

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

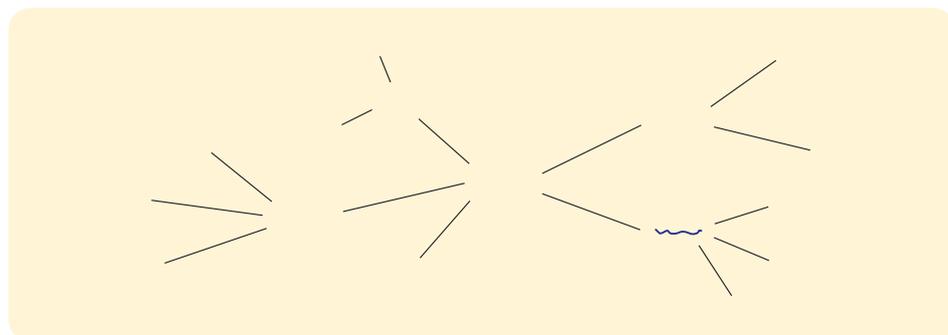


Figure 16 Generalised form of a spray diagram

- 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.