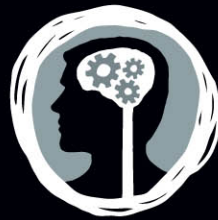




# the Sketchnote HANDBOOK

→ THE ILLUSTRATED *guide* ←  
to VISUAL NOTE TAKING



by **MIKE ROHDE**  
*the illustrator of REWORK*

## PRAISE FOR *THE SKETCHNOTE HANDBOOK*

---

“Entertaining and memorable (just like sketchnotes), this fast-reading, fact-packed book by the godfather of sketchnoting provides everything you and your team need to know about the creative, mnemonic, and business benefits of this brilliant new method of note taking.”

—Jeffrey Zeldman, author of *Designing with Web Standards*

“Mike Rohde has taken his original, fun, and smart approach to note taking and broken it down into simple, clear steps.

—Chris Guillebeau, author of *The \$100 Startup*

“Sketchnotes are a great way to capture the highlights of an idea in a way that will naturally work for your brain.

Nobody will teach you how to do it better than Mike.”

—David Heinemeier Hansson, co-author of *REWORK*

“*The Sketchnote Handbook* is an informative, hands-on book designed to quickly share the principles of sketchnoting so you can get right to creating sketchnotes for yourself. Mike’s fun, illustrative style energizes you to pick up a pen and sketchnote!”

—Nancy Duarte, CEO Duarte Inc.,

and best-selling author of *Resonate* and *Slide:ology*

“Never fear note taking again. Mike Rohde demystifies the practice and makes it accessible to everyone. Your brain will thank him later.”

—Sunni Brown, co-author of *Gamestorming* and leader of the Doodle Revolution

“This book is not really a book. It’s a tool kit for learning a new and better way of capturing and understanding information, and it’s perfectly aligned with the way our brains actually work. If you’re a student, teacher, or businessperson, this book has the potential to change the way you learn, and the way you think.”

—Daniel Coyle, *The New York Times* best-selling author of *The Talent Code* and *The Little Book of Talent*

“The perfect introduction to visual note taking and the most useful how-to guide I’ve ever read, no contest.”

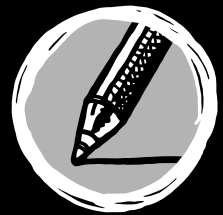
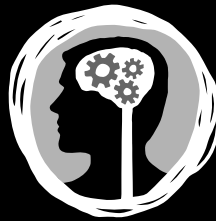
—Josh Kaufman, author of *The Personal MBA: Master the Art of Business*

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# THE SKETCHNOTE HANDBOOK: *The illustrated guide to visual note taking*

Mike Rohde

**Peachpit Press**

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*To Gail, Nathan, Linnea, and Landon,  
thank you for your support on this  
long and challenging journey.*

*You are the reason I work so hard  
to create things and share my ideas.*

*I love you.*



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

**TAKING ON A PROJECT OF THIS MAGNITUDE** is a great reminder of just how valuable my family, friends, colleagues, and community are. Without them, I'm certain *The Sketchnote Handbook* would not have happened.

**GAIL**, you are the first and most important person on the list. Even though you were expecting a baby, you encouraged and supported me on many late nights and weekends. Thanks for sharing the vision with me. I love you!

**NATHAN, LINNEA AND, LANDON**, thanks for supporting me during the creation of the book. As your dad, I hope my work makes you proud.

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Your typefaces have saved me many long hours of drawing every letter by hand.

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**JON MUELLER**, thanks for allowing my sketchnotes of your talk to become such a key part of the book. I've been honored to call you a friend and appreciate your guidance in the creation of my first book.

**FRIENDS AND COLLEAGUES**, thanks for your reviews and feedback about the book in production. This is a better book because of your help.

**TO THE SKETCHNOTING COMMUNITY**, thanks for your support through the years. I'm excited to see where our community will go and how it will grow once this book reaches new readers and viewers.



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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

MIKE ROHDE has a passion for simple and usable design solutions. That passion, along with his lifelong habit of recording concepts and observations through sketching and doodling, inspired him to develop sketchnotes—a practical art that translates simple and complex ideas into easily recalled bits of information.



Professionally, Mike focuses on user interface, user experience, visual design, and icon design for mobile and web applications at *Gomoll Research + Design* in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

As a sketchnoter, Mike provides live, real-time sketchnotes of events, meetings, and experiences in venues across the United States.

In his illustration practice, Mike uses his unique drawing style to amplify and clarify ideas. His work has been featured in *REWORK*, the best-selling book by Jason Fried and David Heinemeier Hansson; *The \$100 Startup*, a best-selling book by Chris Guillebeau; and *The Little Book of Talent* by Daniel Coyle.

Community and sharing are important cornerstones of Mike's philosophy, as evidenced by the creation of *The Sketchnote Army*, a website dedicated to finding and showcasing sketchnotes and sketchnoters from around the world.

Mike has also shared his thinking, design process, and samples of his design and illustration work at his personal website, [rohdesign.com](http://rohdesign.com), since 2003.

Mike lives with his wife, Gail, and children, Nathan, Linnea, and Landon, just outside of Milwaukee. He's an avid Green Bay Packers fan.

Learn more about Mike at [rohdesign.com](http://rohdesign.com).

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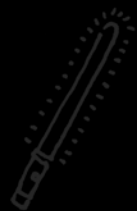
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# INTRODUCTION

**IT WAS THE WINTER OF 2006 AND I COULDN'T TAKE IT ANYMORE.**

I was done. Fed up. I vowed not to take another note with a mechanical pencil or with a giant notebook until I'd found a better way to take notes.

Thinking back, I'm not sure how note taking had become such a burden. In high school and college, I enjoyed expressing ideas visually—easily blending words with drawings, diagrams, and typography in my notebooks.

Somewhere in the process of growing up and getting a job, I lost my way. The relaxed, visual note-taking approach from my college days had morphed into a fanatically detailed, text-only death march. Ironically, I became a great note taker who couldn't stand taking notes.

The solution to my note-taking problem was a blank pocket Moleskine, stacked neatly on my bookshelf. I'd bought it on a whim a few months before and I realized that its small size, paired with an unerasable pen, could be a perfect way to challenge my overly detailed, note-taking mind-set.

In January 2007, I brought my Moleskine and a gel pen to Chicago for a conference to try sketchnoting. Could I take fewer but better notes? If I focused on quality, could I live with seeing my mistakes in pen? Would adding drawings to my notes bring back my joy of note taking? Could taking notes become fun again?

The answer to these questions was a resounding yes! As I captured my first sketchnotes, I was able to slow down and listen for big ideas. I loved the no-turning-back attitude of using a pen. Best of all, I had a great time taking notes again.

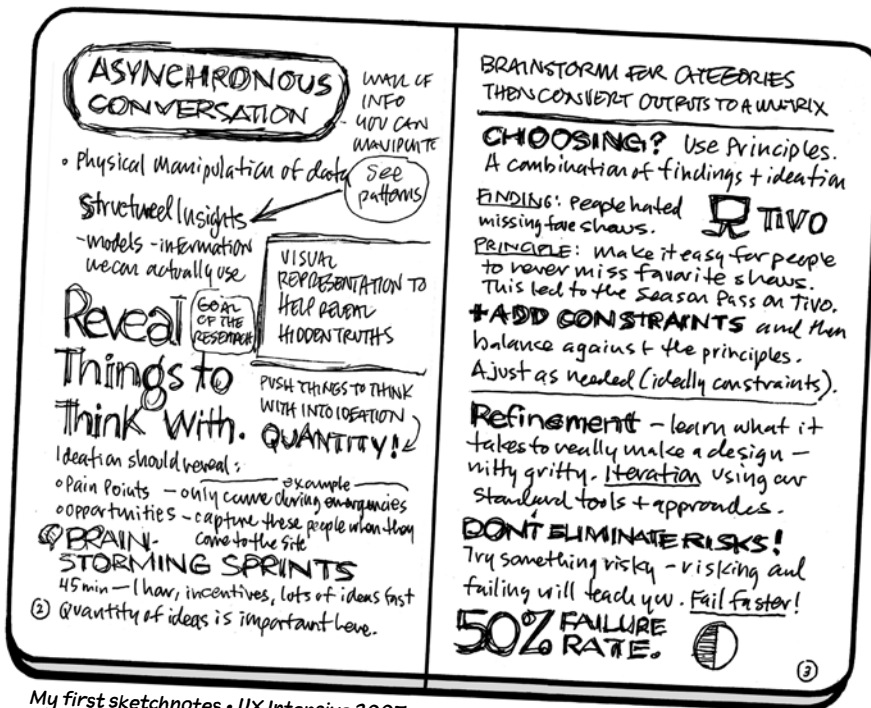
Ever since that mind-altering experience, I've been working hard through my blog, *The Sketchnote Army*, and at live presentations and workshops to share my passion for sketchnoting. I take great pleasure in talking about why sketchnoting enables you to take better notes, explaining how to create sketchnotes, and persuading people to give sketchnoting a try. This passion for sketchnoting is

what drove me to spend hundreds of hours writing, illustrating, and designing this book. I want you to enjoy taking notes as much as I do, and I hope that by the end of this book you will.

## WHO IS THIS BOOK FOR?

Whether you believe you can or can't draw, I'm here to tell you that anyone who can make marks on paper can benefit from this book. Sketchnotes are about hearing and capturing meaningful ideas, not how well you draw.

Take it from me, you can create sketchnotes. In this book, I will show you how to draw simple objects, create custom lettering, and use other hand-drawn elements to help you express your thoughts visually. Even if you can't draw a straight line, you can learn to sketchnote with a little practice.



My first sketchnotes • UX Intensive 2007

## WHAT IS THE SKETCHNOTE HANDBOOK?

The *Sketchnote Handbook* is a simple, visual manual designed to teach you basic sketchnoting concepts, approaches, and techniques quickly, so you can start creating sketchnotes immediately.

Each page of this book has been lovingly hand-sketched to show you how much fun it is to learn from notes that incorporate pictures and words equally. Rather than write a lot of words about sketchnoting, I decided that if I was going to talk the talk, I'd better walk the walk (or, maybe, sketch the sketch?). So, I created the entire book as one, long, fun—hopefully inspiring—illustration.

### 4 CREATE A TITLE



A completed title page, ready to go.



I like to use my iPhone to find photos of the speaker for reference on my title page.

ONCE I'VE SETTLED IN, I check the topic and the speaker's name, verify spellings, and sometimes find a photo on my phone to create a visually interesting title page for the speaker or the topic.

*I complete my title before the speaker begins, so I can focus on the talk rather than rushing to create a title at the start of the presentation.*

### 5 SKETCHNOTE

When the talk begins, I listen, synthesize the ideas I'm hearing, and start drawing what I'm thinking about as sketchnotes in my sketchbook.

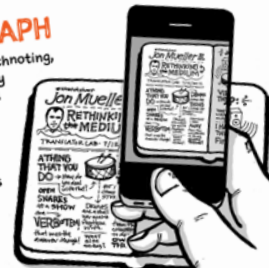


A completed sketchnote.



### 6 PHOTOGRAPH

When I'm done sketchnoting, I shoot photos of my sketchnotes. This is a great way to immediately share what you've created via social media, and photos serve as a good backup of your sketchnotes.



I like to shoot each page as a single image. Photos of single pages provide more detail and are easy to view on mobile devices.

## THE SKETCHNOTE COMMUNITY

Of course, I'm not the only person in the world who sketchnotes. I'm amazed and energized by the wide variety of people all over the world who create and actively share their sketchnotes. I love the sense of community that has sprung up around this process, and I've made a great many friends through sharing and discussing sketchnotes online and at conferences.

I invited 15 of these friends—leading sketchnoters from around the world—to each create a two-page spread for this book that shares a bit about who they are, how they came to sketchnoting, and a tip or two to help you take better notes.

What I hope you'll notice from looking at their work at the end of each chapter is that everyone sees the world differently; everyone processes information differently; everyone has their own, unique style, and that's part of what makes sketchnoting so much fun! There's no right way or wrong way to do it.

I will teach you the basic principles of sketchnoting, but the real joy will come when you start creating sketchnotes and discover how taking notes can unleash your creativity and make paying attention, even at the most boring meetings, something you look forward to doing.

## REACH OUT

As you learn from this book, I encourage you to share your own sketchnotes at *The Sketchnote Handbook* Flickr group ([www.flickr.com/groups/thesketchnotehandbook](http://www.flickr.com/groups/thesketchnotehandbook)). I plan on hanging out there a lot, and I'd love to see how you've taken this process and made it your own.

You can view more of my work and contact me through my personal website at [rohdesign.com](http://rohdesign.com) or on Twitter at [twitter.com/rohdesign](https://twitter.com/rohdesign). I look forward to hearing what you think of the book and learning about your sketchnoting experiences.

***IT'S TIME TO GET STARTED. GRAB A NOTEBOOK AND A PEN.  
LET'S GO TAKE SOME NOTES!***



LET'S GO!



## CHAPTER 4

# the Sketchnoting PROCESS

AFTER YEARS OF EXPERIENCE  
I'VE DEVELOPED MY OWN  
SKETCHNOTING PROCESS  
THAT WORKS WELL FOR  
ME AND CAN HELP YOU  
CREATE A PROCESS OF YOUR OWN.



# HERE ARE THE STEPS I FOLLOW WHEN SKETCHNOTING EVENTS:

## 1 RESEARCH

Before I arrive onsite, I research the event, the speakers, and the topic.

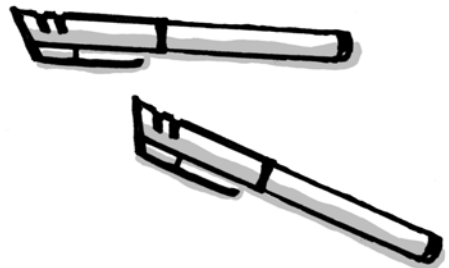
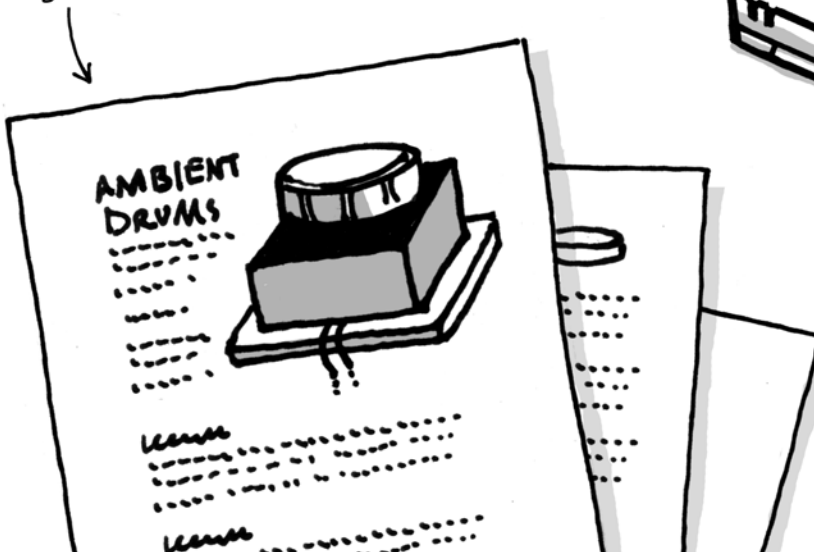
### RESEARCH GIVES ME INSIGHT

and confidence, especially when I'm sketchnoting people or ideas that I'm new to.

iPads are great tools for research before and at an event.



Sometimes I'll bring my research along as printed pages as a backup in addition to my electronic research tools.





## 2 GATHER MATERIALS



### GATHERING KEY MATERIALS

before arriving at an event is critical. I like to bring two or three Moleskine sketchbooks; multiple pens; and my iPhone to access photos and research materials, and to act as a flashlight in a pinch. A book light is useful if the venue is dark.

*A few years ago, I was at an event in Chicago when my sketchbook literally came apart at the seams. Now I always carry at least one spare sketchbook, just in case.*

### ALWAYS BRING BACKUPS

You never know when a pen might run out of ink or a sketchbook might get damaged. Bring spares along to be safe.

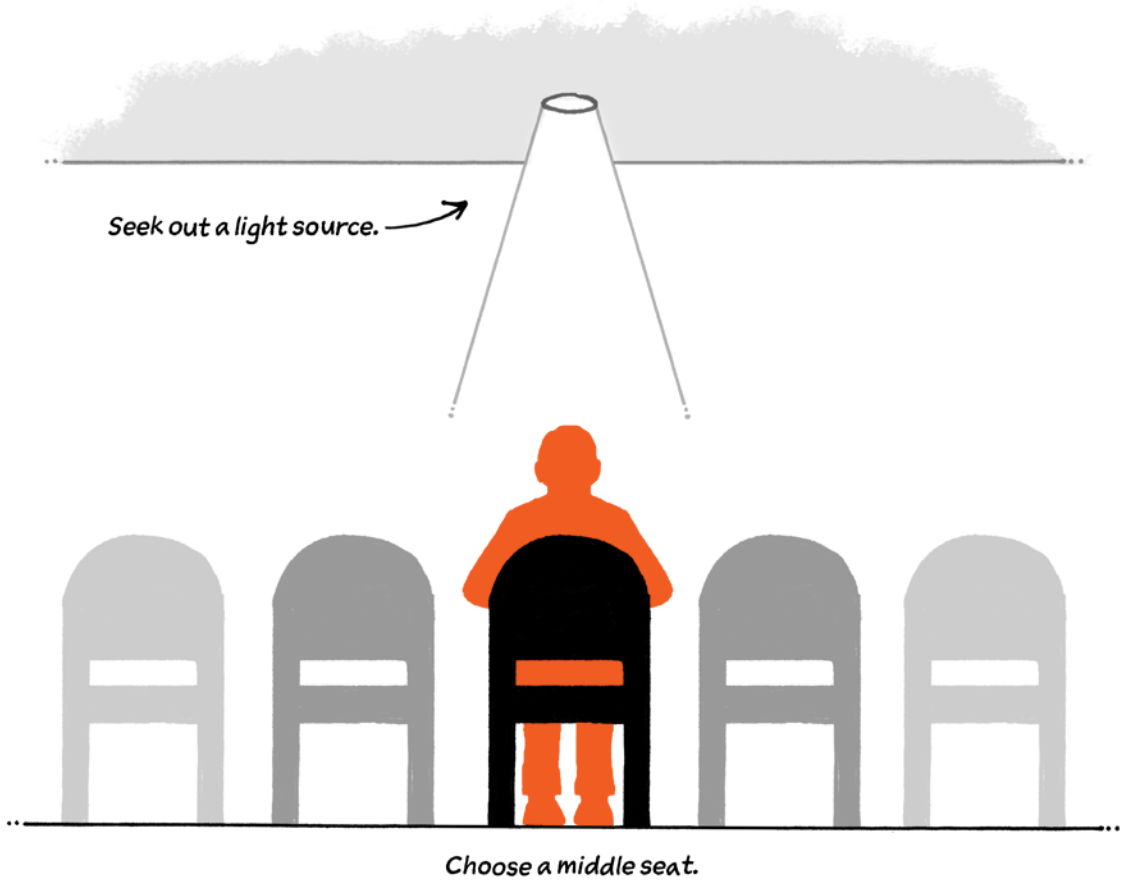


### 3 ARRIVE EARLY

I arrive at a presentation early and scout out the best seating. Spots underneath lights and close to the front allow me to hear and see the speaker.



**SITTING IN THE MIDDLE OF A ROW** can reduce annoyances or disruptions if others are coming in late or leaving early.



## 4 CREATE A TITLE



↑  
A completed title page, ready to go.



↑  
I like to use my iPhone to find photos of the speaker for reference on my title page.

**ONCE I'VE SETTLED IN**, I check the topic and the speaker's name, verify spellings, and sometimes find a photo on my phone to create a visually interesting title page for the speaker or the topic.

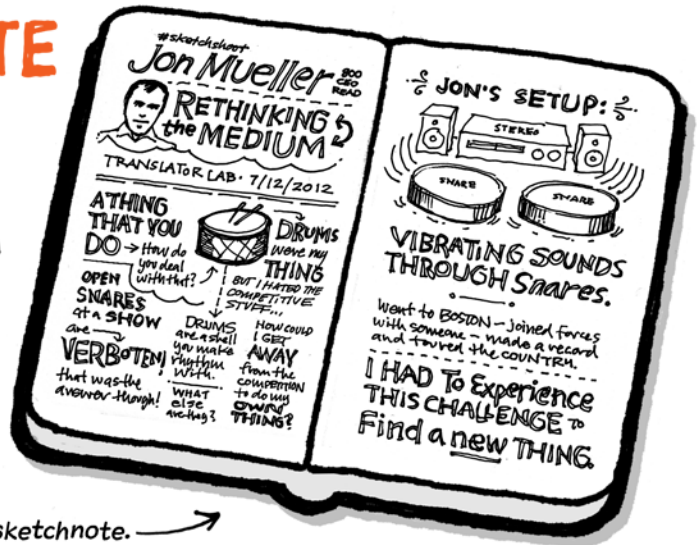
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*I complete my title before the speaker begins, so I can focus on the talk rather than rushing to create a title at the start of the presentation.*

.....

## 5 SKETCHNOTE

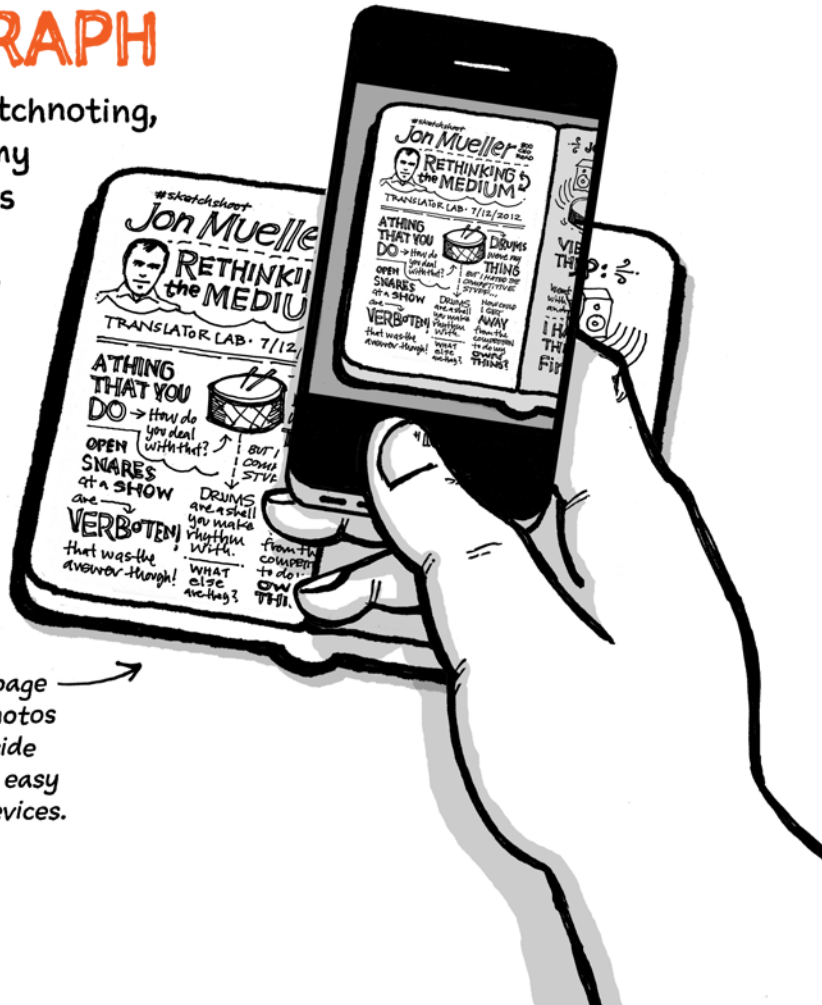
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A completed sketchnote. →

## 6 PHOTOGRAPH

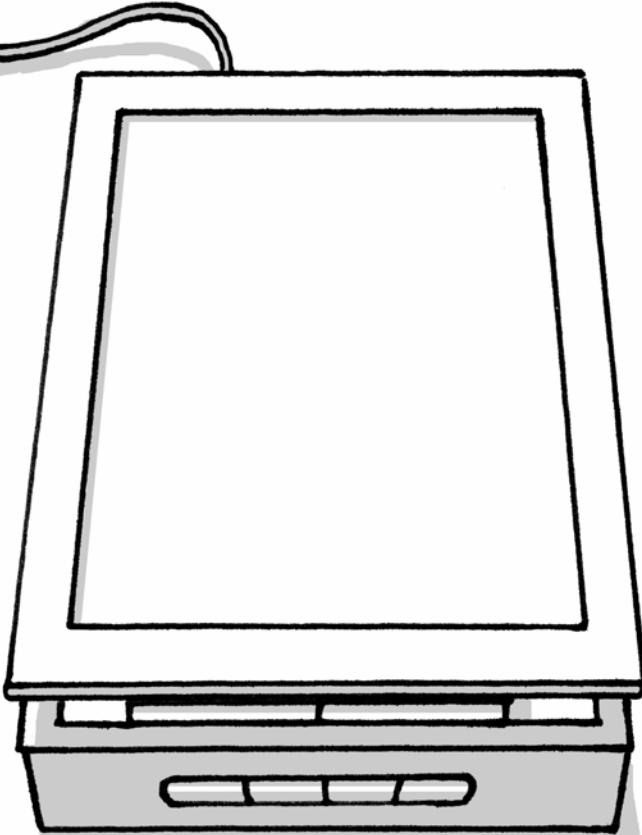
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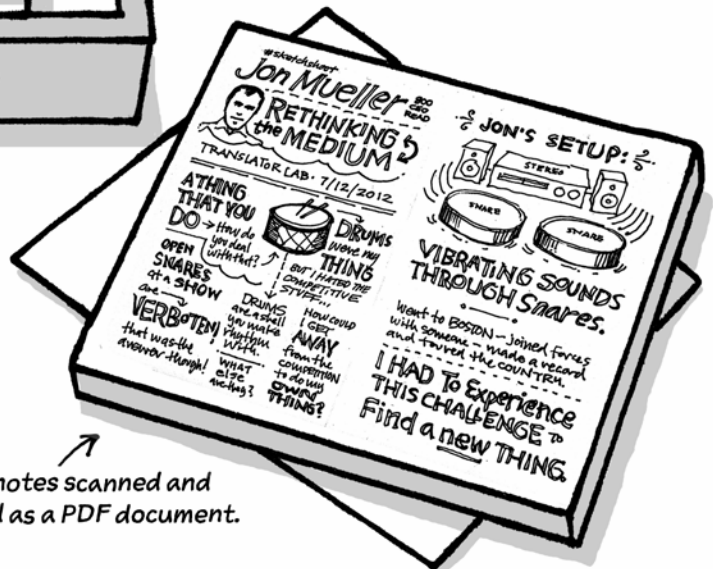
## 7 SCAN, TUNE & POST

When I get home, I scan my sketchnotes at high resolution, adjust the contrast, and fix any typos or errors in Photoshop. Final scans are exported to PNG formatted files for sharing online.



USB powered scanner

I use the same PNG files of my sketchnote scans to create a letter-sized, printable PDF document.



Sketchnotes scanned and assembled as a PDF document.



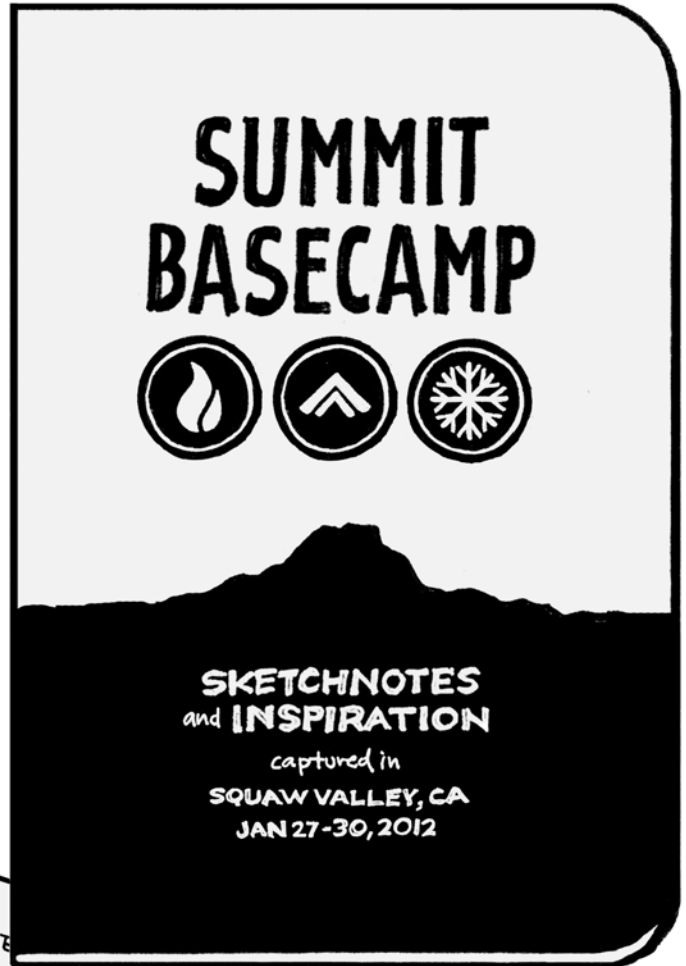
# CONFERENCE ORGANIZERS

share sketchnotes to promote their upcoming events to potential attendees because they capture the event simply and visually.



Organizers often like to give away copies of the sketchnotes as PDF documents or printed booklets to their attendees. These after-event documents work well as handy offline references.

*This printed booklet was created as a gift for the attendees of Summit Basecamp by the organizers. Booklets can also work great as a promotional item for the organizers.*





## ★ TYPOGRAPHY

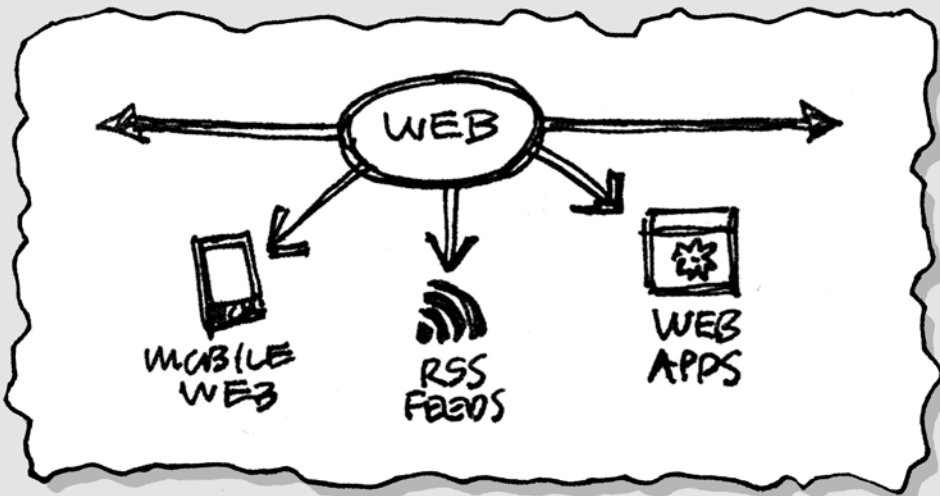
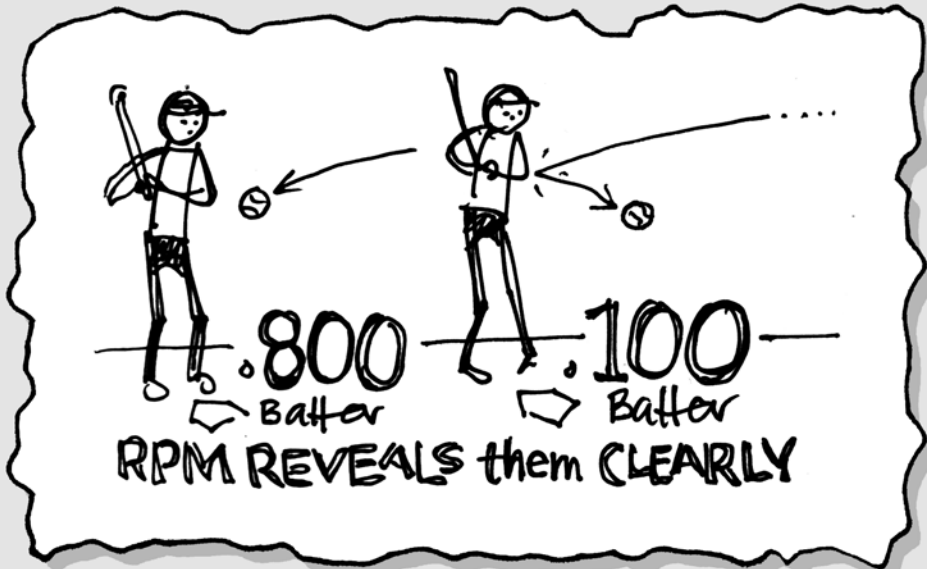
Typography is useful to emphasize ideas, create a hierarchy and structure, and even establish a mood.





# ★ DIAGRAMS & DRAWINGS

Diagrams and drawings make for more interesting elements. A few pen strokes can illustrate complex ideas quickly.





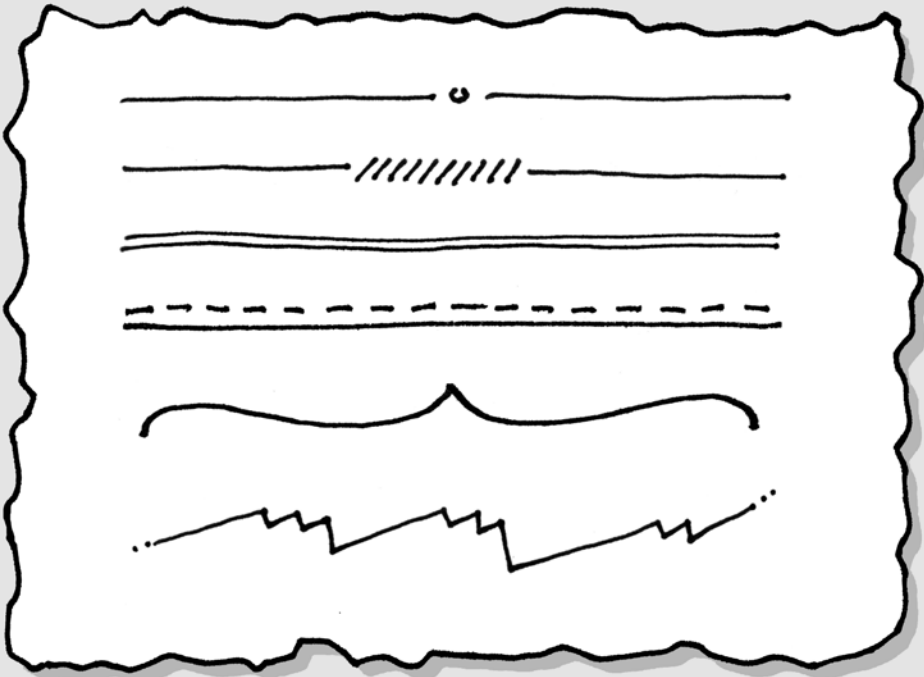
## ★ HANDWRITING

Handwriting is helpful for adding a detailed description if a diagram or information is needed.

IVON led the University of Alabama in the creation of an official Mobile app for the university.

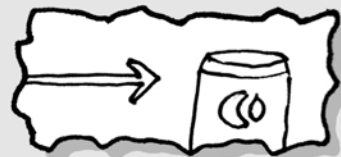
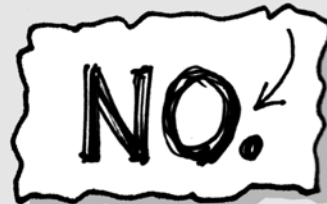
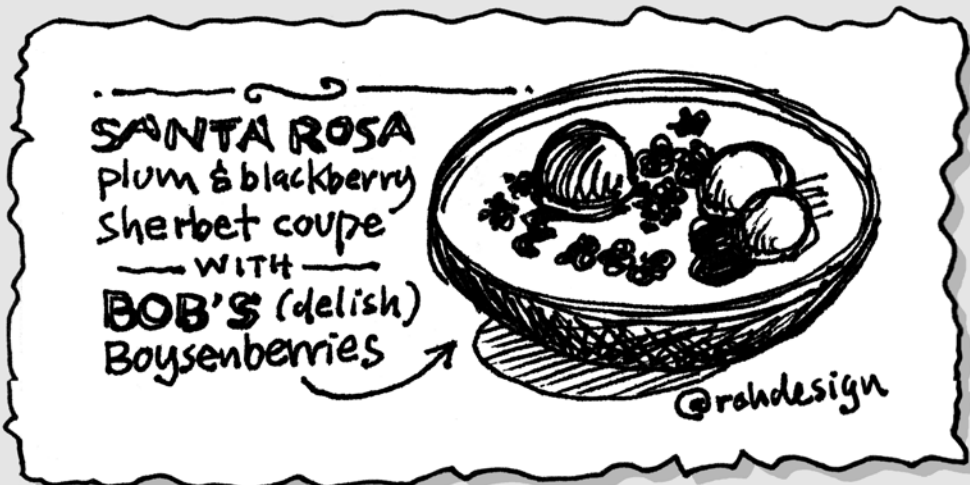
## ★ DIVIDERS

Dividers like rules, dotted lines, and so on can help separate ideas from each other visually, creating order and structure.



# ★ ARROWS

Arrows point out details and can help focus attention on specific drawings, typography, or text, and they can provide a connection between multiple ideas.



## ★ BULLETS

Bullets are useful for identifying a series of ideas or highlighting a single idea among drawings or text. Different types of bullet icons can further define ideas.

- \* RYANAIR - tricky
- \* HOTELS.com - Shifty
- \* REGISTER.COM - Add
- \* PHILIPS - Forced spam

- IS IT READABLE?
- is it legible?
- HOW DID THIS HAPPEN ANYWAY?

- ★ UNDERSTAND CONTE
- ★ LOOK AT THE ENTIRETY  
A TYPEFACE
- ★ HEADLINE + BODY

- Gas prices ros
- President forced
- First year for

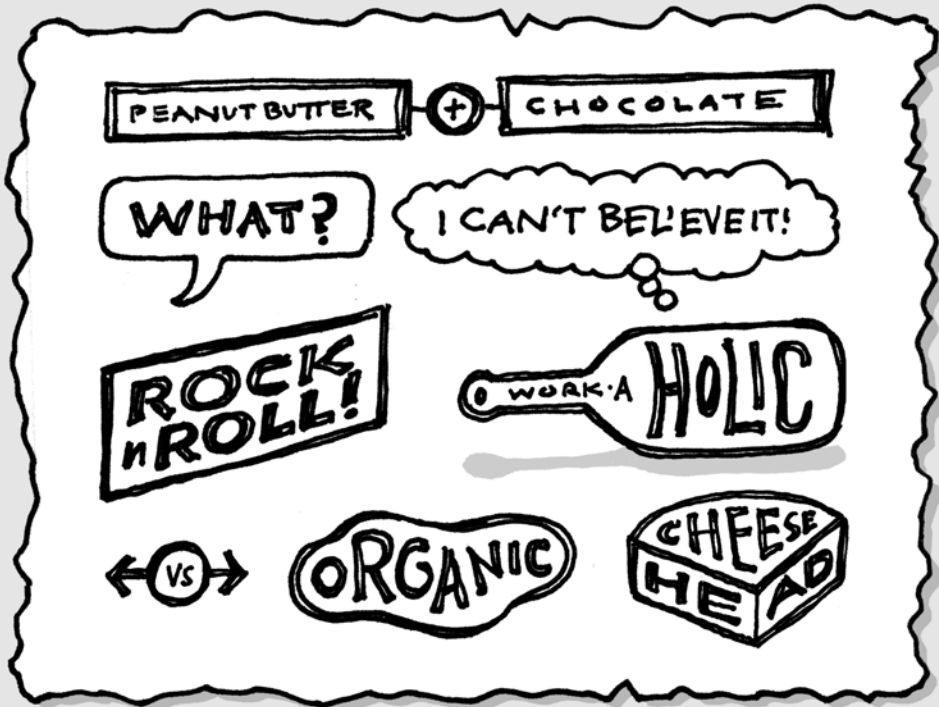
## ★ ICONS

Icons are handy to use throughout a sketchnote document to identify ideas visually as repeating elements.



## ★ CONTAINERS

Containers connect various elements together in a single grouping to represent an overall idea or topic.



## ★ SIGNATURES

Signatures are an optional way to identify sketchnotes. If you're creating sketchnotes for your own use, no signature is required.



#sketchshoot

Jon Mueller <sup>800  
CEO  
READ</sup>



RETHINKING   
the MEDIUM 

TRANSLATOR LAB · 7/12/2012

2 → A THING  
THAT YOU  
DO →

How do  
you deal  
with that?



DRUMS  
were my  
THING 4

OPEN  
SNARES  
at a SHOW

are →  
VERBOTEN!

that was the  
answer though! 7

BUT I HATED THE  
COMPETITIVE  
STUFF...

DRUMS  
are a shell  
you make  
rhythm  
with.

WHAT  
else  
are they?

5 → How could  
I GET  
AWAY 6  
from the  
COMPETITION  
to do my  
OWN  
THING?

# A SKETCHNOTE

## from START to FINISH

PAGE ONE

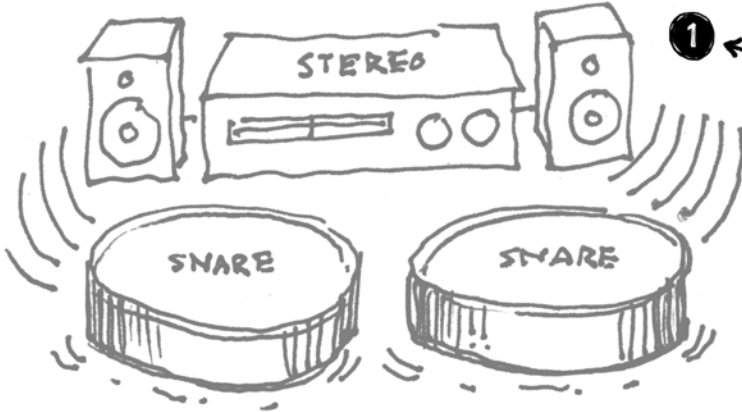
To help you see the progression of a sketchnote from start to finish, I've labeled each section with a number and provided a brief description to show why and in which order each area was drawn.

- 1 The title creation was done before the event, using a photo of the speaker, Jon Mueller, on my iPhone.
- 2 For the first idea, I captured "A THING THAT YOU DO."
- 3 Jon talked about a snare drum, so my first drawing was of a drum.
- 4 Here I've fitted "DRUMS WERE MY THING" into this snug space on the right side of the snare drum drawing.
- 5 An arrow points to another idea lower on the page.
- 6 I added a "DO MY OWN THING" concept in the lower-right area.
- 7 Here I emphasized the idea of snare drums being verboten.

*With this first page of sketchnotes, I've used a radial pattern to organize the talk information. I'll talk about sketchnote patterns in Chapter 5.*



♪ JON'S SETUP: ♪



VIBRATING SOUNDS 2  
THROUGH Snares.

• — • 3 ←

Went to BOSTON - joined forces 4  
with someone - made a record  
and toured the COUNTRY.

----- 5  
I HAD TO EXPERIENCE  
THIS CHALLENGE TO 6  
Find a NEW THING.

# A SKETCHNOTE

## from START to FINISH

PAGE  
TWO

- 1 Here I added a drawing of Jon's drum setup as I pictured it in my mind's eye. I added the title after drawing the image.
- 2 This description of Jon's approach to sending sounds through snare drums was key to the presentation, so I gave it focus with large, ALL CAPS typography.
- 3 I used a separator to create a break between the top and bottom.
- 4 Jon mentioned driving to Boston, creating a record, and touring the country, so I added it just below the separator.
- 5 Here's another separator using dashed lines.
- 6 To wrap up my sketchnotes, I used bold type to to emphasize the speaker's final thought.

*On the second page of my sketchnotes, I used a linear pattern for the information with heavier emphasis on drawings and typography.*

#sketchshoot

Jon Mueller <sup>800 CEO READ</sup>



TRANSLATOR LAB · 7/12/2012

ATHING THAT YOU DO

→ How do you deal with that?

OPEN SNARES at a SHOW

are → VERBOTEN!

that was the answer though!



DRUMS were my THING

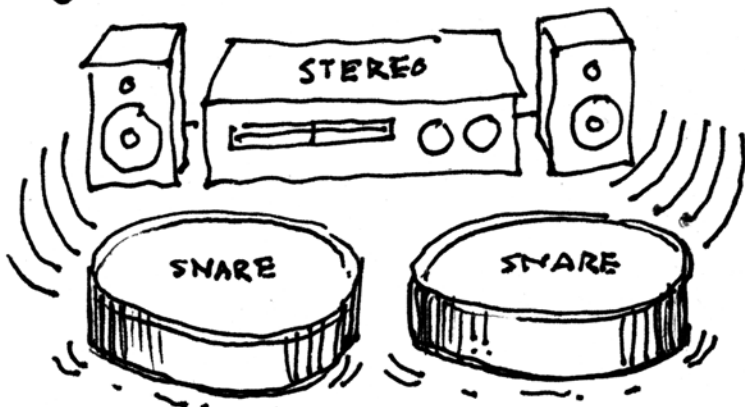
BUT I HATED THE COMPETITIVE STUFF...

DRUMS are a shell you make rhythm with.

WHAT else are they?

HOW COULD I GET AWAY from the COMPETITION to do my OWN THING?

♪ JON'S SETUP: ♪



VIBRATING SOUNDS  
THROUGH Snares.



Went to BOSTON - joined forces  
with someone - made a record  
and toured the COUNTRY.

-----  
I HAD TO EXPERIENCE  
THIS CHALLENGE TO  
Find a NEW THING.



DO YOUR  
RESEARCH

— and —

ARRIVE A  
BIT EARLY!



*Being prepared helps you relax  
when the time comes to listen,  
cache ideas, and draw them.*

# R E C A P



- Use my process as a starting point, and then make it your own.
- Research speakers and topics to gain insight and confidence.
- Backups are key to being prepared when you're sketchnoting.
- Arrive early, scout your location, and use the extra time to create a title *before* the event.
- Photograph your sketchnotes right after the event to share them, and to have a backup.
- Shared sketchnotes are great resources for attendees and work well as PR tools.
- The anatomy of a sketchnote includes the title, typography, diagrams & drawings, handwriting, dividers, arrows, bullets, icons, containers, and signatures.

★ NEXT: TYPES OF SKETCHNOTES



Michelle GEORGE

about.me/michellegeorge

FIND ME HERE

DON'T *forget* TO  
REMEMBER

- THINK ABOUT LAYOUT BEFOREHAND
- HAVE A STANDARD SET OF SYMBOLS & FONTS
- KEEP IT SIMPLE!
- CAPTURE WHAT'S MEANINGFUL TO YOU
- IT DOESN'T HAVE TO BE PERFECT

---

MY *biggest*  
CHALLENGE  
... LISTENING & DRAWING  
AT THE SAME TIME!  
I GET LOST IN THE PICTURES.

# my STYLE & TOOLS



WRITER

ARTIST

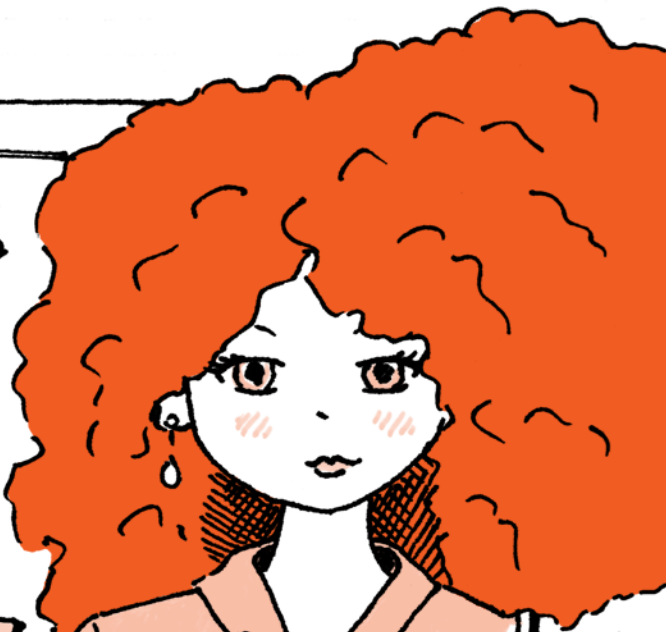
AUSSIE

Geek

MANAGER

MOTHER

WIFE



■ STYLE DEPENDS  
ON WHAT I'M  
CAPTURING

● LOTS OF DATA  
MEANS  
TEXT + SYMBOLS + TYPOGRAPHY

■ EVENTS WITH SCOPE FOR  
ANALYSIS TEND TO BE  
RESPONSIVE & INVOLVE  
MORE PICTURES

● I USE MOLESKINE NOTEBOOKS  
& WATERCOLOUR SKETCHBOOKS



I LIKE PENS THAT

*flow*

SOMETIMES I ADD  
WATERCOLOUR



MY FAVE  
LAMY  
SAFARI

ALSO  
USE  
UNI-BALL  
eye pens





HI!  
I'M  
EVA-LOTTA  
LAMM

I'M A  
DESIGNER  
LIVING IN  
LONDON

WWW.  
SKETCHNOTES  
BOOK.COM

my book  
😊  
one year of  
conference  
notes



@evalottchen

TOMBOW ABT  
BRUSH PEN

PILOT G-TEC-C4  
GEL PEN

COLOURED  
MUJI GEL PEN

Although I love pens, the material you use doesn't really matter that much after all.

I like spiral-bound sketchbooks, because they fold over into a nice solid block

Sketching  
is  
thinking  
made  
visual



Any Pen  
is better than  
No Pen

**BUT**

the best sketchbook  
is the one you have

**ALWAYS WITH YOU.**





# sketching

sketchnotes

QUICK

EXPLORING IDEAS

IMPROVISED

&  
playful

develop your own

VISUAL VOCABULARY & STYLE



# drawing

illustration

PLANNED + LAYED OUT

DETAILED

FINISHED

(this piece is more of an illustration)

## PLAY WITH SHAPES



## PROPORTIONS



## DIRECTION + DYNAMICS



SKETCH AN OBJECT

# 50

TIMES TO MAKE IT YOURS...



surprise yourself



CELEBRATE

# HAPPY ACCIDENTS



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