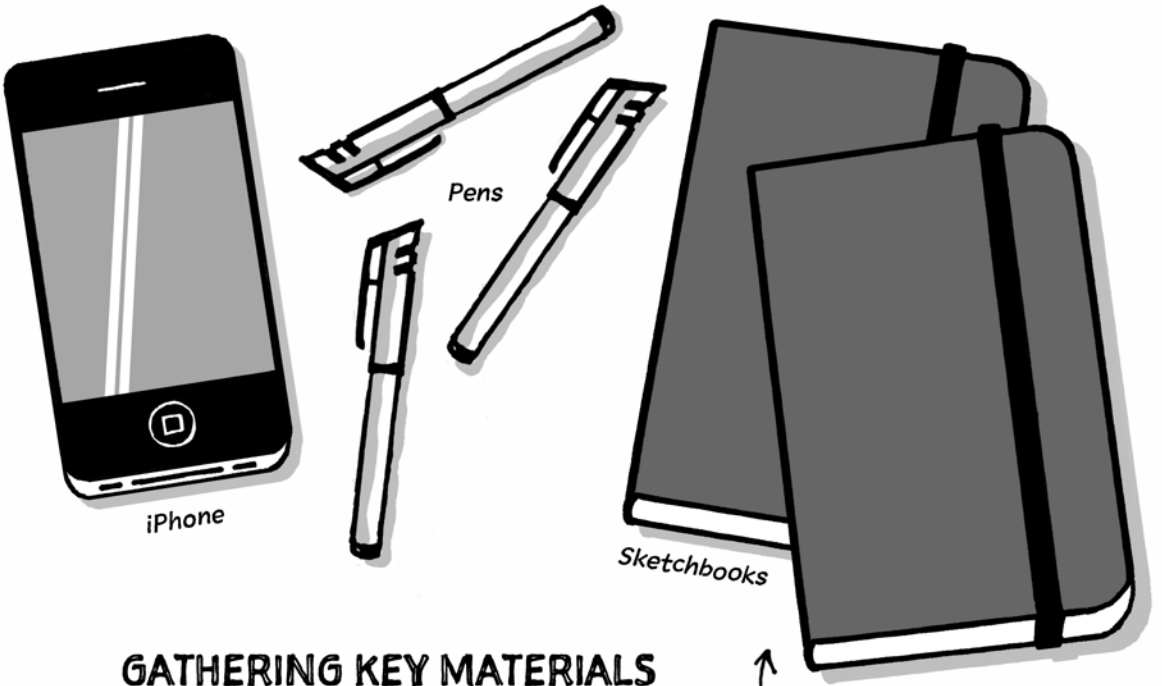


RESEARCH GIVES ME INSIGHT and confidence, especially when I'm sketchnoting people or ideas that I'm new to.

Sometimes I'll bring my research along as printed pages as a backup in addition to my electronic research tools.



2 GATHER MATERIALS



GATHERING KEY MATERIALS

before arriving at an event is critical. I like to bring two or three Moleskine sketchbooks; multiple pens; and my iPhone to access photos and research materials, and to act as a flashlight in a pinch. A book light is useful if the venue is dark.

A few years ago, I was at an event in Chicago when my sketchbook literally came apart at the seams. Now I always carry at least one spare sketchbook, just in case.

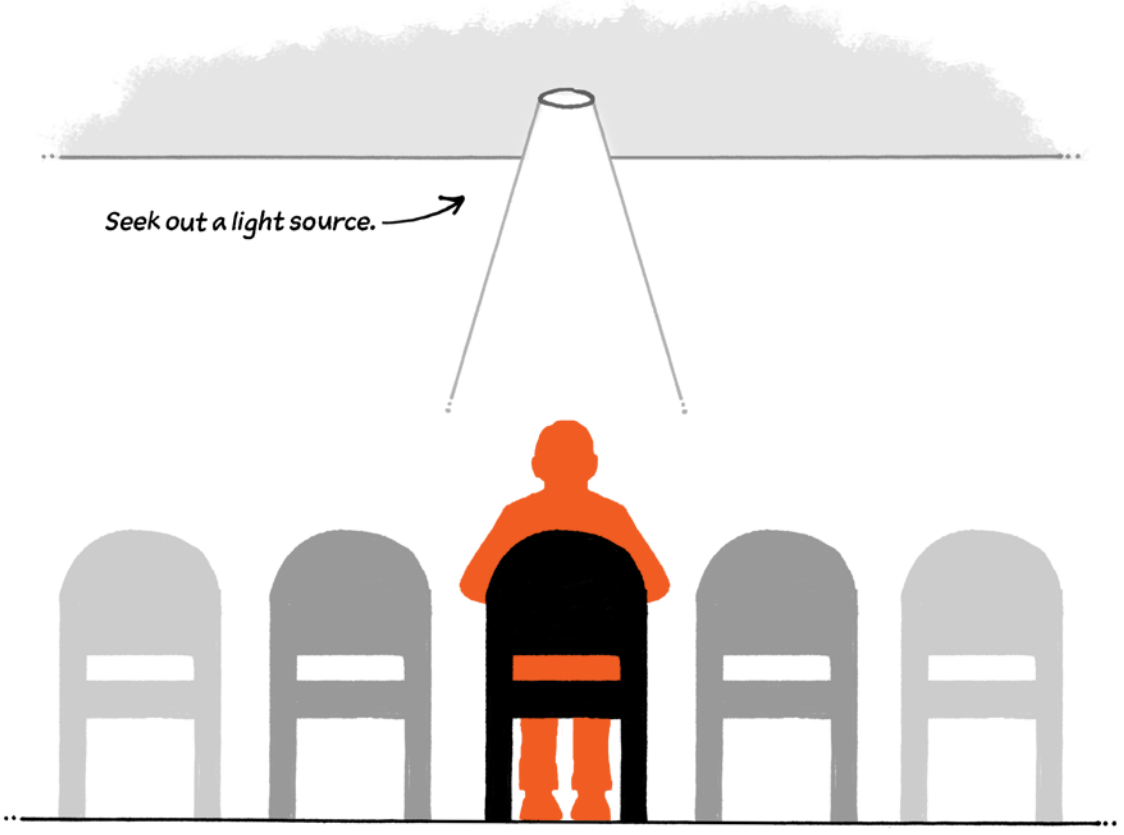
ALWAYS BRING BACKUPS

You never know when a pen might run out of ink or a sketchbook might get damaged. Bring spares along to be safe.

3 ARRIVE EARLY

I arrive at a presentation early and scout out the best seating. Spots underneath lights and close to the front allow me to hear and see the speaker.

SITTING IN THE MIDDLE OF A ROW can reduce annoyances or disruptions if others are coming in late or leaving early.



Choose a middle seat.

4 CREATE A TITLE

A completed title page, ready to go.

I like to use my iPhone to find photos of the speaker for reference on my title page.

ONCE I'VE SETTLED IN, I check the topic and the speaker's name, verify spellings, and sometimes find a photo on my phone to create a visually interesting title page for the speaker or the topic.

I complete my title before the speaker begins, so I can focus on the talk rather than rushing to create a title at the start of the presentation.

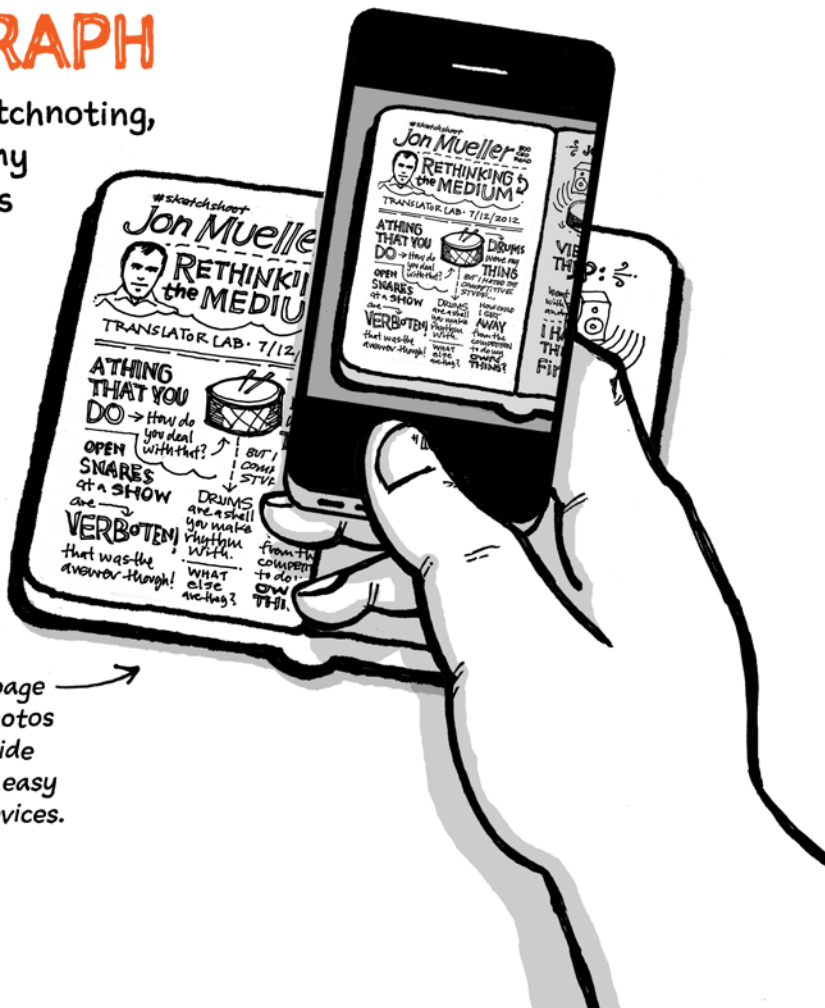
5 SKETCHNOTE

When the talk begins, I listen, synthesize the ideas I'm hearing, and start drawing what I'm thinking about as sketchnotes in my sketchbook.

A completed sketchnote.

6 PHOTOGRAPH

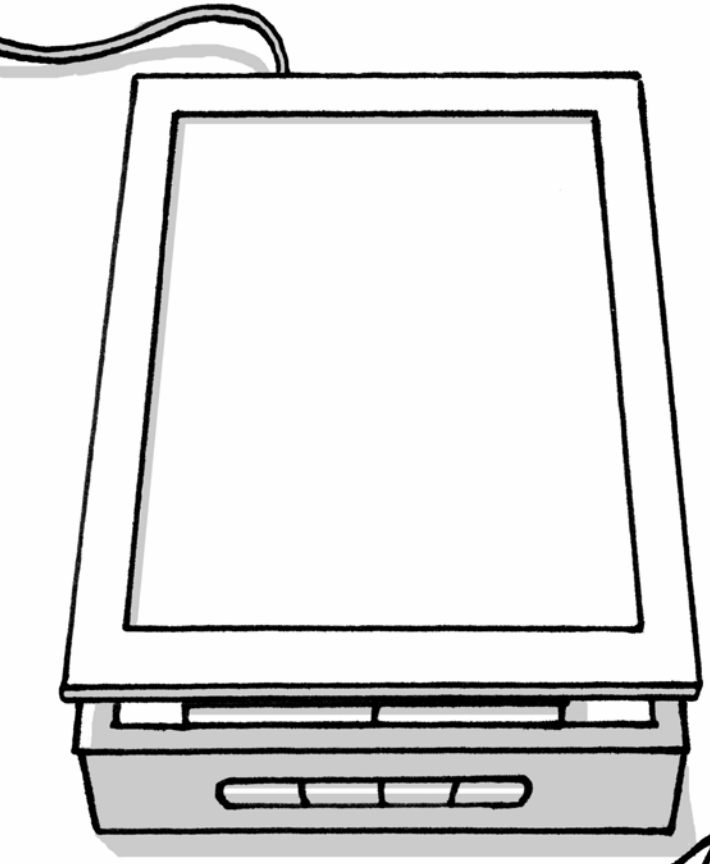
When I'm done sketchnoting, I shoot photos of my sketchnotes. This is a great way to immediately share what you've created via social media, and photos serve as a good backup of your sketchnotes.



I like to shoot each page as a single image. Photos of single pages provide more detail and are easy to view on mobile devices.

7 SCAN, TUNE & POST

When I get home, I scan my sketchnotes at high resolution, adjust the contrast, and fix any typos or errors in Photoshop. Final scans are exported to PNG formatted files for sharing online.



USB powered scanner

I use the same PNG files of my sketchnote scans to create a letter-sized, printable PDF document.

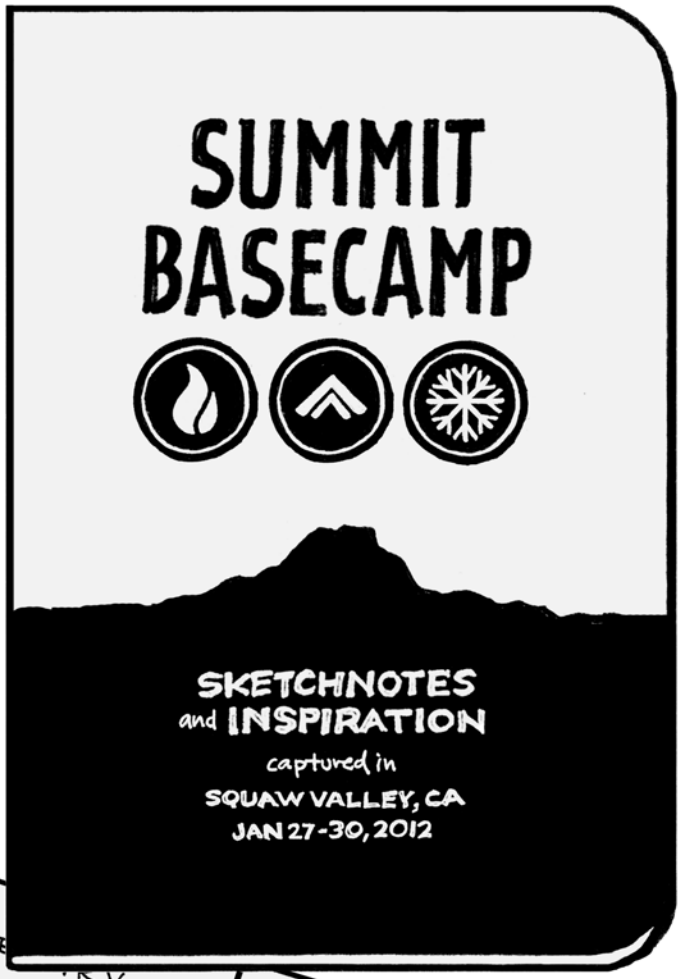
Sketchnotes scanned and assembled as a PDF document.

CONFERENCE ORGANIZERS

share sketchnotes to promote their upcoming events to potential attendees because they capture the event simply and visually.

Organizers often like to give away copies of the sketchnotes as PDF documents or printed booklets to their attendees. These after-event documents work well as handy offline references.

This printed booklet was created as a gift for the attendees of Summit Basecamp by the organizers. Booklets can also work great as a promotional item for the organizers.



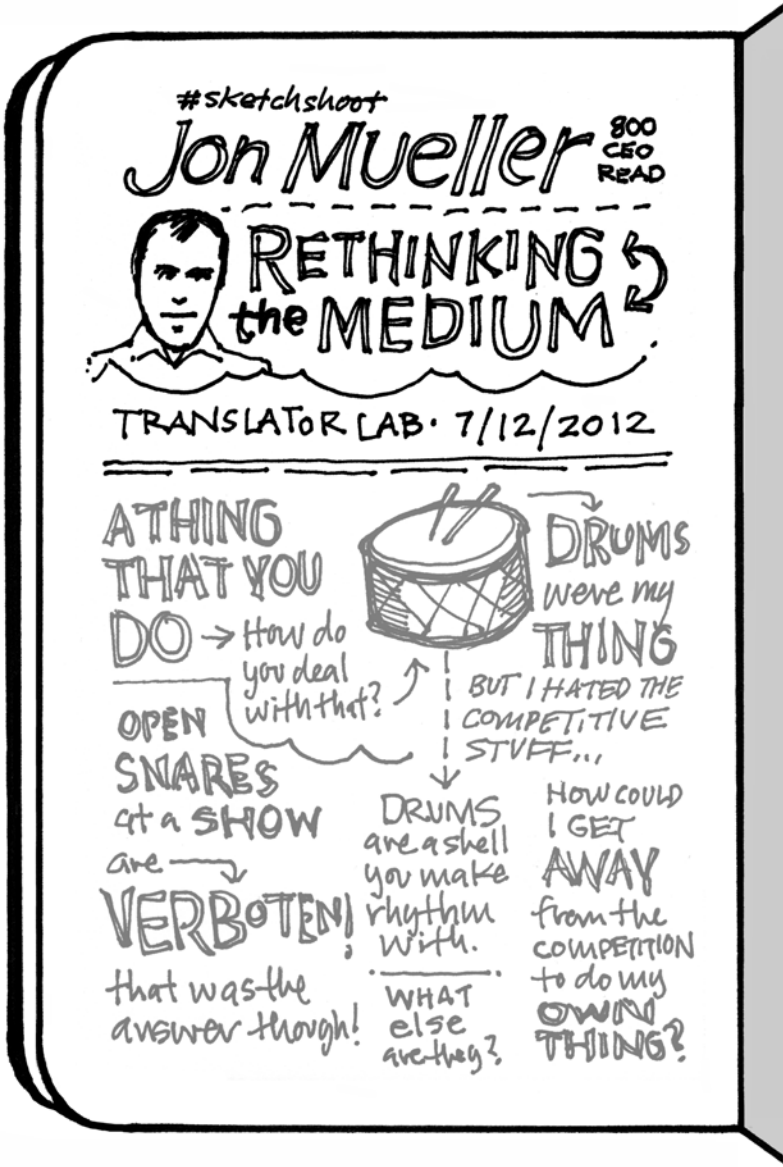
ANATOMY OF A SKETCHNOTE

I've created a map of sketchnote elements from an existing sketchnote so you can see and better understand each element.

★TITLES

Titles are ideal for defining sketchnotes. They can include an event name, speaker names, date, location, and topic. Multiple talks at the same event can follow a consistent design for unity, or each speaker's title can be fun and unique.

TAKE TIME TO CREATE A TITLE BEFORE YOU BEGIN YOUR SKETCHNOTES.

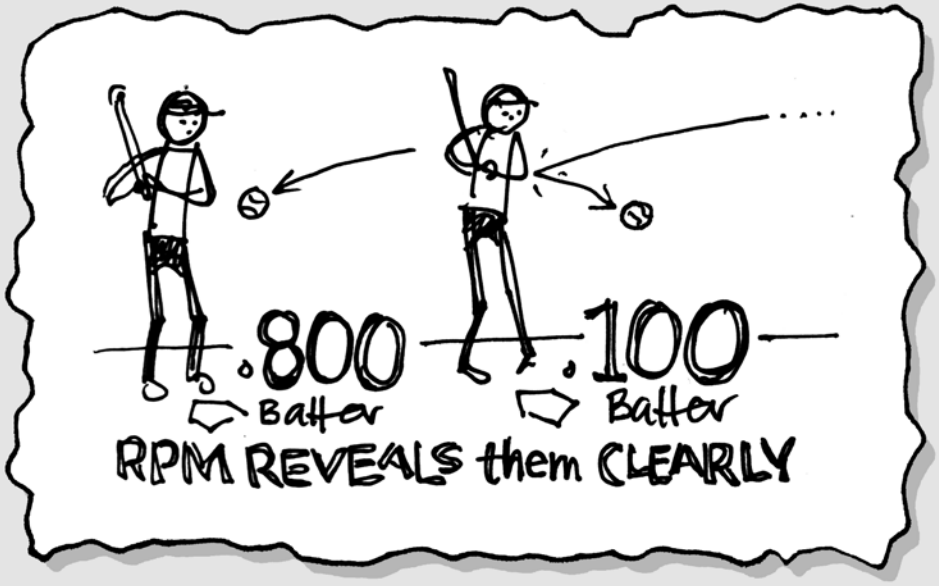


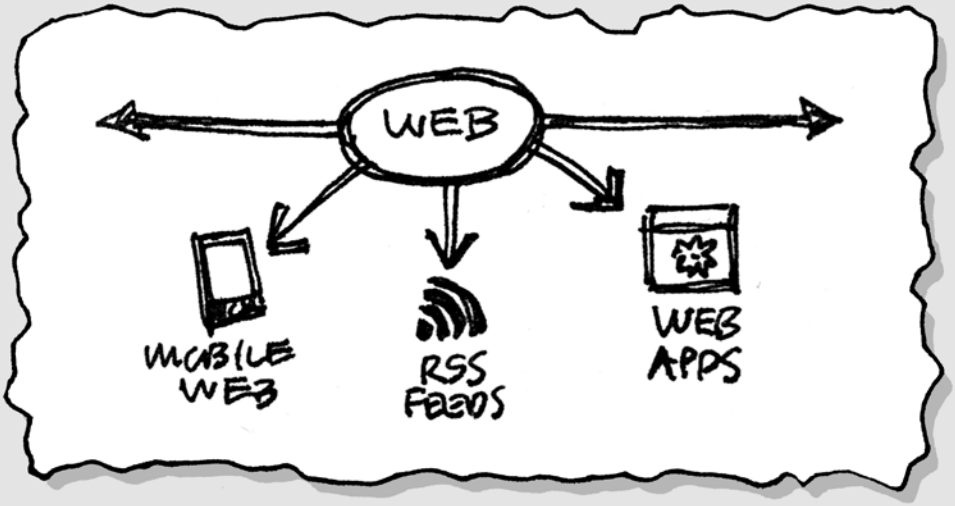
★TYPOGRAPHY

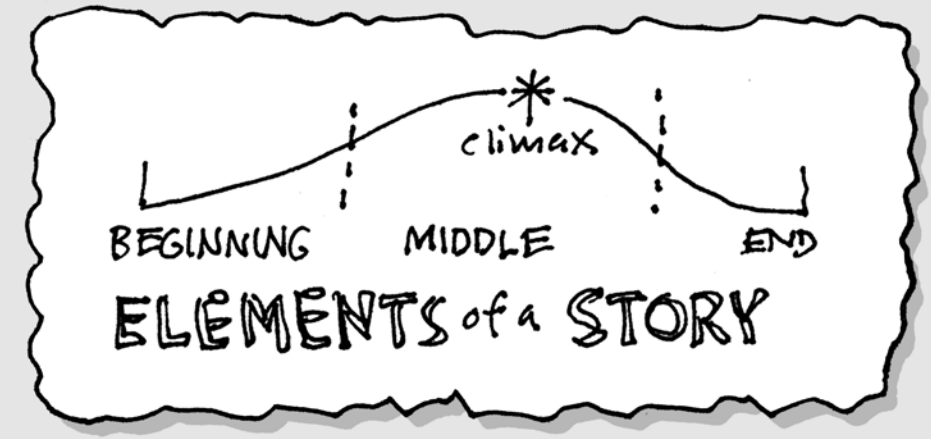
Typography is useful to emphasize ideas, create a hierarchy and structure, and even establish a mood.

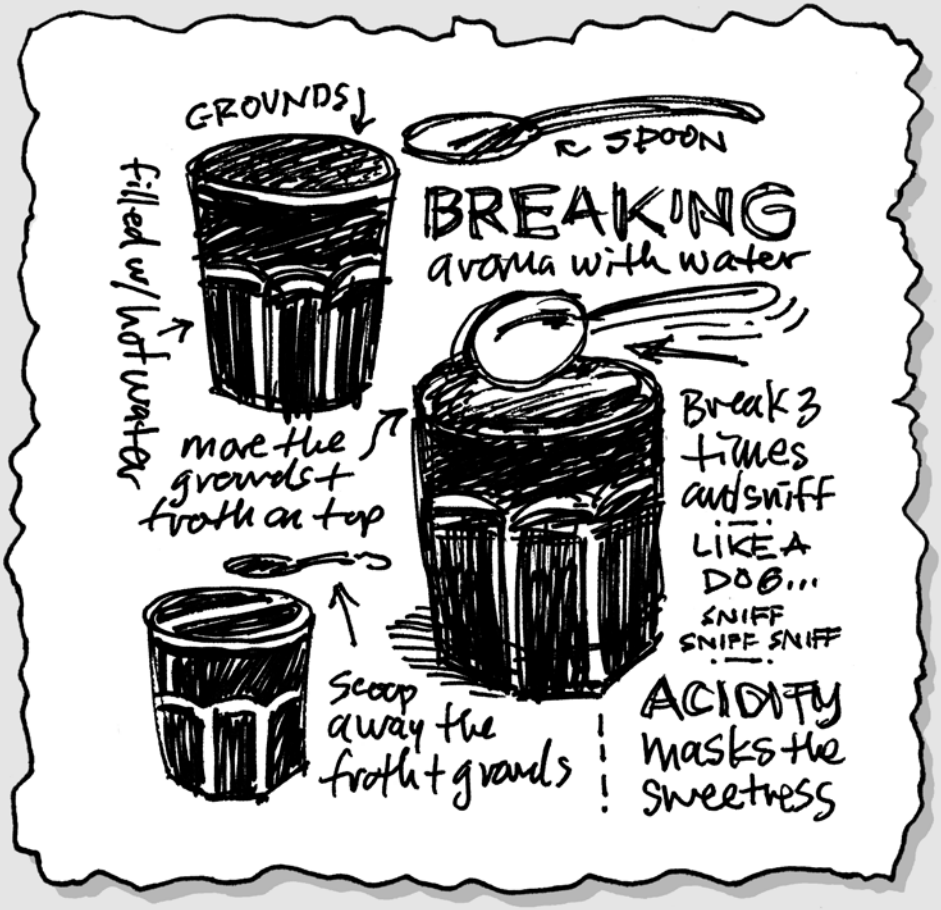
★DIAGRAMS & DRAWINGS

Diagrams and drawings make for more interesting elements. A few pen strokes can illustrate complex ideas quickly.






climax
BEGINNING
MIDDLE
END
ELEMENTS of a STORY


GROUNDS
SPOON
BREAKING
aroma with water
filled w/ hot water
move the grounds + froth on top
Break 3 times and sniff
LIKE A DOG...
SNIFF SNIFF SNIFF
Scoop away the froth + grounds
ACIDITY masks the sweetness

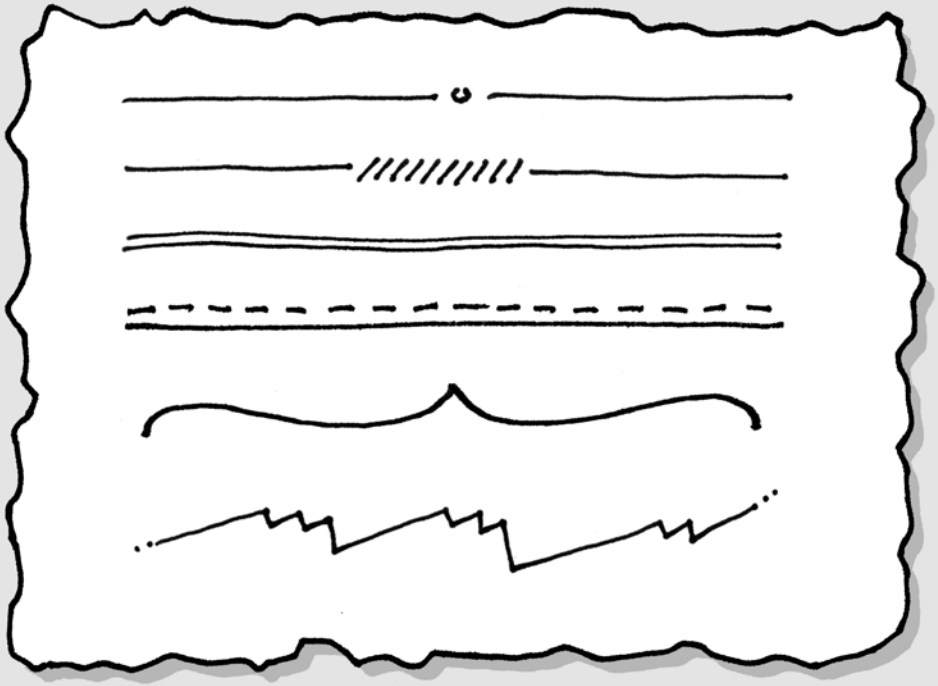
★HANDWRITING

Handwriting is helpful for adding a detailed description if a diagram or information is needed.

IVON led the University of Alabama in the creation of an official Mobile app for the university.

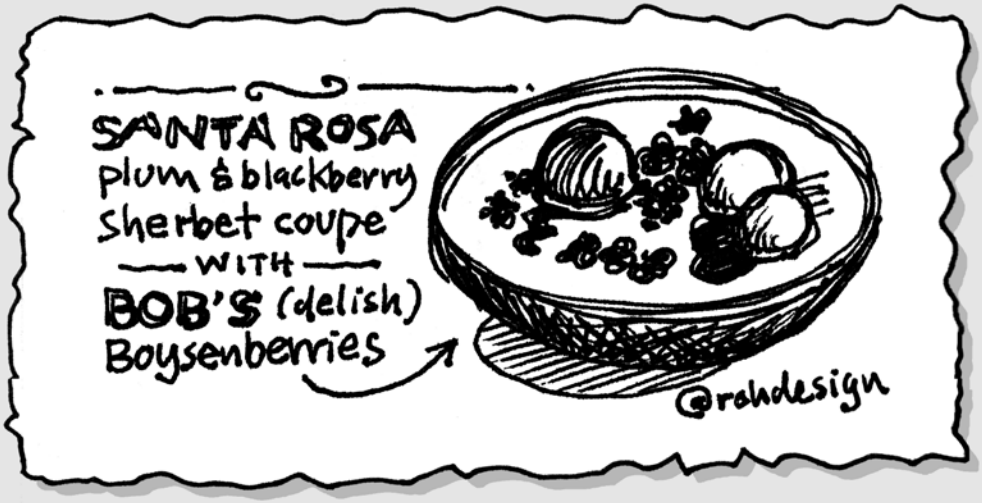
★DIVIDERS

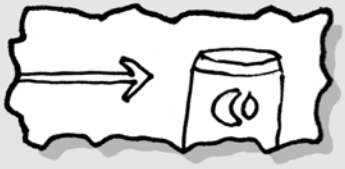
Dividers like rules, dotted lines, and so on can help separate ideas from each other visually, creating order and structure.



★ARROWS

Arrows point out details and can help focus attention on specific drawings, typography, or text, and they can provide a connection between multiple ideas.



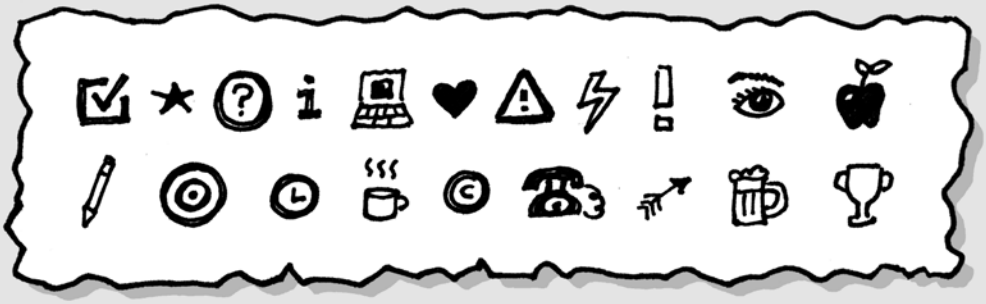


★BULLETS

Bullets are useful for identifying a series of ideas or highlighting a single idea among drawings or text. Different types of bullet icons can further define ideas.

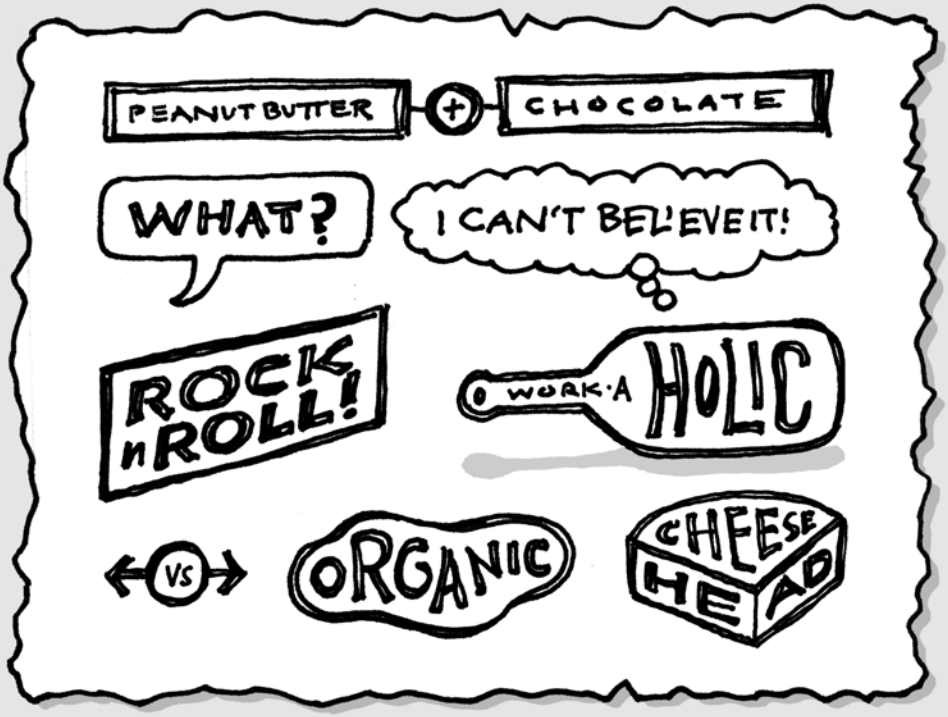
★ICONS

Icons are handy to use throughout a sketchnote document to identify ideas visually as repeating elements.



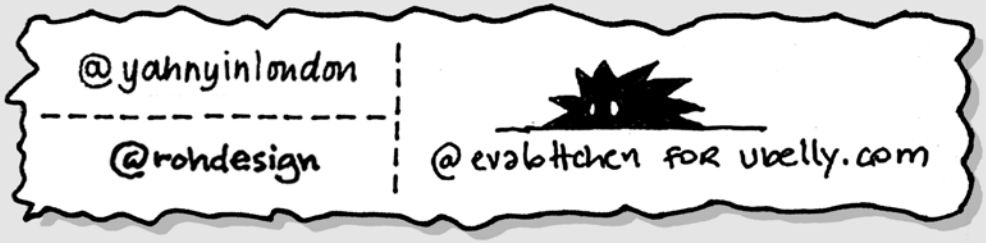
★CONTAINERS

Containers connect various elements together in a single grouping to represent an overall idea or topic.



★SIGNATURES

Signatures are an optional way to identify sketchnotes. If you're creating sketchnotes for your own use, no signature is required.



#sketchshoot

Jon Mueller

800 CEO READ

RETHINKING the MEDIUM

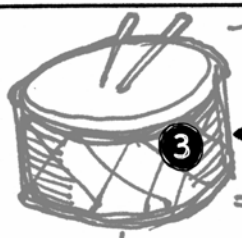
TRANSLATOR LAB · 7/12/2012

1

2

A THING THAT YOU DO → How do you deal with that?

OPEN SNARES at a SHOW are → VERBOTEN! that was the answer though!



3

DRUMS were my THING

4

BUT I HATED THE COMPETITIVE STUFF...

5

DRUMS are a shell you make rhythm with.

7

WHAT else are they?

HOW COULD I GET AWAY from the COMPETITION to do my OWN THING?

6

A SKETCHNOTE *from* START *to* FINISH

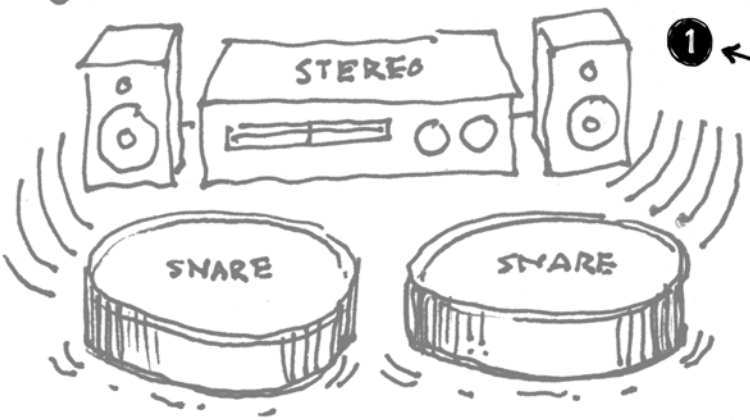
PAGE ONE

To help you see the progression of a sketchnote from start to finish, I've labeled each section with a number and provided a brief descripton to show why and in which order each area was drawn.

1. The title creation was done before the event, using a photo of the speaker, Jon Mueller, on my iPhone.
2. For the first idea, I captured "A THING THAT YOU DO."
3. Jon talked about a snare drum, so my first drawing was of a drum.
4. Here I've fitted "DRUMS WERE MY THING" into this snug space on the right side of the snare drum drawing.
5. An arrow points to another idea lower on the page.
6. I added a "DO MY OWN THING" concept in the lower-right area.
7. Here I emphasized the idea of snare drums being verboten.

With this first page of sketchnotes, I've used a radial pattern to organize the talk information. I'll talk about sketchnote patterns in Chapter 5.

JON'S SETUP:



1

VIBRATING SOUNDS THROUGH Snares. 2

3

Went to BOSTON – joined forces with someone – made a record and toured the COUNTRY. 4

5

I HAD To Experience THIS CHALLENGE To 6

Find a new THING.

A SKETCHNOTE *from* START *to* FINISH

PAGE TWO

1. Here I added a drawing of Jon's drum setup as I pictured it in my mind's eye. I added the title after drawing the image.
2. This description of Jon's approach to sending sounds through snare drums was key to the presentation, so I gave it focus with large, ALL CAPS typography.
3. I used a separator to create a break between the top and bottom.
4. Jon mentioned driving to Boston, creating a record, and touring the country, so I added it just below the separator.
5. Here's another separator using dashed lines.
6. To wrap up my sketchnotes, I used bold type to to emphasize the speaker's final thought.

On the second page of my sketchnotes, I used a linear pattern for the information with heavier emphasis on drawings and typography.

#sketchshoot
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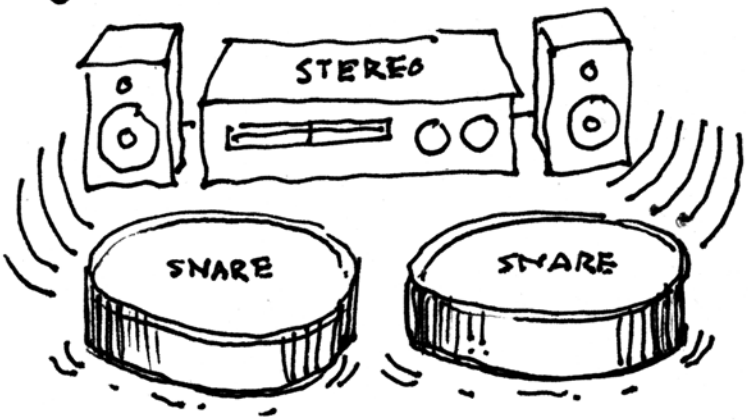
A THING THAT YOU DO → How do you deal with that?
DRUMS were my THING
BUT I HATED THE COMPETITIVE STUFF...
OPEN SNARES at a SHOW are → VERBOTEN!
that was the answer though!
DRUMS are a shell you make rhythm with.
WHAT else are they?
HOW COULD I GET AWAY from the COMPETITION to do my OWN THING?

JON'S SETUP:



VIBRATING SOUNDS THROUGH Snares.

Went to BOSTON – joined forces with someone – made a record and toured the COUNTRY.

I HAD To Experience THIS CHALLENGE to Find a new THING.

DO YOUR RESEARCH

—and—

ARRIVE A BIT EARLY!

Being prepared helps you relax when the time comes to listen, cache ideas, and draw them.

RECAP

- Use my process as a starting point, and then make it your own.
- Research speakers and topics to gain insight and confidence.
- Backups are key to being prepared when you're sketchnoting.
- Arrive early, scout your location, and use the extra time to create a title *before* the event.
- Photograph your sketchnotes right after the event to share them, and to have a backup.
- Shared sketchnotes are great resources for attendees and work well as PR tools.
- The anatomy of a sketchnote includes the title, typography, diagrams & drawings, handwriting, dividers, arrows, bullets, icons, containers, and signatures.

★ NEXT: TYPES OF SKETCHNOTES

Michelle GEORGE

about.me/michellegeorge

FIND ME HERE

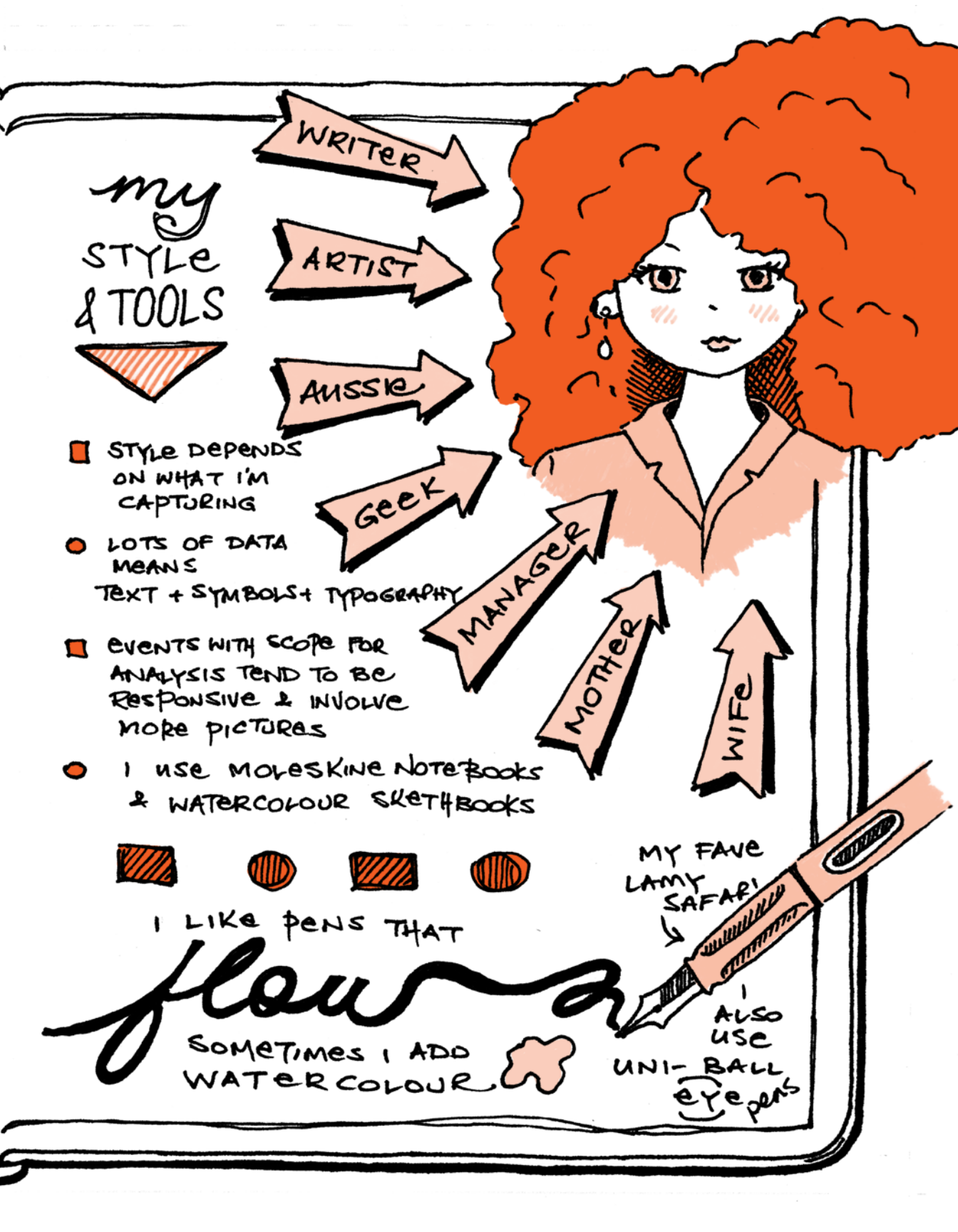
DON'T ~~forget~~ TO REMEMBER

- THINK ABOUT LAYOUT BEFOREHAND
- HAVE A STANDARD SET OF SYMBOLS & FONTS
- KEEP IT SIMPLE!
- CAPTURE WHAT'S MEANINGFUL TO YOU
- IT DOESN'T HAVE TO BE PERFECT

~~MY biggest CHALLENGE~~

... LISTENING & DRAWING AT THE SAME TIME!

I GET LOST IN THE PICTURES.


my STYLE & TOOLS
WRITER
ARTIST
AUSSIE
GEEK
MANAGER
MOTHER
WIFE
STYLE DEPENDS ON WHAT I'M CAPTURING
LOTS OF DATA MEANS TEXT + SYMBOLS + TYPOGRAPHY
EVENTS WITH SCOPE FOR ANALYSIS TEND TO BE RESPONSIVE & INVOLVE MORE PICTURES
I USE MOLESKINE NOTEBOOKS & WATERCOLOUR SKETCHBOOKS
I LIKE PENS THAT
flow
SOMETIMES I ADD WATERCOLOUR
MY FAVE LAMY SAFARI
I ALSO USE UNI-BALL eye pens

HI! I'M EVA-LOTTA LAMM
I'M A DESIGNER LIVING IN LONDON
WWW. SKETCHNOTES BOOK.COM
sketch notes 2011
my book ☺ one year of conference notes
@evalottchen
TOMBOW ABT BRUSH PEN
PILOT G-TEC-C4 GEL PEN
COLOURED MUJI GEL PEN
TOMBOW
Sketching is thinking made visual
although I love pens, the material you use doesn't really matter that much after all.
I like spiral-bound sketchbooks, because they fold over into a nice solid block
Any Pen is better than No Pen
BUT
the best sketchbook is the one you have
ALWAYS WITH YOU.

sketching ≠ drawing

sketchnotes ≠ illustration

QUICK
EXPLORING IDEAS
IMPROVISED
&
playful

PLANNED + LAYED OUT
DETAILED
FINISHED
(this piece is more of an illustration)

develop your own VISUAL VOCABULARY & STYLE

PLAY WITH SHAPES

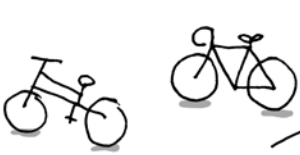
SKETCH AN OBJECT 50 TIMES TO MAKE IT YOURS...

PRO-PORT-IONS

surprise yourself

DIRECTION+ DYNAMICS

CELEBRATE HAPPY ACCIDENTS



INDEX

A

about this book, xiv
active listening, 46
Akah, Binaebi, 22–23
ALL CAPS type, 135, 173
anchoring ideas, 25
arrows, 43, 69, 134, 174
artwork
    art & structure scale, 87–88
    ideas emphasized over, 18–19, 148
    See also drawings
asterisks, 134
asymmetric radial sketchnote, 96
attention, directing, 47

B

backup supplies, 58, 79
Balara, Matt, 91
Berman, Craighton, 24–25
big ideas, 6, 37
block lettering, 169, 171
bold type, 135, 167, 168
book light, 58
Boudwin, Marichiel & Dan, 107
brain
    dual coding theory and, 27–28
    visual maps and, 29–30
brainstorming, 25
Broadbent, MJ, 111
Brown, Sunni, 85, 144
bullet points, 133
bullets, 70, 174

C

caching ideas, 25, 46, 48
cameras, digital, 189
capturing ideas, 6, 18, 42
cartoons, 138, 139
Chew, Boon Yew, 40–41
circles, 16, 150
commentary, 137
concentration, 31, 39
concepts, describing, 8
connectors, 174
containers, 71, 175
c-shape path, 103

D

descriptive text, 133, 134
diagrams, 66–67
digital cameras, 189
digital sketchnotes, 13
distractions
    effect of sketchnoting on, 31
    eliminating and filtering, 47
dividers, 68, 75
doodling
    drawing compared to, 14
    study on memory and, 30
dots, used in drawings, 16, 150
drawing faces, 162–164
    basic elements for, 162
    exercises on, 163–164
drawing metaphors, 182–183
drawing people, 156–161

exercise on, 160–161
Gray method of, 157–159
scaling tip for, 23
star method of, 156
drawing type, 165–171
block lettering, 169
exercise on, 170–171
single-line lettering, 166–167
tips for quickly, 168, 169
triple-line lettering, 168
two-line lettering, 167
See also typography
drawing visual elements, 174–175
drawings
fancy vs. simple, 153
five basic elements of, 16, 149–152, 154–155
ideas conveyed through, 15, 18–19, 34–35, 151
including in sketchnotes, 66–67
skills for creating, 14
See also artwork
drop shadows, 169
dual coding theory, 27–28, 39
dynamic note taking, 38

E

Erb, Veronica, 42–43, 109
Esch, Jessica, 52–53, 85
events, 57–62
arriving early to, 59, 78, 79
gathering materials for, 58
making sketchnotes at, 61
researching beforehand, 57, 78, 79
sharing sketchnotes from, 62, 63
title page for, 60
experimenting with sketchnotes, 20
eyebrows, drawing, 162
eyes, drawing, 164

F

faces
basic elements for, 162
exercises on drawing, 163–164
facial expressions, 162, 164
felt-tipped markers, 187
Finch, Alexis, 54–55, 114, 129
five basic drawing elements, 16, 149–152
exercise on using, 154–155
finding in drawings, 151
fixing/tuning sketchnotes, 62
Flickr site for book, xv, 196
focusing attention, 47
frames in sketchnotes, 43
frustration with note taking, xii, 3
funneling information, 25

G

gel pens, 185, 187
George, Michelle, 80–81
grade school doodles, 14
graphic recording, 191
Gray, Dave, 158
Gray drawing method, 157–159
grid-like patterns, 108

H

handwriting, 8, 68, 173
hard-back notebooks, 145
Hawkins, Erin M., 140
headlines, 133
hierarchies
    creating, 133–134
    elements of, 135
holistic approach, 11
hub-and-spoke structure, 95–96
humor, 138, 139

I

icons, 25, 70, 135, 175
ideas
    anchoring metaphors and, 25
    caching through listening, 25, 46, 48
    connecting with arrows, 43
    conveyed through drawings, 15, 34–35
    emphasized over artwork, 18–19, 148
    focusing on larger themes and, 37
    process for capturing, 42
    sketchnotes built from, 10
Ide-Smith, Michele, 105
illustrations. *See* artwork; drawings
immersion process, 48
iPad and iPhone, 57, 58

K

Keaggy, Bill, 131
kitchen items drawing exercise, 178–179
Kleon, Austin, 112, 118, 162

L

Lamm, Eva-Lotta, 82–83, 97, 144
Lamson, Gerren, 86, 93, 106, 118–119
language, visual vs. verbal, 34–35
larger themes/ideas, 37
lettering
    block, 169, 171
    single-line, 166–167, 170
    triple-line, 168, 171
    two-line, 167, 170
linear sketchnote pattern, 75, 91–94
lines in drawings, 16, 150, 174
listening, 44–51
active process of, 46
author's approach to, 47–49
caching ideas through, 25, 46, 48
keys to process of, 45
naturalness of drawing while, 32
practicing skills in, 50
summary points about, 51
live sketchnoting, 124–126
lowercase handwriting, 173

M

Magain, Matthew, 120–121
maps, visual, 10, 29–30, 39
materials for sketchnoting, 58, 184–187
McDaniel, Cassie, 102
meandering storytelling, 49
memory
    drawing items from, 176
    study on doodling and, 30
    visual maps and, 30
mental cache, 25, 48

metaphors
anchoring ideas and, 25
tips on drawing, 182–183
mind
dual coding theory of, 27–28
holistic note taking and, 11
visual maps and, 29–30
modular sketchnote pattern, 106–109
Moleskine sketchbooks, 7, 58, 184–185
Monlux, Mark, 139
mouths, drawing, 162, 164

N

Newman, Greg, 153
note taking
author's frustration with, xii, 3
feeling of sketchnoting vs., 36–38
visual and holistic approach to, 11
numbering points, 134, 135

O

office items drawing exercise, 180–181
opinions in sketchnotes, 136, 137
organic path shapes, 103

P

Paivio, Allan, 27
panel discussions, 110
path sketchnote pattern, 103–105
pattern recognition, 46, 49
patterns for sketchnotes, 90–116
linear pattern, 75, 91–94
modular pattern, 106–109
path pattern, 103–105
popcorn pattern, 113–115
radial pattern, 73, 95–99
skyscraper pattern, 110–112
vertical pattern, 100–102
PDF documents, 62
pencils
highlighting with colored, 187
pencil to ink approach, 127–129
text-only note taking using, 3
penmanship, 173
pens for sketchnoting, 185, 187
people
exercise on drawing, 160–161
methods for drawing, 156–159
scaling tip for drawing, 23
personality in sketchnotes, 9, 12, 136
personalization of sketchnotes, 136–140
photographing sketchnotes, 61, 79, 188–189
pie charts, 30
planning process, 42
PNG formatted files, 62
pocket-sized Moleskine sketchbook, 7, 184–185
popcorn sketchnote pattern, 113–115
practicing listening skills, 50
presentations
immersing your mind in, 48
recognizing patterns in, 46, 49

R

radial sketchnote pattern, 73, 95–99
real-time sketchnoting, 123, 124–126, 141

recall. *See* memory
recognizing patterns, 46, 49
refining sketchnotes, 43
relaxed note taking, 36
researching events, 57, 79
Reynolds, Timothy J., 113, 142–143
Rohde, Mike, 92, 140, 153
rohdesign.com website, xv
rough-to-refined approach, 130–131
Rowland, Francis, 144–145

S

scanning sketchnotes, 62, 189
Schildt, Bauke, 104, 186
seating considerations, 59
separators, 68, 75, 175
Sewell, Carolyn, 94
sharing sketchnotes, 62, 63, 188–189
Shipton, Chris, 101, 190–191
sign language, 136
signatures in sketchnotes, 71
single-line lettering, 166–167, 170
sketchbooks
  Moleskine, 7, 58, 184–185
  spiral-bound, 23, 82, 186
Sketchnote Army blog, xii
sketchnoter community, xv
sketchnotes
  advantages of, 36–38
  anatomy of, 64–71
  arrows in, 43, 69
  artwork in, 87–88
  bullets and icons in, 70
  containers used in, 71
  creation process for, 57–62, 72–77
  diagrams and drawings in, 66
  dividers used in, 68
  experimenting with, 20
  handwriting in, 8, 68
  hierarchy for, 133–135
  holistic approach of, 11
  how to create, 13
  ideas over art in, 18–19, 148
  key concepts for making, 25
  patterns used for, 90–116
  personalization of, 136–140
  photographing and scanning, 61, 62, 188–189
  planning process for, 42
  real-time, 123, 124–126
  refining the look of, 43
  sharing, 62, 63, 188–189, 190
  signatures for, 71
  structure of, 87–89
  style of, 85–86
  titles for, 60, 64
  tools for creating, 58, 184–187
  two-stage, 123, 127–131
  typography for, 65, 165–171
skyscraper sketchnote pattern, 110–112
smartphones, 188
social media, 61, 188
Soupiset, Paul, 192–193
speech bubbles, 53, 175
spiral-bound sketchbooks, 23, 82, 186
squares, 16, 150
star drawing method, 156
Steed, Kyle, 194–195
stories, connecting, 49
structure of sketchnotes, 87–89

style of sketchnotes, 85–86
subheads, 133
symmetric radial sketchnote, 96
synthesizing information, 25

T

talk bubbles, 53, 175
text, descriptive, 133, 134
text-only note taking, 3
themes, focusing on larger, 37
thinking processes, 85
thought bubbles, 175
three-point sermons, 49
titles, 30, 60, 64
tools for sketchnoting, 58, 184–187
triangles, 16, 150
triple-line lettering, 168, 171
Twitter info for author, xv
two-line lettering, 167, 170
two-stage sketchnoting, 123, 127–131, 141
    pencil to ink approach, 127–129
    rough to refined approach, 130–131
typography, 165–171
    block lettering, 169
    exercise on drawing, 170–171
    hierarchy emphasized through, 135
    including in sketchnotes, 65
    single-line lettering, 166–167
    tips for adding to, 168, 169
    triple-line lettering, 168
    two-line lettering, 167

V

verbal mode, 27–28
vertical sketchnote pattern, 100–102
visual elements
    building a library of, 176
    drawing in sketchnotes, 174–175
visual language, 34–35
visual library, 176–181
    advice on building, 176
    kitchen items exercise, 178–179
    office items exercise, 180–181
visual maps, 10, 29–30, 39
visual mode, 27–28
visual notes, 11
visualizing ideas, 25

W

warming up, 191
website of author, xv
whimsy, 138, 140
Wright, Amanda, 98, 186
written sketchnotes, 13
w-shape path, 103

Z

zigzag path, 103
zone for sketchnoting, 33, 39
z-shape path, 103