

# Capture the Flying Monkeys

by Linda Rohrbough  
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I've heard it said writing a book is like sorting paper in a wind tunnel. That's pretty close to my experience. It doesn't matter if the book is fiction or non-fiction, during the initial stages ideas are swooping around my head like the flying monkeys in the Wizard of Oz. I know they'll get away if I don't have some quick capture method, because it's happened before. But I've found some tools to handle this problem I'd like to share with you.

Up until now, I've been forced to use paper. But I hate paper. However, electronic files are no problem for me. Recently I ran across a couple of tools that provide me with real flexibility to capture the energy around a book, especially in the early stages of a project: mind mapping software and electronic note cards.

Paramount is a tool that doesn't get in my way when I'm trying to nab my ideas. It needs to be almost transparent, so I forget about what I'm using and can generate ideas on the fly and at random, then organize them in any manner I choose. I don't want my hand slapped when I'm in this process and I hate being interrupted. I tried Microsoft Word to jot down ideas, but they all look the same in a long list and organizing them gets me into all sorts of painful mechanics and makes me very aware of Word as a tool. Now when I'm actually writing, Word is transparent to me. But during the idea stage, if I stop to take care of a formatting issue or I can't get a visual approach to the structure, then I get frustrated. I'm happy to report I've found a couple of new tools that work for me.

The first is MindManager from Mindjet. MindManager is a graphical tool for generating concepts and relationships between those concepts. It can be used for project management at the

corporate level, but it's great for getting my ideas on the page without getting in the way. The learning curve was steep for me but I can make it shorter for you by giving you a single tip: use the insert key. Once you understand the insert key is the way to generate new boxes, the rest is easy. What's even better is it exports to Microsoft Word in a standard outline format. So once I'm ready to start filling in details, I can use Word. It'll also go the other way, so if you have a Word outline, you can export it to MindManager and then manipulate it graphically.

The downside is the price. MindManager starts at about \$350. However, there are other mind mapping products available, some free and some priced less. You can find a list, plus screen shots, on Wikipedia if you type in the term "mind mapping software."

SuperNoteCard is another graphical tool for plotting. It duplicates on-screen the old 3x5 note card system of writing and arranging scenes. It also exports to Word or any other word processor that will import a standard Rich Text Format (.rtf) file. It's not quite as elegant as MindManager, but it has the advantage of letting you see your work sequentially. And it's a lot cheaper, as the full version is only \$29. There's also a version aimed at scriptwriting for just \$34.

The beauty of these electronic tools for me is they're light, easy for me to find, and key-word searchable. I know writers who can buy a pack of 3x5 cards for a buck and keep what they've written on them for years. I'm not that kind of person. I lose paper, spill things on it, crumple it until it's just about unrecognizable, and do other injustices to it. But electronic data I never lose. I'm a nut about backups, so I have multiple copies stored away in various places, both in my office and off-site, on everything I've ever written or jotted down electronically. And it comforts me to know every copy of an electronic file is a perfect copy, so there's no degradation of the data.

One added benefit of both of the tools I've mentioned here is they offer a try-before-you-buy feature, so you can see if they help you capture your monkeys before you plunk down any cash. It doesn't get much better than that.

**Resources:**

MindManager from Mindjet Software: [www.mindjet.com](http://www.mindjet.com)

Wikipedia list of free and proprietary mind mapping software:

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_mind\\_mapping\\_software](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_mind_mapping_software)

SuperNoteCard from Mindola: [www.mindola.com](http://www.mindola.com)

**Biography:**

*Linda Rohrbough has been writing professionally since 1989, has more than 5,000 articles, seven books and numerous awards for her fiction and non-fiction. Linda's new book is Weight Loss Surgery with the Adjustable Gastric Band. Visit her website for details:*

[www.LindaRohrbough.com](http://www.LindaRohrbough.com).