

Constructing a concept map - suggested steps

The idea behind concept mapping is that it helps to:

- Identify what you perceive as the important concepts
- Clarify relationships among concepts
- Simplify your thinking
- Set aside temporality in planning

There are three stages in mapping: writing, making a map and then critiquing it.

A. *Intensive writing and review*

The idea behind intensive writing is to write without editing – just to put your ideas on paper without judgment (a ‘mind dump’) so that you can then analyze them.

1. Prepare to write in whatever way is most comfortable for you, e.g., on paper, or on the computer.
2. It can be difficult not to edit as you write; some people find it useful to cover the screen or make it blank if they are using a computer.
3. Write for as long as you can using one or both of the following questions to stimulate your thinking:
 - What exactly is the focus of the research?
 - What will the research be about?
4. Read over what you have written and as you do circle the words that to you represent key concepts.

B. *Making the map*

1. Create a list from the concepts you circled. Add any others you wish.
2. Read through your list of concepts and if you have a lot of concepts, e.g., over 15, reduce the number in light of which are the most important
3. Write each concept on a post-it note and arrange them in a way that you think reflects the relationships between the concepts. Remember, this is how YOU see the research topic and a colleague may view it somewhat differently. The assumption is that you will conduct research based on your own view of the research area and topic.
4. Think about the overall shape or format of your arrangement - does it reflect the overall structure of knowledge in the area?
5. Draw lines showing the relationships among the concepts. Try to label these connecting lines/arrows to more clearly indicate the nature of the relationships among them.
6. Get feedback (see ‘Critiquing the map’ below).
7. When you are satisfied with your first draft, construct a diagram that represents the arrangement of post-its. Reminder: Your map will likely undergo changes as you think more about the focus of your research, and later when you work through different aspects of your design.

C. Critiquing the map

When you have a draft:

1. Find someone to listen while you describe the map out loud; ask them to see if you mention ideas or relationships that are not included in the map. The emphasis of the feedback should be on how well the explanation is reflected in the actual map.
2. Ask these questions of the map, either your own or someone else's...
 - What is the specific relationship between/among each of the concepts?
 - Have any relationships been overlooked?
 - What would happen if "x" concept were moved?
 - Is it easily apparent which concepts are peripheral/less important?
 - Is it easily apparent which concepts are central/important?

Adapted from:

Saroyan, A., & Amundsen, C. (2004). *Rethinking teaching in higher education: From a design workshop to a faculty development framework*. Sterling, VA: Stylizing Publishing

(Available at Oxford - see <http://solo.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/OXVU1:oxfaleph017225070>) |