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This tool visualizes information so students can connect ideas, concepts, and terms.
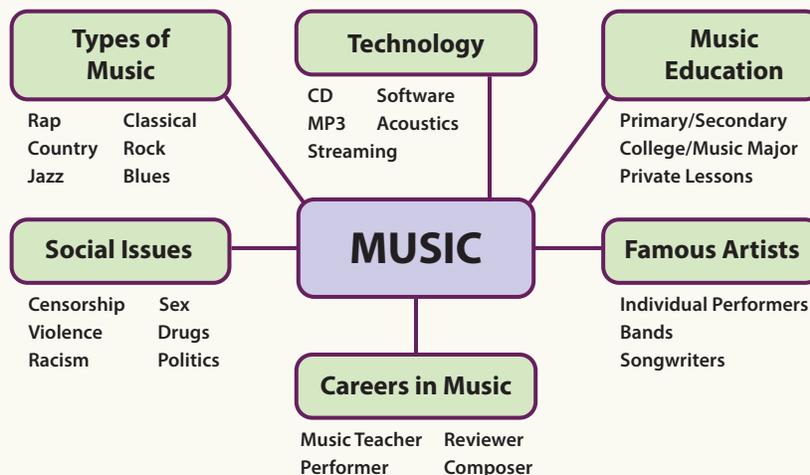
Concept Map

AConcept Map is a visual representation students create to connect ideas, concepts, and terms. Students can use it to organize information they already know and to incorporate new learning with this prior knowledge. Concept Maps help teachers see how students make sense of content.

A Concept Map can assess prior knowledge and developing knowledge on a particular topic. Teachers can visually scan to assess student maps throughout a lesson and easily observe if key elements are represented by students or if they are missing. For optimum student success, provide students with feedback and definite criteria to guide them as they construct their concept maps.

For instance, if you were to write down all that you know about music, it could be overwhelming and hard to know where to start and stop. Ideas would vary from genres, artists, and favorite songs, to technical aspects of music. Now imagine if you pose a similar question to your students, "What do you know about music?" Their collective experiences will also vary exponentially. To graphically represent all the knowledge about music, a simple concept map could look like this.

Concept Map (continued)

To have an impactful lesson about music with students, implement a visual structure to distinguish all the things about this topic so a focused, meaningful discussion can be held.

How to Use a Concept Map

Teach students the four steps to creating a Concept Map:

1. **Brainstorm**
   Students brainstorm main ideas to an assigned topic.

2. **Organize**
   Students organize these ideas from general to specific. Cluster ideas or terms that are similar to one another.

3. **Map**
   Students write the terms in the appropriate bubbles or cells of the concept map. Arrange and add spaces as needed.

4. **Connect**
   Students draw arrows or lines to connect the spaces that contain words that are related. Words or phrases can be written along those lines to explain the relationship between the spaces.
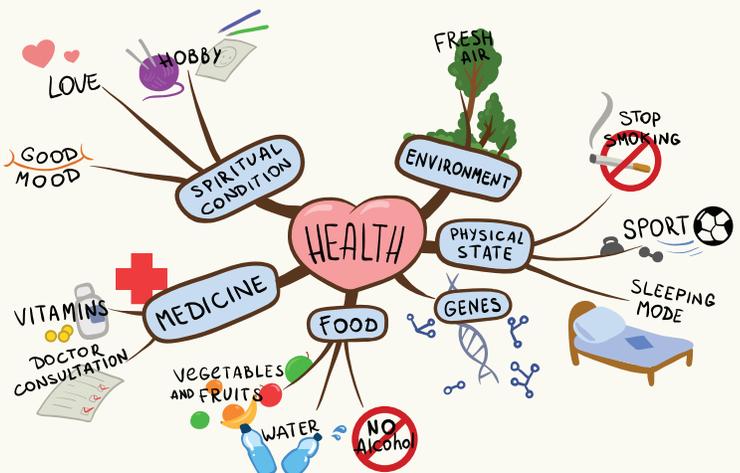
When to Use a Concept Map

The versatility of a Concept Map makes the strategy useful with any grade level and for all content areas to create a visual representation of the information from the lesson.

- ◆ Organize ideas while reading a story, novel, or article
- ◆ Synthesize information just covered during the Guided Practice section of a lesson
- ◆ Generate related ideas using a pre-writing approach
- ◆ Synthesize information just covered as a Closing Activity
- ◆ Access prior knowledge before a new unit of study
- ◆ Check for understanding as an assessment tool
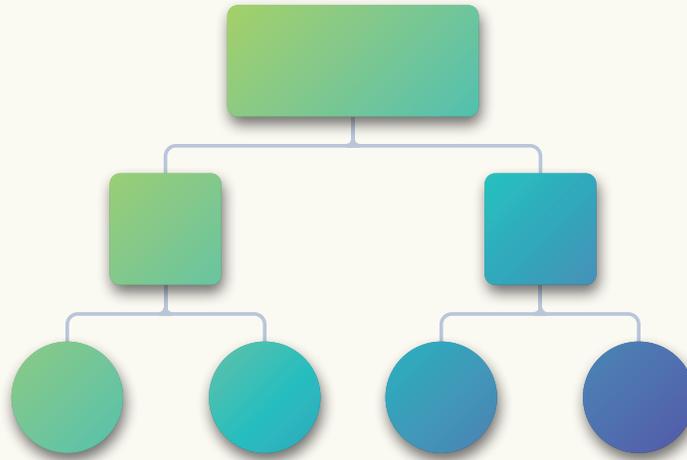
Concept Map Variations

Mind Map
These typically include pictures, drawings, and diagrams to show connections between ideas, so they are more flexible and personal. Instead of using a set template, the students create their own mind map on a blank piece of paper.

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Concept Map (continued)

Hierarchical/Chronological Map

This map will start at the top or bottom, and in a linear way, represent information sequentially.

Flow Chart

This chart is easy to read and organizes information in a logical, ordered fashion. Information is shared in a step-by-step sequence. A flow chart is most effective in the process of solving a problem from beginning to end.

Step 1   Step 2   Step 3   Step 4   Step 5

Value of Using a Concept Map

◆ Concepts can be displayed hierarchically, like a family tree, to readily see the interconnection among categories of information.

◆ As students acquire new knowledge, cross connections offer opportunities to see significant relationships more readily among subgroups.

◆ All level of learners can recognize patterns and ideas visually, so Concept Maps engage students as they take in the whole picture.

Visualization is a powerful learning tool. The more vividly students can picture information, the more real it will feel with the increased likelihood of it impacting learning.