

Stuck?

**Breakthru
Mental Blocks**

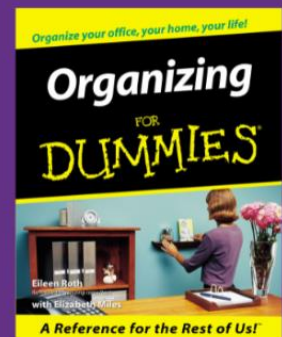


3 Methods to Develop and Organize Content



Eileen Roth

Everything in its Place®
everythinginitsplace.net



Author



Copyright Notice

All Rights Reserved. Sept. 2021; Rev. Oct. 2022

No part of this document may be reproduced manually or electronically.

It is illegal to copy this document, email it, or distribute it by any means. You do not have the right to reprint, email, sell nor resell this document.

All photographs were taken by Eileen Roth. There are several pictures and references to Avery® and Wilson Jones® products. The author is not being paid by any product to mention their names. They are product examples.

Disclaimer Notice

The author is not a legal or financial person. No information in this document should be construed as financial or legal advice.

All information presented here is the view of this author as of the date of this publication. Because conditions change, the author reserve the right to alter and/or update this information if needed. This document is the opinion of the author. The author is under no obligation to update this information.

Breakthru Mental Blocks with 3 Methods to Develop and Organize Content

Are you stuck trying to decide what to write about for your next blog or article?
Do you have a topic or idea but don't know how to fully develop it?

Here are 3 different techniques to unleash your logical and your creative side to break through your mental blocks.

Method #1 - Brainstorming

What is brainstorming?

Brainstorming is a free-form type of thinking that can take you in all kinds of directions. That's the whole point of brainstorming, to come up with different ideas.

It's a great technique when you need new ideas. And it's probably the easiest to do too.

What Tools do you Need?

If you brainstorm by yourself, write on a blank piece of paper – lined or unlined. If you can't read your handwriting, use a computer to type quickly without thinking about any one word.

It's usually best to brainstorm with other people, because you can play off each person's responses.

So you might want to video record it to capture every idea. Zoom® is a free video service that makes it easy to do this, plus you can see each other. So it will be more fun. You could also do an audio recording.

In a seminar or conference, brainstorm by groups sitting at the same table or use flip charts and markers. *(see next section)*

How to Brainstorm

Start with a topic. Someone says a word associated with the topic. The next person responds with a word related to the second word, etc. You are only allowed to say 1 word or a 2-3 word phrase, i.e. sprinkler system, bucket of water, water wheel. *(I just brainstormed water words because it is raining.)*

The faster each person expresses their word after hearing someone else's word, the more fun it becomes. And when it's fun, you're more creative. You don't want to stop and think, let ideas flow rapidly. There's time to review words/ideas afterwards. During brainstorming you just want to get ideas flowing.

No explanations or comments are allowed during a true brainstorming session. This is a rapid-fire session. Just say the next word that comes to your mind.

The key topic is: "dog"

The first person says "dish".
Someone else says "food".
Someone says "meat".
Someone says "hot dogs". (2 words – 1 item)
Someone says "hamburger".
Someone says "corn on the cob". (4 words – but 1 item)
Someone says "barbeque".
Someone says "backyard"
Someone says "flowers"
Someone says "rose"
Someone says "yellow"
Someone says "red"
Someone says "heart"
Someone says "love"

The conversation above moved from the word "dog" to various foods, flowers, colors and love. That's the point of brainstorming-- thinking of different ideas.

You can brainstorm by yourself. Write a list of words on paper and see where you end up. It doesn't matter if the paper is lined or unlined. Use whatever you prefer. Do not stop on any word, just keep writing. You could also do it out loud and video or audio record yourself.

Brainstorming often works better to have at least one other person to “play off of”. Otherwise, you may limit your own thinking. If you don’t have someone near you to brainstorm with, you might want to call a friend or business associate and ask if they will do it with you.

In a conference everyone at each table can brainstorm together while one person is assigned to take notes. *(need a fast writer)*

For other groups, you can bring flip charts or hang flip chart paper on the wall. Everyone walks around the room from one flip chart (or paper) to another adding their word to the ones already listed on that flip chart paper. It might not be in order of a vocal brainstorm, but responses must be related to the main topic on the paper.

You lose the benefit of rapid-fire responses although you may get more responses and more variety from more people participating.

Include these flip chart directions:

Responses must relate to the topic listed.

Do not stand for more than 20 seconds at the flip chart paper.

If you can’t think of something not listed, just move to the next flip chart.

You can return to any flip chart you did not write on.



Logic or Creative?

Some people believe that brainstorming is logical and left brain. I beg to differ. I think this is much more creative and right brain -- you are bouncing ideas off another idea, even if you are just bouncing off your own ideas.

Method #2 - Mind Maps

This is a technique you may have heard about and even seen it, but you don't really know how to do it.

What's a Mind Map?

A mind map helps you see different alternatives so you can explore various options. When you are working with a mind map, it is as if you are outside of yourself looking in. Let's call it a bird's eye view. There's no judgment, your mind map might not even seem very relevant at first.

I was laid off twice within 8 months from two different association management firms. I was at a loss as to what type of job I wanted, but I knew I wasn't going to try for another layoff by staying in the same industry.

That was the first time I ever used a mind map, and it helped me discover that I wanted to change directions from being an executive assistant to becoming an organizing expert based on my strengths at previous jobs. It really helped me see things in a different light.

What Tools do you Need?

1. Blank piece of paper
2. Pens, colored pencils or markers
For some people, the color helps them. So if you want, you can use highlighters later.
3. Mind Map Software
 - Free Mind – free in Microsoft
 - XMind
 - Coggle
 - MindMeister
 - MindManager

How to Mind Map

This explanation will be a paper version so anyone can use a mind map. There are free software programs listed above. Some people prefer to draw their mind map on paper and others prefer a computer program.

Step 1:

Turn a blank piece of paper sideways or landscape. You can do it portrait, but I find landscape gives you more space away from the center oval. Draw an oval about 2 inches wide on its side in the center of the blank piece of paper.

In the middle of the oval write your topic in one or two words, if possible. It could be “blog post”, “article” or a specific topic. What’s your expertise in? That topic could be in the center oval.

Here’s two examples:

After I was laid off twice in a row, I wrote JOB in the middle for my topic. I wanted to decide what type of job I wanted to do next. For 3 of my favorite jobs, my sub-topics were what I liked about that job. The fourth section was about the importance of being home when school was over at 3pm.

I’ve also done a mind map with the word VACATION to decide where I wanted to travel next. Follow along with the colors mentioned as you do each step. See the Mind Map of a “vacation” to easily follow along on the next pages.

Step 2:

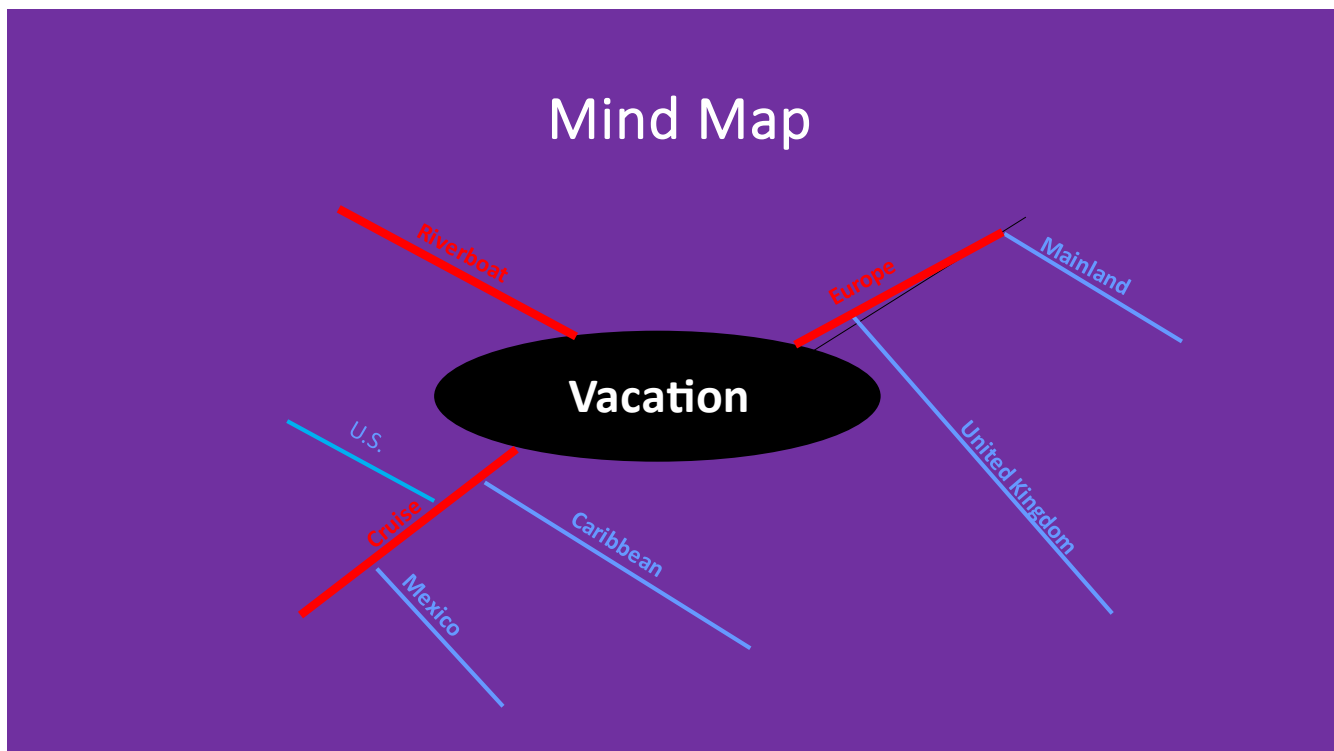
From the oval, draw separate lines outward toward the corners of the paper. If you're using color, choose a color for these lines. This is the first tier or main categories of the topic. i.e., red. The red lines should be about 4-5 inches angling towards the corners of the paper. You may want more or less than 4 *red lines*.

What ideas do you think about or what large categories fall under the word/s in the center oval? Put an idea or category on the top edge of the 4 red lines.

(Feel free to use your own colors.)

I'm matching the Vacation example so it's easy for you to follow.)

In the VACATION mind map – the red lines.



Line 1 - Europe

Line 2 - Cruises

Line 3 – Riverboat

(I didn't have a 4th line when I made this example years ago.)

Step 3:

Concentrate on **one** of the key categories you chose in Step 2.

Split one of the key categories into subcategories.

Choose a new color for these lines – i.e., blue.

Under each red line, add your subcategories with blue lines and name them.

In the Vacation example – the blue lines

Europe (red line) > Mainland

> United Kingdom

Step 4:

Stay with this one red category and blue subcategories before doing the other main categories (red lines).

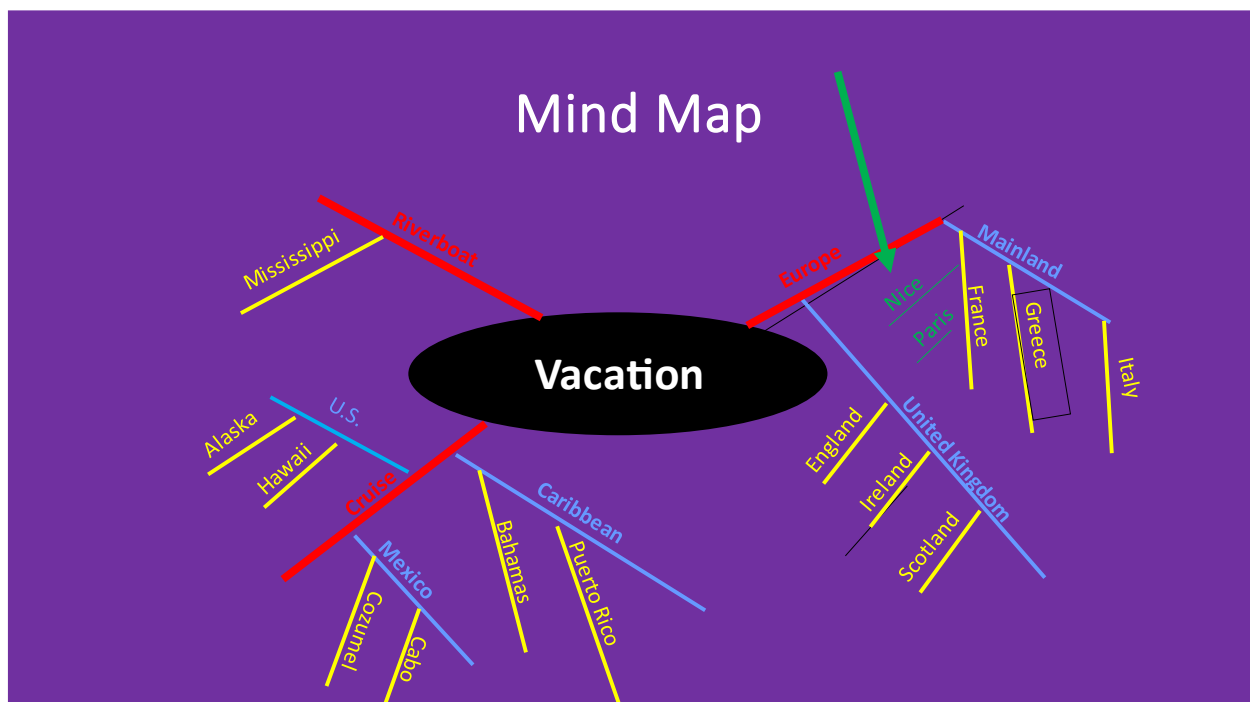
Can you break these subcategories down more?

If so, choose another color, i.e., yellow.

In the Vacation example – the yellow lines

Mainland > France, Greece, Italy, etc.

U.K. > England, Scotland, and Ireland.



Step 5:

Can you break your subcategories down even further?
Choose another color, i.e., green for cities

In the Vacation example – the green lines

France > Paris and Nice (cities)

Step 6:

If you can break it down farther, do so now, OR
Start another breakdown with one of the other main categories (red).

Color

Many people prefer to create a mind map by hand to free their thinking and have fun by using different colors for variety. Color also helps understand the hierarchy, and/or having things parallel (all the same levels).

I was first taught to do each category and all subcategories in the same color and change colors for each main category. i.e. all of Europe: the mainland and the UK and all the countries and cities would be the same color. However, one color in a category makes it difficult to read once you have 4 or more layers of lines. Using different colors in each category also helps you go back and see if everything in all of the other main categories is parallel.

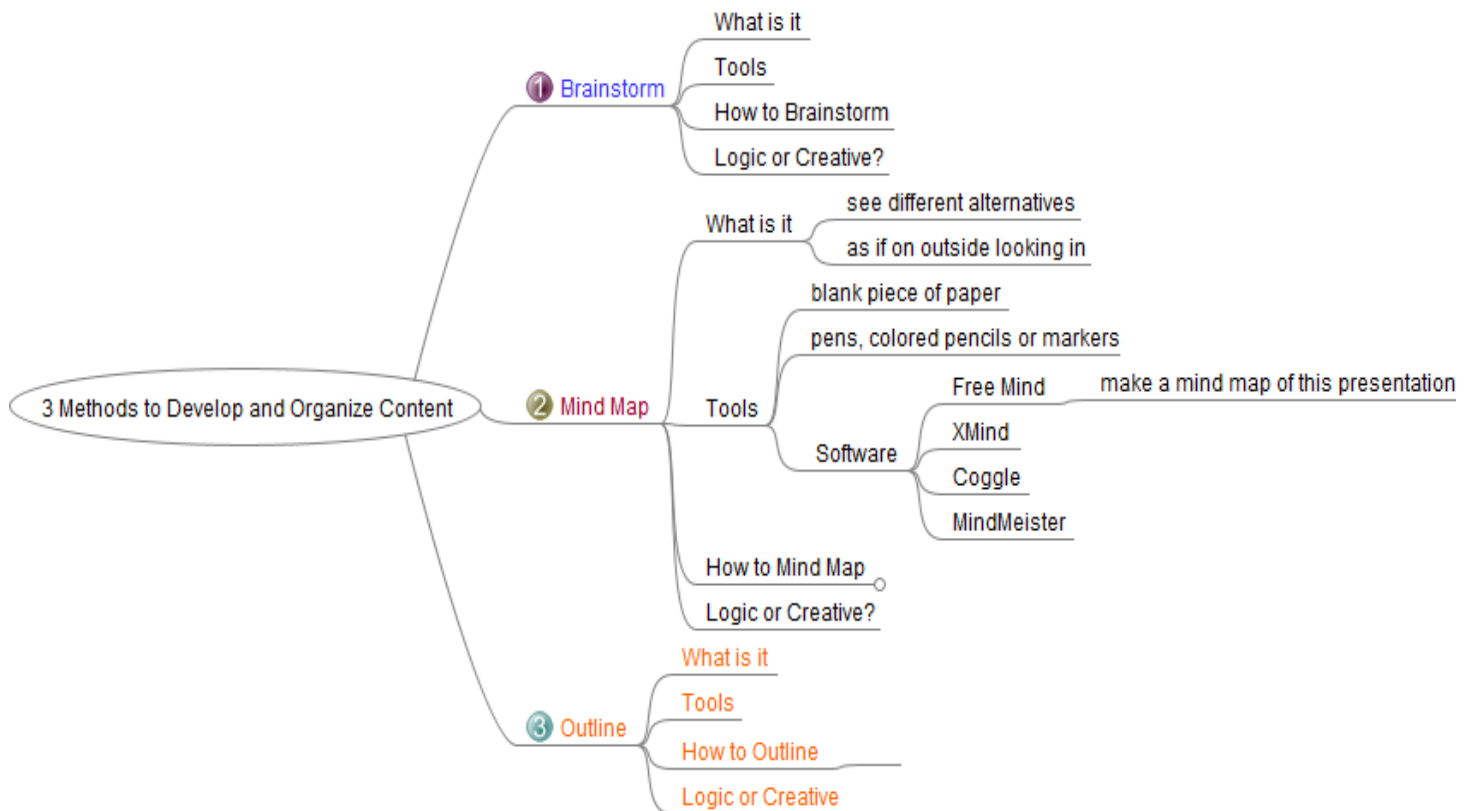
Example: When I first made this mind map in pen (one color), I originally put Alaska and Hawaii as lines coming down from the Cruise line. It wasn't until I color coded, that I noticed I had missed the bigger country category – the blue lines.

So if you do use one pen, I suggest color coding with highlighters after you are done to see if you missed any levels compared to the other categories or subcategories.

It's harder to move things in a Mind Map, especially on paper. You have to white things out, start over, or cover up with a new piece of paper and tape. So you may want to use a software program to easily shift items and change colors easily!

While Power Point can work, it is not so easy to move a bunch of lines with writing on it if you have to move many items. Look how crowded it is for the cities listed under France. How would there be room to list 5 or 6 cities in each of the 3 countries let alone tourist spots in each city (a level that is not there due to space) in just the mainland? You need mind map software to go deeper than 3 or 4 levels or use the third method.

Mind Map Software – FreeMind®



Logic or Creative?

Some people think that mind mapping is more right brain and creative. I beg to differ. I believe it's the exact opposite! I feel more linear doing a mind map because items are falling under other items as compared to a brainstorm where items can move in any direction.

Method #3 - Outlines

What is an Outline?

If you already have an idea or direction of where you are going, then use an Outline technique. This technique is very logical and linear.

If you choose to handwrite an Outline, you will find lined paper easier than unlined.

What Tools do you Need?

1. You can easily write this on a lined piece of paper.
However, if you make a mistake or want to shift something into a different category, you will need to use whiteout or possibly start over.
2. You can do it on the computer in a Word program.
At least then it's easier to insert, delete or move items around.
3. Use a spreadsheet - Excel or Google Sheets.
It's much easier to move items from one section to another, whether it's moving them in rows or into different columns.
Even adding columns can be helpful.
It's also easier to see that items are parallel.

How to Outline

You may consider an outline to be “old school” but the idea is very useful. In writing this report, it kept me consistent by always talking about the 3 key items under each of the 3 methods.

What is it?

What Tools?

How do you do it?

There are several advantages to using the computer over handwriting, the main one may even be that it’s not easy to read your handwriting! *(That includes me!)*

- ❖ You can move items up and down.
- ❖ You can easily change headings, groupings, or their order.
- ❖ You can add rows or columns for subcategories.

Start an Outline using either a Word program or a spreadsheet like Excel or Google Sheets. Spreadsheets have an advantage over Word in that it is easier to add or move columns. *(You can use a Table in Word.)*

To view the Outlines faster and easier, try some of these extra techniques:

TOPICS: All caps, bold and centered on the spreadsheet version
Leave 1-2 blank lines between each main topic.

Subcategories: Initial caps
Leave 1-2 blank lines after Subcategories with specific items underneath them.

specific Items: **all lowercase**
indented under the Subtopics OR
in a separate column

Roman Numeral Outline

Intro

I. BRAINSTORMING

- A. What is it?
- B. What Tools?
 - 1. people
 - 2. paper and pen
 - 3. flip charts and markers
- C. How to Brainstorm
 - 1. two people
 - 2. by yourself
 - 3. groups

II. MIND MAPS

- A. What is it?
- B. What Tools?
 - 1. paper
 - 2. colored pencils or pens, crayons
 - 3. software - free
 - a. Free Mind
 - b. XMind
 - c. Coggle
 - d. MindMeister
- C. How to do it (can choose color scheme)
 - 1. oval
 - 2. red lines
 - 3. blue lines
 - 4. yellow lines
 - 5. green lines
 - 6. more subcategories or start over with the next red line

III. OUTLINES

- A. What is it?
- B. What Tools?
 - 1. lined paper + whiteout
 - 2. word program on the computer
 - 3. spreadsheet
- C. How to Outline
 - 1. paper or Word program with Roman Numerals: I, II, III
 - 2. spreadsheet program – Excel or Google Sheets
 - 3. ALL CAPS - Initial Caps – lowercase

Conclusion

To view the Outlines or spreadsheets faster and easier, try some of these extra techniques:

TOPICS: All caps, bold and centered on the spreadsheet version

Leave 1-2 blank lines between each main topic.

Subtopics: Initial caps

Leave 1-2 blank lines after Subtopics with specific items underneath them.

specific Items: **all lowercase**

indented under the Subtopics OR
in a separate column

The next page has an Outline of this guide in a spreadsheet format. You can see how the items above are utilized in different ways. Some are indented and others are in a separate column so you can see the difference.

The spreadsheet is also much easier to move items around to change the order or add or delete items than using a handwritten outline or even a Word program where you have to watch for alignment too.

The red notes on the spreadsheet are not actually part of the spreadsheet but comments about the style used in that area.



Logic or Creative?

Outlining is the most logical of all 3 techniques. You are following distinct paths.

Spreadsheet Outline

Topic	Subtopics	Main Points	Specific Points	Graphics
INTRO				
BRAINSTORM	What is it?	rapid fire responses		
	What Tools?	paper - by self	video or audio record	paper
		people		table
		flip Charts		flip chart
	How to Brainstorm	rules		example - dog
	Logic or Creative	creative		brain
MIND MAP	What is it?	drawing		
	What Tools?	paper - unlined		
		pen, colored pencils, markers		
		free software - optional	Free Mind	mind map in Free Mind
			X Mind	
			Coggle	
			Mind Meister	
			MindManager	
	How to Mind Map	1 oval - key topic		mind map examples
		2 3-4 main lines	red	mind map examples
		3 subtopics	blue	mind map examples
		4 sub - subtopics	yellow	mind map examples
		5 points	green	mind map examples
		6 develop a new main line	OR Step 1 new red line	mind map examples
	Color Coding	color strategies		
	Logic or Creative	logic		brain
OUTLINE	What is it?	structured outline		
	What Tools?	paper -lined		
		Word program		
		spreadsheet		
	How to Outline	paper or Word program	Roman numerals I,A, 1, a	example
		spreadsheet - Excel or Google Sheets		example
		All Caps - Initial Caps - lowercase	TOPIC - Subtopic - specifics	
	Logic or Creative	very logical		brain
CONCLUSION				

Conclusion

If you have no idea where you are headed, choose the **Brainstorm** technique.
If you have some idea of where to go, choose the **Mind Map** technique.
If you know where you're going, choose the **Outline** technique.

Brainstorming is more creative

Mind Mapping is a combination of logical with creative

Outlining is completely logical

It's nice to have options to develop and organize your content. If you try one and you're still having difficulty to develop new ideas or organize your content, try a different one.

So what are you waiting for? The train is leaving the station!

Jump on whichever train you want:

The **blue** train is for **Brainstorms**.

The **maroon** train is for **Mind Maps**.

The **orange** train is for **Outlines**.



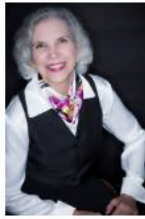
One is always at the train station. Choose one today and a different one tomorrow. Just pick one and start chugging down the track!

Have fun organizing your ideas!

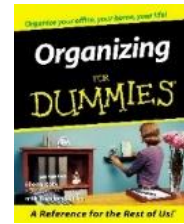
Eileen Roth

PS This logical, organizing expert just created a color-coding system for talking about organizing content with trains. That was creative brainstorming in my head. I've never used this phrase before - "The train is leaving the station" ... and suddenly I had the idea of color-coded trains with alliteration: (B is for Blue and Brainstorms, etc.) (Yes, I have a model railroad train).

Logic meets Creativity - or is it - Creativity meets Logic?



Eileen Roth
Your Organizing Tour Guide for Success



As the author of **Organizing For Dummies**®, Eileen Roth demonstrates how to be more productive, reduce your stress, and save time and money. Eileen named her company Everything in its Place® because she truly believes that you can find a place for everything.

Eileen is a national speaker, trainer and productivity expert in the areas of:

Office Organization
Time Management

Home Organization
Student Organization

She helps people put everything in its P.L.A.C.E.™ This reduces stress and people find things WHEN they need them. Eileen Roth's organizing principles are simple to remember, easy to implement, and maintenance is minutes a day to stay that way.

Eileen Roth's background stems from over 15 years in office and association administration. Clients include entrepreneurs as well as corporations and associations such as: Argonne National Labs, Northwest Airlines, the Paper Industry Manufacturer's Association, Wisconsin Bankers Association, ABA-New England and TAP Pharmaceuticals.

Major National Media

Today Show
Oprah
Real Simple
Self
Woman's Day
Men's Health

Business Publications

Fast Company
Successful Meetings
Office Pro
ASTD's Training & Development (now ATD)

Eileen Roth
Everything in its Place®

eroth@eileenroth.com
everythinginitsplace.net