A. Background of the Study

English is a compulsory subject in Indonesia. There are four skills of English that are supposed to be learnt in Junior High Schools. They are listening, speaking, reading and writing. These skills are divided into two major skills, namely receptive and productive skills. Receptive skills, according to Harmer (2001: 199), are the ways in which students extract meaning from the discourse they listen and read, while productive skills are the ways students use the language to produce a message in a spoken and written form in order to achieve a communicative purpose. Writing can be defined as an activity of creating pieces of written work. It is a process of producing language that derives from our thought to a written form.

The teaching and learning process of English in Junior High Schools is aimed at making the students reach the functional literacy level, that is, to communicate in written and orally to solve daily problems (BSNP, 2006). Therefore, English instructions can be divided into two cycles, i.e. oral cycle consisting of listening and speaking skills as well as written cycle consisting of reading and writing skills. Among those four skills, most students regard writing as more difficult especially when it relates to writing in English as their foreign language.

Westwood (2008: 56) states that written language is the most difficult of all skills to acquire because its development involves the effective coordination of
many different cognitive, linguistic and psycho-motor processes. In addition to this view, Nation (2009: 119) assumes that one possible cause is the difference between the writing system of students’ first language and their second language. From these perceptions, it is true that writing problems frequently occur in the classroom. Some of students may find problem about what they want to write. One cause can arise from their lacks of practice writing in any language. Because of its complexity, writing must be practiced regularly and completed step by step. Thus, each cause requires different techniques to deal with it and teachers need to consider how to discover the causes and how to deal with them.

Writing texts in English, however, is not a simple thing to do for students in Junior High School. These problems arise from different aspects of writing and the teaching technique used in writing. Another problem is some learners are able to say what they want to write but they have difficulty to put it into written form. In other words, they have problems in transferring their ideas into text. The others can do this but they are very slow.

The similar problem, as previously stated above, also happened in class VIII A class at SMP Muhammadiyah 8 Yogyakarta. The students assumed writing as more difficult than other skills because they found it as uninteresting activity. Then, the researcher came with an idea to improve the students’ writing ability through the use of mind mapping software. To help students visualize, mind mapping software namely iMindMap6® can be integrated with in-class writing instruction. Therefore, using mind mapping as an in-class exercise is an effective tool that the English teacher can use to improve their way of teaching writing.
B. Identification of the Problems

From the preliminary observation conducted at VIII A class of SMP Muhammadiyah 8 Yogyakarta, the researcher identified some problems that she found in English teaching and learning processes at the class. Focusing on VIII A class, the researcher classifies the problems including the aspects of writing, the teaching technique, media and time management. These problems were identified as follows.

The former was including the students’ difficulties in writing itself. As the researcher conducted preliminary observation, she found that students’ mistakes firstly appeared from the aspect of content. Sometimes the ideas that they wrote were not clearly supported because they did not know the English words. Besides, most of them had difficulties to use appropriate vocabulary to put in the text. Several errors were also found in the use of tenses, prepositions and articles of their writings. The students’ writing problems were also come from spelling, punctuation and capitalization errors. However, most students made greater spelling errors than punctuation and capitalization errors. As they wrote recount texts, the paragraphs were not well organized. In this case, it could be seen that they had difficulties in organizing the recount texts into appropriate sequences.

The latter was the problems which arose from the media, teaching technique, and time management applied in VIII A class. The teaching writing was lack of visual aids in the classroom. It brought effects on the classroom atmosphere that became uninteresting. The lack of media also made the students’ motivation became less. In addition to this problem, the classroom atmosphere was
previously considered as not interactive. It was happened because they were not interested in the writing activities. There were only few students who participated actively in the classroom. Thus, the role of a learning media was expected to have effects on students’ motivation and interaction in writing activity.

The use of media will not support the classroom activity if the teaching technique is also monotonous. In this case, the English teacher gave only a brief description about the form of the text and then asked the students to make or continue some paragraphs. She then went outside as the students finished their works without assisting them in the activity. It took a very long time for them just to work the task given without the teacher’s assistance. In this case, the teacher only acted as a presenter and task-giver.

The last, but not least, the students found some problems in accomplishing the task. Some of them submitted the task on that day, but their writings were not completely finished. The others could complete the writing task, but they had to bring the task home and submitted it the next day. In other words, the students needed long time to accomplish the task appropriately. Thus, the time management was required to be improved in order to make the time become effective.

All in all, those problems above had to be solved in order to make the students’ writing increase. The teacher also had to notice students’ difficulties in writing and find the actions to overcome those problems. Therefore, technique which helps the students write will have good effects on their writing.
C. Limitation of the Problem

This research is limited to the problems deal with students’ writing ability in the aspects of writing VIII A class of SMP Muhammadiyah 8 Yogyakarta. The researcher and the collaborator decided to solve that problem. Based on the preliminary class observation, the teaching technique in writing is considered as less effective. Due to these problems, the researcher focuses on the teaching on writing a recount text.

Recount text is a text that should be mastered by junior high school students both in the first and the second semester. Referring to Basic Competence for the second semester, there are two kinds of texts that is taught in the academic year of 2011/2012 such as narrative and recount texts. However, considering the flexibility level of the research the researcher decided to use only recount texts. Thus, the choice of the topic was expected to be successful and meaningful for VIIIA class students. Besides, by considering the ethical procedure of the institution, the research was limited to three months to be conducted. Thus, the researcher set certain times in each meeting to see the improvement of students’ writing.

D. Formulation of the Problem

Based on the identification and limitation of the problems above, the research question is formulated: How could the use of mind mapping software improve writing abilities of VIII A Grade Students in SMP Muhammadiyah 8 Yogyakarta?
E. Objective of the Study

The objective of this study is to improve writing ability of the VIII A students of SMP Muhammadiyah 8 Yogyakarta through the use of mind mapping Software. This research objective is formulated out of the research question above.

F. Significance of the Study

1. Theoretical Significance

This study hopefully can give more insight into the improvement of teaching writing.

2. Practical Significance

The results of the study are expected to be useful for:

a. The Students

This study provides the students with a useful experience about improving the writing learning process by implementing mind mapping software. The students of class VIII A of SMP Muhammadiyah 8 Yogyakarta are expected to enjoy writing an essay by the use of Mind Mapping software.

b. The Teacher(s)

The study provides some informative inputs for the teacher about the appropriate learning tasks that can facilitate the writing learning process. This study can be used as a practical guidance to implement mind mapping to teach writing. To other English teachers, either at SMP Muhammadiyah 8 Yogyakarta or at others, this study can be used as a model activity to teach functional texts in form of recount texts.
c. **The Researcher(s)**

This study let the researcher herself give better understanding about how to solve the problem in writing an essay for junior high school student. To other researchers, this study is expected to bring about changes on how to improve the students’ writing ability through conducting an action research.