

Combining sources to form an argument

Rationale: As students move towards independent learning and developing individual projects, they will likely encounter new information in a much less structured way than they are used to in the typical university setting of lectures and textbooks. They may not know how to impose a structure on this new information and this lack of structure can make it difficult for them to synthesize this new information in a meaningful way. One approach to this problem is to show students how to create a flexible structure for new information using concept mapping. Free software is available to do this at: <http://vue.tufts.edu> or in the cloud at: <http://prezi.com>

Objective: This two-part activity includes an overview PowerPoint presentation explaining a simple map and a take-home assignment asking students to draw a concept map from a list of study results and conclusions. *After this activity students will be able to represent the relationships between different study conclusions using a concept map and explain what is, and what isn't, known about a topic from the map.*

Materials provided:

- A brief PowerPoint that explains what a concept map is, what it looks like, and walks students through a simple example of creating a concept map.
- A one-page instruction sheet explaining to students how to create a concept map

Suggested assessments using writing:

Provide students with a list of conclusion summaries and ask them to create a concept map. Based on the concept map, ask them to write a paragraph explaining one (or each) of the following:

- Based on your map, identify a potential paper topic that would use these sources. Would you include all the sources in writing about this topic? Why or why not?
- Based on your map, hypothesize one relationship among the concepts that is not in conflict with the existing relationships and justify your hypothesis.

Provide students with a concept map and ask them to hypothesize a relationship that isn't present on the map. Ask the students to write a paragraph using the data that is on the map to support their argument that the relationship they hypothesize can be expected.

Alternatively, if students are writing a major paper for the course, ask them to provide you with a concept map as a stage in the writing process.