Diagramming: Spray diagrams

Spray diagrams show the connections between related elements or concepts associated with a particular issue. They do not show the nature of the relationship between the elements. They are widely used as thinking tools and can be used in a number of different ways:

- for thinking about an issue from scratch
- to help you organise various facts, issues or ideas into a structured form
- for taking notes
- for setting out the structure of an argument.

You can use a spray diagram to organise material into a basic structure, both to clarify your own understanding, or as the basis for a report or presentation. The spray diagram you create can therefore be used as a tool to give an overview of your understanding of a situation, and to enable you to share your understanding of a situation as you discuss it with others.

Conventions

The form of a spray diagram is very simple: it consists of lines, a few blobs and words at the ends of lines or where they branch (Figure 16). There are no arrows. It’s a good idea to circle the topic or central idea that the diagram sprays out from. Some people also find it useful to circle other sub-topics on the diagram. You don’t have to think about the nature of the connection between two nodes joined by a line. The line simply means that in your mind there is some association. In spray diagrams, you:

- express ideas in one or a few words
- keep track of the key topics or sub-topics by circling them

![Figure 16](image.png)

Generalised form of a spray diagram
● use lines to join up the components or concepts that appear related in some way
● do not show directional links on the lines.

**Guidelines**

1. Write down the central idea you wish to explore, leaving plenty of space round it.
2. Identify branches from that idea that you want to explore further. Write them down around the central idea and link each to it with a straight line. Keep going by considering each branch to see if further branches (ideas) link to it.
3. Start by working fairly freely and then look at the diagram to see whether any of the strands are effectively the same idea.
4. If you get stuck or lose the thread, start with a new central keyword and create a subsidiary spray diagram rather than clutter up the original. Spray diagrams can be useful to add to over time as situations or arguments develop or you gain new insights.