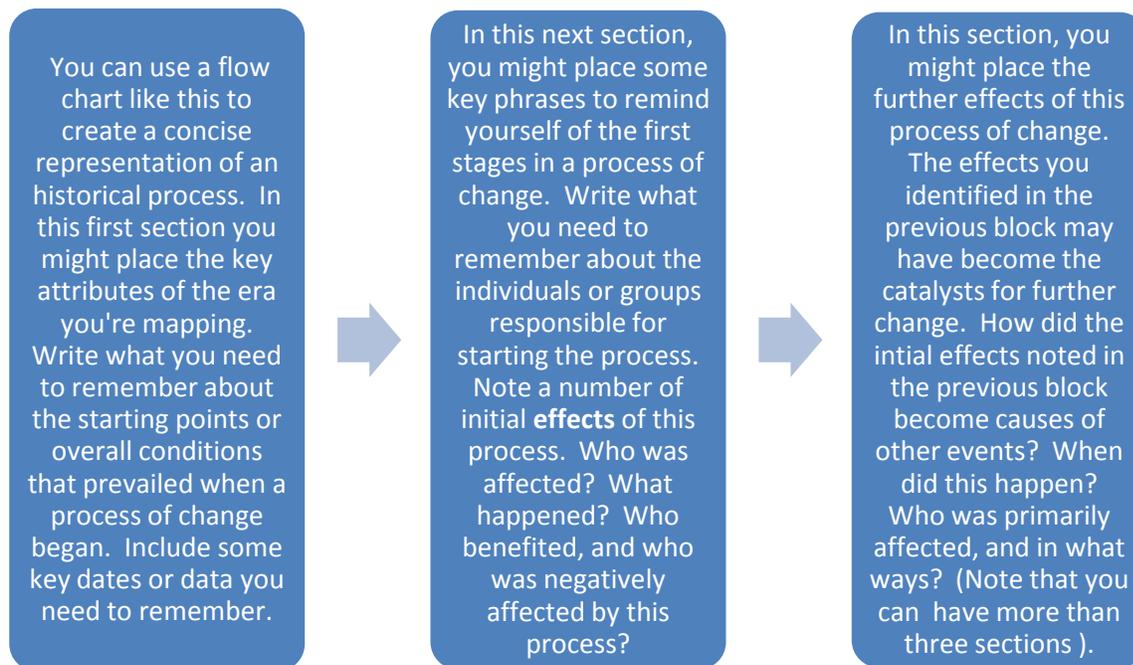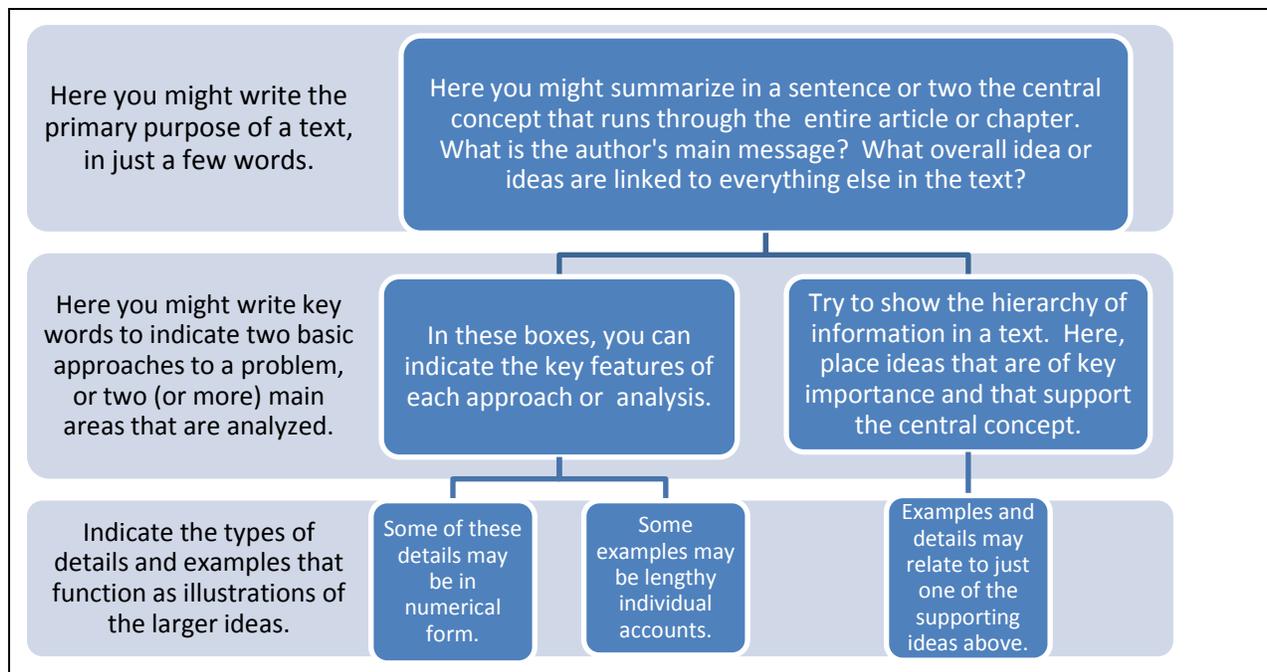## *Reading to Write: Visual Mapping*

Many people find it easier to absorb reading material by creating a visual map of an article, book chapter, or an important section of a piece of writing. A visual representation of concepts has the advantage of showing on a single page the complex logical relationships that an author may develop in many pages of writing. The map can provide a useful reminder of these relationships to refer back to as you move through a text. Additionally, it can function as a study tool, reminding you of key concepts that you've read and heard lectures about in greater detail. Depending upon your personal learning style, a visual map may be a superior means of memorizing material for tests and can also aid in the writing of longer papers. The map may be drawn by hand or made on the computer; sophisticated "mind-mapping" software programs also exist for this purpose. Here are some examples of visual mapping:

You can use a flow chart like this to create a concise representation of an historical process. In this first section you might place the key attributes of the era you're mapping. Write what you need to remember about the starting points or overall conditions that prevailed when a process of change began. Include some key dates or data you need to remember.

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In this next section, you might place some key phrases to remind yourself of the first stages in a process of change. Write what you need to remember about the individuals or groups responsible for starting the process. Note a number of initial **effects** of this process. Who was affected? What happened? Who benefited, and who was negatively affected by this process?

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In this section, you might place the further effects of this process of change. The effects you identified in the previous block may have become the catalysts for further change. How did the intial effects noted in the previous block become causes of other events? When did this happen? Who was primarily affected, and in what ways? (Note that you can have more than three sections).

Note that this chart could also be added to in any way you find helpful. If you need to keep events that occurred in several regions or countries clearly separated, an individual chart could be made for each region. Alternatively, you might organize your chart to show the causes and effects that occurred across regions and countries. Quick flow charts made by hand during a lecture may also make your class notes more understandable when it's time to review them.

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Here is another type of visual map which might be used to help distinguish between an overarching idea or thesis that runs through an entire article or section of a work, and the smaller details, examples, or points which help explain and illustrate that central concept.

Here you might write the primary purpose of a text, in just a few words.	Here you might summarize in a sentence or two the central concept that runs through the entire article or chapter. What is the author's main message? What overall idea or ideas are linked to everything else in the text?
Here you might write key words to indicate two basic approaches to a problem, or two (or more) main areas that are analyzed.	In these boxes, you can indicate the key features of each approach or analysis. Try to show the hierarchy of information in a text. Here, place ideas that are of key importance and that support the central concept.
Indicate the types of details and examples that function as illustrations of the larger ideas.	Some of these details may be in numerical form. Some examples may be lengthy individual accounts. Examples and details may relate to just one of the supporting ideas above.

The two examples above were made using "Smart Art", which appears under the "Insert" button in Word 2007. However, even a simple Word table like the one below can become a valuable visual aid. (This is made by clicking on "Insert Table," and then specifying the number of rows and columns you want). Many students find that the time taken to create a table is worthwhile, as it helps in keeping track of ideas in a complex reading and can also allow a comparative look at several readings.

(Example 1) Here, you could place a summary of one author's point of view on a subject.	(1a) The centre column might hold the areas common to both the author and the sources cited by him or her.	(1b) Here, place contrasting evidence or ideas which the author may refer to or critique in the article.
(Example 2) Another way to use a chart is to use each column for some key area you're comparing across texts. Here, name the area.	(2a) This column could contain the relevant ideas from Article A which relate to the key area you're comparing.	(2b) This column could contain the relevant ideas from Article B which relate to the key area you're comparing, and so on. There may be many more columns and rows added.
(Note) Many people use colour coding as a further visual aid.	You can use various colours to correspond to information about individuals, regions, etc.	