INTRODUCING SKETCHNOTES IN A CLASS

This chapter is a step-by-step guide to getting started with sketchnotes in the classroom. You can choose to recreate each of the chapter's sections as 10-minute mini-lessons, or you can present the entire contents in about an hour. I'll offer more thoughts on how to convert this material for classroom use at the end of this chapter. For now, however, let's go over the basics of a sketchnote.
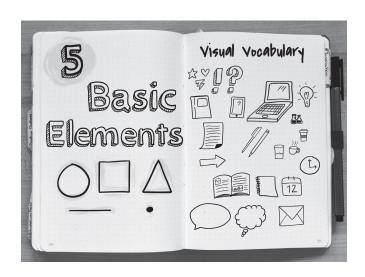

A Sketchnote will have:

- A title

- A mixture of text and images to convey content

- Arrows to show connections

- People (when people are mentioned in the learning)

- Containers and banners to hold important information and draw the eye

- Different types of fonts to draw the eye

Visual Vocabulary

When introducing sketchnotes to a classroom, the first thing that you must *do* is model and build your confidence in drawing with simple shapes. Start with the five basic elements shown below, which form the foundation of your visual vocabulary. If you can draw these, you should be able to draw any and all icons.
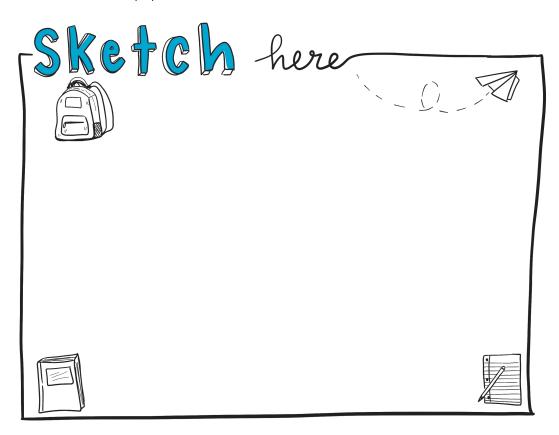
What you want to *do* is have students start to break down how to draw icons by thinking of their *visual alphabet*, the simple shapes used to create the items or symbols that make up their visual vocabulary. Even the most complex things you might have to draw in notes can be drawn in a more simple form and your brain will still recognize them. Your *visual vocabulary* is comprised of the things that you can comfortably draw right away, just like you can spell common words quickly without the help of a dictionary. For example, because I do a lot with educational technology, I am constantly drawing iPads and laptops. If I was in a science classroom my visual vocabulary would be a different set of content-related icons I could easily draw.
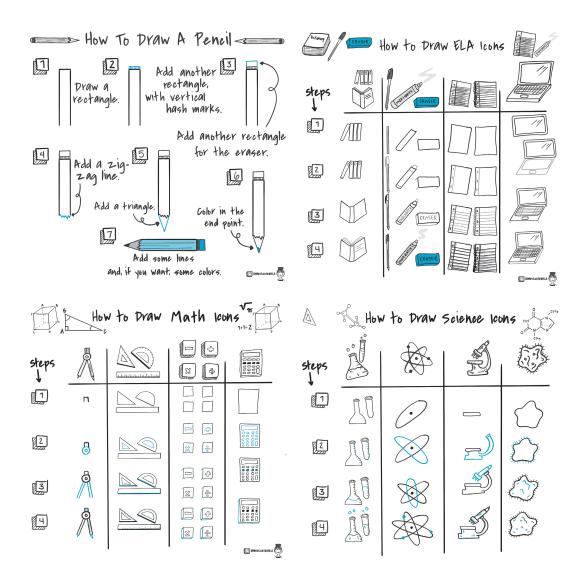
To practice using your visual alphabet and grow you visual vocabulary, try drawing the following items by combining simple shapes in the space below.

- House
- Tree
- Book
- Notebook paper

- Pencil
- Ruler
- Calculator
- Magnifying glass

Sketch here

How To Draw A Pencil

1 Draw a rectangle.

2 Add another rectangle, with vertical hash marks.

3 Add another rectangle for the eraser.

4 Add a zig-zag line.

5 Add a triangle.

6 Color in the end point.

7 Add some lines and, if you want, some colors.

How to Draw ELA Icons

steps

1

2

3

4

How to Draw Math Icons

steps

1

2

3

4

How to Draw Science Icons

steps

1

2

3

4

Remember, depending on how your brain interprets different words, your icons may look different from mine and your students' may look different from yours—that's okay! The important thing is that the icons are meaningful to the note taker.
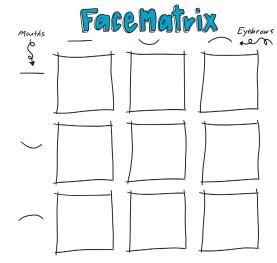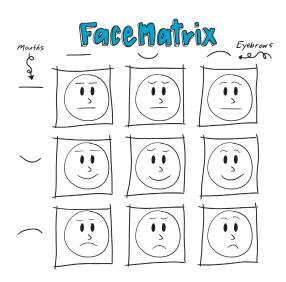
Drawing People

Drawing people can be very intimidating to most people, so giving students the skills to draw people to the best of their ability is really important. We will start with filling a face matrix, which is an activity that many people practice when learning to animate faces. Minute changes in facial features can help bring about many different characters and expressions. As you look at the matrix below, you will see that each column indicates a shape to use for the eyebrows and each row indicates a mouth to combine with them.
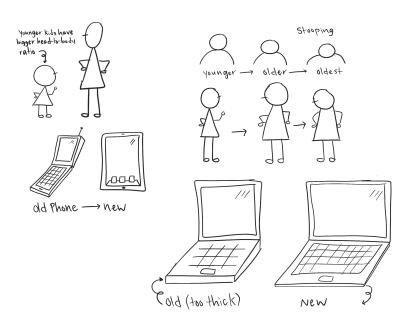
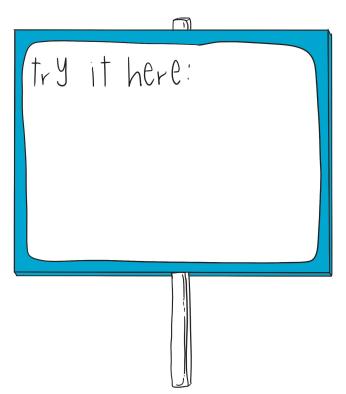Even shifting the mouth from the center of the face to the side or changing the shape of the head itself will give you more animation. Moving the head on the body of the person can also signify age. A head directly on top of a body with a longer space for a neck signifies youth, while less neck to no neck can show stooping and signify age.

younger kids have
bigger head-to-body
ratio

stooping

younger → older → oldest

old Phone → new

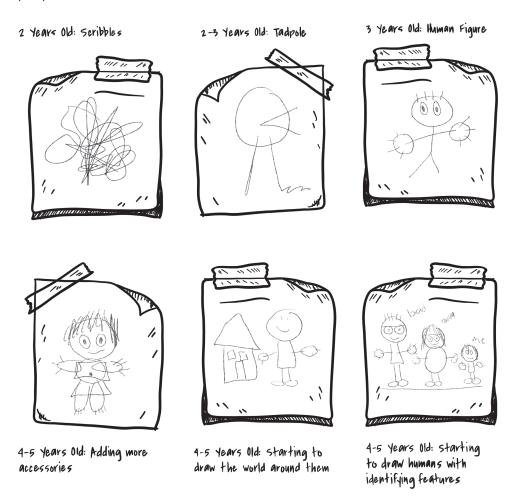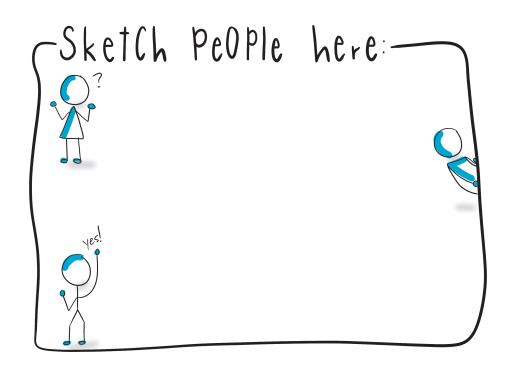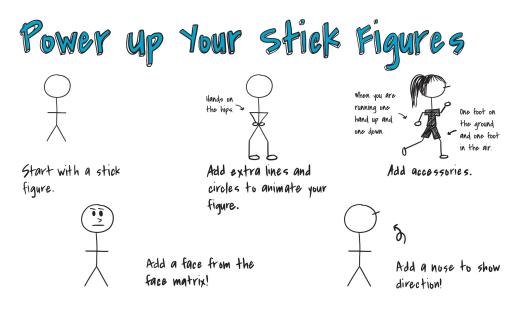old (too thick)   new

try it here:

When two- and three-year-olds are first learning to hold a marker and begin drawing, they start drawing people, rather scary looking stick people, in fact.

2 Years Old: Scribbles

2-3 Years Old: Tadpole

3 Years Old: Human Figure

4-5 Years Old: Adding more accessories

4-5 Years Old: Starting to draw the world around them

4-5 Years Old: Starting to draw humans with identifying features
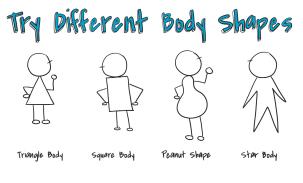
So third graders will have success in starting with a simple stick figure. Using the face matrix, you can easily animate a stick figure to meet the needs of your notes. When hearing or reading someone's name, good note takers will write it down. In sketchnotes, you should draw that person to help your brain better remember the name.

Sketch People here:

The Grey method allows you to start adding accessories to your stick figures. You can also denote direction by adding a simple line for a nose.

Power up Your stick Figures

Start with a stick figure.

Hands on the hips.

Add extra lines and circles to animate your figure.

When you are running one hand up and one down.

One foot on the ground and one foot in the air.

Add accessories.

Add a face from the face matrix!
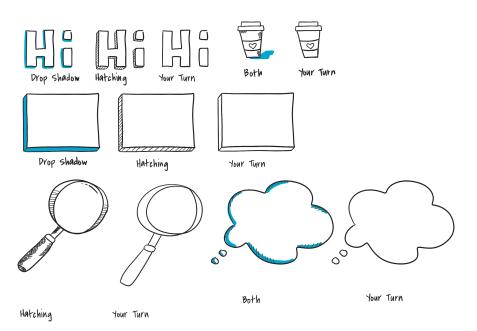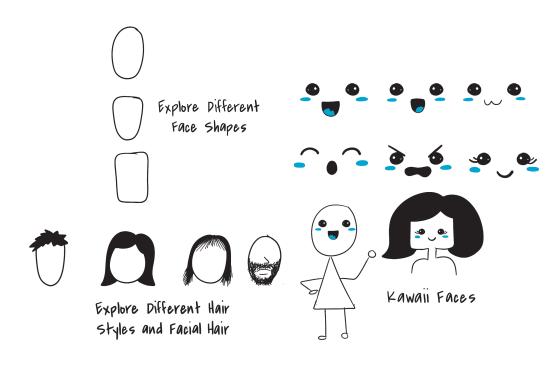
Add a nose to show direction!

Another option is to think about the body shape of your people. Try using different shapes. To show age, for instance, you can use a larger circle for the head of a child and a smaller circle on a taller body for an adult.

Try Different Body Shapes

Triangle Body   Square Body   Peanut Shape   Star Body

Advanced Techniques

Some additional techniques you can try involve using shadows and hatching to imply depth and dimensionality, as well as more advanced facial features. I have even explored creating vector-style graphics by drawing over the top of a photo of an individual. You can do this using tracing paper or a drawing app that allows layering.

Drop Shadow   Hatching   Your Turn   Both   Your Turn

Drop Shadow   Hatching   Your Turn

Hatching   Your Turn   Both   Your Turn

Explore Different
Face Shapes

Explore Different Hair
Styles and Facial Hair

Kawaii Faces

My daughter Molly

The vector-style drawing
I created over her photo

Me

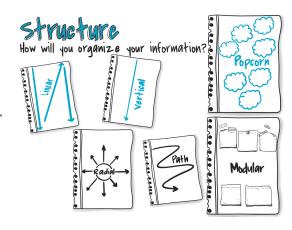The drawing from over
my photo

Sketchnote Structure

When I am talking with students about starting their sketchnotes, I mention that they need to think about their thinking (added bonus: prompt them with the word *metacognition*). The first question they should ask themselves is how they want to position their paper.

Do they like to draw their sketchnotes in landscape or portrait? Their answer often depends on the paper they are using too. Once they decide their paper orientation, they need to think about where they want to place their title. The placement of the title will then help them think of their structure. If their title goes at that top of the page, they will be looking at a linear, vertical, or path structure.

If a student decides to put the title towards the center, the most natural approach is a radial or popcorn structure. The "My Day" sketchnote here could be considered either a path (follow the arrows) or a radial (items circle the central theme) sketchnote.
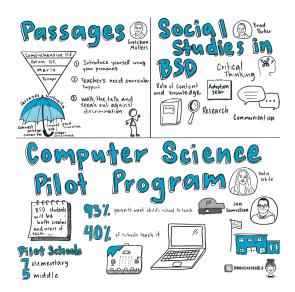
If you have multiple topics to condense into one sketchnote, or multiple people speaking, you might want to separate out your page ahead of time and do a skyscraper or modular structure. These take a little bit of preplanning or knowledge on the part of the sketchnoter to break up the page into logical sections. In the classroom, you could provide this structure on a premade template

for students or model it for them. The example sketchnote shows that I was listening to three brief presentations. None was long enough to really fill a whole page with notes on its own, and by grouping the speakers together in this modular structure I got more information from the day as a whole.
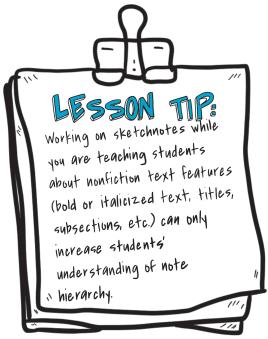
Note Hierarchy

Good note takers can identify a hierarchy of ideas based on their note's overall structure and other clues, such as the style of font chosen for each piece of information and the use of dividers and containers. Sketchnoting reinforces this skill by forcing the note taker to think about the big ideas and ways to emphasize them. As a sketchnoter, you are often listening, analyzing, and figuring out what has the most meaning to you, and then creating meaning through your symbols and font choices. As you develop your skills, you will also start to notice patterns that develop based on how your brain is making those connections visually.

Because your eyes are drawn to visuals, you have to develop the skills to emphasize the right points. You also have the added benefit of making a more pleasing note to come back to and study later. As an English teacher, I expected my students to take notes, but I never directly taught the art of note taking until I started researching

and practicing sketchnotes myself. I see now that I was missing an opportunity to help students make more meaning and connections with their learning, especially at the secondary level. Don't repeat my mistake. By teaching students to think about the structure of their notes, to use different fonts, colors, and containers to pull the eye to important points, you will explicitly teach students about note hierarchy.

Fonts

Your handwriting or font choice is one of the easiest ways to draw the eye to your note's most important points. As you see below, writing in all capital letters, going over your word a couple of times to create a bold effect, and changing the color all draw the eye. When I introduce font choice to students, I usually use the word "hello," because it's a simple to spell and allows them to practice font options. I typically tell students to identify three types of fonts for their sketchnotes:

LESSON TIP: Working on sketchnotes while you are teaching students about nonfiction text features (bold or italicized text, titles, subsections, etc.) can only increase students' understanding of note hierarchy.

- Regular handwriting, which is for most of the sketchnote's text

- A big and bold font for titles

- A font for special direct quotes, which can also be put in a container to show importance
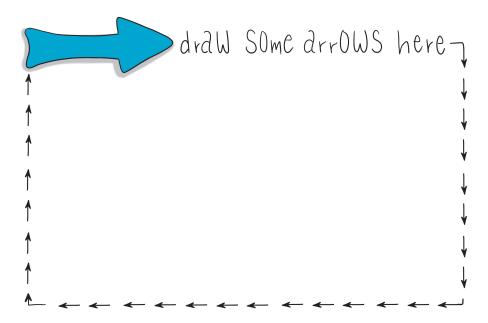
Regular Handwriting
hello

All Caps
HELLO

Tall & Skinny
HELLO

Wide & Short
HELLO

Bold
hello hello

Color
hello

Cursive
hello

Faux-ligraphy
hello
hello

Kinder
hello

Serif
hello

Fancy
hello
hello

Block or Bubble
Hi

3-D Block Letter
Hi Hi Hi

Shadow Block Letter
Hi

Scan the QR code to watch a great video from Sketcho Frenzy about typography. This would be appropriate to show in classrooms.
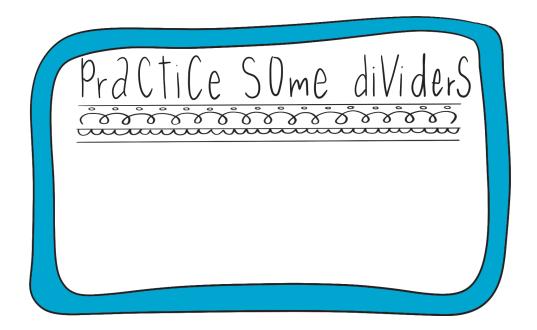
Arrows

Arrows and similar connectors allow us to tie one idea to the next. It is incredibly important to do this physically on the paper to help trigger a connection in the brain too. Arrows can also draw the eye to important information. Depending on how you draw the arrows you could point out important information *and* connections.
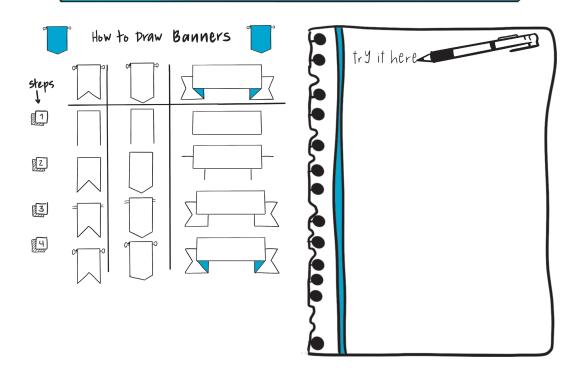
draw Some arrOWS here

Dividers

You can use dividers to delineate a title or to indicate a vocabulary word and definition pair. I typically use a divider only when defining a new vocabulary word: The word goes on top of the divider with the definition on the bottom. There is no right or wrong way to use these elements, however; it, again, is personal preference.

Practice Some dividers
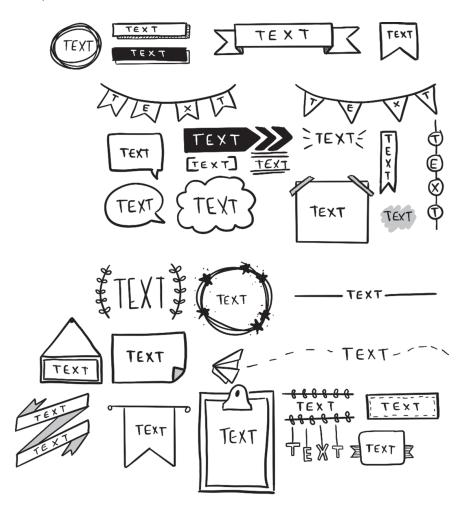
Containers & Banners

The last and final pieces for the basics of sketchnotes are containers and banners, which are similar but drawn slightly differently. Both are used to make up the structure of a modular sketchnote or added sporadically in any sketchnote to show hierarchy. For example, you can draw a container around an important quote, definition, thought, or question to catch the eye. Often you may write or draw something and then realize its importance later the more you listen or learn. To signify that importance, go back and put a container around it. Containers can be as simple as a circle, rectangle, speech bubble, or thought bubble. I like to jazz up the rectangles, though, to look like banners. Give it a try.

Practice Containers:

How to Draw Banners

steps

1

2

3

4

try it here

Advanced Technique: Headers

Another way to gather attention in your structure or note hierarchy, headers are a combination of containers, fonts, and dividers. You can use these for more detailed notes that will include multiple subjects or subheadings, such as when reading a textbook or working from a long lecture outline. Similar to containers or banners, headers combine a few techniques, which ultimately takes practice, on-the-spot thinking, or setup ahead of time.

Implementation of Sketchnote Basics

My recommendation is to go through the sketchnoting basics with your students as an introductory lesson. You can use the previous sections as a guide for how to get students started drawing, and be sure to draw along with them. For more help, scan the QR code on this page to access a mini course on this chapter, as well as a one-page handout, which you can provide to secondary students to keep as a reference in their binders. Additionally, there is also a flipbook option, which can be printed, folded, and glued into readers' or writers' journals.

To get access to the mini course on this chapter scan this QR code and enter the password.

After your intro lesson, try using an article or a read-aloud to do some revisited sketchnotes as they are often more approachable than sketchnoting in real time (see Chapter 6 for more detail). In the next chapter, we will investigate some tools available for sketchnoting in the classroom.