

# Using Mind Mapping as a Visual Research Plan

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## Introduction

Thorough analysis of the documents you use helps lead you to your next research steps. Including mind mapping in your toolkit can help focus your research questions and point to missing sources. Every researcher has his or her own methods of data analysis and this session will help expand the ways of analyzing sources by breaking them down into their constituent parts and finding the holes that need filled. Typical mind mapping starts with a central question. Instead of starting with the research question, we will start with sources and work towards selecting the appropriate next research question based on the data.



## Agenda

- ❖ Source Analysis Objectives
  - Who created the document/source and why?
  - Are there gaps in the record set?
  - What information does the document contain?
  - What research questions can we generate?
  
- ❖ What is a mind map?
  - Visual ways to correlate and examine data
  - Genealogical charts can be understood as a form of mind map
  - Work from the known data towards a set of new research questions
  - Work from simple maps to more complex arguments
  
- ❖ Tools for creating mind maps
  - Paper/sticky notes and colored pencils/highlighters
  - Drawing and mind map programs
  
- ❖ Steps for creating mind maps
  - Identifying the known information
  - Mapping the basics
  - Analysis and asking questions
  - Evaluation and planning
  
- ❖ Examples
  - Indexes and individual records
  - Combined maps for complex data and arguments

## Programs

Most mind mapping websites allow you to save a few mind maps for free, and some have an app that you can download and run on your computer. Be sure to read the terms as some of the sites make your mind maps publicly visible unless you use the paid version. The following list (in alphabetical order) will give you a wide variety of options.

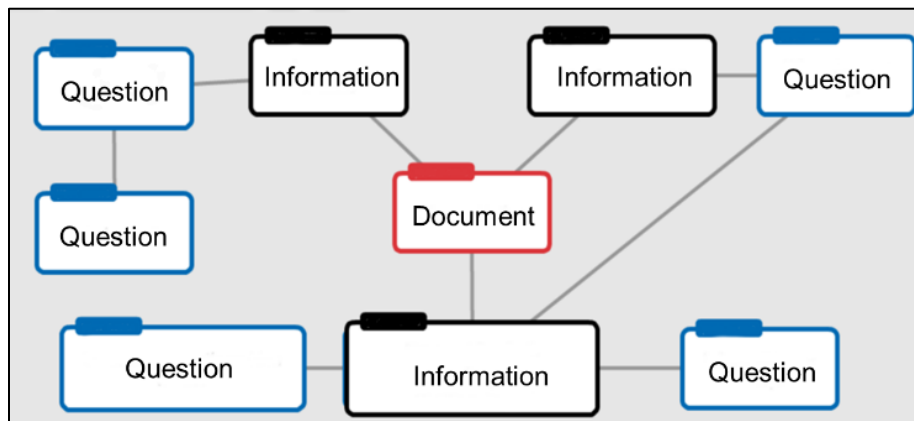
1. FreeMind (<http://freemind.sourceforge.net/wiki/>)
2. GoConqr (<https://www.goconqr.com/en/mind-maps/>)
3. Popplet (<https://popplet.com/>)
4. XMind (<https://www.xmind.net/>)
5. Maria Myre, “The Best Mind Mapping Software in 2021: 10 tools to make great mind maps,” July 2, 2021. <https://zapier.com/blog/best-mind-mapping-software/> : accessed 8 September 2021.  
This review covers ten different products that do not include the four listed above.

Other programs you are more familiar with can also be used to create mind maps, such as Microsoft Word and PowerPoint. Using these allows you unlimited mind maps and you can create a standard template for your work.

## Examples

The following examples show mind maps used for source evaluation and research planning. The basic premise for using mind mapping as a visual research plan is to analyze a source document, extract the information contained therein, and ask questions of the data. These research questions then become the basis for the next steps in your research process.

The image below illustrates a general diagram of a mind map based on a specific record. Using coloration to help highlight the different types of items on the map can help you focus your analysis. In this example the central item of the map is a document (red border) surrounded by specific items of information contained in the document (black borders), and the research questions that are generated from this information (blue borders).



General format for a mind map (created with Popplet)

Using a mind map should be a help, not a hindrance. Creating one for every document is not necessary (e.g., a single city directory entry for your ancestor); however, this process can be used on combined documents (i.e., 20 years’ worth of city directory entries) to correlate the data. Likewise, creating a computer-based mind map is also not necessary in most cases. Hand-drawn maps using variations of outlining or sticky notes serve the purpose in most cases. If you are wanting to show others your work or have combined and/or complex document(s) to map, then maybe a digital version would be best. Just remember, simple methods such as paper and pencil will be on-hand and easy to use, even in an archive.

## Using Mind Mapping as a Visual Research Plan

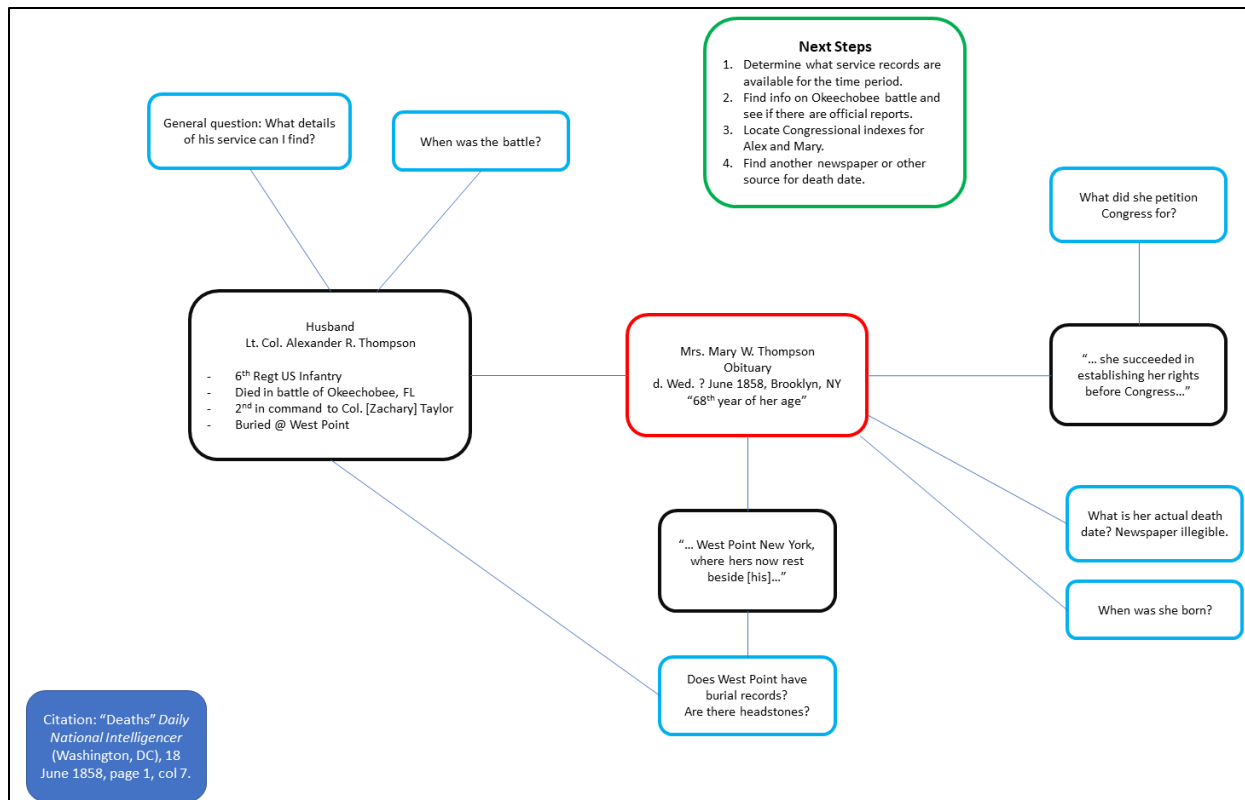
The example below is for a newspaper obituary of Mary W. Thompson published in the *Daily National Intelligencer* in Washington, DC, on 18 June 1858.

### Transcription:

In Brooklyn, on Wednesday, June [?], Mrs. MARY W. THOMPSON, relict of the late Lieut. Col. ALEX. R. THOMPSON, in the 68<sup>th</sup> year of her age.

Mrs. Col. THOMPSON was known and held in high esteem by numbers of our citizens, who recollect her as a woman of uncommon energy and perseverance, warmly attached to her friends, and of strong Christian principle. Her husband, Lieut. Col. Alex. R Thompson, of the 6<sup>th</sup> regiment U.S. Infantry, fell at the head of his troops in the battle of Okeechobee, Florida, being then second in command to Col. Taylor, afterwards President Taylor. His remains were deposited at West Point, New York, where hers now rest beside them. She often visited this city in the prosecution of her claims, and formed acquaintances with various families here, by whom she is sincerely lamented. With a constancy and unwearied effort, such as few exhibited, she succeeded in establishing her rights before Congress; and thus the later years of her life were rendered free from the anxiety and care of the earlier ones of her widowhood. She died shortly after a paralytic attack, surrounded by her friends, in the full possession of her reason, and an unwavering faith in the Redeemer, whom she had long believed in and honored—patient, resigned, and happy.

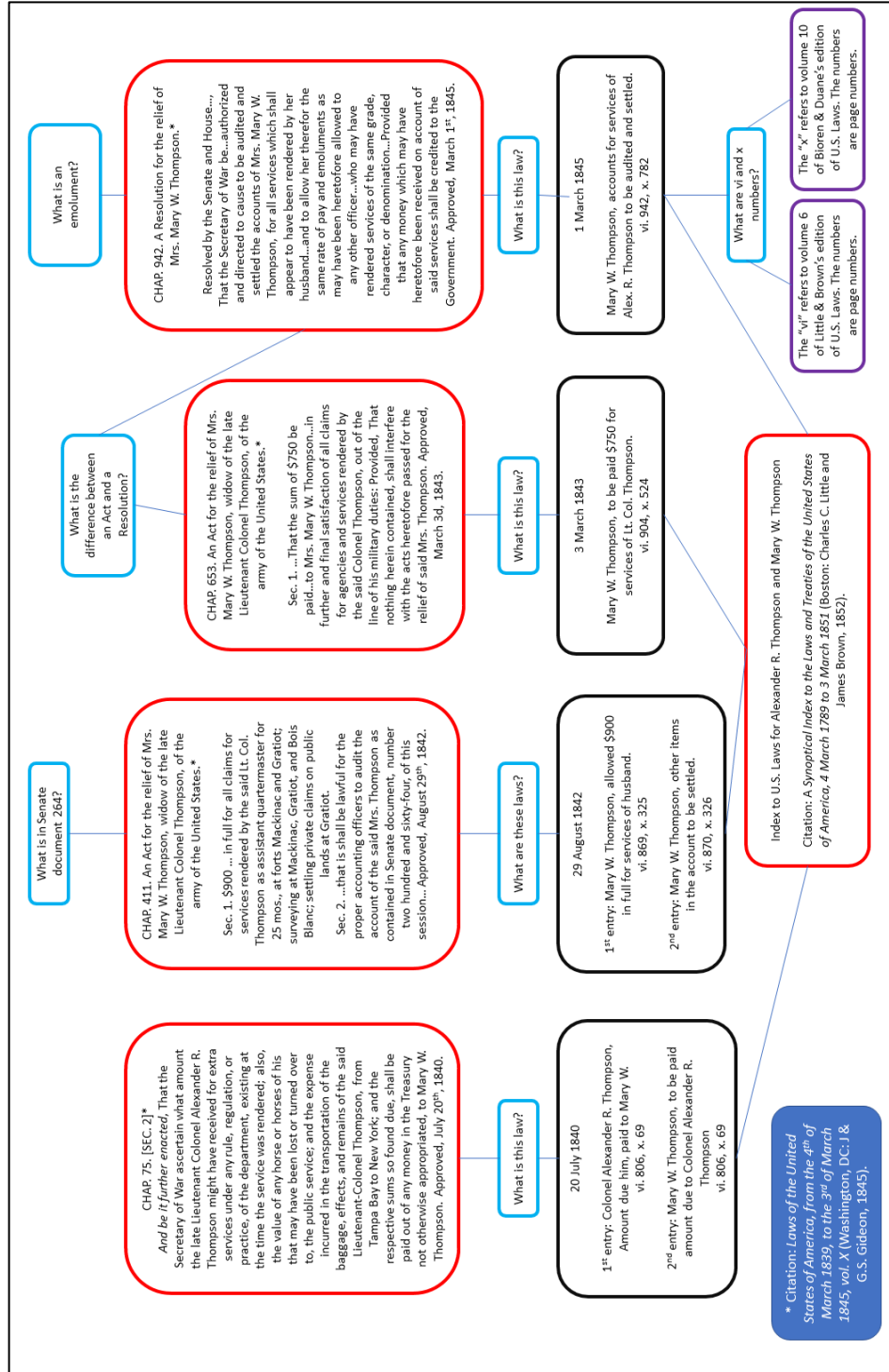
As you read through a document, sketch out a map of the information found and begin to focus on questions based on what you have learned from the document. The questions (in blue) are then used to create the next steps in your research plan (in green).



Mind map for obituary of Mary W. Thompson (created in PowerPoint)

# Using Mind Mapping as a Visual Research Plan

Sometimes documents, such as the *Synoptical Index to the Laws and Treaties of the United States of America* (Little & Brown, 1852), at the bottom center of the image below (red), require some deciphering and then lead to the actual documents. By mind mapping the index entries, determining the published laws to which they refer (Bioren & Duane), and summarizing the documents, you can make a combined map that bubbles your research questions up to the top.



Mind map of Congressional Acts and Resolutions for Mary W. Thompson (created in PowerPoint)



## References

1. Benton, Thomas Hart, Senator. "Report on the Petition and papers of Mary W. Thompson, widow of Lieutenant Colonel Alexander R. Thompson," 27<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> Session, 398 S. doc. 264, 26 April 1842. *ProQuest Congressional Publications*  
[https://congressional.proquest.com/congressional/docview/t47.d48.398\\_s.doc.264](https://congressional.proquest.com/congressional/docview/t47.d48.398_s.doc.264) : accessed 7 June 2020.
2. French, Benjamin B., compiler. *Laws of the United States of America, from the 4<sup>th</sup> of March 1839, to the 3<sup>rd</sup> of March 1845*, vol. X (Washington, DC: J & G.S. Gideon, 1845). *Google Books*  
<https://books.google.com/books?id=IForAQAAMAAJ> : accessed 8 September 2021.
3. Mayo, Robert and Ferdinand Moulton, compilers. *Army and Navy Pension Laws, and Bounty Land Laws of the United States, including Sundry Resolutions of Congress from 1776 to 1852: Executed at the Department of the Interior* (Washington, DC: Jno. T. Towers, 1852). *Internet Archive*  
<https://archive.org/details/cu31924020610600> : accessed 8 September 2021.
4. Secretary of the Senate, *A Synoptical Index to the Laws and Treaties of the United States of America, 4 March 1789 to 3 March 1851* (Boston: Charles C. Little and James Brown, 1852). *Google Books*  
<https://books.google.com/books?id=qksUAAAAYAAJ&oe=UTF-8> : accessed 8 September 2021.

## Supplemental Reading on Evidence Analysis

1. Anderson, Robert Charles. *Elements of Genealogical Analysis: How to Maximize Your Research Using the Great Migration Study Project Method* (Boston: New England Historic Genealogical Society, 2014).
2. Board for Certification of Genealogists. *Genealogy Standards*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. revised (New York: Ancestry, 2019).
3. Devine, Donn. "Evidence Analysis," *Professional Genealogy: A Manual for Researchers, Writers, Editors, Lecturers, and Librarians*, Elizabeth Shown Mills, editor. (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Company, 2001).
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5. Merriman, Brenda Dougall. *Genealogical Standards of Evidence: A Guide for Family Historians* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2010).
6. Mills, Elizabeth Shown. "Fundamentals of Evidence Analysis," *Evidence Explained: Citing History Sources from Artifacts to Cyberspace*, 2nd ed. (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing, 2009).
7. Rose, Christine. *Genealogical Proof Standard: Building a Solid Case*, 3rd ed. (San Jose, CA: CR Publications, 2009).