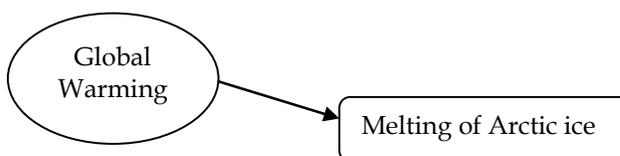


Concept Maps for Organizing Thinking

A concept map is a visual representation of main ideas and relationships among those ideas. Concept mapping is a thinking strategy for finding patterns in the information you have gathered during your research and organizing your conclusions for presentation and sharing.

The concept map often looks like a spider web, with nodes of main ideas connected by arrows, lines, or symbols to show how the main ideas are related. For example, if you have found that global warming is causing the melting of Arctic ice, then a portion of your concept map might look like this:



How to Create a Concept Map:

1. Focus
 - Identify the main concept of your research topic or question.
2. Select
 - Select the key ideas that you discovered through your research.
3. Categorize and Cluster
 - Categorize the key ideas and group the categories that are related into larger ideas, or clusters. [Ex: *melting of Arctic ice, flooding, drought – clustered under Effects of Global Warming*]
4. Organize by Pattern / Draw Conclusions
 - Look for patterns that will show the relationships between your clusters of ideas. This is the most creative and thoughtful phase of your research because you will be able to draw conclusions based on the patterns you see. For example, does it make the most sense to organize the clusters in a chronological sequence? In a cause and effect pattern? In order of importance?
5. Arrange in a visual display
 - Place the main concept in a prominent place so that the supporting ideas can be connected to it (center, left side).
 - Arrange the clusters of ideas according to the pattern you have selected in order to show your conclusions (for example, a chronological sequence may be laid out left-to-right).
 - Connect the clusters with lines and arrows (and perhaps words) that show how the ideas are related.
 - Fill out the concept map with your supporting ideas/evidence.