



How to make a biographical map for yourself or others

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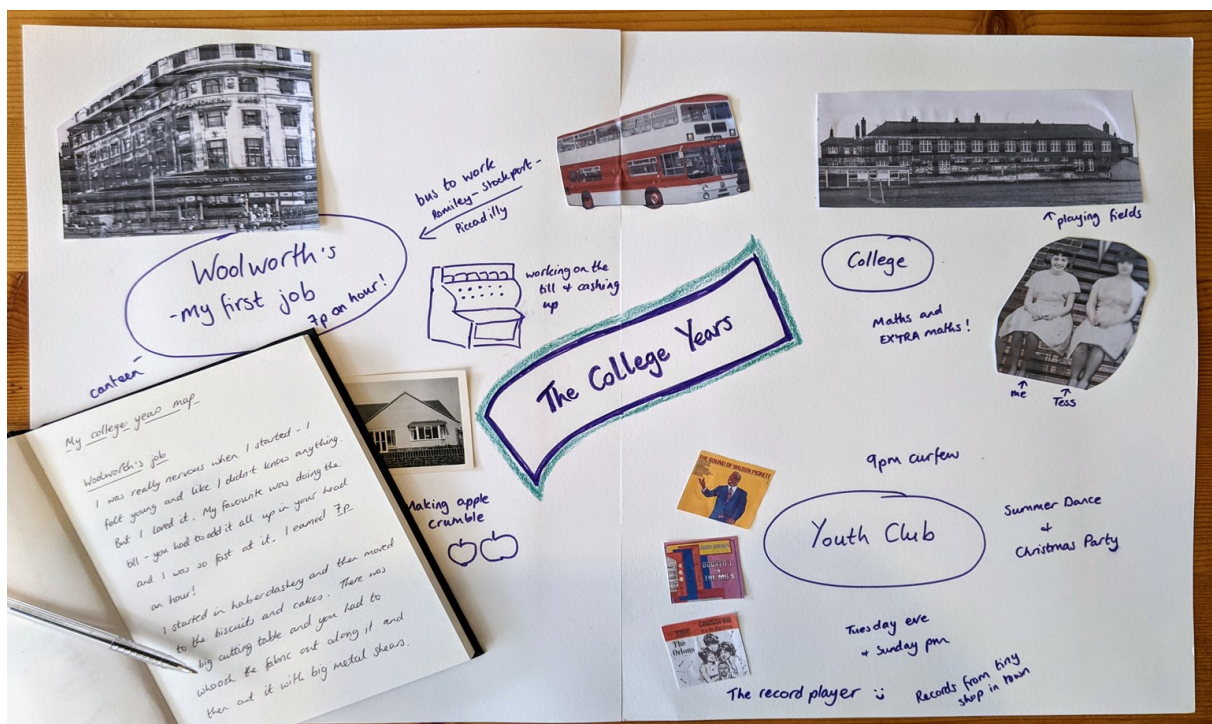
How to make a biographical map for yourself or others

What is a biographical map?

A biographical map is a fun way to think and talk about the past. They are made using a combination of pictures, words and sometimes sounds to represent a particular time in a person's life.



You can make a biographical map for yourself, or to share with others. Anybody can make a biographical map and you don't need any special skills or equipment.



An example of a finished biographical map

Usually, when we think about the past we think chronologically, trying to fit our memories onto a timeline in the correct order. With biographical mapping, you pick a time period or theme that interests you, and use important places and journeys as a starting point, hooking your memories onto these.

We developed biographical mapping as part of our Girlhood and Later Life. In this project, we made biographical maps about the teenage lives of women born between 1939 and 1952.

You can make your own map, or work with a friend or family member. You can also use the technique in your work with individuals and groups – see our notes for workshop facilitators below.

Before you start

All you really need to make a biographical map is a piece of paper and a pen or pencil, but the technique works best with a bit of planning first. Use the questions below to help you prepare.

Who is the map for?

Thinking about who the map is for will help you decide what to include. Is the map to share with family and friends, or is it purely for yourself? Are you making a map as part of a community history project?

Who do you want to make the map with?

You can make your map on your own, or with a friend or family member. Groups might want to make shared maps or make individual maps.

What is the purpose or theme of your map?

In our project we asked people to make a map about their lives between the ages of about 13 and their mid-twenties. You might prefer to focus your map on a shorter time period or just one place or journey.

You could make a map about your childhood home, the journey to school with your friends, a special trip or holiday, moving to a new town or when your children were young.

Or you could explore a theme, for example creating a map with all the homes you have lived in, or you could create a life story through places and journeys. You could even make a series of maps.

Which places or journeys do you want to include?

Once you have decided on the theme of your map, you can make a quick list of places and journeys that come to mind when you think of this time.

You don't *need* to do this now, but it can be easier to have a rough idea of the places you want to include before you start because it gives you a chance to collect photos and images.

For example, if you are going to make a map about your last year at college you might note down:

1. College - sixth form building
2. Woolworth's - my first job (getting three buses to work and back)
3. Youth club
4. Gran's house in Bridlington - visits in school holidays with mum.

Tip: Think about how you travelled to the places you have chosen. We found that journeys could be an interesting starting point for thinking about the past.

Don't worry if you find out later that you want to add extra places to your map that you haven't put on your list. Just add them in as you think of them.

What do I need?

You will need:

1. A big piece of sturdy paper or card – we used thin card, size A1 (the same size as 8 pieces of A4 paper). It helps to have plenty of space for your memories.

2. Pens and pencils – marker pens, felt tips and strong colours are good. Be bold and creative and use what you have.
3. Photos (or copies of photos) – collect any personal photos you want to use. Remember to make a copy first if you don't want to use the originals.
4. Other images – see below for tips on how to find images from the internet. You can download these and print them out ready to use on your map.

Tip: See our website for title banners and illustrations, like this bike and suitcase, to print out and stick on your map to get you started.

www.manchester.ac.uk/biographical-mapping.



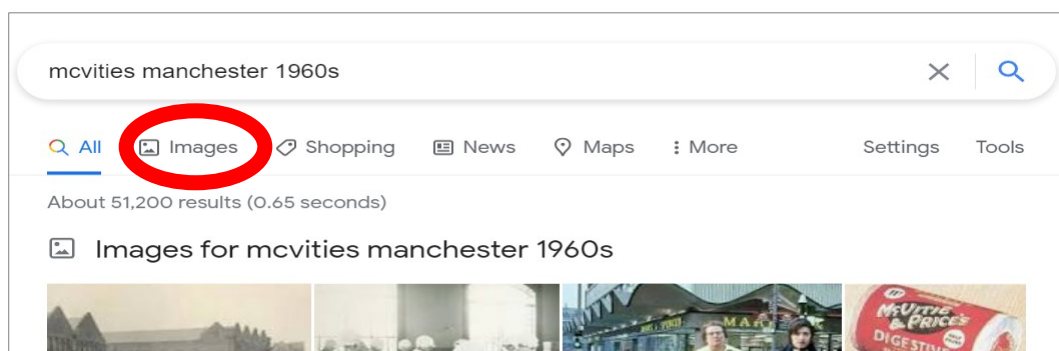
5. Any other bits and bobs – eg tickets, travel passes, invitations, newspaper clippings.
6. Music – we asked our interviewees about the music that reminded them of being a teenager. Do you have music you could play while you make your map?

Tip: Spotify can help you find music. You can search for eg 'Nina Simone' or 'Beach Boys' or '1982 hits' at www.spotify.com.

7. A way to record your memories - we recorded the conversation that took place as we created the map on a digital audio recorder. If you want to do the same, you can record spoken memories using your smartphone, or any other device you use already to record sound. Another way to record your stories or memories is simply to note them down on a separate piece of paper.
8. Refreshments. Based on our extensive academic research (!) we found that biscuits (or fruit, as a healthy alternative) can be a big help in creating biographical maps.

How to find images online to use on your map

You might not have a photo of the street where you lived when you were first married, a tram from the 1970s or the factory where you worked in your twenties... but Google often does. Add in your search words (try the name of your old school, a street, a business name or even '1980s bus'). Often, images will show at the top of the page, and you can see more of them by clicking the 'Images' button circled in red in the image below.



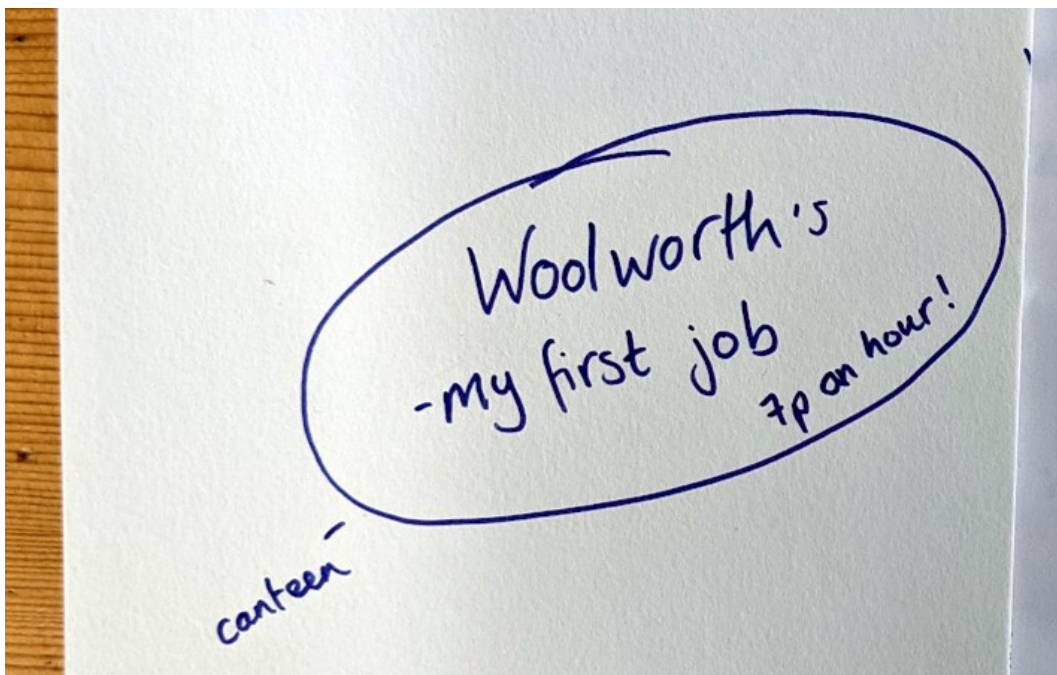
If you are going to share your map publicly then remember to check the copyright of the images.

Making your map

1. Collect your paper, pens, photos, printed images, glue and scissors to make your map.
2. How are you going to record your memories? If you are going to write them down, get a notebook, or some pieces of paper. If you are going to audio record them, make sure you have your mobile phone or your audio recorder.



3. If you have chosen music that reminds you of this time in your life, turn it on now.
4. You can start by adding a title to your map, if you like. Or you can add this in later, or skip it altogether.
5. Choose any place or journey to start with, and write it on your map.



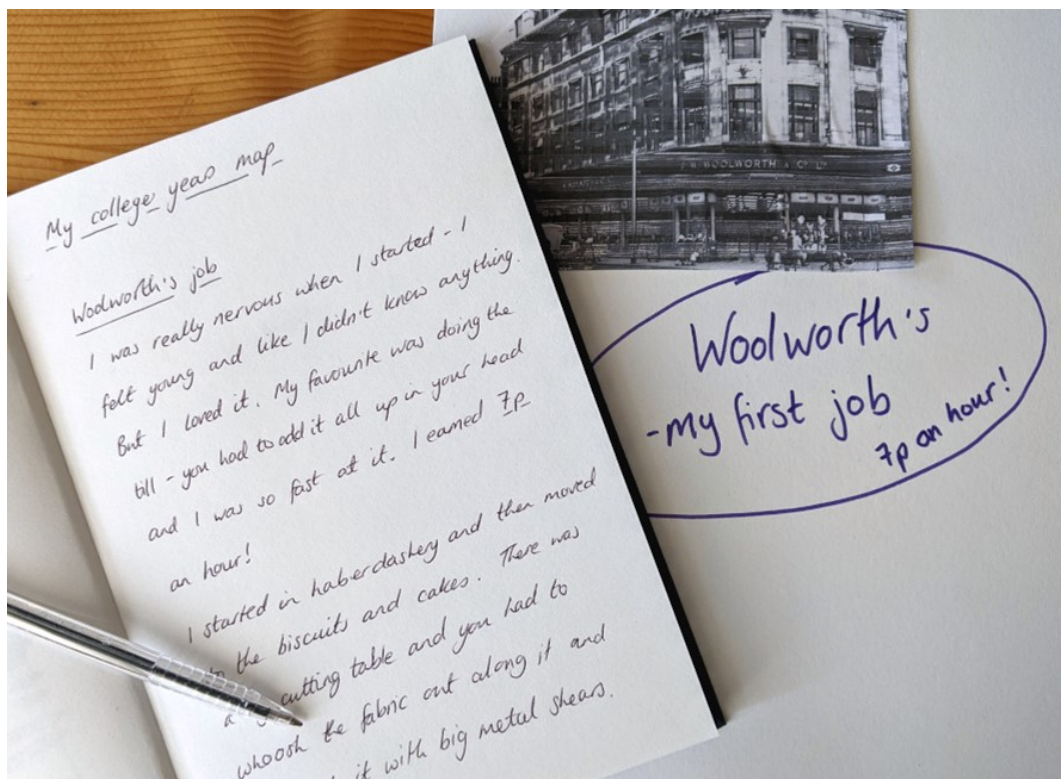
6. Glue on any photos or downloaded images connected with this place and add any extra notes or sketches that come to mind when you think of this place or journey.

Stick figures are fine, this isn't a drawing competition.

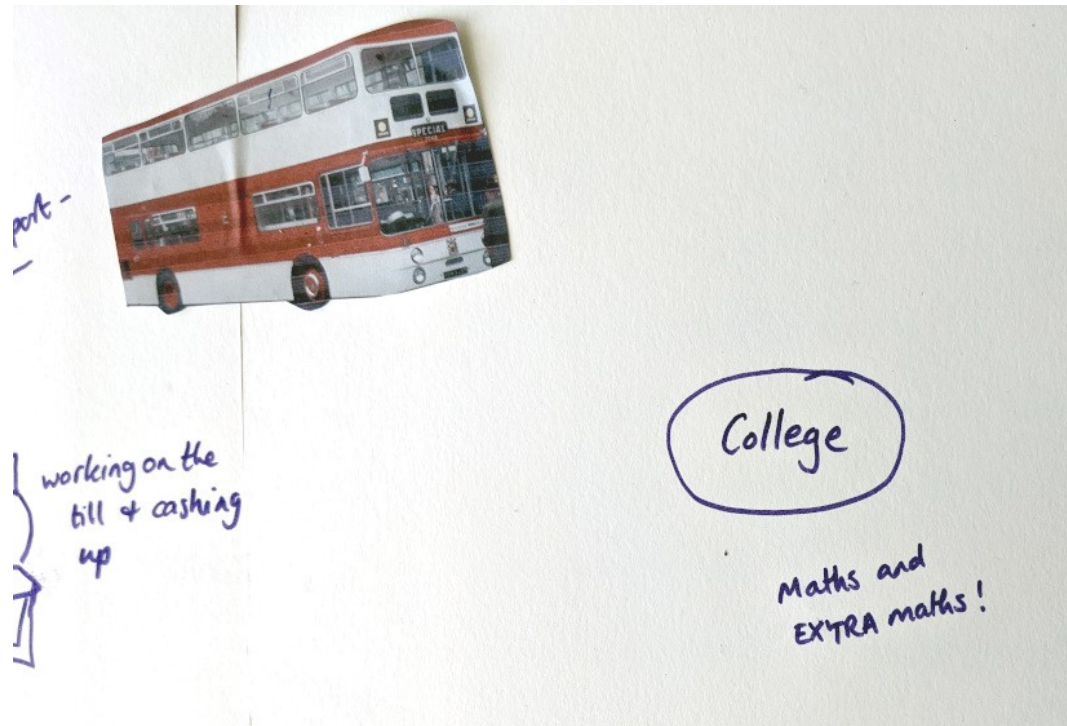


7. Think of a few words that sum up this place or journey for you and write them on your map. You can also add the year(s), if this is relevant for you.

Now, write or audio record your memories of this place, using your pictures, drawings and notes as a prompt. Why is this place or journey important to you? What do you remember about it? Small details are as important as big ones.

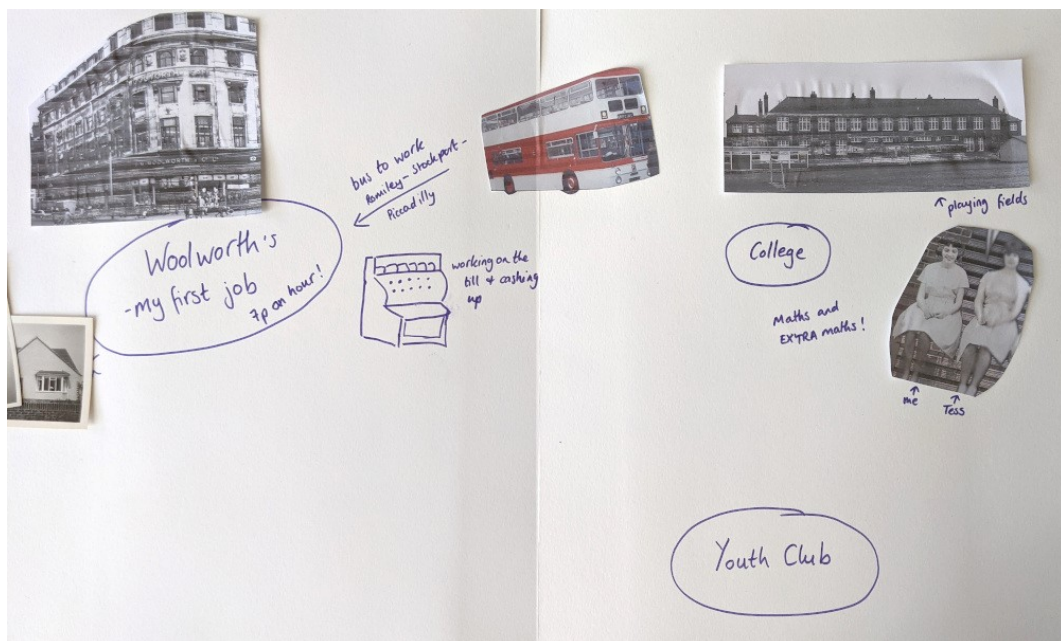


8. When you have added everything you want for the first place or journey, pick another and repeat the process, adding photos and notes.



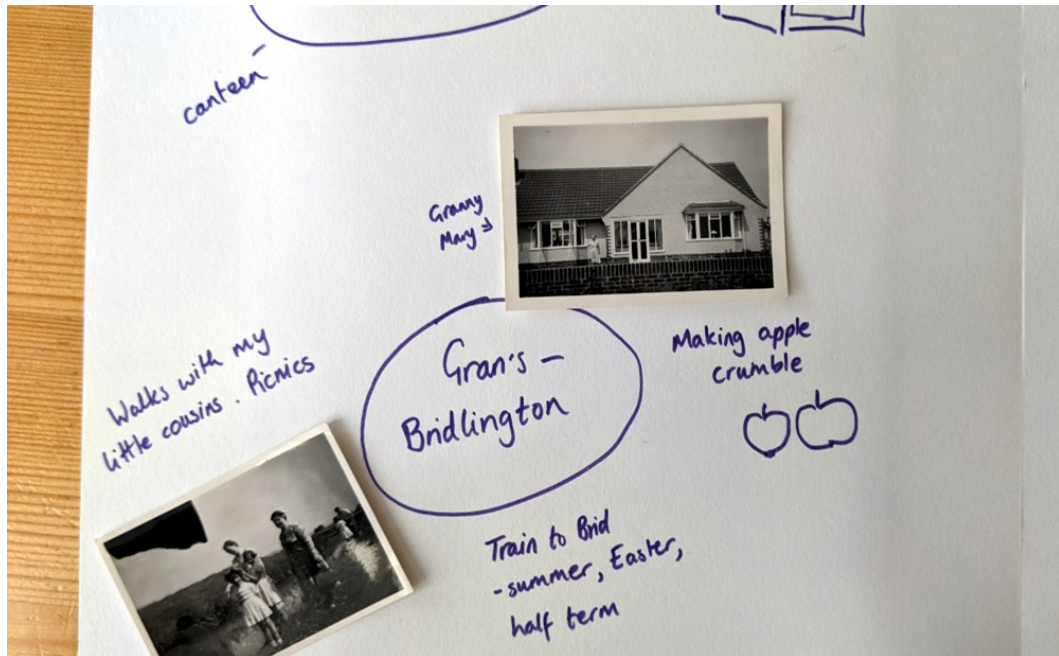
9. At this point, you might want to think about what kind of map you are making.

If you are tracing places or journeys that have been important to you *across* time eg throughout your childhood, you might want to organise your places/journeys from earliest to latest in a line. If you are focusing on a particular time in your life, you might want to dot your places and journeys around the map.



10. For each new place or journey, add your title, any photos, images, drawings etc and ask yourself which words and memories come to mind when you think of them.

Tip: Small is beautiful. Let yourself explore the details of your memories eg the flowers on a favourite walk, saving money by buying one portion of chips between three of you, rushing for the last train so you didn't get told off by your mum.



11. There is no 'right' number of places and you are in charge of which places to include or leave out. Maybe you are mapping a time where you spent long hours at work but prefer to focus on your evening classes and the club you went to at weekends: this is fine. This is not an exam!

12. Carry on until you have included all the places and journeys that you want. Then label your map and add the date you created it. Do the same with your written or audio recorded memories.



Notes for workshop facilitators

If you would like to use biographical maps in your work, either with individuals or with groups, then you might find the points below helpful.

- Do make sure you have enough glue sticks, pens, images and photos, and remember you will need lots of space if everybody is working with A1 card. The note about the importance of refreshments also applies in group settings!
- Be sensitive. Don't assume too much about your mapmakers' backgrounds and keep questions and themes as open as possible. Not all families have enough money for holidays, for example.
- People may not always have personal photos. Often this can be due to the relative scarcity of photos before digital cameras and smartphones, but it can sometimes be tied to difficult pasts/relationships.
- Again, thinking about the purpose of the biographical maps will help you plan your session. What are you going to do with the maps after the session? Do you want to take photos of the finished maps for future reference? Do you want to make an audio recording for future use? If so, how will this work in your setting? Do you have enough audio recorders or phones for everybody? Would it be better to encourage mapmakers to make longer written notes on a separate piece of paper, or to share some of their memories with the group at the end of the session? Or could a facilitator collect memories, using written notes or mini-interviews with mapmakers throughout the session?
- Reassure mapmakers that biographical mapping is not a drawing competition or a test of memory. In our research we came across some people who did not like the idea of drawing on their own map. Think about how you will manage any artistic shyness in your group. You could demonstrate your own inexpert drawing skills, or volunteer to sketch in stick figures, or just make sure you have a good supply of downloaded images or illustrations.
- If you are going to show the maps in a public exhibition you should check image copyright and make sure that any images can be used in this way.
- Biographical mapping could work well as an ice-breaker exercise. People usually enjoy talking about places they have known and trips they have taken, and the topic does not feel too personal so it can be fairly easy to open up and share experiences.
- Community groups could create maps based on memories of local areas or places eg parks or community centres. Groups could create maps based in a particular time period, or trace a place through time, perhaps with different generations of people adding their memories.
- If you are working with people with dementia, place can last longer in the memory than other details, so biographical mapping could be a pleasurable activity as well as a way of collecting memories to manage future memory loss.
- As well as a short animation about making a biographical map and download-and-print illustrations, you might find our 'Methods for Change: Biographical Mapping' resource useful: it goes into more detail about the background to, and use of, biographical mapping. All these resources are on our website.

More information and resources to help you make your map

For more information about Biographical Mapping, see our web page:

www.manchester.ac.uk/biographical-mapping.

On this page you will find drawings and motifs that you can print out and use on your map, a short film about the technique, and links to other resources.

Biographical Mapping was developed by Penny Tinkler, Laura Fenton, Resto Cruz and Hazel Burke as part of the Girlhood and Later Life project, in collaboration with Manchester Age Friendly. You can find out more about the project at: www.manchester.ac.uk/girlhood-and-later-life including an online exhibition about the experiences of young women growing up in Britain in the sixties and seventies.

This 'How to' guide is written by Hazel Burke and Penny Tinkler.

