

## Description and transcript: What are spray diagrams?

### Spray Diagram

This animation shows how a spray diagram is built up. The final product is a visual representation of the key features of a spray diagram in the form of words linked together with nodes and lines.

This text description is chunked into the four main features of spray diagrams:

#### A. Common Uses

#### B. Value

#### C. Form

#### D. Relationship to other Diagram Forms

The animation is in 15 parts, divided between the relevant chunks, and each part needs to be activated.

The audio transcription is included, in quotes, below each part.

At the end of the text description is the information in the spray diagram represented in a linear format.

#### A. Common Uses

1. The animation opens with the question, 'What are Spray Diagrams?,' written centrally on the screen. The question then moves to the top left of the screen to leave room for the diagram to be built up. The term 'spray diagram' appears and then branches to show the following as sub-headings of common uses:

Taking Notes

Setting out the structure of an argument

Thinking about a topic

'Spray diagrams are very widely used as a thinking tool. They can be used in a number of different ways: for thinking about a topic from scratch rather like a structured sort of brainstorming; for taking notes; and for setting out the structure of an argument.'

#### B. Value

2. 'Spray diagrams' branches to include 'value' which in turn branches to show 'product' and 'process' as sub-headings of 'Value'.

'Spray diagrams can be valuable both as a product and as a process.'

3. The diagram branches to show the following as sub-headings under 'process':

Integrate large quantities of materials

Untangle complex materials

Organise material in a structure.

This last sub-heading further branches to show the structure can be used 'to gain understanding' and 'for reports'.

'The process of constructing a spray diagram can help you to integrate and structure large amounts of material for example from a number of different documents or interviews. The process can help you to untangle the argument in a complex or badly written document. You can use a spray diagram to organise material into a structure either to clarify your understanding, or as the basis for a report or presentation.'

4. 'Product' branches to the sub-headings of 'communication' and 'self'.

'Communication' branches to include 'overview' and 'map of thoughts'. 'Self' branches to include 'reference' and 'memory aid' .

'The product, the spray diagram you end up with, can be used as a communication tool perhaps to give an overview

during a presentation, or to allow you to share your mental map of a situation as you discuss it with others. The diagram can be a useful reference - a record of information you might later need. Personally I find spray diagrams very useful as a memory aid. It's as if they capture my understanding of a situation in the form that is laid down in my brain. The diagram acts like a key to the memory, bringing back not just what is written in the diagram, but also my memory of the ideas and details I associated with the points in the diagram at the time I drew it. Perhaps this is why spray diagrams are sometimes referred to as mind maps.'

### **C. Form**

5. 'Spray diagrams' branches to include 'form' which in turn branches to include 'lines', 'nodes' and 'no arrows'.

'As you can see, the form of a spray diagram is very simple. Just lines, and words at the nodes where the lines join. No arrows.'

6. 'Form' branches to include 'write along the lines'. The heading 'Spray diagrams' changes colour.

'Occasionally people write along the lines, rather than at the ends of them, or use colour for emphasis.'

7. 'Form' branches to include 'circle' which in turn branches into 'central issue' and 'key nodes' while a circle is then drawn 'spray diagrams' and the other key nodes ('common uses' 'value' 'form').

'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 key nodes on the diagram.'

8. 'Lines' branches to include 'unspecified association'.

'One thing which makes spray diagramming easier than other types of diagramming is that 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.'

9. 'Form' branches to include 'fanning in?' which is then joined by a line to the heading 'to gain understanding' which already links back to value.

'Fanning in, to show connections between different branches of a diagram, is sometimes frowned on, perhaps because it might inhibit your flow of thinking if you're using the diagram as a way of brainstorming. Personally I sometimes find it useful to fan in, particularly when exploring the structure of an argument, because a good argument will often make connections between the reasoning of different lines of argument.'

### **D. Relationship to other diagram forms**

10. 'Spray diagrams' further branches to include 'Relationship to other diagram forms' which in turn branches to include 'rich picture' which is sub-divided into:

Both used at early stages

Preferences as starting point

'Like rich pictures, spray diagrams are often used in the early stages of an analysis. People have different preferences. Some people find it very difficult to plunge into a rich picture perhaps if they're less graphically minded so they find a spray diagram a good place to assemble their initial ideas before sketching them. Others believe that drawing a spray diagram can limit your understanding of a situation by requiring you to impose a hierarchical structure which may later constrain you to see the situation in this particular way, while a rich picture can capture ideas without constraining them.'

**11.** Rich picture branches to include 'different uses'.

'As well as depending on personal preference, it can depend very much on the type of exploration you're undertaking. A rich picture can be better for capturing impressions which don't readily or entirely translate into words. A spray diagram can be better for capturing material which someone else has already put into words, perhaps especially print, where words are the sole means of communication.'

**12.** 'Relationship to other diagram forms' branches to include 'can lead to systems map or multiple cause diagrams'.

'A spray diagram may provide material you wish to explore further in a systems map or multiple-cause diagram.'

**13.** 'Relationship to other diagram forms' branches to include 'sometimes called tree diagrams or mind maps' and 'similar to concept maps'.

'Sometimes spray diagrams are referred to as tree diagrams or mind maps. They're also similar to concept maps.'

**14.** 'Form' branches to include 'untidy while drafting' which in turn branches to include 'multiple drafts'.

'Spray diagrams often look very messy while you're drafting them, and you can go through numerous drafts as you think of better ways to structure your ideas into related groupings, and as space becomes needed for new ideas. It's often worth producing a final draft which makes the tree-like structure clear, so that it can easily be read at a glance. I find that setting out the structure clearly on paper helps me to see it clearly in my head. It's not that it's the right structure - there are always many possible structures. It's more that the structure is a sort of container for the ideas, so that they're remembered and understood, rather than lost in the distant corners of my brain. Like a container, the structure constrains the shape that the ideas take. So at the same time as helping you to reach an understanding, the structure can also limit understanding.'

**15.** 'Value' branches to include 'develops thinking skills'.

'Finally, remember that spray diagramming can help you to develop a very important skill: that of constructing a coherent argument from a set of related but initially unstructured ideas.'

End of animation.

## The spray diagram in linear format

### Spray Diagrams

#### A. Common Uses

Taking Notes

Setting out the structure of an argument

Thinking about a topic

#### B. Value Process -

Integrate large quantities of materials

Untangle complex materials

Organise material in a structure for reports and to gain understanding.

Product-

Self  
Memory Aid  
Reference

Communication  
Overview  
Map of thoughts  
Develops thinking skills  
**C. Form**

No arrows  
Nodes  
Lines – unspecified association  
Write along lines  
Circle – key nodes and central issue  
Fanning-in?  
Untidy while drafting – multiple drafts  
**D. Relationship to other diagram forms**

Rich picture –  
Both used in early stages  
Different uses  
Preferences as starting point

Can lead on to systems map or multiple cause diagram

Sometimes called tree diagrams or mind maps

Similar to concept maps

End of linear representation

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