Concept Mapping

Concept mapping is an activity that is useful for generating content when composing. We are limited by the number of items we can remember in our short term memory at any single moment, and concept mapping reduces the number of items we must focus on. The organization provided by concept mapping reduces mental burden, allowing for quicker, deeper insights. The resulting map documents your thought process, preventing you from forgetting your insights if you become distracted.

In addition to being useful for composing, concept mapping is useful for memorization. The organization aspect of concept mapping helps you see similarities and identify hidden memorization cues.

Concept mapping also supports intuitive leaps. Many students describe frustration in describing a concept they know is “right” at a gut level. Concept mapping allows you to explore these types of intuitive conclusions and support them with logic and hard facts.

Steps for productive concept mapping:

1. Select a fairly large space to use for the map. White boards are particularly effective, but several fresh sheets of paper are sufficient.

2. If you are exploring a topic, write a single word or short phrase in the middle of your page and circle it. This first circle is your nucleus. For instance, if your assignment was "Discuss a Strong Emotion," your nucleus could be "fear," "joy," or "anger."

   If you are trying to make connections between separate concepts or events (e.g., relating the changing role of the church during the middle ages with the role of Archimago in the Faerie Queen), write the two topics on opposite ends of the page.

3. Write down associations when thinking of the word or nucleus. Write whatever comes to mind without judging, even if words or phrases seem to have little connection. These words or phrases will radiate outward from the nucleus word. Draw circles around them and connect them with related lines, adding arrows to indicate direction, if you wish.

4. Rearrange the connecting lines to relationships between separate ideas, things, or phenomenon. Try to identify similar things and link them in groups (e.g., blue, red, and green are all colours, so they should be connected to central node: colour. Or, if there are more colours, perhaps they should be broken into two groups: primary and secondary colours.)

   Tip: Do not be afraid to break connections or rearrange relationships; this activity is the most productive part of the mapping process.

4. Once you have explored the topic enough to identify interesting, non-obvious, or original relationships, or you unable to brainstorm any more new ideas, start cutting away information that is unnecessary.
Tip: Not everything identified during the mapping process needs to be included in an essay. After identifying the core concepts, redrawing the map without any extraneous information gives you more room to re-explore or reorganize your main concepts.

5. Use the information to create an outline and/or a thesis statement for your assignment.

**Concept map example: Relate an article of clothing to natural selection**

![Concept Map Example](image-url)