Applied Mind Mapping:

Extending XMind to Design-Thinking and Decision-Making

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Introduction

The objective of this tutorial is to introduce real estate students and other readers to Mind Mapping, a technique that is useful in generating new ideas, developing processes, and project planning. Since the best way to learn the ins and outs of any tool is to apply it to specific cases, this tutorial applies XMind to real estate decision making. While this tutorial focuses on XMind, it should be noted that much of the functionality can be replicated in many of the other mind mapping packages that are available. XMind is built on an open source platform, allowing for customization and enhancements by developers and advanced users interested in customizing their mind mapping.

Mind Mapping

Mind mapping is the "art" of creating a visualization of some process or decision. It consists of a series of topics or steps that are linked together. Once a process has been mapped, it can be converted to template or model that can be modified and/or extended to other processes or decisions. However, rather than being a rigid, checklist type of modelling process, creating a mind map is a dynamic and interactive, allowing the designer and/or team to think freely and inclusively, not worrying about how things are connected as much as making sure the key components are identified. Once these building blocks or "steps" are noted at a general level, attention can turn to how they are connected as well as what they entail. Since mind mapping is learning, it takes on a continuous nature in which new knowledge can be integrated. So, sit back and start opening up your mind to a new way of thinking; a form of People Learning that can help us compete with –and direct-- Machine Learning.
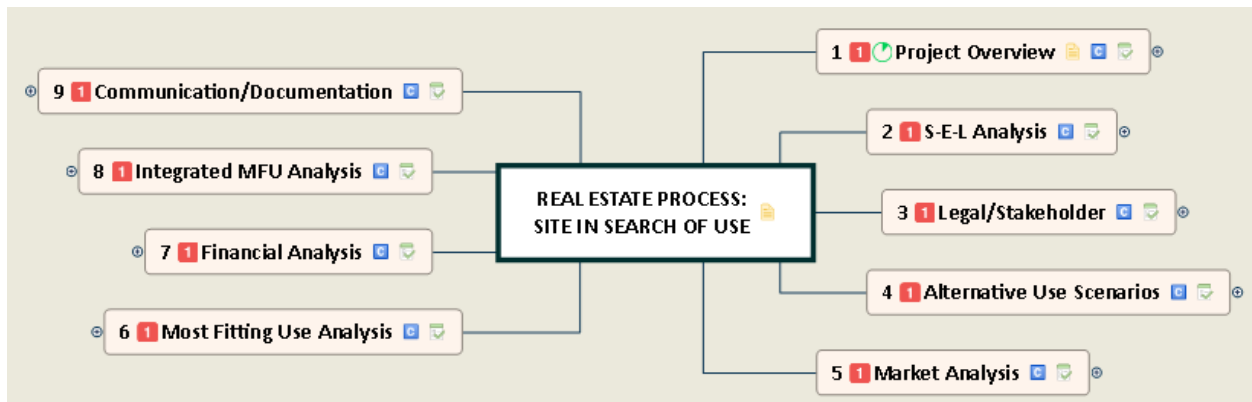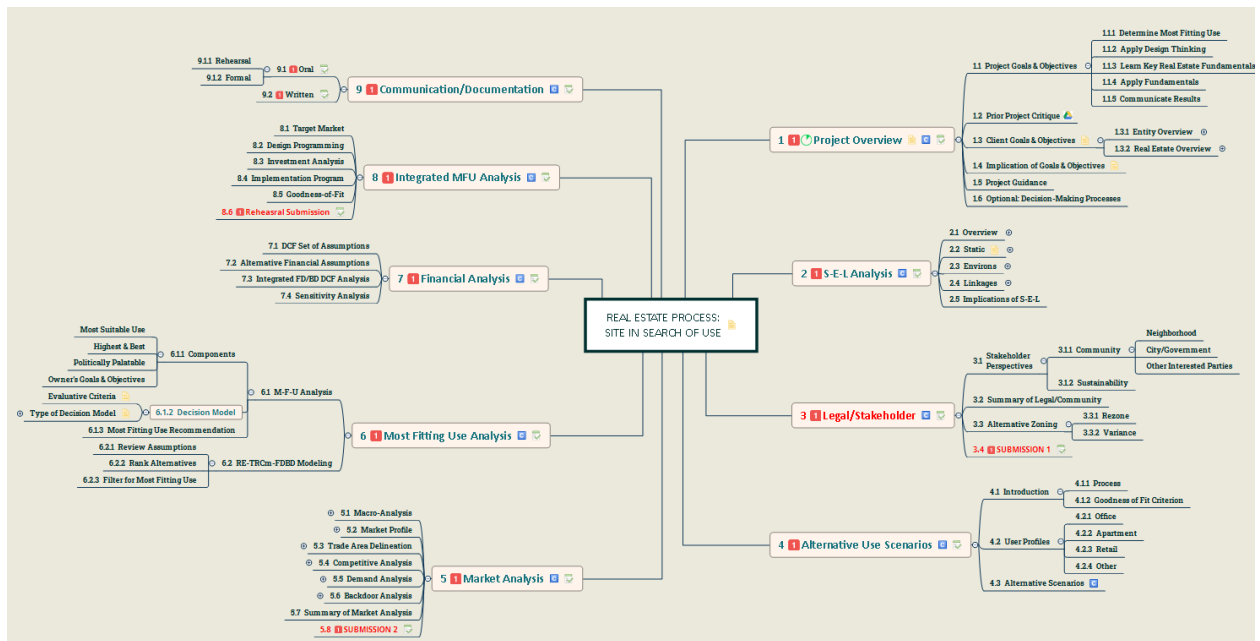

To provide students with examples of many of the features contained in this tutorial, several XMind maps created by the author and embedded herein are available. Other interested parties should contact the author at: **JRDeLisle**.

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Critical and Design Thinking

Critical Thinking

While the term "real estate" may seem fairly clear and straightforward, in reality it is a complex multidimensional product concept that entails a variety of attributes. When expanded to the "real estate industry," the complexity increases geometrically given the inherent interdisciplinary nature of the field. Since real estate decisions involve an "irretrievable commitment of scarce resources," making correct decisions related to the utilization of property and the broader industry itself is of paramount importance. of which it is a component. This need is further punctuated by the fact that the outcome of many real estate decisions creates externalities that can have significant impacts that ripple far beyond the individual property.

Exhibit 1: The Critical Thinking Process

Critical thinking is a disciplined process that is used to make objective decisions based on the breadth and depth of inquiry appropriate to the issue at hand. Exhibit 1 illustrates the critical thinking process. As noted, the process begins with an awareness of some need or another trigger event and culminates in execution of the decision. While the illustration suggests there are clear separations between one phase and another, the reality is quite different. That is, critical thinking is an interactive process in which making sure the each of the steps is addressed is more important than the sequence. In addition, the depth of inquiry for each stage may vary depending on the nature of the problem or issue being addressed.
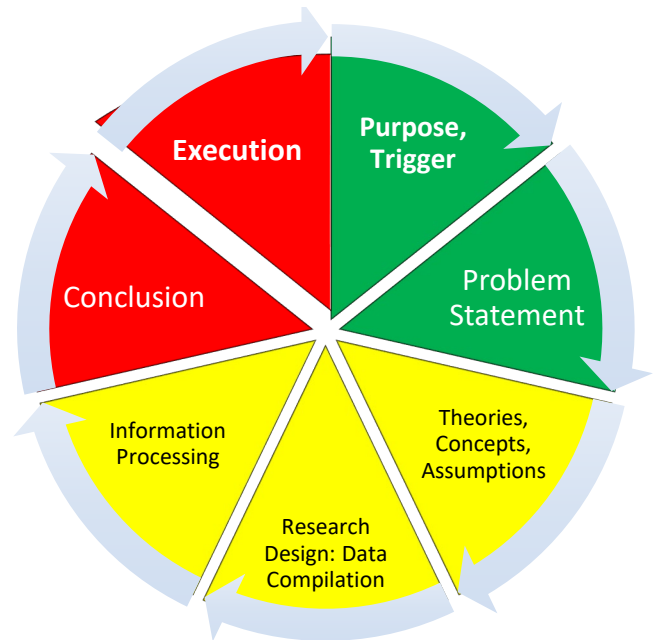
Critical thinking is a learned process by which one approaches a variety of decisions from an objective perspective. To be an effective critical thinker, one must be able to get out of one's comfort zone and become something of an intellectual pioneer. One must also be inquisitive, challenging assumptions or conventions to improve decision-making processes and outcomes. One must also be patient and tolerant and recognize that critical thinking as an interactive process, a process which benefits from vetting results with various constituencies. Thus, an effective critical thinker is one who is not only goal seeking, but is constantly open to new and more dynamic ways of thinking effectively communicate those thoughts.

Exhibit 2: The Scenic Tour to Thinking (Robert Frost)

> *"I shall be telling this with a sigh*
> *Somewhere ages and ages hence:*
> *Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—*
> *I took the one less traveled by,*
> *And that has made all the difference."*
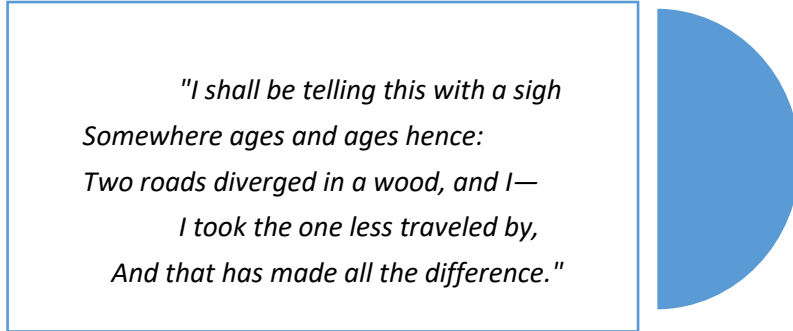
Design Thinking

While critical thinking is fairly intuitive, the emergence of "design thinking" is a relatively recent shift in semantics and philosophy that is important to note. At a simple level, design thinking is an enhancement of critical thinking with the major distinction being the emphasis placed on the customer or user/beneficiary of a product or service. One of the key components of design thinking is the intellectual curiosity and willingness to take the "scenic tour" while remaining focused on the destination. The combination of "creativity" and "disciplined analytics" is also essential to optimize solutions. During the process of design thinking, new facts may emerge which if known earlier, would have resulted in a different decision or course of action. Thus, it is critical that processes, assumptions, and alternatives that are made along the way are documented, creating an intellectual audit trail that supports creativity and action-oriented thinking that remains flexible and responsive to new information/insights.

Exhibit 3: The 3Ds of Design Thinking

Discover Empathize Ideate Design Prototype Test Revise Deliver
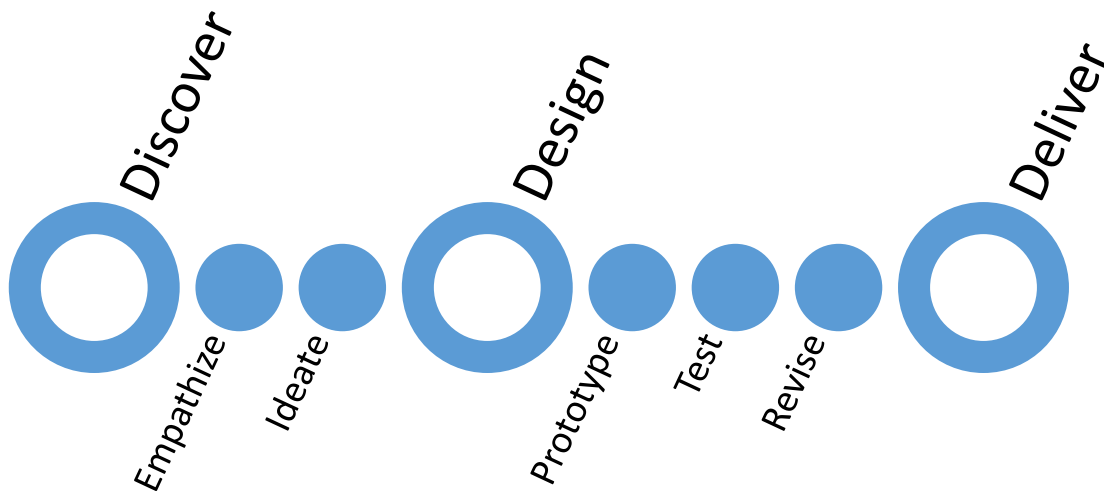
Enough with the thinking, let's start mapping….

Install XMind

Download XMind 8 Free version

Go to XMind and Download the XMind 8. You can also upgrade to the Pro Version at this point, or later to take advantage of some of the advanced features. However, the free version provides a fairly robust starting point. Note, XMind offers academic pricing for XMind 8 as well as the Zen and Mobile versions.

Exhibit 4: Download XMind 8
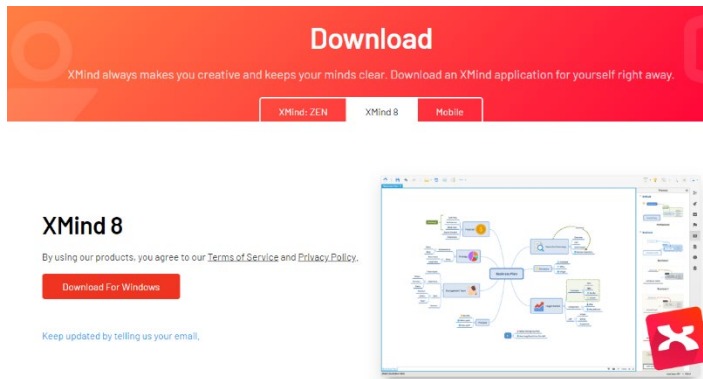
Create an Account (Optional)

If you want to share XMinds using their free Cloud App, create an account. That will allow you to post and share maps across platforms.

Explore XMind Community Shared Maps

While this tutorial will walk through the mind mapping process, one way to get your creative juices going is to explore mind maps others have created and shared. To view them, go to the XMind Share Center. You can scroll down and see 100s of maps that you can download and modify for your own use. Many of them use creative features that you can "reverse engineer" to learn as well as enhance your own maps.
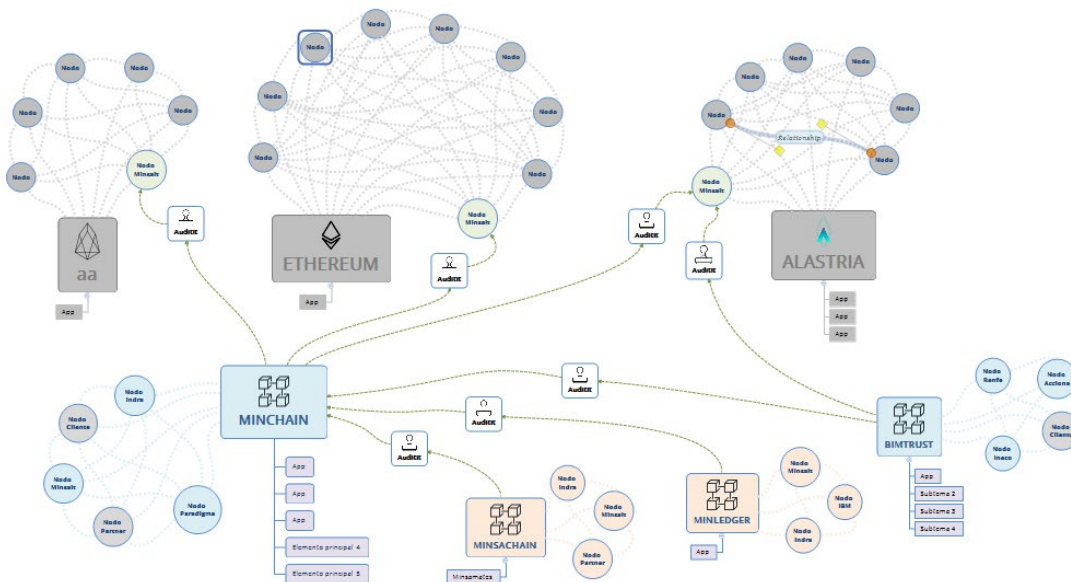
Using XMind

Create New Workbook

There are two alternatives for creating a new Workbook from scratch: selecting a Blank Structure; or, Selecting a Template.

Exhibit 5: Blank File Creation Options
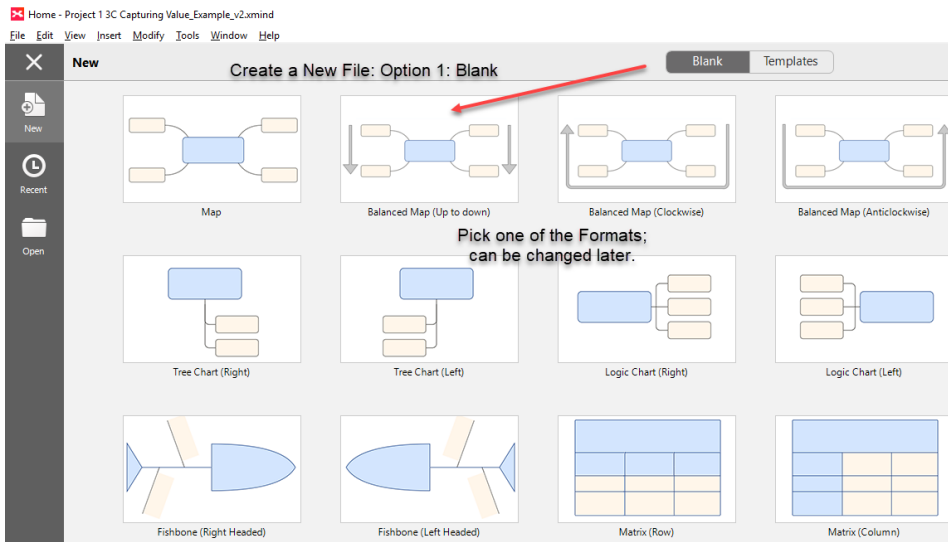
Depending on your project, you might find a prepared template that you can use as is or that you can modify for your needs. This will fast-track the process and give you some ideas that you might adopt in your work.

Exhibit 6: File from Template
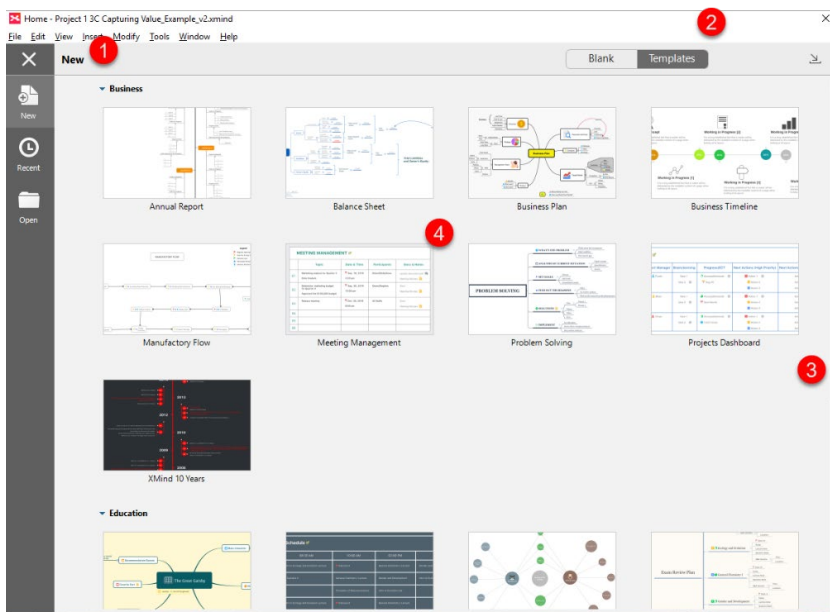
XMind uses the term Workbooks to refer to separate Files. Once you launch XMind and choose Blank or Template, it will open a new workbook that shows up as a tab name "Untitled."

Exhibit 7: Workbooks
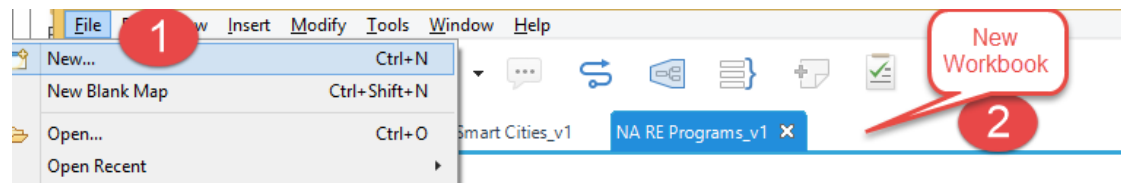
XMind Workbook Sheets

Basic Structure/Features

Depending on whether you selected a Blank form or a Template, you will see the same basic structure with several features. These include: 1) Ribbon options which toggle on for more detailed choices, 2) Common tasks as shortcuts, 3) a list of Open XMind Workbooks (you can cut and paste among files), 4) a Central Topic or your starting point, just click and relabel (if you selected a template there will be more topics), 5) a tab indicating Sheets in your Workbook at the bottom (you can add more; right-click to rename), 6) expansion/navigation options that open upon selection, and 7), advanced features available in the Pro version (e.g., Export to PDF, Brainstorming, Gantt Chart, Convert to presentation).

Getting Started

Given the intuitive nature of XMind, for many or you the best way to learn and draw from this tutorial may be to create a new blank XMind map and experiment with it as you explore the various features. To get started, once you have a Central Topic just mouse over it and you can replace the text by simply typing into the box. If you want to wrap text to keep the box small, use SHIFT-Return to start a new line. At this point, Click on the Central Topic box and enter the TAB key; this creates a subtopic. If you want multiple tabs coming from the Central Topic, just click on the box and enter TAB again. To create a hierarchy, Click on the Subtopic and TAB. You can repeat this process to lay out your basic structure. Although you should give some thought to the layout and structure of your map, it is often more important to get your thoughts/topics on the screen. Once there, you can easily CLICK on a topic and drag it to a new location; that will alter the map and move the TOPIC and any SUBTOPICS to the same branch or location. The UNDO Icon in the favorites bar let's you roll back changes

Exhibit 8: XMind Layout
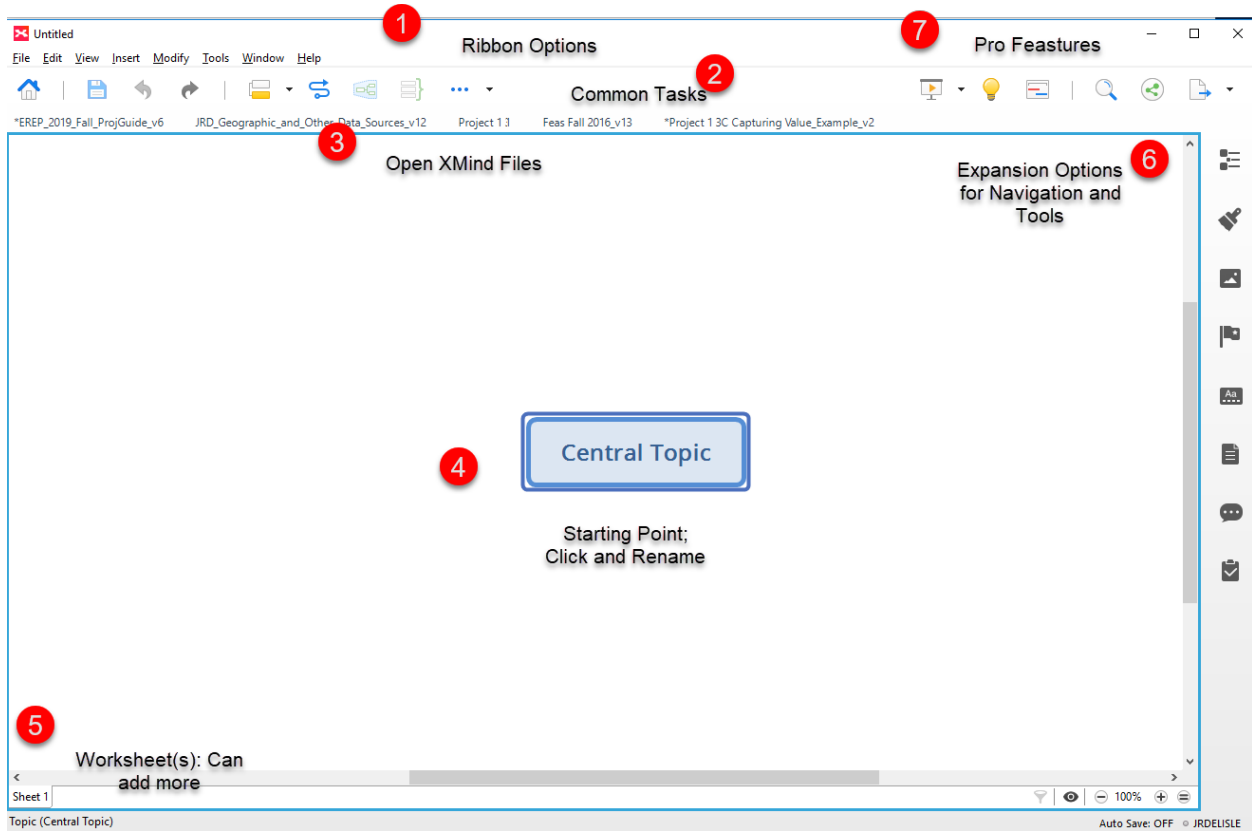
Add Topics and Subtopics

Overview

There are three ways to populate your XMind; using the tab key to add to each topic/subtopic, adding in the Outline Feature, or using the Insert Tab and drop-down menu. There are four kinds of topics: Central Topic (the starting point), Main Topic (first level), Subtopic (multiple layers of topics), and Floating Topics (placed anywhere without linkages).

Exhibit 9: Create Topics by Tabs
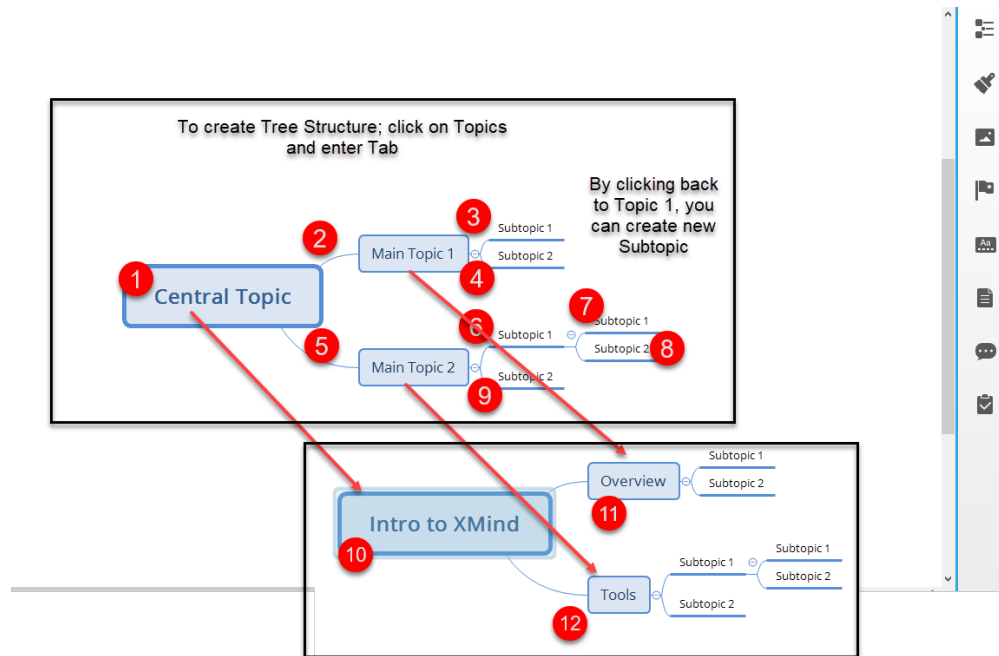
Create Topics Via Insert Tab

You can also Create Topics by using the Insert Tab and selecting from the dropdown menu. In addition to pointing to the Insert Tab, you can use the shortcut ALT-I (note, this syntax is used for each of the Menu items). As noted, the topics can be placed anywhere depending on which Topic you highlighted and which option you select.

Exhibit 10: Insert Topics
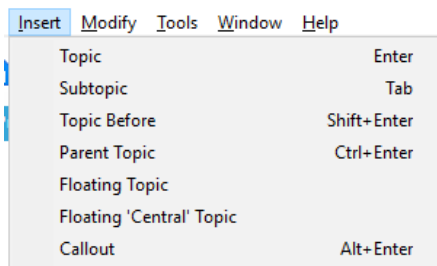
Once you have created topics, you can rename them by clicking on the Topic and typing in the desired label. If you want to wrap text to 2 lines, use CTRL-ENTER.

Floating Topics

Floating Topics can be added via the Insert Menu or by quickly double-clicking oh the open Map. This is useful for brainstorming and getting Topics on the Map which can later be placed where they belong and populated with more detail. Floating topics can be renamed, and can have Subtopics and other enhancements.

Exhibit 11: Floating Topics to Brainstorm

Change Order or Layout of Topics on a Map
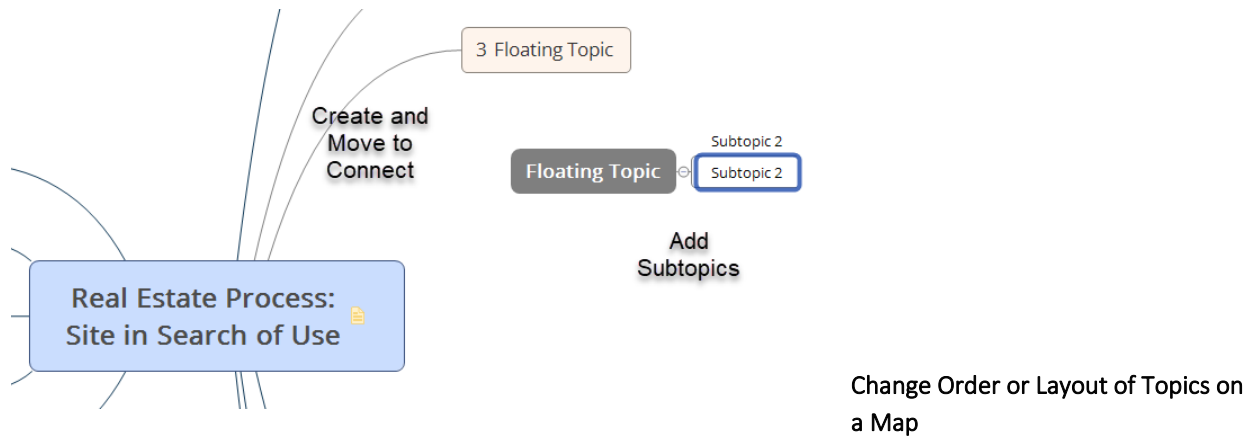
To move topics, simply drag and drop once a connection is automatically established. Sub Topics can also be inserted to change the order and/or add more features to the map. Connections can be deleted which creates a form of Floating Topic.

Exhibit 12: Changing Map Layout/Topics
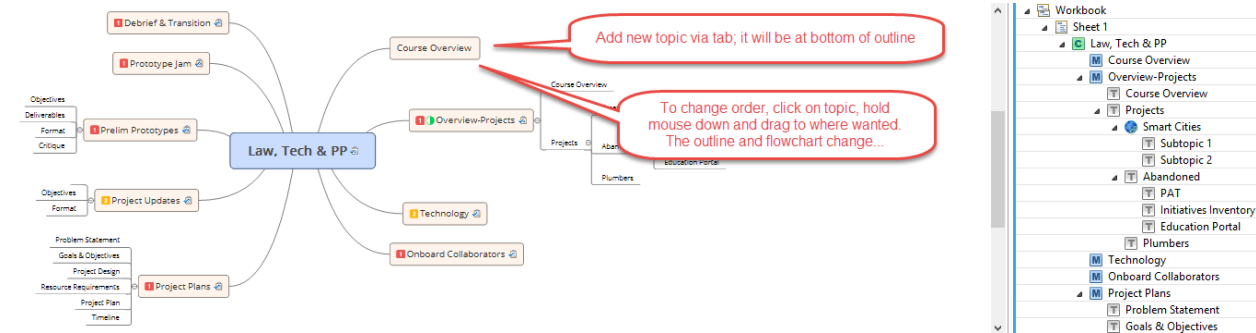
Expanding/Collapsing Topics

For each Topic/Subtopic you create, XMind will add a placeholder until you rename it. To the right of each Topic with Subtopics, a small + Icon appears. You can toggle that on and off by clicking on it. In Expand mode the Subtopics will be shown; in the Contract mode (-) the Subtopics will be hidden.

Exhibit 13: Expand/Contract Icons
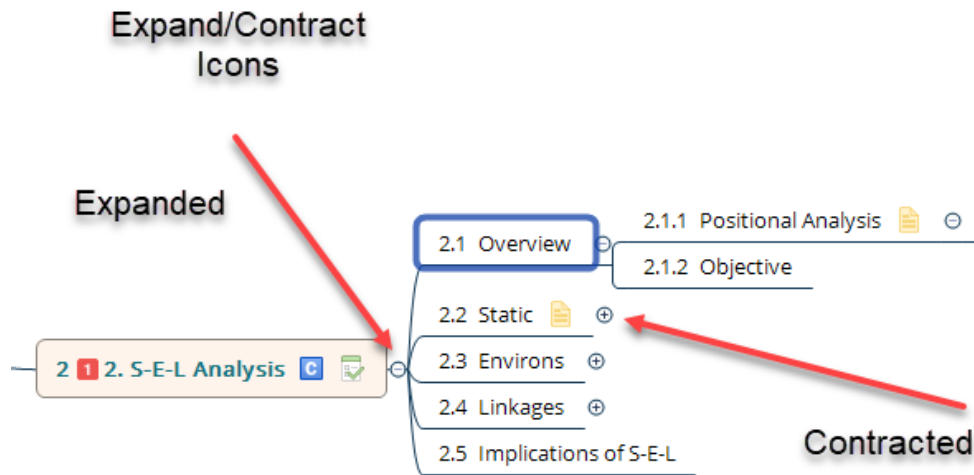
Mind Map Structure

In some cases, changes to the order of topics may change the basic format/structure of your map. To apply a different Structure or Layout, RIGHT-CLICK on the topic of interest
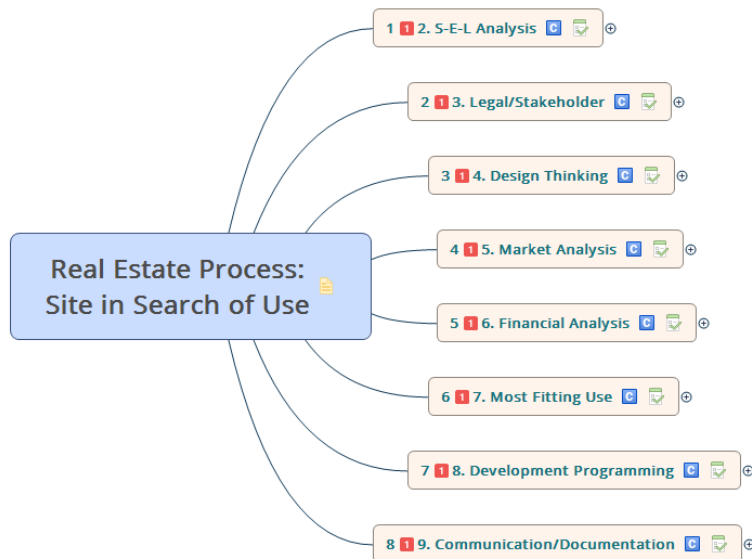
Changing Structure

To Change the Structure of a Map, go to the MAIN Topic and RIGHT-CLICK. At this point you will see "Structure" as a menu option.

Exhibit 14: Select Structure for Changes to Selection
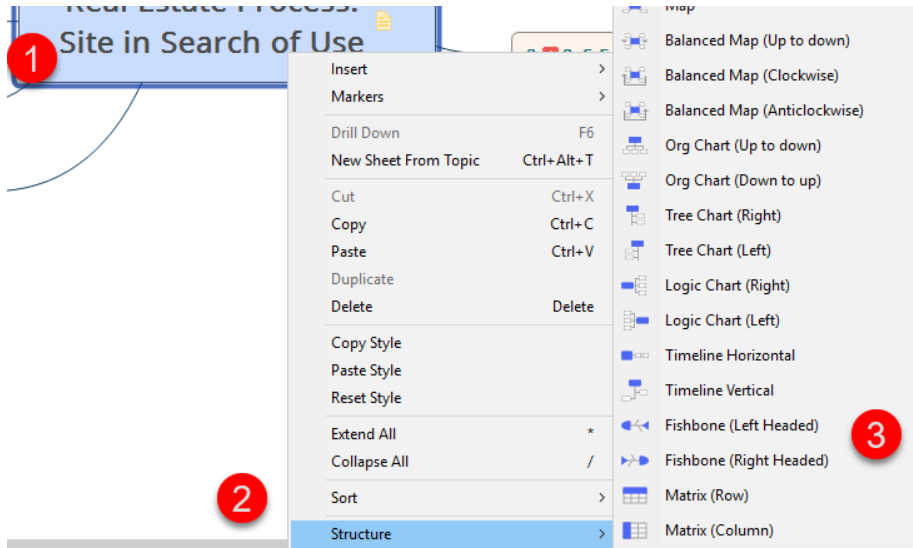
Exhibit 15: Fishbone Structure & Optional Themes
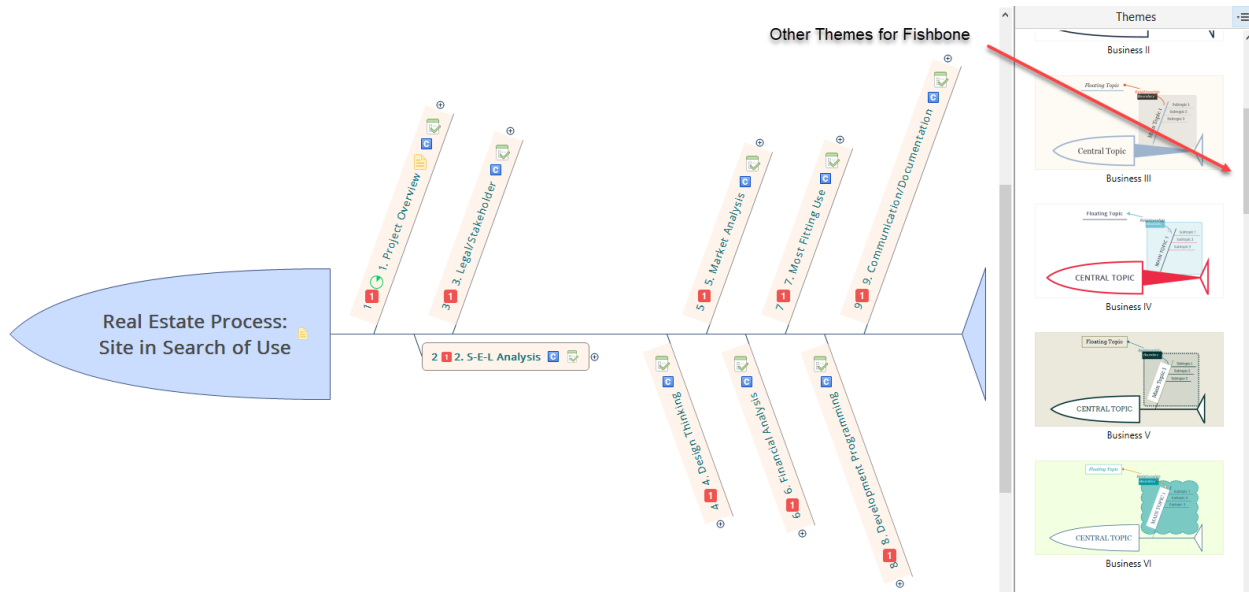
Outline View and Thumbprint

To View Outline Panel, click on icon to upper right. You can change labels and/or add topics from either the map or the Outline Panel. The TAB addition will work in either and the results will show up in the other frame. Another useful feature for larger mind maps is the Thumbnail preview screen activated by clicking on the EYE-icon. If you scroll around in the preview, the larger Mind Map moves around s as well.

Exhibit 16: Create Topics in Outline
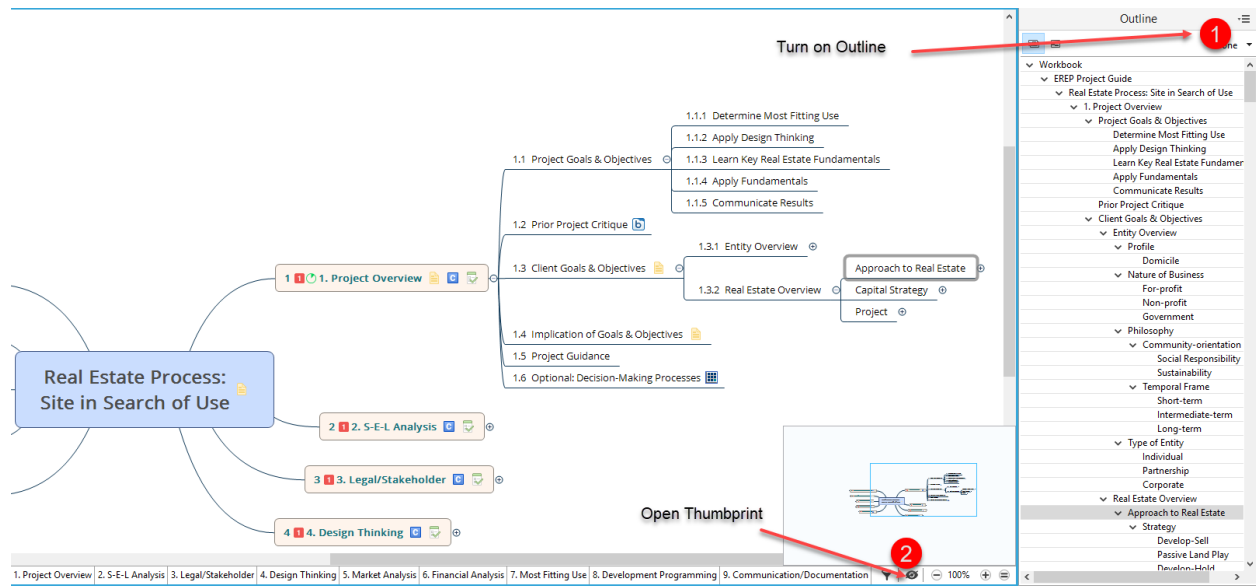
Changing Formats

There are a number of ways of accessing the Format options, including RIGHT-CLICK on a topic or selected group of topics. Again, you do not have to completely enfold the topics of interest, but just overlap part of each one to include it in the changes.
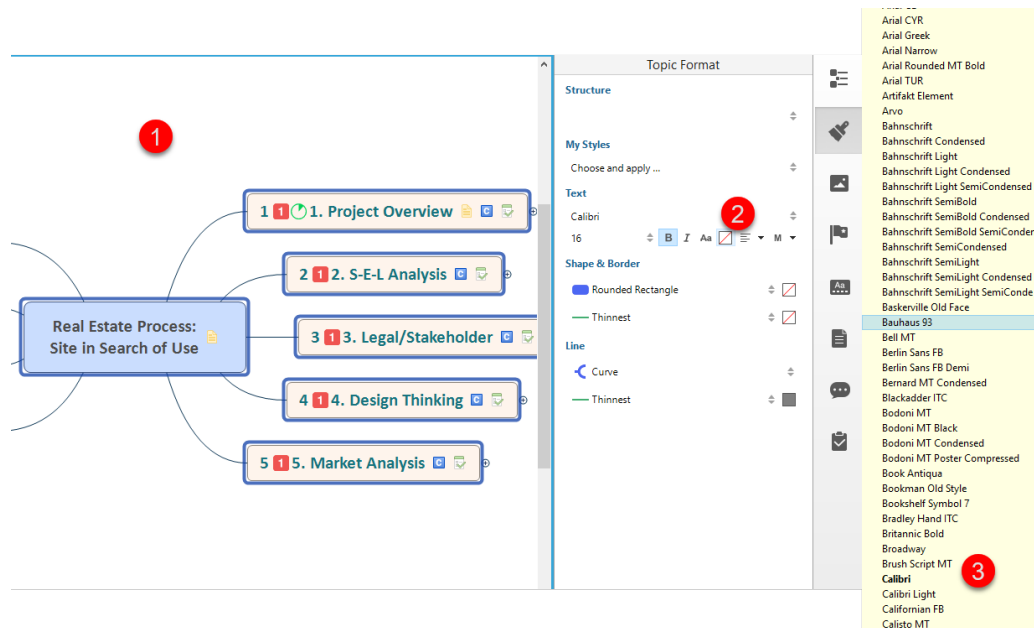
Menus

Overview

As with many software packages, XMind has a number of tools that can be used to build, modify, save, or export files. In this tutorial, we will focus on some of these tools and defer to the XMind community

and company to introduce more advanced features. That said, it is useful to review each of the menu tabs to point up some basic functions you will need to successfully mind map. The Menu Folders at the top of the map screen can be accessed by clicking on them, or by using the shortcuts (e.g., ALT-F for File, ALT-E for Edit; some operating systems will use CTRL instead of ALT). Once opened, the tabs are organized hierarchically, indicating additional shortcuts and in some cases, pointing to an expansion menu for more detailed functions.

File Menu

Exhibit 17: File Menu
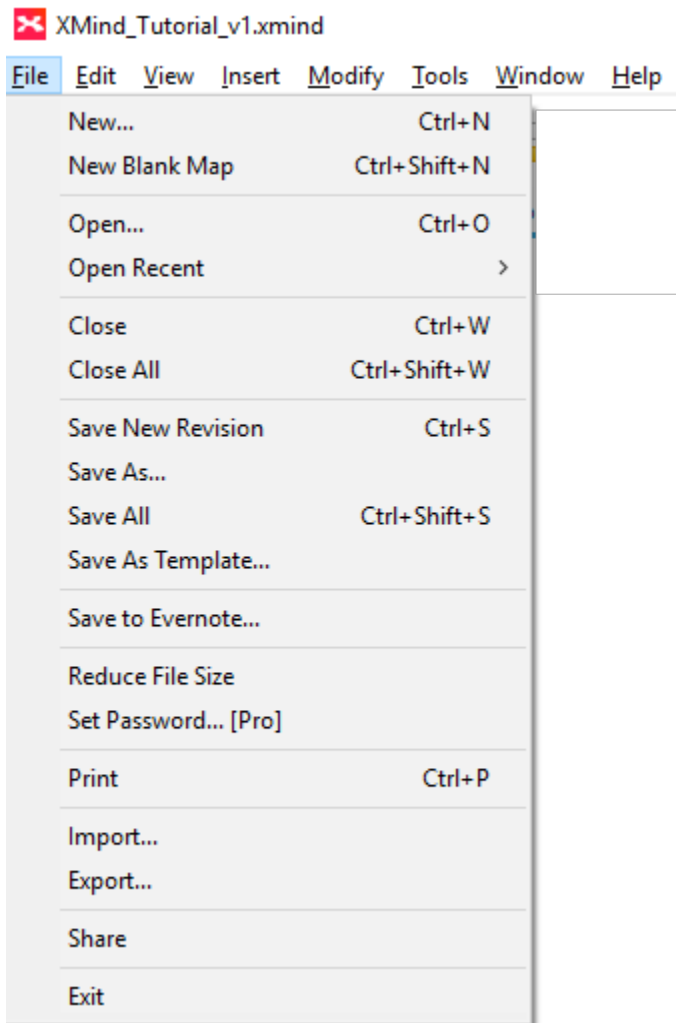
The File Menu is fairly familiar, containing the basic New, Open Recent, and Close functions. The Save functions provide some additional options including Versioning in which XMind keeps a copy and log of your files without requiring any naming convention. However, if you are collaborating with others and/or making continuous changes, I recommend adopting some version number (e.g., Project1_v1) to make sure you and your colleagues are both looking at the same file.

If you have the Pro version, there are some additional feature related to Password Protection, Import and Export. Sharing gives you a number of options for providing others access to your maps, either in public or private forums.

Edit

Overview

The Edit Menu allows you to perform some common tasks. Whether the individual items are available depends on whether you are on a TOPIC when you select the Edit Menu or elsewhere on the map. In general, the shortcuts are the same as most operating systems, including Undo, Cut, Copy, Paste.

Duplicate allows you to create a copy of some process and subprocesses and then Paste elsewhere. This is handing when you have a common framework.
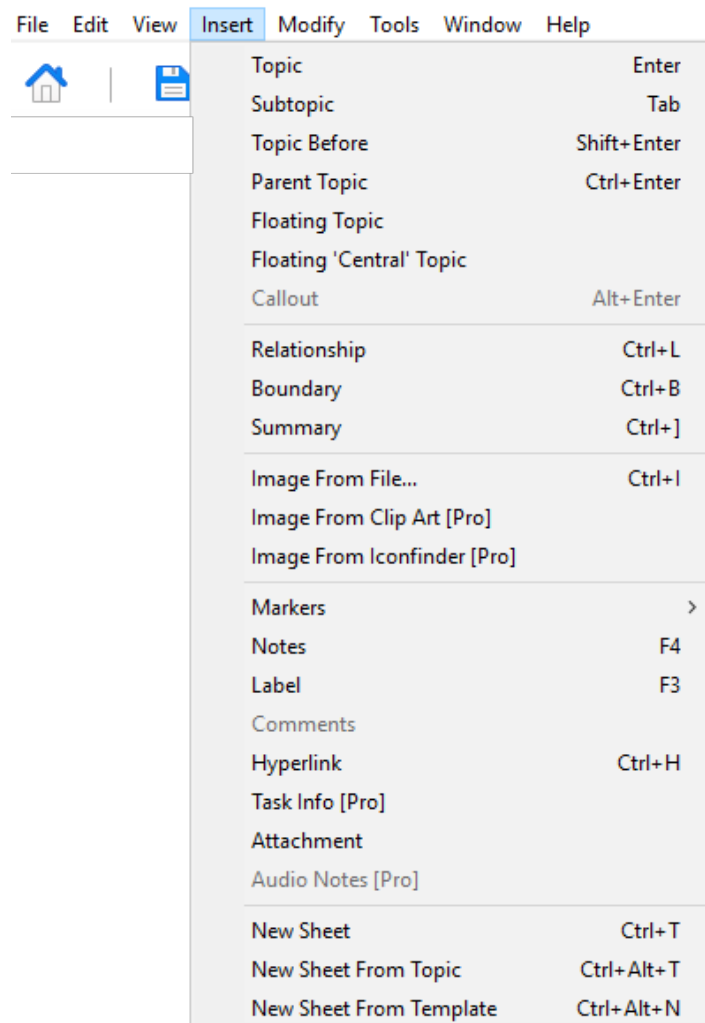
Exhibit 18: File Menu
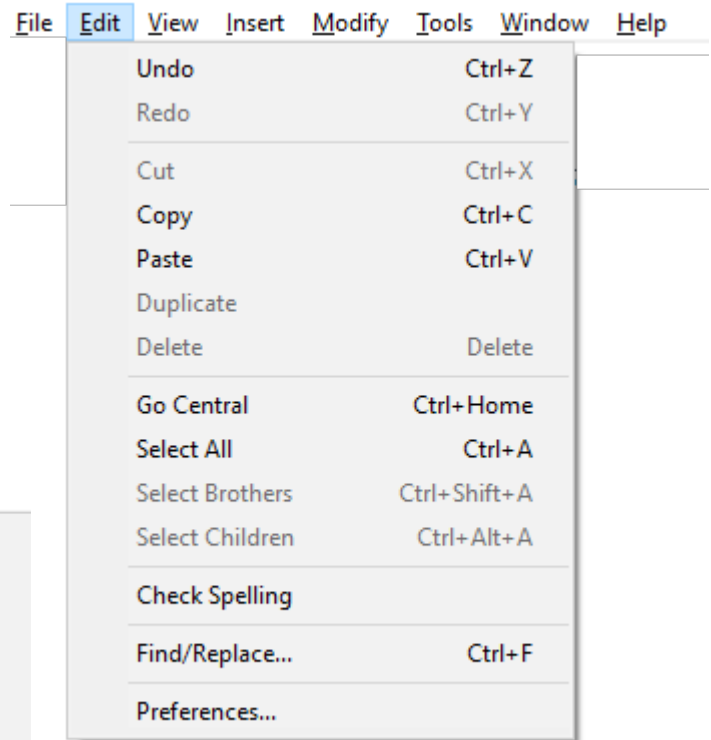
Insert Menu

The Insert Menu has a number of features that can be used in building out your mind maps. Depending on whether you are on a Topic or the general map canvas, different options will be bold and active vs. greyed out.
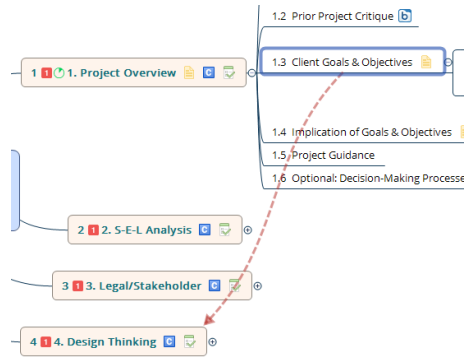
Exhibit 19: Insert Menu

Insert Menu Options

Relationships

The Relationship task allows you to visually point out how some elements feed into others. This is more of visualization than a project plan since project planning is a separate component of the Pro version of XMind.

Exhibit 20: Showing Relationships

Boundary

In addition to Callouts, you can visually highlight an area or set of topics by Inserting a Boundary. You do not have to completely enfold the topics to select; just touch them while clicking the Left-Mouse button

Exhibit 21: Boundary Highlight
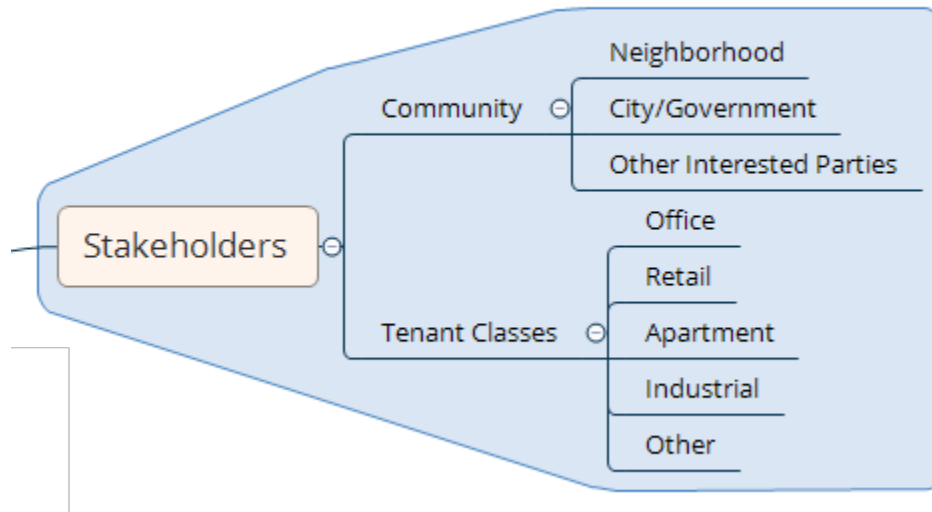
Summary

In addition to Boundaries and Callouts, you can Insert Summary to indicate how certain Topics/Subtopics feed into some conclusion. This is accomplished similar to boundaries by highlighting the Topics/Subtopics and then Insert Boundary.

Exhibit 22: Creating a Summary
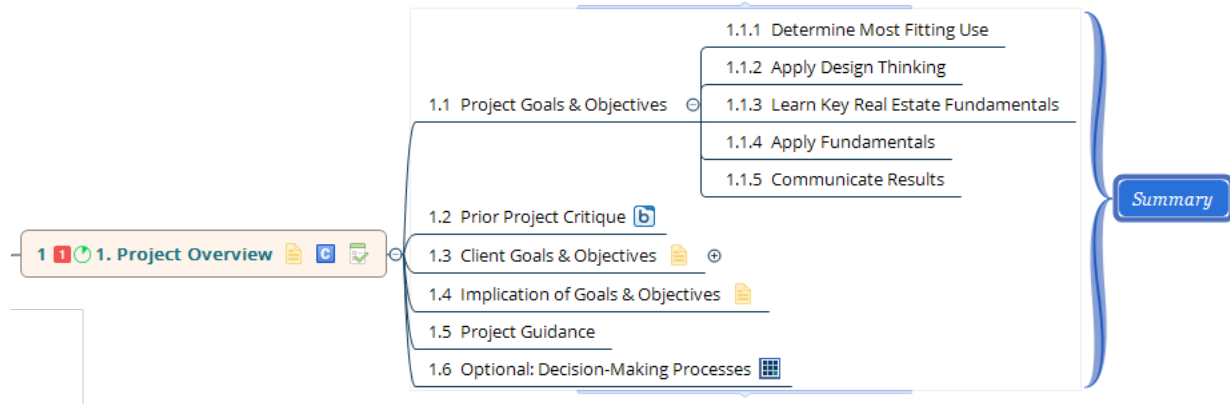
Once you have created a Summary button, you can edit it and add features to populate it with information and/or links.
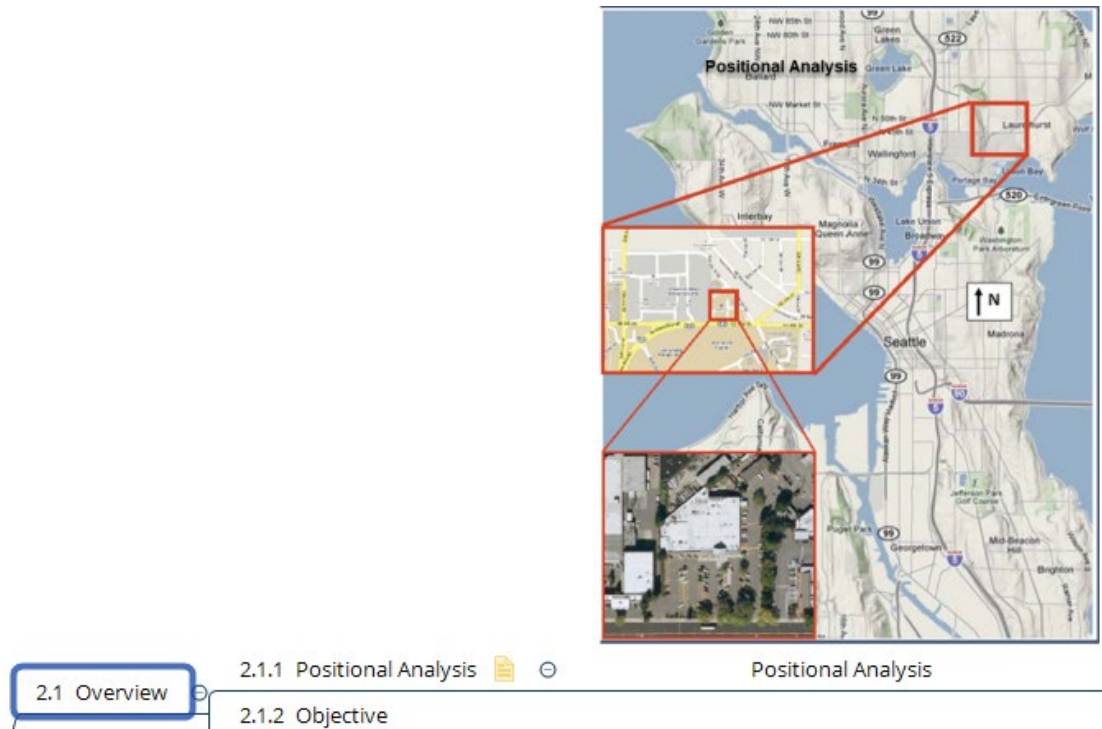
Exhibit 23: Adding to a Summary
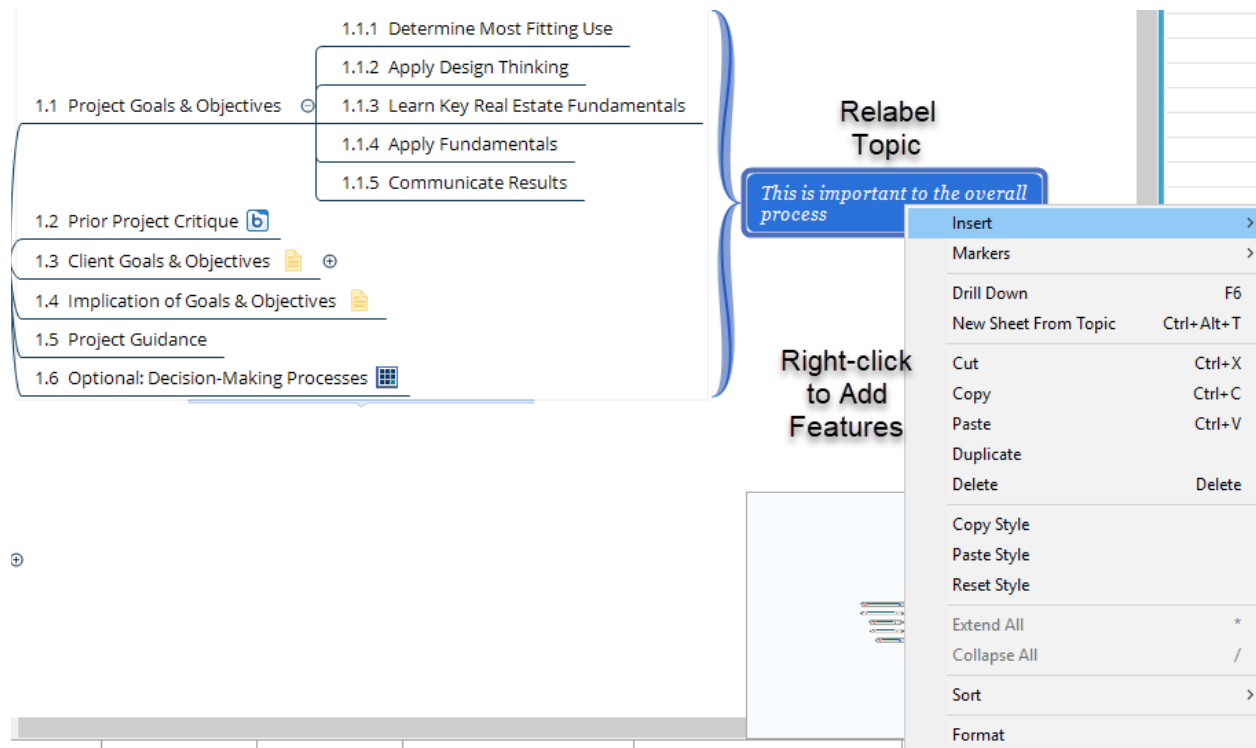
Insert Images

To enhance the visual appeal and/or clarity of your mind map, you can Insert Images. The Images can be Expanded or Contracted depending on whether you want them to appear on the map. You can Insert from your clipboard, or from an Image file you upload.

Exhibit 24: Inserted Image

Markers

Inserting Markers can help enliven a Mind Map and also provide more information. For example, if not using the Pro version with the Gantt chart, one can still track progress by Inserting Progress Markers. A variety of other markers/images can also be Inserted depending on your mapping needs and/or artistic tendencies.

Exhibit 25: Inserted Marker Options
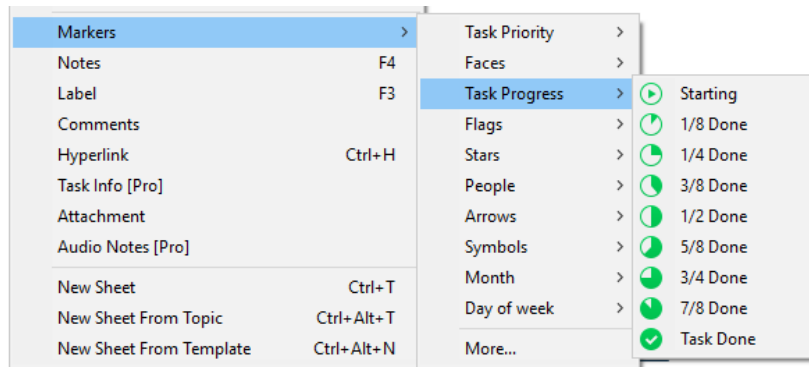
While the core of your mind map tends to consist of short button labels, other information can be added by Inserting other materials.

Notes

Notes can be inserted to provide more details than displayed on the map. The reader activates the notes by Mousing over the Icon to the right of the Topic and/or by toggling the navigation pane to the right to select the Note Icon (vs. the Outline or other view). These notes can be populated by typing directly in the box, or by cutting and pasting from another document or file.
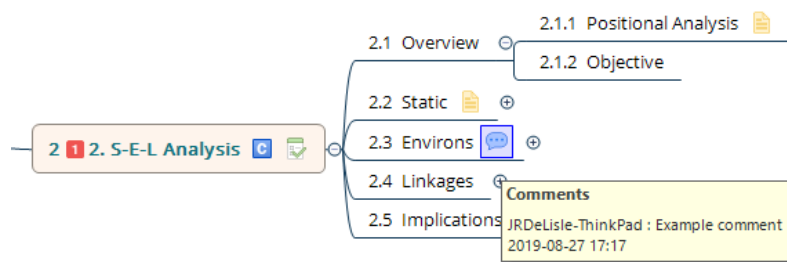
Exhibit 26: Notes for Documentation
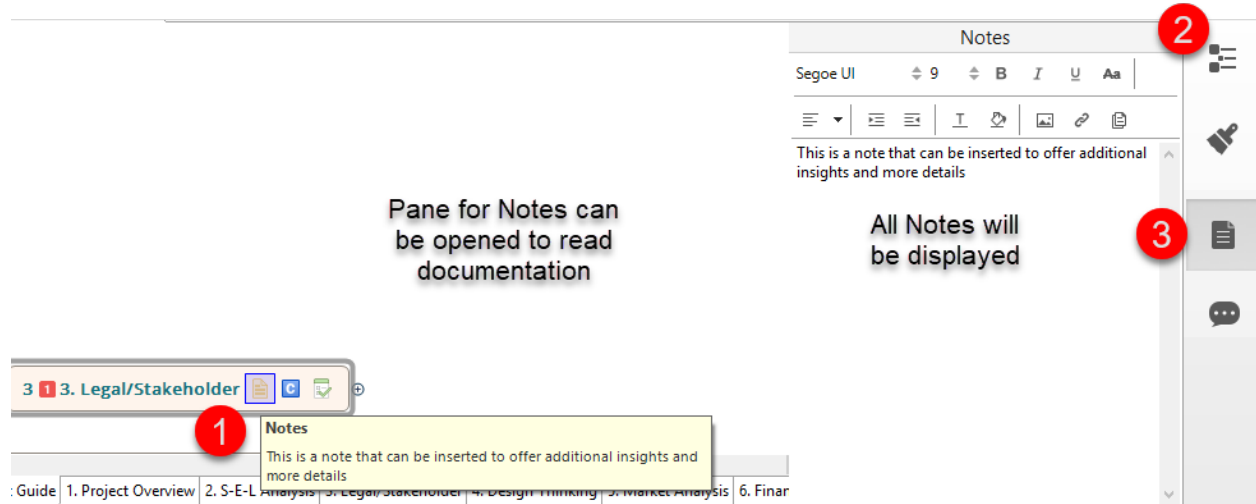
Comments

In addition to Notes, you or another collaborator can add comments. These comments are generally shorter than notes and create an audit trail with respect to the source and diming of the comments.

Exhibit 27: Comments for Collaboration & Documentation

Hyperlinks

In some cases, it may be appropriate to add links to external websites. The Insert Hyperlinks option allows you to create interactive links to specific URLs. This feature extends the scope of the Mind Map without adding to its size since the links open in the default browser of the user.

Exhibit 28: Insert Hyperlinks
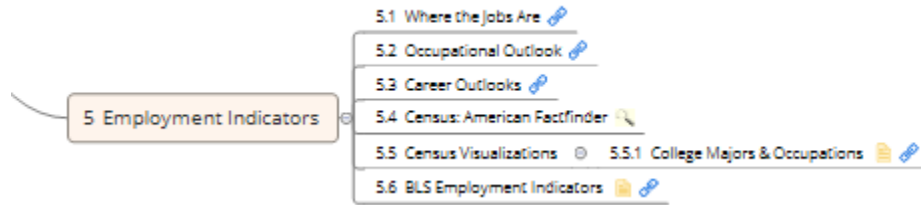
Attachments

While the hyperlink feature is useful when the desired content is located on a webpage, in some cases you may want to attach a file to the Mind Map. This "embeds" the file so that, when the Workbook is Exported, it is attached to the file. While this will increase the size of the Mind Map, it may be useful in situations where users may be offline or where customized materials that are not hosted on a website are included. Once the Link has been established, the content can be accessed by clicking on the icon.

Exhibit 29: Attachments
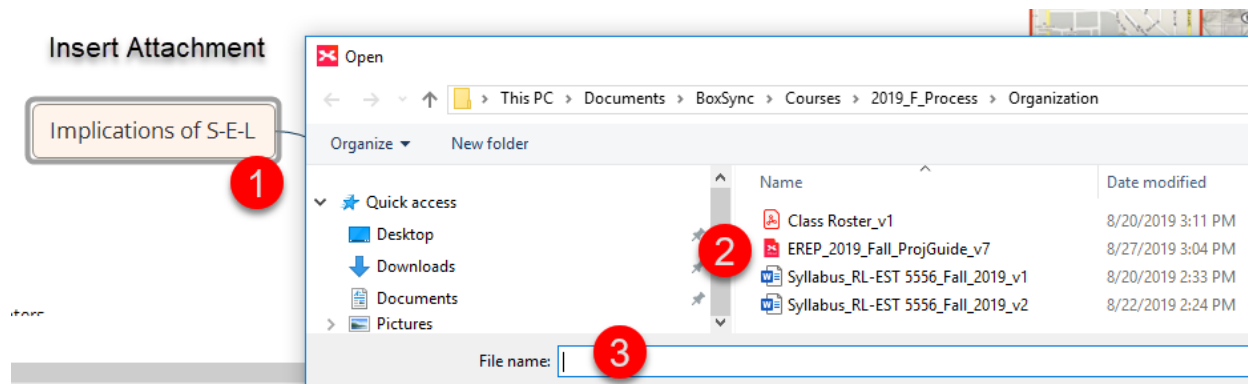
Audio Notes

In the Pro Version, you can attach Audio Notes or clips to Topics or Subtopics. Once the Audio file is prepared, a user can click on the note to listen to the track. To Activate Audio Notes, click on a Topic where you want it pasted and then Insert Audio Notes. That will immediately open a Recording Window so be prepared to talk. Once you enter Stop, the recording is located as a separate Topic. This can be played back by others and makes the XMind more "interactive." Audio notes can be replaced to allow you to update portions of a map or provide more clarity or documentation for other users.
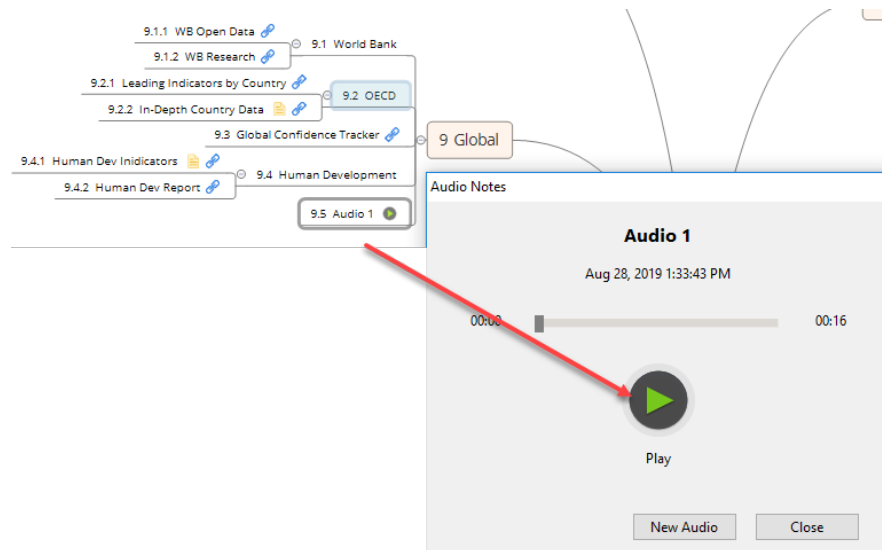
Exhibit 30: Inserting Audio Notes
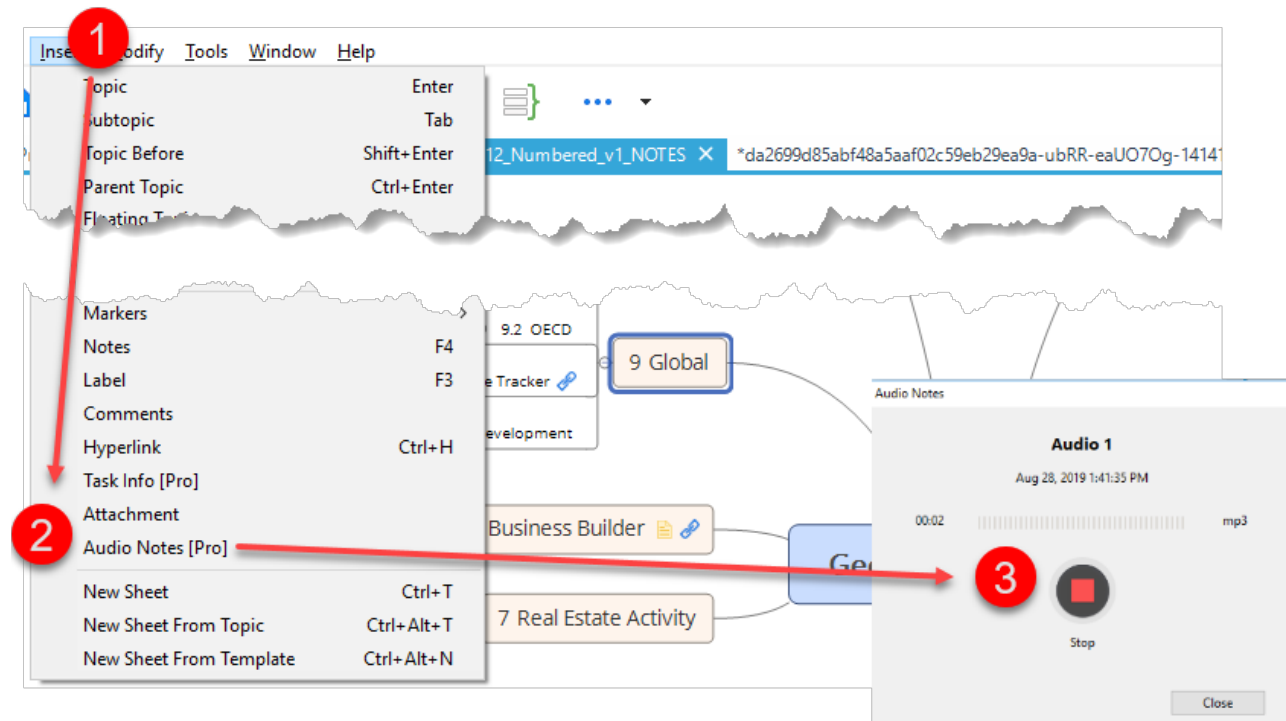
Playing Audio Notes

Once audio notes have been created, the New Topic Entitled Audio 1 (or other number in auto sequencing is added).

Exhibit 31: Playing Back Audio

Add Sheets to Workbooks

Sheet Tab

 There are some options to add sheets to a workbook. At the bottom left of the screen is a Tab that by defaults is labelled Sheet 1. To Rename the tab, RIGHT-CLIC and choose Rename. In the same menu, you

can see the option of creating new sheets; right click and add Sheet (similar to Excel). Once you have created new sheet(s), right-click on the tab to rename them. Step 3 allows you to create a blank sheet or use a template. As with the mind map itself, you can move the SHEETs around by LEFT-CLICK on the SHEET and dragging it to where you want it placed.

Exhibit 32: Adding Sheets

Exhibit 33: Inserting Sheets via Menu
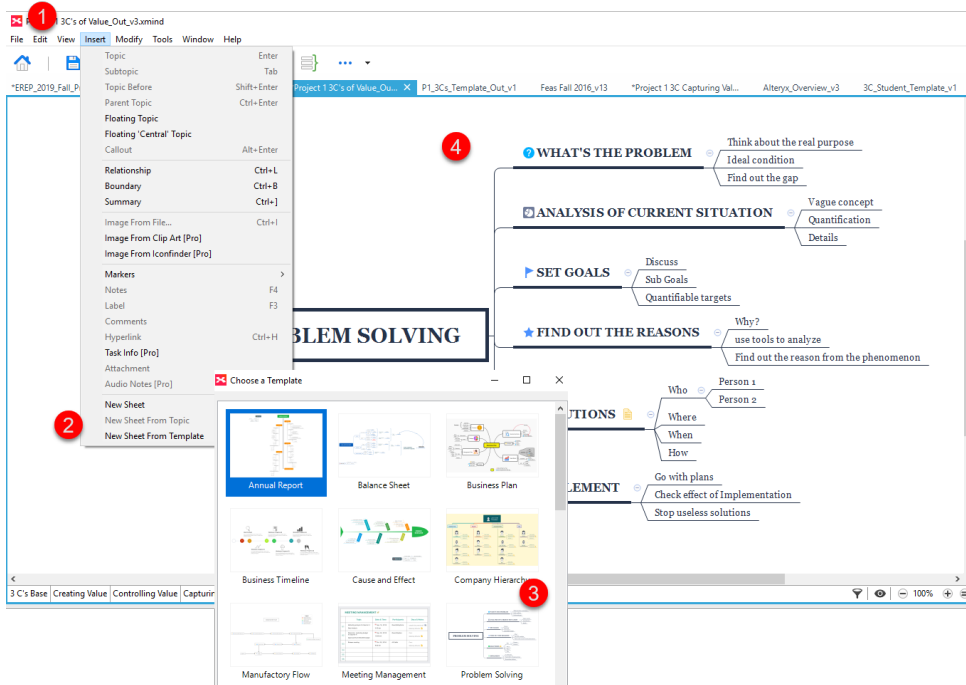
You can also Insert New Sheet from the menu. This allows you to select from prepared templates for various types of activities, in this case, a problem-solving model. You can them Rename the sheet and customize the template to meet your needs.

Make Sheet from Topic

Once you have a basic structure, you can make separate worksheets for each element. This can be helpful if your model has a lot of detail and/or components which could be unwieldy if constrained to one sheet. To add a new sheet, right-click on the topic you want made into a sheet, and select Insert

New Sheet from Topic. The Insert also allows you to create a new sheet with the same name as the topic and Link to it from the Main menu. Alternatively, select topic and right click to see Insert Sheet. This will pull the Topic and its Subtopics. Note that editing at the Sheet Level will not show up at the Main Level so you should think about how detailed you go for each Sheet.

There is a work-around that you can use to update the Main Source sheet if you want to include more details from the individual sheets. Before making these changes, save your file so you can roll back in case some issues arise. To pull information from a Detailed Sheet to the Main Sheet, Copy the Contents on the detailed sheet and then go to the Main Sheet and delete the old content. At this point, simply Paste the content in your clipboard. You may have to re-arrange the map depending on how large the clip was and how the map is laid out. At this point you can delete the Sheet from which you drew the information. Remove the Linkage Icon from the Main Sheet and then simply "Create New Sheet from Topic." Rename it and move it to where you want the sheet.
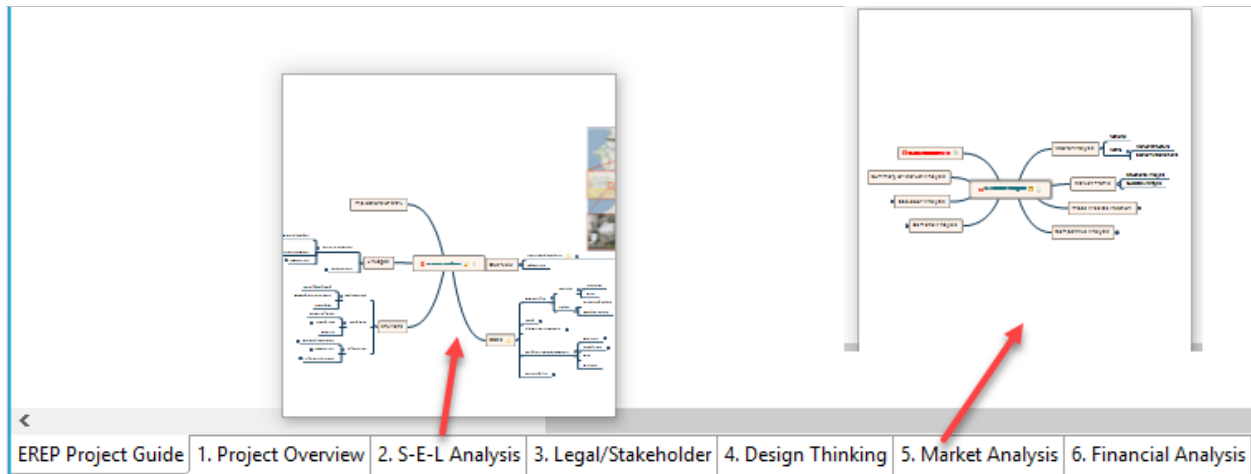
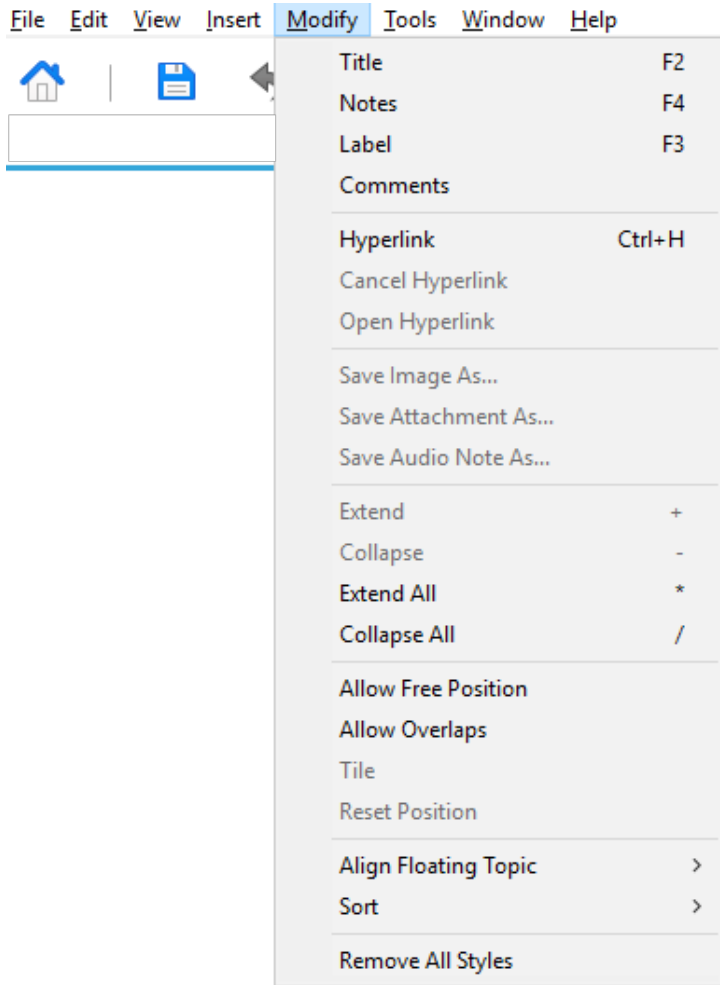*Exhibit 34: Making Sheets from Topics*
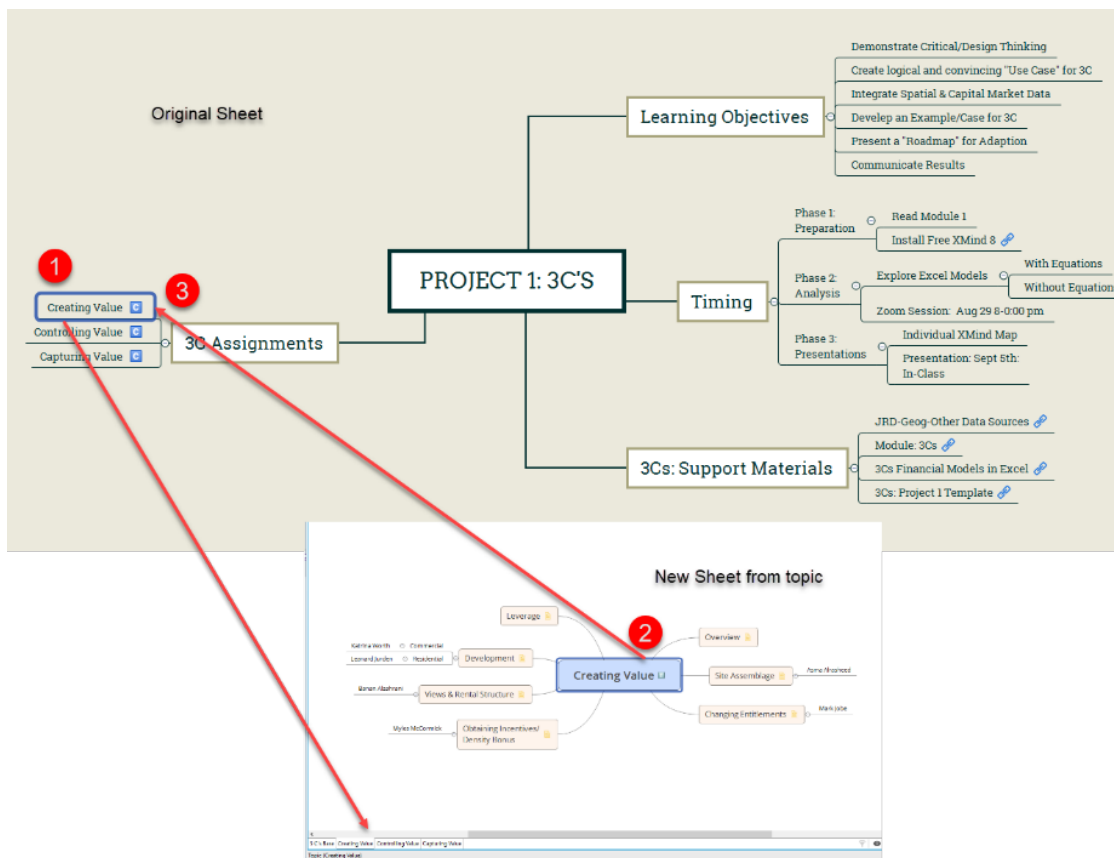
Previewing Sheets
Once you have created multiple Sheets, you can preview the contents of each sheet by mousing over the respective Sheet Tabs.

Exhibit 35: Previewing Sheets

| EREP Project Guide | 1. Project Overview | 2. S-E-L Analysis | 3. Legal/Stakeholder | 4. Design Thinking | 5. Market Analysis | 6. Financial Analysis |

Modify Menu

Exhibit 36: Modify Menu

The Modify Menu provides a number of useful tools, some of which are also on the Insert Menu including Notes, Labels, Comments, and Hyperlinks. If the Topic that is selected before entering the Modify Menu has Images, Attachments, or Audio Notes, those can be saved outside of XMind. The Modify Menu also allows you to quickly Extend or Collapse the mind map overall, or for the selected topic. The RIGHT-Mouse click will also open many of these features. If you use Floating Topics in a freeform map, you can align the topics for more visual appeal.

Window Menu

Overview

The Windows Menu has a number of useful features that can make your maps more "user-friendly." Some of these features are available for the free version, while others are restricted to the Pro version. As with some of the other Menu Items, several of them can be access in other menus (e.g., Format, Markers, Notes, Comments) or through the use of shortcuts. Readers are encouraged to review the options to discover added features.

Exhibit 37: Window Menu
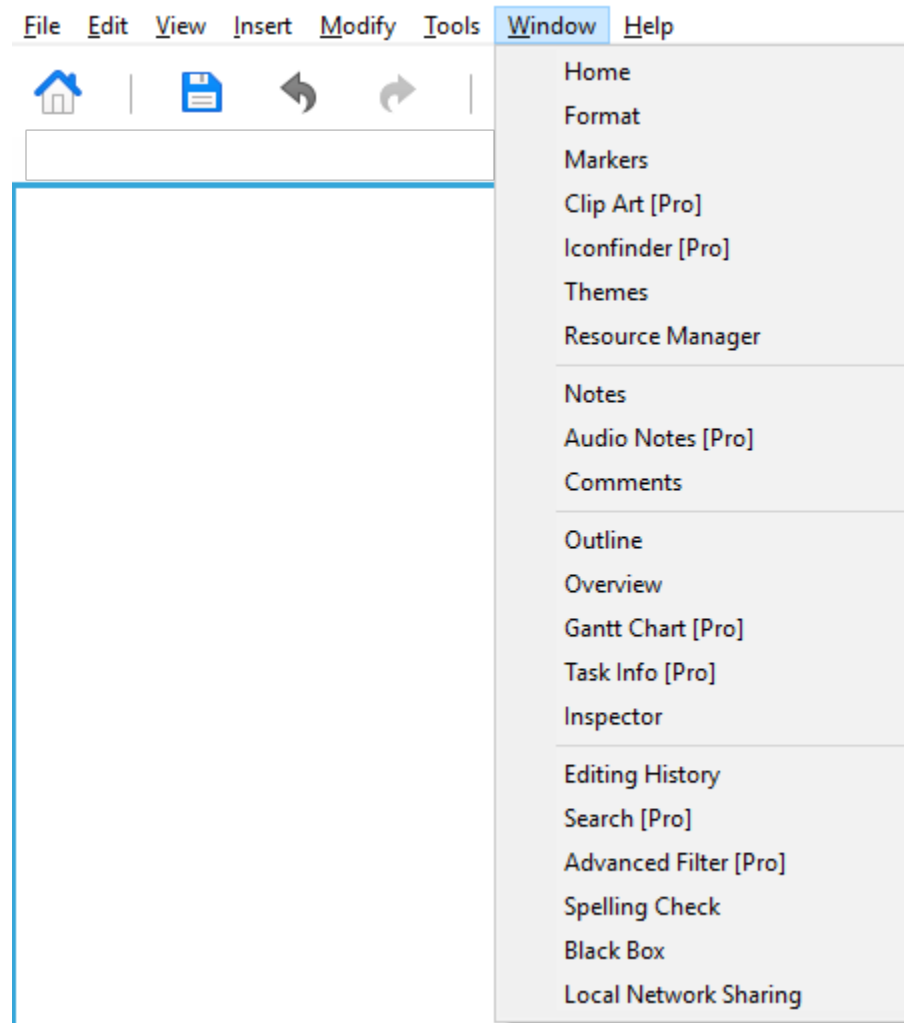
Resource Manager

Exhibit 38: Resource Menu

The Resource Manager allows you to import various "resources" into your mind map taking advantage of some pre-packaged items. In the Window Menu, Resource Manager is a shortcut to a number of helpful resource items that can be embedded in your Mind Map. Options include Clip Art, Markers, Themes, Styles, and Templates. A number of these can also be accessed via the navigation icons to the right of the screen.
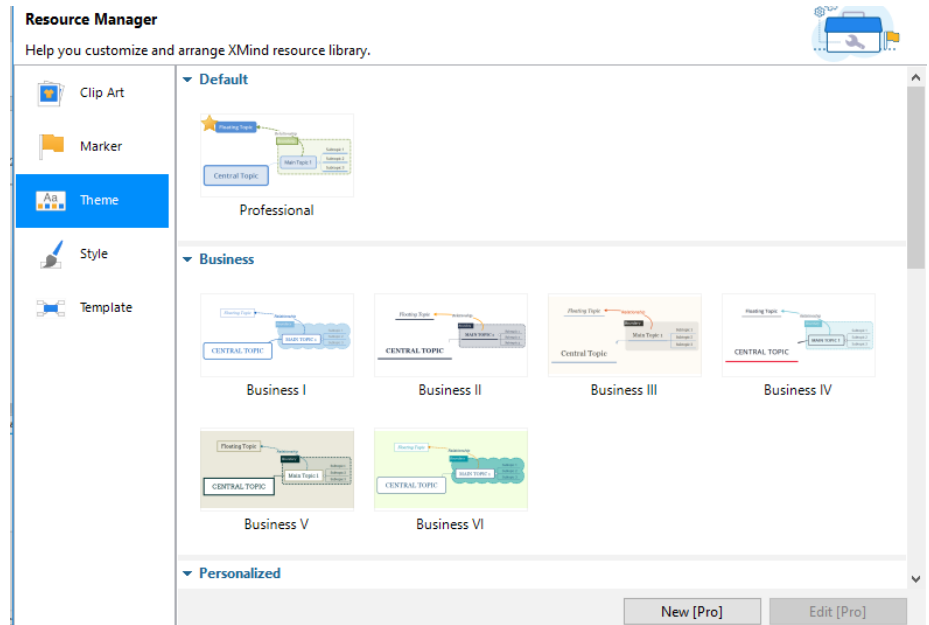
Blackbox

The Blackbox tab opens up backup copies of the XMind maps you have created so you can recover them.

Exhibit 39: Blackbox File Recovery
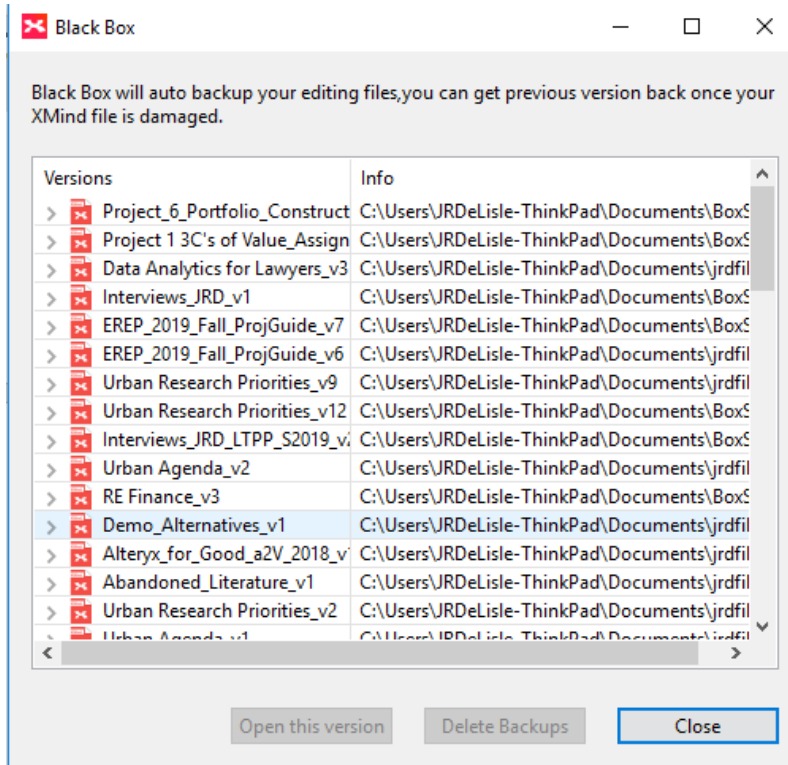
Help Menu

The Help menu allows you to manage your XMind account and license, access Tutorials, and view Featured Mindmaps created by other designers or users.

Exhibit 40: Help Menu
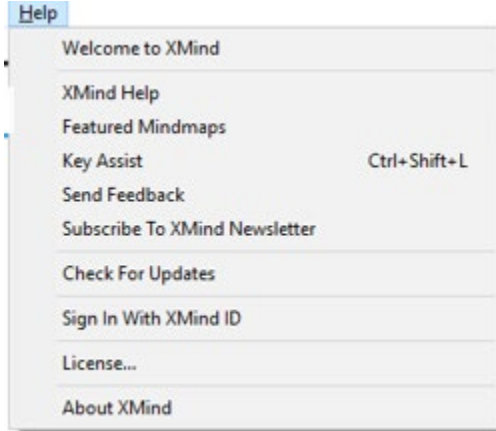
Advanced Features

Copy and Pasting Across Workbooks

In essence, each of your Workbooks and sheets --as well as those from other designers—can be considered a "toolbox" for your use. That is, you can cut and paste topics or subtopics from one Workbook to another. To do so, open the Workbooks of interest which will appear at the top of the screen. Go to the SOURCE Workbook from which you want to pull materials; highlight the Topics/Materials of interest; enter CTRL-C or use other keystrokes to COPY the highlighted area. At this point, you have selected the Topic and any embedded subtopics (i.e., children).

Exhibit 41: Copying from a Workbook
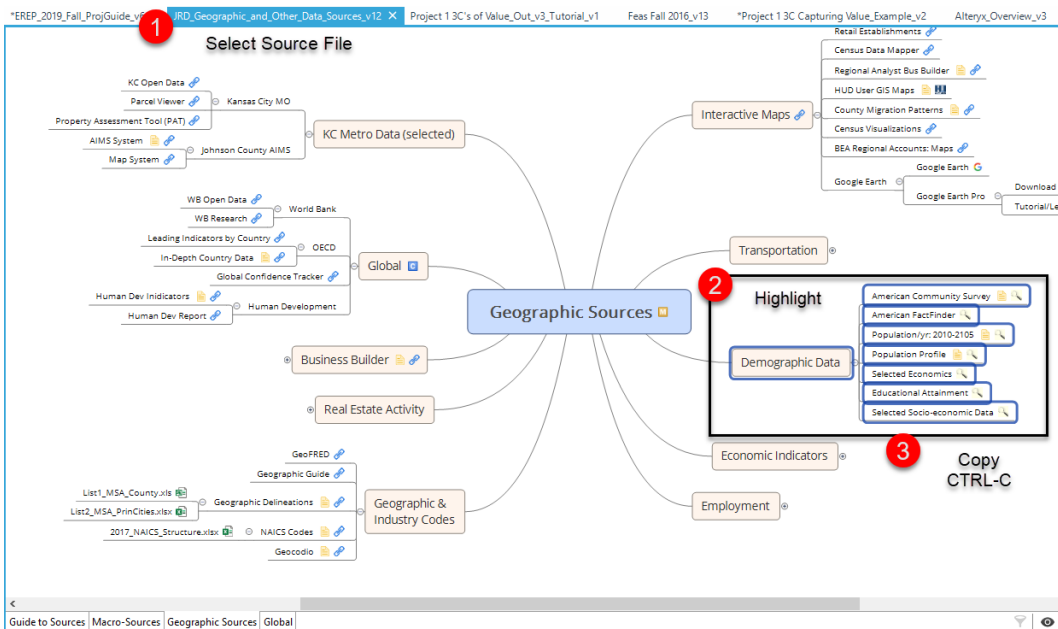
Once the desired Topic(s) are selected and Copied (CTRL-C), click on another Workbook and paste the results. Select Destination Workbook by clicking on the File Name at the top of the window; go to where you want it pasted and enter CTRL-C or PASTE. You may have to move the pasted section to where you want it, but you now have combined the materials.

Exhibit 42: Pasting to New Workbook
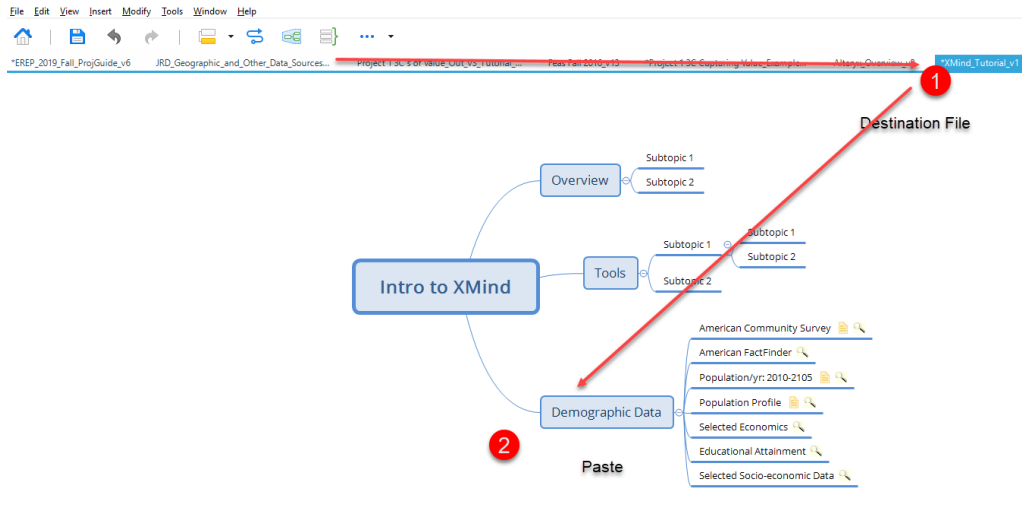
Automatic Topic Numbering

Once you have a basic structure, you can organize it by turning on Numbering and choosing the style. This involves several steps including: highlighting multiple levels of topics (you don't need all as it will apply to the entire Sheet); selecting the Window Tab and then the format; turning Numbering ON and then selecting type of Number (i.e., letter or #); determining if you want them tiered, and then selecting the Separators between tiers. Note, if you drag and drop Subtopics to other Main Topics, the numbering will automatically update on the Map View.
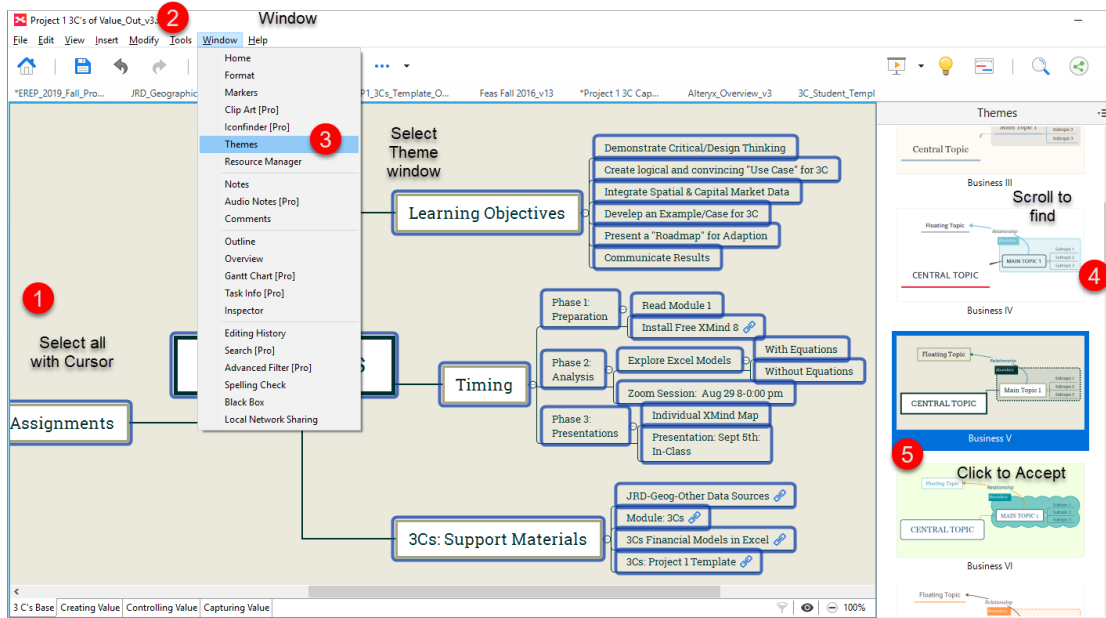
Exhibit 43: Automatic Numbering
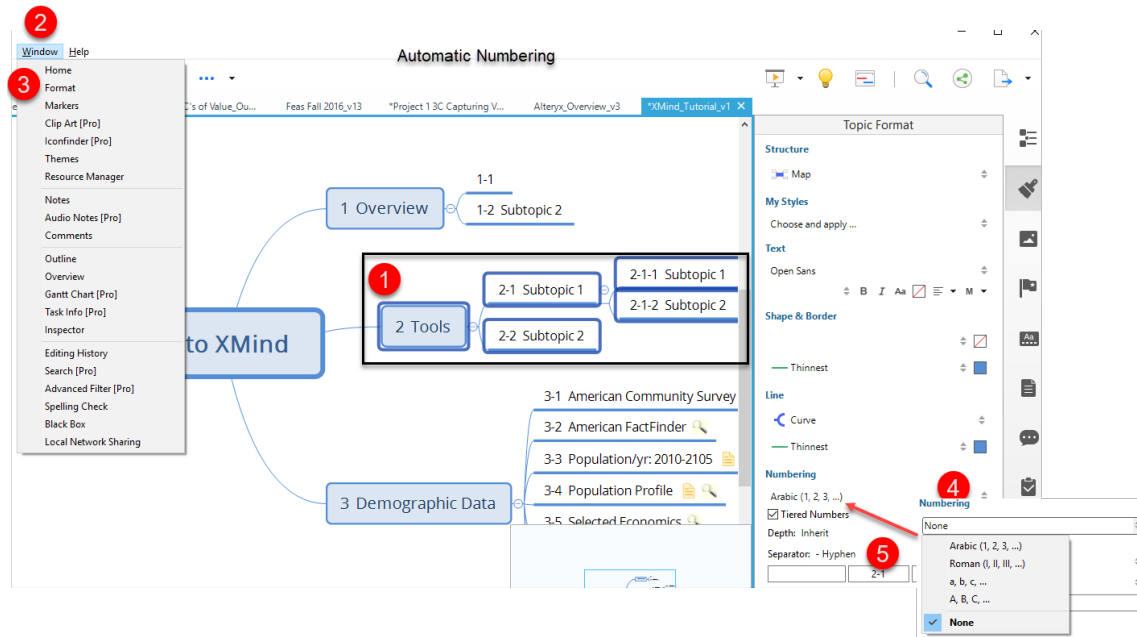
Change Map Properties via Themes

Changing Themes

Once you have selected a Structure and/or Template, you can change the layout. Highlight the map using LEFT-Click on mouse; then Select Window and Theme. Now, scroll down various options and select on of interest by double-clicking.
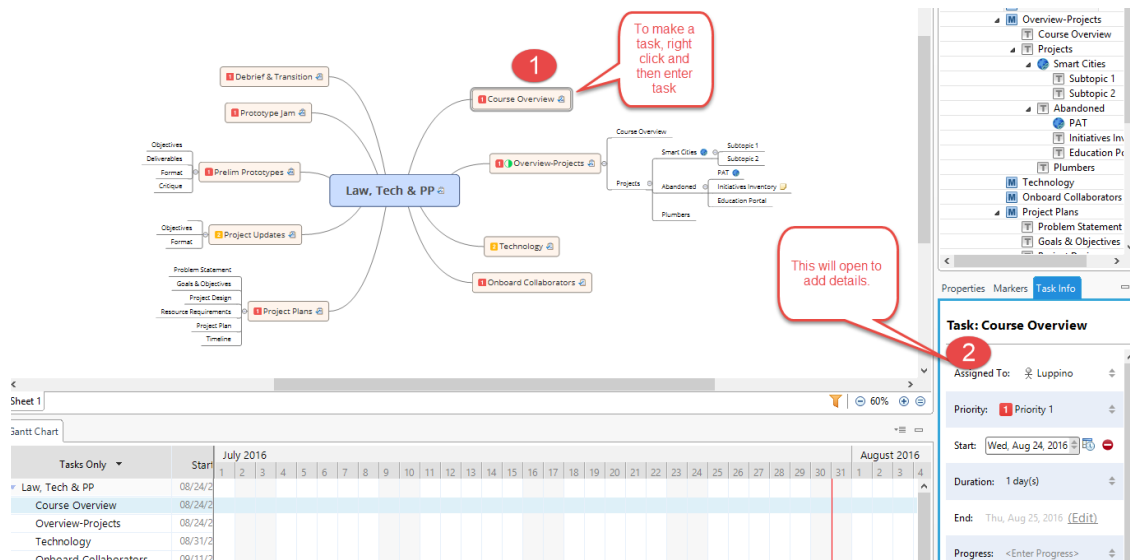
Exhibit 44: Changing Themes

Tasks: Pro Version

To add Tasks, expand the right navigation icon or use the Insert Menu.

Exhibit 45: Adding Tasks
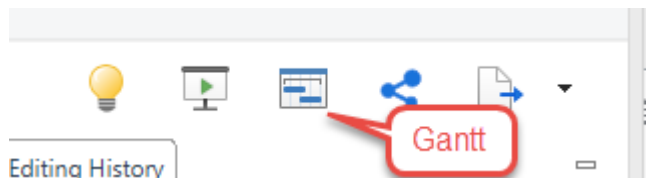
Gantt Chart

Overview

One of the positive features of XMind is the ability to change a mindmap into a Gantt chart. Once the various tasks are laid out, the Task Info must be entered. This is done by right-clicking on a Task in the chart and then entering the relevant data in the Task Info sheet that opens in the lower right;

Exhibit 46: Gant Components
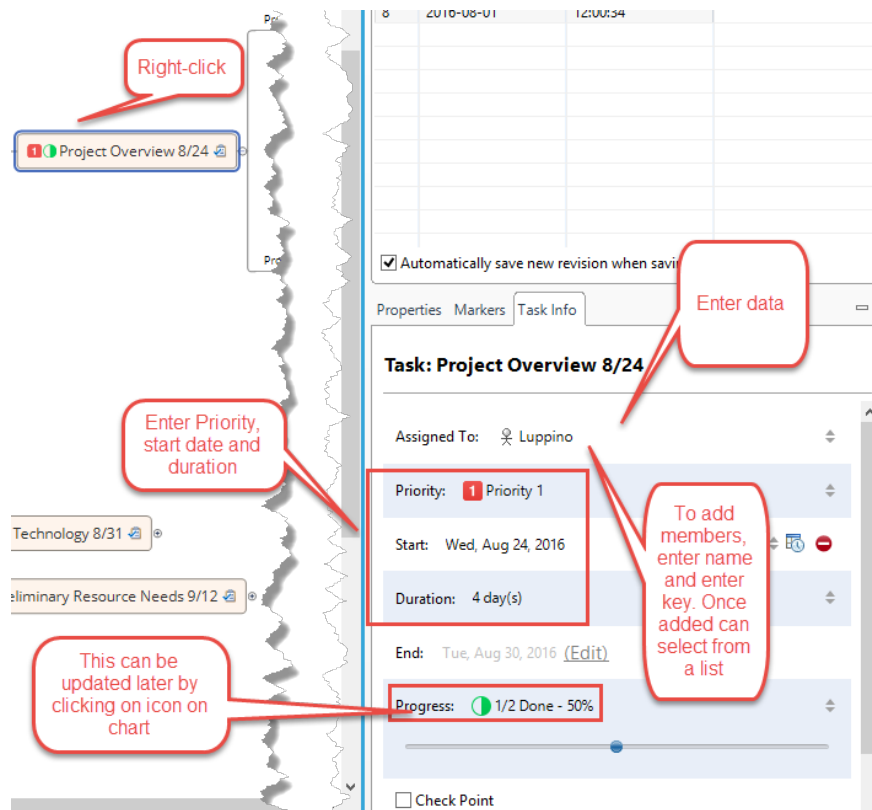
To view Gantt, click on Chart Icon to upper right. The Gantt should appear below the chart in a split screen. If Gantt is floating or not in split screen, click on Split Screen icon in upper left. If you min. Gantt, this is how you get it back or else it will be a floating screen on top of your chart.

Exhibit 47: Viewing Gantt Chart

*Exhibit 48: Gantt Chart Options*
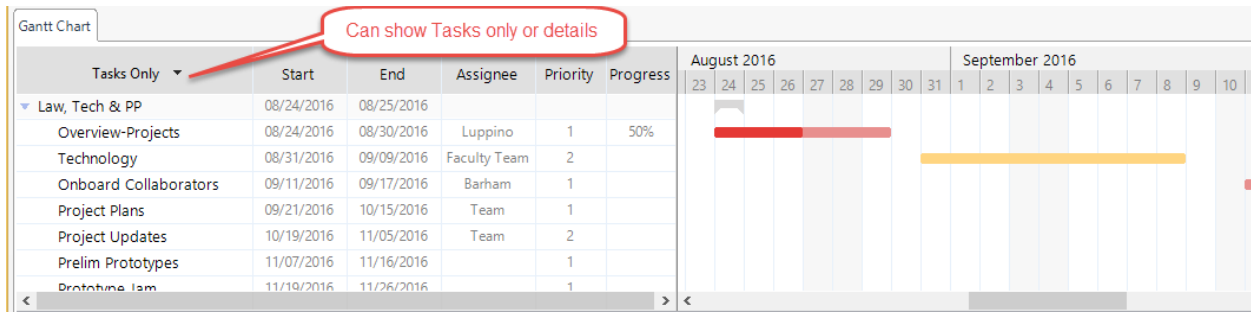
Saving Files

Save or Save As

The "Save As" option can be used from the File Menu to change the file name. Alternatively, the SAVE Icon in the shortcuts can be used to replace the current file. Files can be saved to My Computer locally, or to your XMind private cloud. If the latter, it can be accessed by you and shared with other users who have the link, or to the general public.
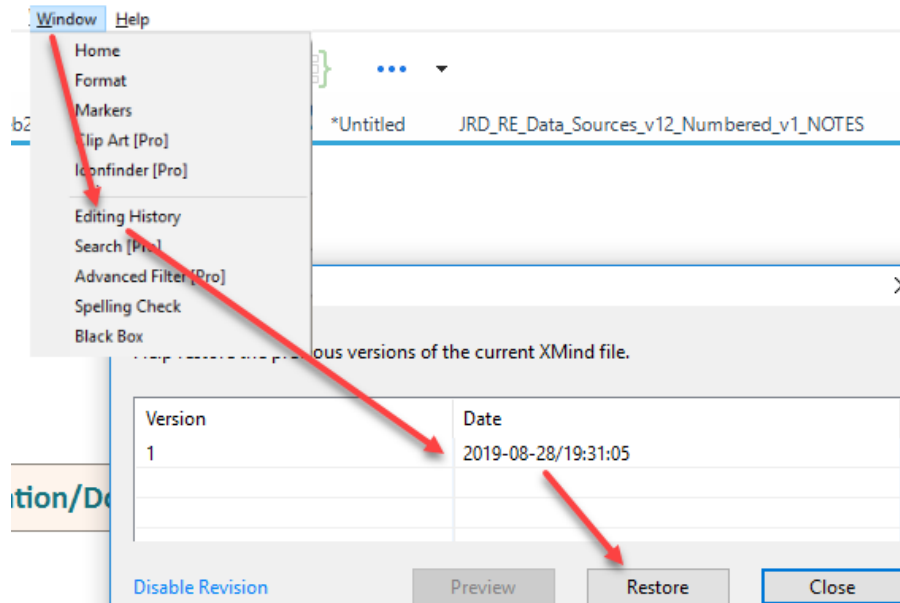
Exhibit 49: Saving Files
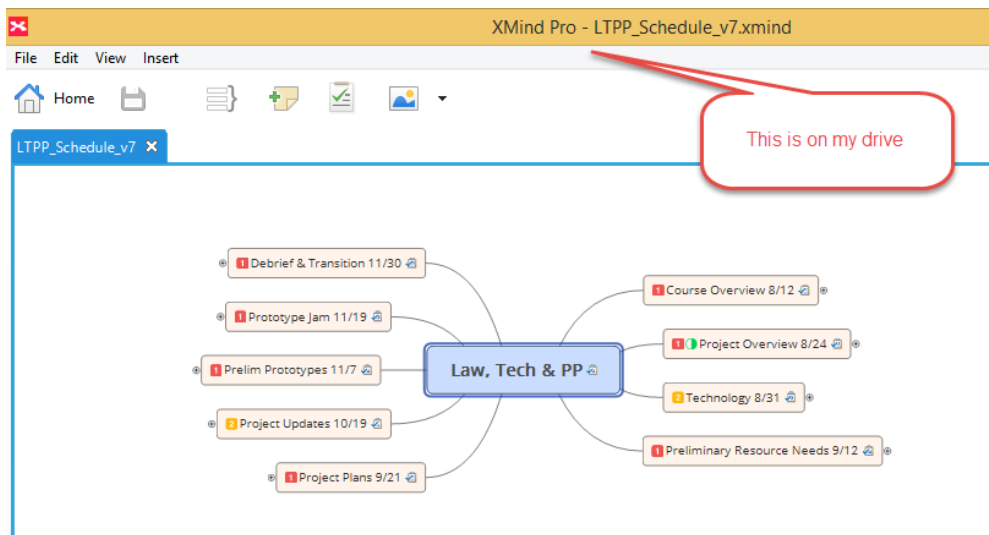

Versioning Files

XMind saves versions of a file each time it is Saved as a Version in the File Menu. Unless default changed, you can view Revision History, check changes, and rollback. This in effect attaches prior versions to the File which can get large so you might delete older versions.

Exhibit 50: Review Prior Versions

Assuming multiple versions have been created, you can preview them and select which one(s) to restore.

Exhibit 51: Select Prior Versions
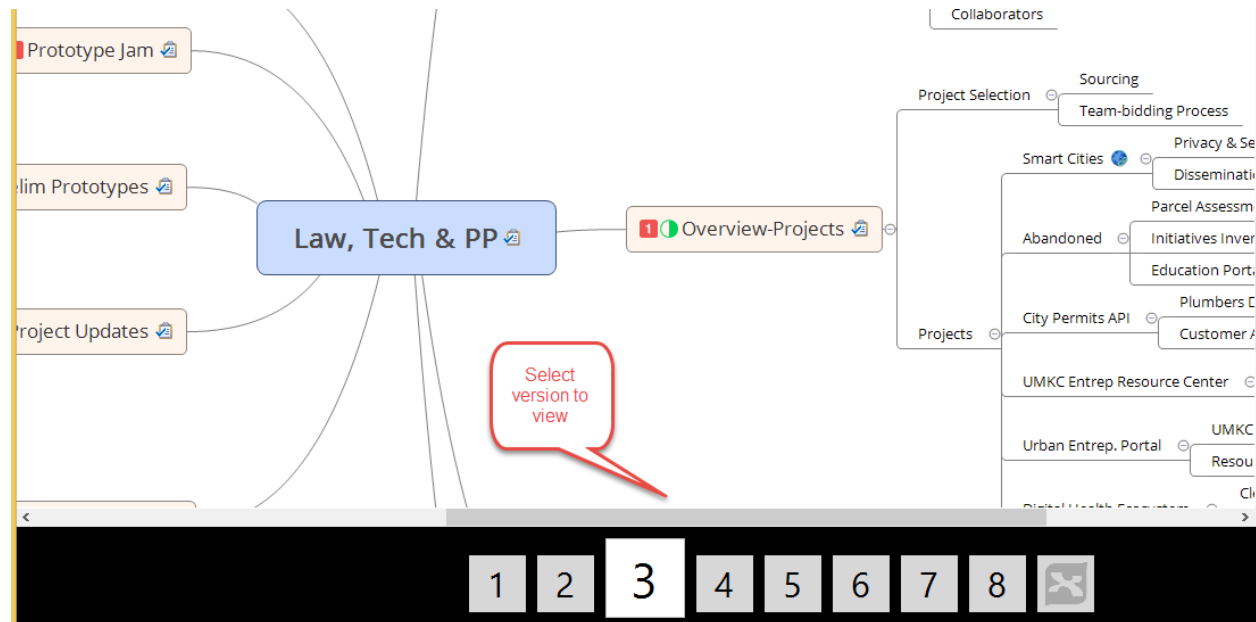
Sharing can take various forms but in all cases you are sharing the XMind Workbook file; not the program. Thus, viewers will have to have access to the program to view the file and add and/or modify it.

Sharing XMind Files

To share XMind files, click on the SHARE icon in the upper right of the screen. That will open a menu with a number of options for sharing. Assuming you have registered and created an XMind Cloud account, you can File-Share to XMind Cloud, either with a public link that can be viewed by anyone, or a private link which is not searchable and will be open to anyone you send the generated URL to as part of your sharing.

Exhibit 52: Sharing XMind Workbooks
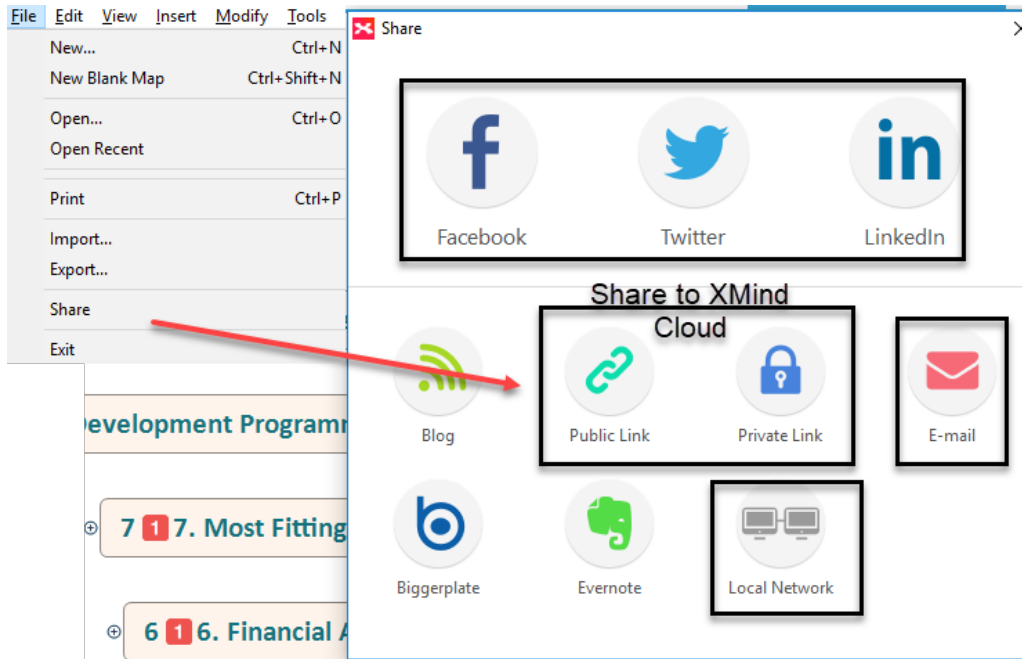
File Save As Template

In some cases you may customize your Mindmap design settings and want to save them for use in future projects as part of your "brand." To do so, use FILE-SAVE-AS-TEMPLATE and it will create a Template with the same name as your file. To access it, create a New File, Select Templates and Scroll down to USER where it saved your settings.

Exhibit 53: Creating and Using Templates
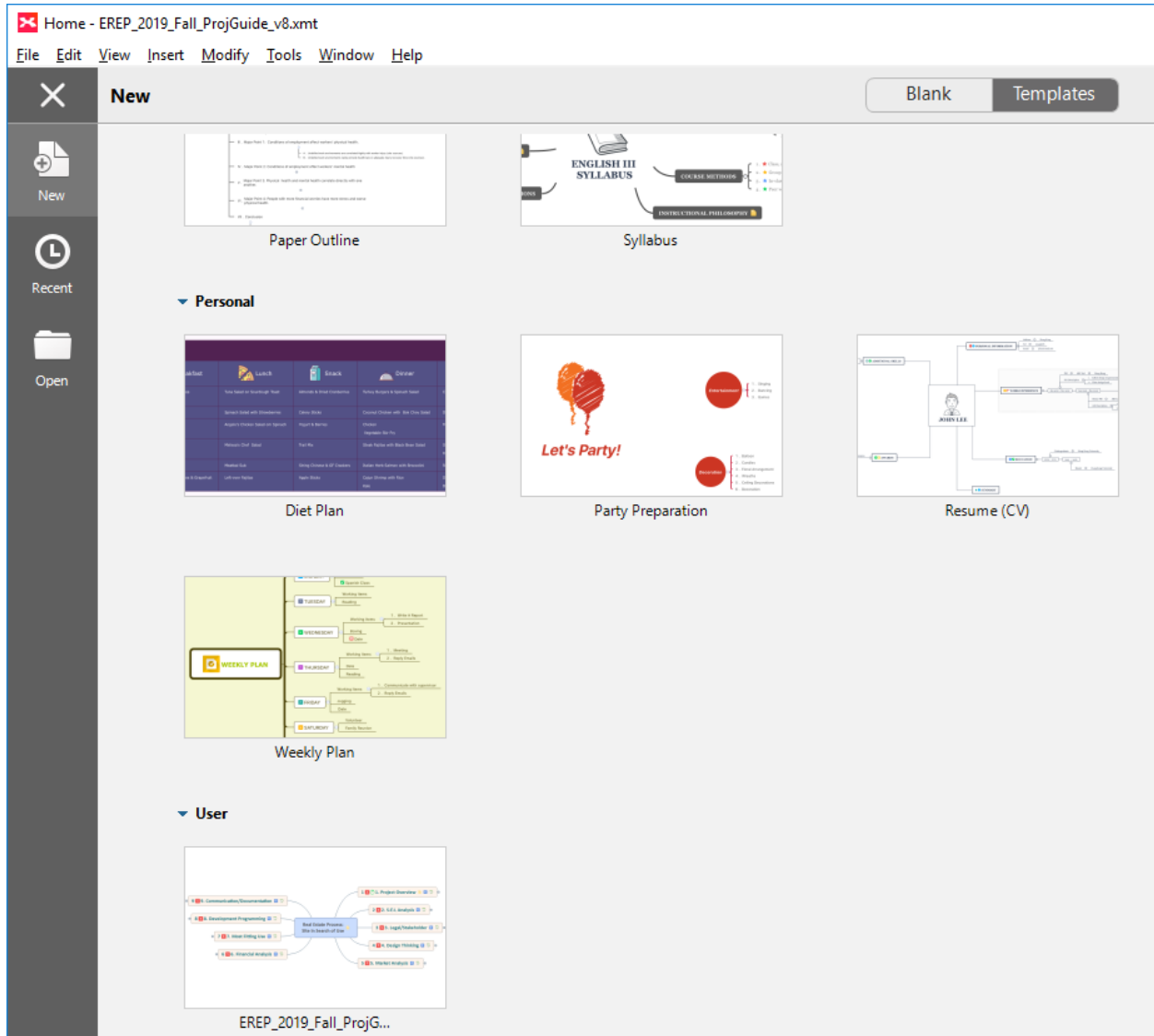
Conclusion

The title of this section is a misnomer; hopefully, this not the END but the beginning of your XMind creative ventures.