



# *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

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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.*



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**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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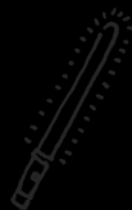
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# INTRODUCTION

**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.

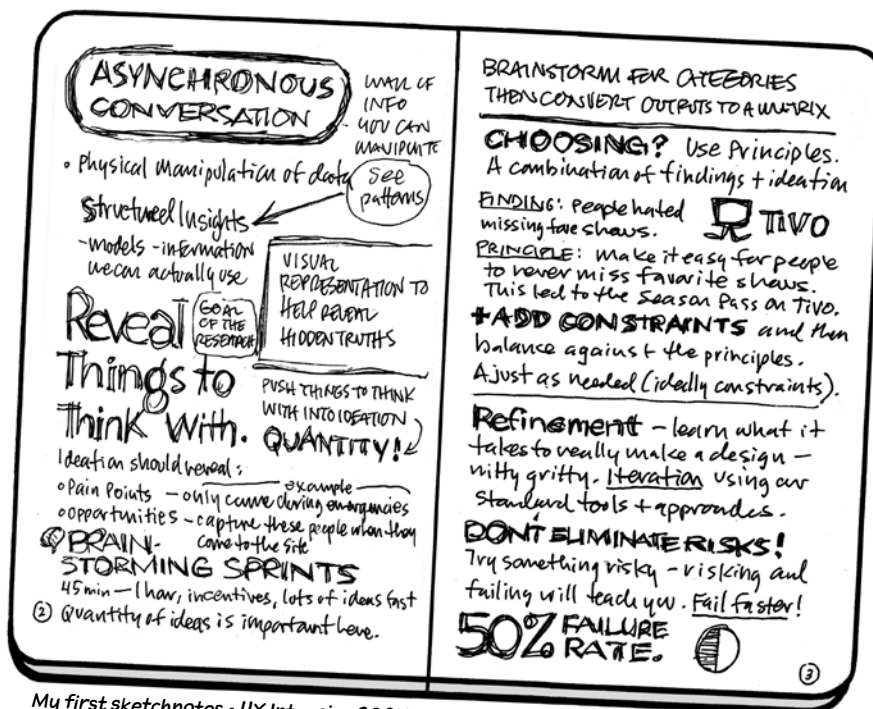
Ever since that mind-altering experience, I've been working hard through my blog, *The Sketchnote Army*, and at live presentations and workshops to share my passion for sketchnoting. I take great pleasure in talking about why sketchnoting enables you to take better notes, explaining how to create sketchnotes,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

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.*



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

### 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 1

# *What are* SKETCHNOTES?

SKETCHNOTES ARE RICH VISUAL  
NOTES CREATED FROM A MIX OF  
HANDWRITING, DRAWINGS,  
HAND-DRAWN TYPOGRAPHY,  
SHAPES, AND VISUAL ELEMENTS  
LIKE ARROWS, BOXES & LINES.



# SKETCHNOTES WERE BORN of *frustration!*

..-----..

**I WAS FRUSTRATED** by the highly detailed, text-only notes I was taking at conferences and in meetings. The stress escalated as I worked hard to capture every last detail in very large, lined notebooks. Worse, I never looked at my notes after their completion.

**ARG!  
I HATE  
THIS!**

## **A PENCIL**

*I was so worried about making mistakes, I took my notes in pencil, so I could erase any errors.*

## **A LARGE, LINED NOTEBOOK**

*Because I tried to capture every detail, I needed large pages to store all of that information.*





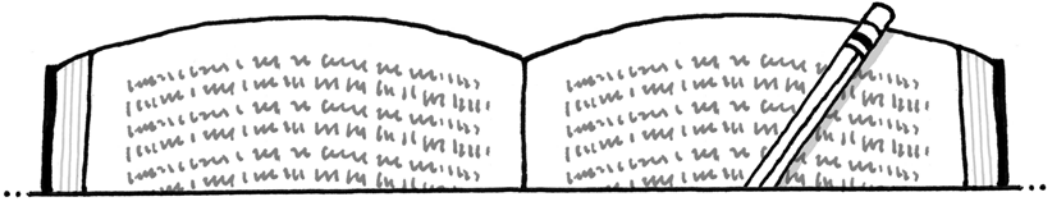
*I decided to*  
**GIVE UP**

*— and —*

**TRY**  
*Something*  
**NEW.**

**RATHER**

↳ than worrying about every last detail ↳



*I relaxed a bit,*



**LISTENED**

→ *more* ←

**INTENTLY,**



And  
**FOCUSED**  
ON CAPTURING

