

## Teaching Students How to Create Concept Maps

Since some students may be unfamiliar with concept maps, or many may have seen them but not had experience creating their own, it is important to teach students how to effectively create concept maps. You can do this by following these steps:

1. Model the process by demonstrating the step-by-step process of constructing a simple concept map, discussing the steps as you draw it. Use a simple focal concept that is familiar to all students, such as choosing a restaurant for dinner, in order to help them understand the process as opposed to the content of the map (Newbury, 2010, p. 1).
2. After you have modeled the process, have students create their own simple concept map with a familiar concept, such as applying to college. Give students about 10 minutes to complete the exercise, following these instructions:
  - a. Write the main topic, such as applying to college, on an index card.
  - b. Identify and write five key actions required to apply to college on separate index cards.
  - c. Place the concepts next to one another in order to display their relationships to the main topic and to each other. To do this, the most important or broad concepts should form a line directly under the main topic. Subsets of those topics should be listed under each of the first-line concepts. (Note: Having students place the concepts in a line is just a starting point to provide them with structure. As they become more proficient at developing concept maps, they may use a different approach.)
    - i. Label the lines to identify connections.
    - ii. Use dotted lines to indicate connections that go across the columns.
3. Circulate around the room as students complete their maps and identify a few maps for students to share with the class. Project these students' maps or have the students recreate them on the board and explain their approach to selecting topics and noting connections.
4. Ask the class questions such as:
  - "Who had the same concepts on their maps?"
  - "What else could be a subconcept in this section?"
  - "Did someone have a different description for this line?"

Once students understand the value of concept maps and the process for creating them, you can have them generate concept maps for other units of study or complex topics in order to help them organize their knowledge and deepen their understanding. This offers students a construct they may use in other courses and in their future careers to organize knowledge and better understand complex topics (Newbury, 2010; Nilson, 2010).