



Assessing Students' Progress on their Major Course Paper (Without Spending Hours on Grading)

If your course does not lend itself well to gathering students' drafts and providing comments and insights, consider having students create a Concept Map (also known as mind maps, hierarchical maps, or cognitive maps).

Concept maps are used to organize information in a hierarchical structure. The topic is written in the center or top of the map and related phrases are written on rays extending from the topic. They may be used to visually represent concepts not only for a paper, but also for a course unit or curriculum.

Concept maps can be used to stimulate critical thinking while brainstorming and are also "an excellent way to help learners organize knowledge, to empower themselves to better comprehend the key concepts and principles in lectures, readings, or other instructional materials" (McGriff, 2007, as cited in Naqbi, 2011, p. 123).

Concept Maps

The creation of concept maps benefits both the instructor, who can quickly see the development of a student's paper, and the students:

- Creating a concept map "requires more active engagement on the part of the learner, and this too leads to greater learning" (Twardy, 2004, as cited in Davies, 2010, p. 280).
- "Mind mapping allows students to imagine and explore associations [and understand the relationships] between concepts" (Davies, 2010, p. 280).
- "Concept mapping allows students to display inferential connections between propositions and contentions, and to evaluate them in terms of validity of argument structure and the soundness of argument premises" (Davies, 2010, p. 280).
- Concept maps promote "meaningful learning" by "linking new concepts to existing knowledge" (Lockhart, 1972; Maas & Leaby, 2005; both as cited in Davies, 2010, p. 285).

Requiring a concept map before the paper is due can help students make timely revisions. It can also empower instructors to see how students are progressing on their papers. In addition, "if students can represent or manipulate a complex set of relationships in a diagram, they are more likely to understand those relationships, remember them, and be able to analyse [sic] their component parts. This, in turn, promotes 'deep' and not 'surface' approaches to learning" (as cited in Davies, 2010, p. 279).

A variety of concept map templates are available on the Internet. To make it easier to review multiple maps, consider using a template for all students to use. Choose one that can be edited to add or delete, as needed. Students could place their thesis in the central circle, with their main headings in the extending circles. The evidence for their claims could stem from each main heading. [See some examples of concept map templates below.]

Reviewing students' concept maps can empower you to catch problems before they get too big and can motivate students to avoid procrastinating. Add a question or two before returning the maps to help students know how to proceed. ["Have you considered . . ."]

References:

Al Naqbi, S. (2011). The use of mind mapping to develop writing skills in UAE schools. *Education, Business and Society: Contemporary Middle Eastern Issues*, 4 (2), pp. 120-133. <https://doi10.1108/17537981111143855>

Davies, M. (27 November 2010). Concept mapping, mind mapping and argument mapping: What are the differences and do they matter? *High Educ* 62, pp. 279–301. doi 10.1007/s10734-010-9387-6

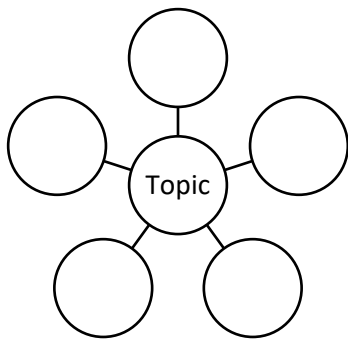
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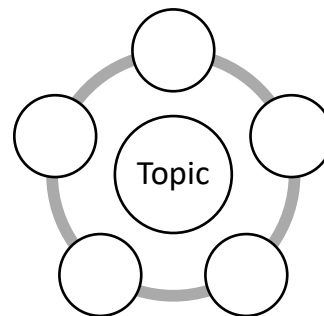
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Concept Map Templates

Concept Map



Cyclical Map



Sequential Map

Hierarchical Map

