

**Institute for Information Law and Policy at NYLS  
presents  
Legal Education Technology Series:  
Visual Outlining**

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**Introduction**

This is the first in a series of newsletters on Legal Education Technology prepared by the Institute for Information Law and Policy at New York Law School. These newsletters will focus on new developments in technology and how they can be applied in law school settings for students *and* teachers. This newsletter will focus on new tools to create better, more functional law school outlines.

**What is the Challenge?**

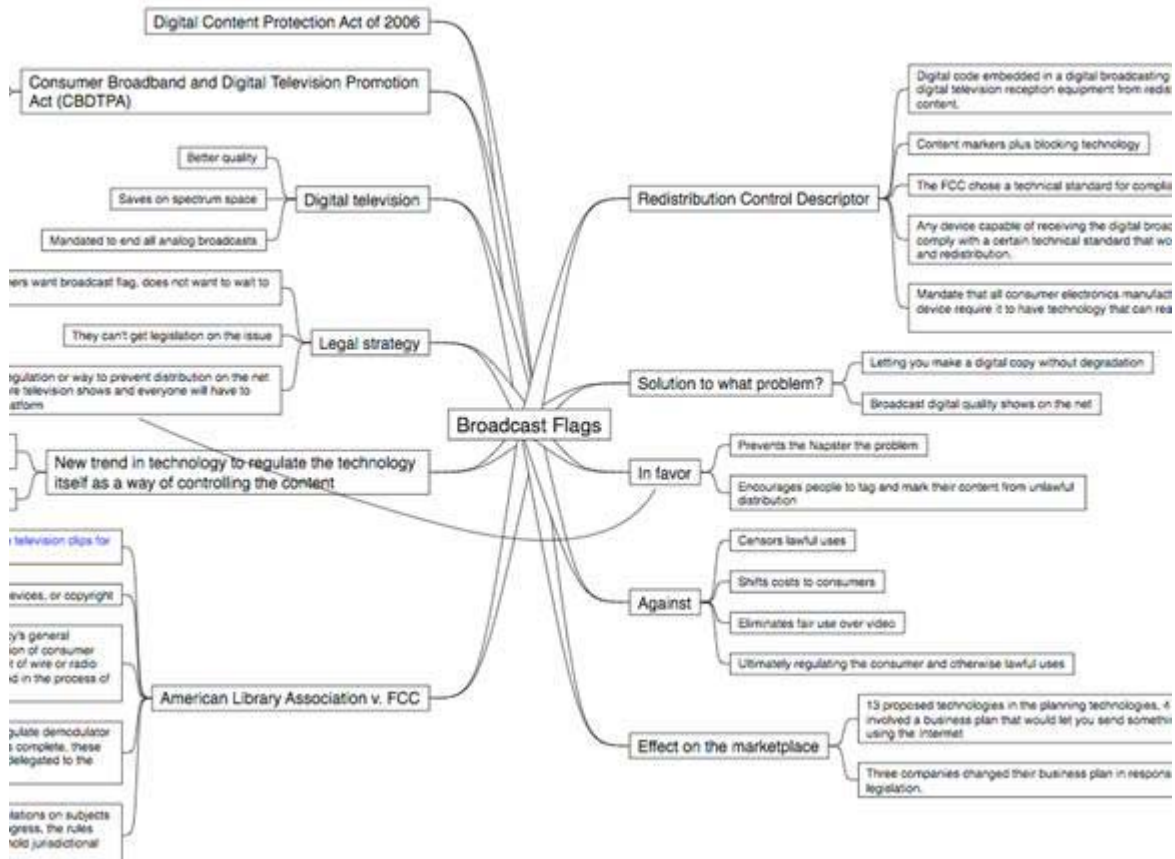
As the proliferation of computers in the classrooms increases, we must be open to the new opportunities technology has to offer for teachers and students.

In a recent Newsweek article, Bill Gates commented that: "...as software gets smarter about how people think and work, it's starting to help them synthesize and manage knowledge, too. Some of this technology is deceptively simple...a new generation of "mindmapping" software can also be used as a digital "blank slate" to help connect and synthesize ideas and data—and ultimately create new knowledge."

**What is "visual outlining"?**

"Visual outlining" or "mindmapping" software is a graphical alternative to the rigid structure of conventional text outlining, and could be used as a powerful tool for teaching and learning in the law school classroom.

A mindmap looks something the top view of a tree. In the center, the trunk is the title of your project. Ideas or topics are shown as branches. And subtopics under each idea are shown as smaller branches. Mindmapping software lets you freely drag any of these subtopics to another branch.



## Why Mindmapping?

Mind maps allow you to look at the big picture, yet drill down to specific tasks and pieces of information and see them at the same time. By arranging information in a mind map, it's possible to solve problems in new ways and allow you to see things differently from the usual linear lists.

Generally, a mind map has many functions:

- Remembering information
- Generating ideas:
- Organizing thoughts:
- Working from a broad overview to the details
- Focusing your mind on the main issues
- Helping you to solve problems, graphically
- Compact
- Graphical

Here is a simple textual [mindmap](#) describing the many benefits of mindmapping, and here is the same mindmap transferred into [Microsoft Word .doc format](#).

One law professor, Jerry Kang, has implemented Mindmanager, the leading PC mindmapping software in his classrooms at UCLA. [Mindjet](#), the creators of Mindmanager did a [spotlight](#) on his method of teaching law with mind maps:

Professor Jerry Kang uses MindManager maps to create lecture notes, in the way other professors might use PowerPoint or Word documents on a screen. He creates lecture notes as a MindManager document, with color-coded notes to himself. For any particular class, he filters out his own teaching notes, and projects only the bare skeleton map of what is to be covered that day. He starts with a broad overview of the case material, then adds complexity step by step as the class conversation unfolds.

Kang says he finds MindManager to be the perfect for modifying his lectures, should topics or discussion shift according to student interest or need. "When students ask questions, I capture the essence of the questions and the answers," he says. "I will type their answers or responses right into my presentation, open up branches, draw arrows, and clump and reclump information based on the nature of the conversations, so that I have a dynamic way of capturing the class dialogue based on the Socratic method."

MindManager is also a great tool for organizing information after a lecture has been completed. At the end of the class, he outputs the map as HTML and posts it on his class Web site for students to review.

### **Changing the way teaching works**

Kang has never liked PowerPoint, the de facto standard for teaching classes at many professional schools. "It brings a C teacher up to B, but never gets beyond that," he says. "If you can't capture the interactivity of the classroom you are encouraging a passive form of teaching. MindManager, on the other hand, has allowed me to integrate student responses and ideas right onto the screen— and at the same time manage the big picture and the small details."

Students are "staggeringly positive" about his teaching method, Kang says, as are other faculty, whom he has trained to use MindManager. "Jaws drop when I use MindManager. Since I have been using it for so long, I forget how amazing it is the first time you see it. Students deeply appreciate the clarity and precision that this method of teaching invites. They can see the underlying organization of the course material. They can see what they've said and what other students have said. And they are

able to see ideas and concepts be manipulated or transformed. Being able to reorganize ideas in real time enables my students to reach a deeper level of analysis more quickly.”

Kang has also posted samples ([map1](#), [map 2](#)) of his Civil Procedure mindmaps on [his faculty page](#) at UCLA along with a more detailed [explanation](#) of how he has managed to implement mindmapping into his teaching.

### **What are the advantages/disadvantages?**

At first glance, mindmapping software may seem a bit daunting, especially in the classroom context where a student is trying to keep up with a fast-paced law school lecture. However, once the learning curve is overcome, many mindmappers can create and manipulate a mindmap with ease. Unlike traditional outlines or handwritten notes, mindmaps can be quickly altered or rearranged by simply clicking and dragging facts, rules, holdings, or explanations to their desired location. Ideas can be linked together with ease by creating arrows, and colors can be associated with different aspects of your mindmap. But more specifically, each mindmapping program comes with its own set of advantages and disadvantages as described below.

### **What are the available tools?**

[MindManager](#) and [NovaMind](#) are the leading mindmapping software programs for PC and Mac respectively. NovaMind can import MindManager files and both programs have the ability to easily move between the mindmap and a corresponding outline. MindManager’s quick and easy one-click interoperability with Microsoft Word is a valuable tool that NovaMind does not have as a feature. Both of these programs may be expensive for some. MindManager Basic edition is \$229 and NovaMind Basic edition is \$99. There are also other PC programs such as [Visual Mind](#) and [Concept Mindmap](#).

There are also free alternatives, such as [FreeMind](#) (open-source Java, available on all platforms) and [MyMind](#) (a free Mac OS simple mindmapping program with an emphasis on outlining.) Both of these programs are less functional than the high priced versions, and do not offer as much compatibility with Microsoft Office as the pricier mindmapping programs. However, they are reasonable alternatives for students who cannot afford the pay programs.

### **Other Alternatives to Mindmapping?**

Programs such as [OmniOutliner](#) and [OmniGraffle](#) for Mac are other viable alternatives to traditional note taking separate from mindmapping software. OmniOutliner is a powerful linear outlining tool and OmniGraffle is a diagramming, drawing, and flowcharting tool, both of which can be used in the law school environment with great success.

It is my belief that students *and* teachers can benefit greatly from mindmapping software in the law school context. For the Spring 2006 semester, I decided to

take all of my reading and lecture notes within mindmapping software. Other students have seen my mindmaps in the classroom and have inquired with interest what I was taking notes with, and I have made suggestions to fellow students to try their hand at mindmapping instead of the rigid linear outlining we are accustomed to. Professors should try their hand experimenting with mindmaps as a way to present graphically detailed analyses of law and cases to classes who can follow along creating their own mindmaps.

There are many possibilities to enhance the law school experience by integrating new technologies, and departing from rigid formal outlining into mindmaps is one approach that may have positive benefits for everyone.