What Are Concept Maps?

Concept maps are graphical tools for organizing and representing knowledge. They include concepts, usually enclosed in circles or boxes of some type, and relationships between concepts indicated by a connecting line linking two concepts. Words on the line, referred to as linking words or linking phrases, specify the relationship between the two concepts. We define concept as a perceived regularity in events or objects, or records of events or objects, designated by a label. The label for most concepts is a word, although sometimes we use symbols such as + or %, and sometimes more than one word is used.

What Does a Concept Map Look Like?

A concept map is a 2-dimensional representation that depicts the most important concepts and relationships. Another characteristic of concept maps is that the concepts are represented in a hierarchical fashion with the most inclusive, most general concepts at the top of the map and the more specific, less general concepts arranged hierarchically below. The hierarchical structure for a particular domain of knowledge also depends on the context in which that knowledge is being applied or considered. Therefore, it is best to construct concept maps with reference to some particular question we seek to answer, which we have called a Focus Question. The concept map may pertain to some situation or event that we are trying to understand through the organization of knowledge in the form of a concept map, thus providing the context for the concept map.

There are two features of concept maps that are important in the facilitation of creative thinking:

- the hierarchical structure that is represented in a good map and
- the ability to search for and characterize new cross-links.

A final feature that may be added to concept maps is specific examples of events or objects that help to clarify the meaning of a given concept. Normally these are not included in ovals or boxes, since they are specific events or objects and do not represent concepts.

How Do I Construct a Concept Map?

A good way to define the context for a concept map is to construct a Focus Question, that is a question that clearly specifies the problem or issue the concept map should have to resolve. Every concept map responds to a focus question, and a good focus question can lead to a much richer concept map. When learning to construct concept maps, learners tend to deviate from the focus question and build a concept map that may be related to the domain, but which does not answer the question.

Where Can I Find Pre-Made Concept Maps?

There are numerous websites where you can find pre-made concept maps, but the best webpage resource is at https://www.edrawsoft.com/share-conceptmap.php.