City University of New York (CUNY)

CUNY Academic Works

2017

Topic Development with Concept Mapping Lesson

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Topic Development with Concept Mapping Lesson
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Use when students are trying to choose their research topics.

Concepts in Context
According to Project Information Literacy, defining and narrowing a topic is the most difficult step for beginning undergraduate researchers. This concept mapping activity is designed to reinforce the idea that students are creating a paper/project really entails engaging in a scholarly conversation.

Classroom learning outcome:
- Students will identify different aspects ("conversations") about a broad topic that they are interested in order to refine and narrow it into a manageable research focus.

Total Time: 55 minutes

Materials/Equipment: laptops, Internet connection, "Brainstorming Your Research Topic" handout (concept mapping handout), example concept map, YouTube video on topic development (optional): https://www.lib.ncsu.edu/tutorials/picking_topic/
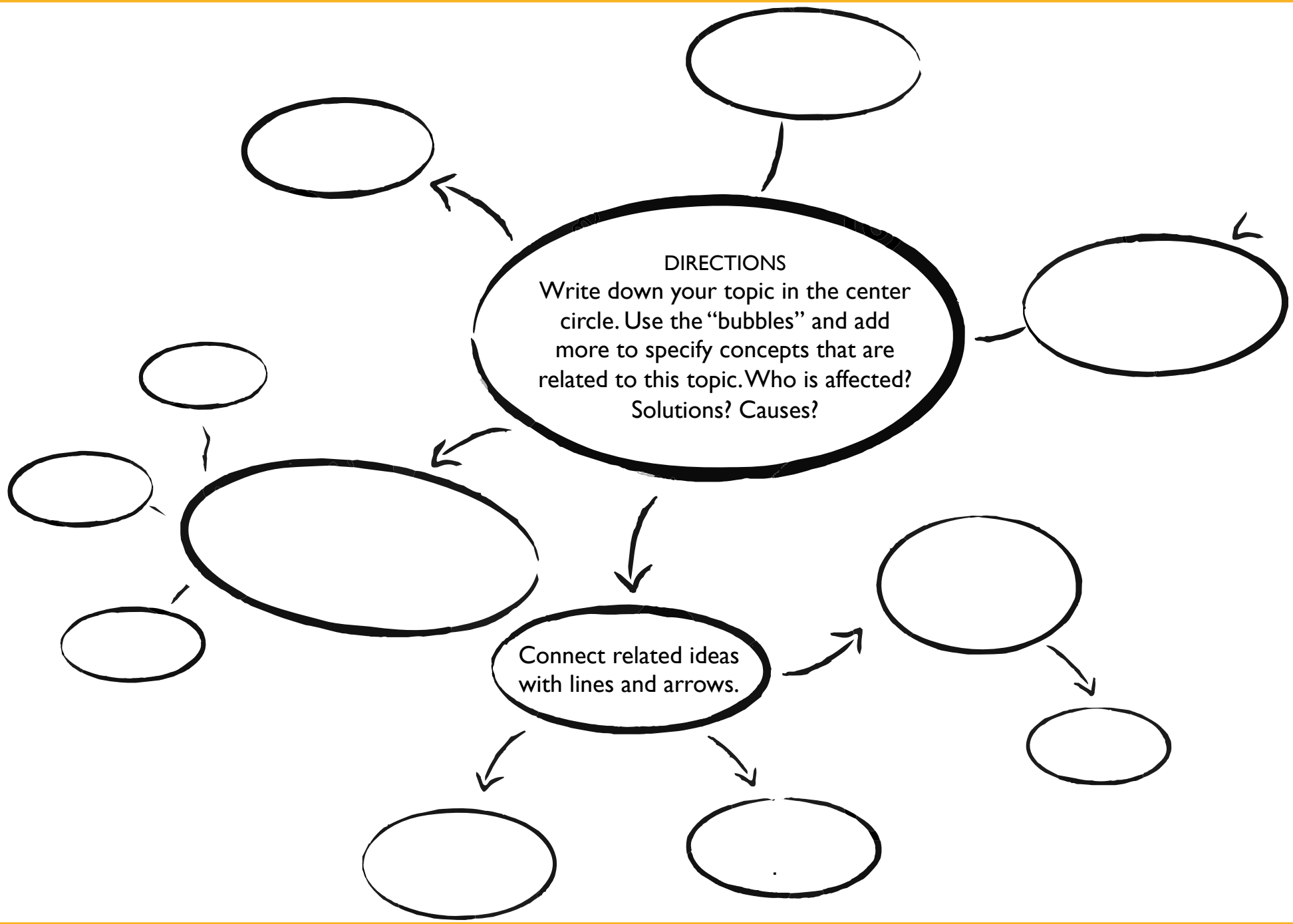
Introduction	Explain that advanced scholars like you and researchers are driven to research out of a real desire to find an answer to a question. Use an example from your own research. (Optional: Show three-minute video from NCSU Libraries, entitled "Picking Your Topic *Is* Research.")	10 minutes
Teaching Strategy 1	Frame the concept mapping activity by explaining that several "conversations" revolve around a topic, and narrowing a topic involves choosing one aspect of the topic on which to focus (i.e., one conversation). Demonstrate how to concept map (see example concept map). Use a general topic (e.g., "homelessness in NYC," "teenagers and social media use"). Then draw a circle on the whiteboard or Smartboard and write the topic in the middle of it. Prompt the class to volunteer related "conversations." Add additional bubbles to represent these related conversations (i.e., sub-topics). Draw connecting lines between the topic and sub-topic bubbles as connections begin to emerge.	15 minutes
Comprehension Check	Distribute "Brainstorming Your Research Topic" handout and give students time to make their own concept maps for their general topic, and ask them to identify three sub-topics of potential interest.	10 minutes

Transition	Now that students have identified possible sub-topics, have them do some preliminary research to gather more information (i.e., background research).	
Teaching Strategy 2	Suggest potential starting points for background research (depending on topic) by demoing an example sub-topic: • General Reference: Wikipedia, Gale Virtual Reference Library • Current issues: Opposing Viewpoints, CQ Researcher, New York Times (note: students may need to register for their free CUNY *NYT* account) Then give them time to find information on their sub-topics.	10 minutes
Comprehension Check	Assign part 2 of the "Brainstorming Your Research Topic" (the backside).	5 minutes
Conclusion	Remind students that research is a process and that their initial topic will be different (more defined) than the topic they identify in their homework. Moreover, their question will change as they conduct research and learn more about their topic, which is also a normal/necessary part of the research process.	5 minutes
	Total Time:	55 minutes

Follow-up: Use the "Brainstorming Your Research Topic" handout as a formative assessment to provide students with guidance on how to narrow their topic and places to look for information.

What's Next: Suggested follow-up lessons are "Creating a Research Question and Formulating Keywords" and "Website Evaluation."

DIRECTIONS
Write down your topic in the center circle. Use the "bubbles" and add more to specify concepts that are related to this topic. Who is affected? Solutions? Causes?

Connect related ideas with lines and arrows.
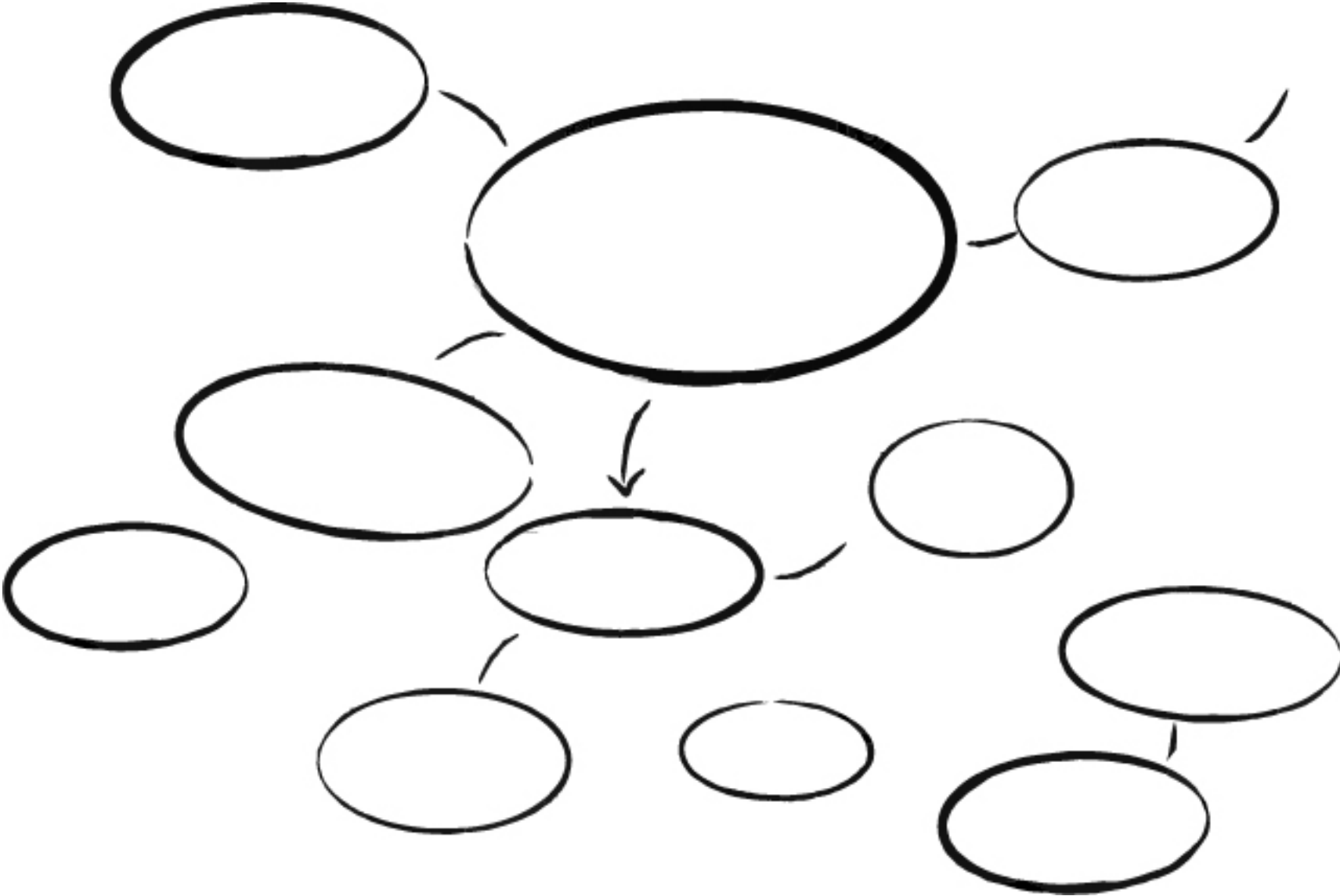
1. WHICH SUB-TOPIC ARE YOU MOST INTERESTED IN PURSUING FOR YOUR RESEARCH?
....
....
....

2. WHAT QUESTIONS DO YOU HAVE ABOUT THIS SUB-TOPIC?
....
....
....

3. WHAT ARE YOUR NEXT STEPS? HOW ARE YOU GOING TO PROCEED IN FINDING OUT MORE INFORMATION ABOUT YOUR TOPIC?
....
....
....

4. WHAT SOURCES OF INFORMATION MIGHT HELP YOU ANSWER THESE QUESTIONS? WHERE MIGHT YOU FIND THIS INFORMATION?
....
....
....

Example Concept Map

homelessness in NYC

Physical appearance
- beards
- cleanliness
- dirty clothes
- no shoes

Places to go
- shelters
- sov't kitchens
- churches
- subway
- libraries
- parks
- benches

'stuff'
- sleeping bags
- bags
- shopping carts
- old men

Poverty
- joblessness

teenagers
- children

Pets
- dogs

signs
- spare change
- begging

veterans
- alcoholism
- drug abuse
- health problems

mental illness
- PTSD
- depression