Make Connections with Concept Maps

Do you like to see how facts connect in the big picture? Do you prefer to see your ideas laid out using colour, shapes and arrows? Concept maps might be the tool for you. You may have used them in the past, or heard them called *mind maps, webs,* or *even graphic organizers*. This resource provides some examples of how to build different types of maps, and some templates you could use to start your own.

Get Creative with Your Big Ideas

Some students say that concept maps are a more hands-on and creative way to "play" with their ideas when they write assignments or study for classes. Many people find them to be an effective tool for exploring ideas, making connections between ideas, and keeping track of what they want to learn for a course. Students often tell us the concept map's non-linear, graphic format is an intuitive, low-pressure way to get a handle on that big, imposing project you might need to tackle (thesis, term paper, work-placement report).

How to use this resource

Take a look through at the different ways you could use a concept map in higher education. Some approaches might work well in your courses, and some might not. Try out our templates, or develop your own. Even better, email us if you have any great examples and ideas about how to organize your thoughts graphically: learning@uvic.ca.

Note: our examples here were created using Inspiration, Webspiration and MindMeister tools. Other software options exist for concept mapping, and, of course, you can always make maps on whiteboards or scratch paper.

Some general tips for concept mapping:

- Use colour, arrows and shapes to identify relationships and themes
- Keep your statements concise and specific. Develop full sentences and paragraphs later, if you are using the concept map for writing
- Maps can work really well for big ideas and deeper thinking. They're probably not the best way to memorize tons of facts and details

In this resource you will find concept maps to help you:

BUILD VOCABULARY	**SET A PURPOSE FOR READING**	**CONNECT CONCEPTS**
PLAN AN ARGUMENT	**BRAINSTORM FOR A RESUME**	**CREATE AN ACTION PLAN**

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BUILD VOCABULARY

Interested to add some new terminology to your writing tool kit? Or maybe you would like to have a definition close by as you work through a difficult reading? Concept maps can help you get familiar with new words and phrases. Try building your own, use our simple PDF template or ask about our blank templates Inspiration formats: learning@uvic.ca.

When two things are placed or dealt with close together for contrasting effect

her juxtaposition of the angry dogs and the cheerful hippos creates an interesting contrast

definition

In a sentence

juxtaposition

lecture reference

My questions

Juxtaposition in children's literature. Discussion of contrast between/ juxtaposition of the well fed antagonist and the hungry protagonist in Danny the Champion of the World.

Are there other ways that I can talk about contrast in my essays?
Is juxtaposition something authors do or critics do?

Here are some ways we've seen people use this strategy:

- Learning a new language
- Getting comfortable with theoretical terms in a tough course
- Expanding their writing vocabularies (place a new map by your writing space)
- Preparing for an oral exam or presentation

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SET A PURPOSE FOR READING

The KWL strategy is a popular technique for approaching course readings. Before you tackle your reading, the strategy requires you to identify what you know and what you want to know. After reading, note what you learned as a result.

1. Start by identifying what you already **know** about a topic.
2. Decide what you **want** to know as you read.
3. Identify what you **learn** as a result.
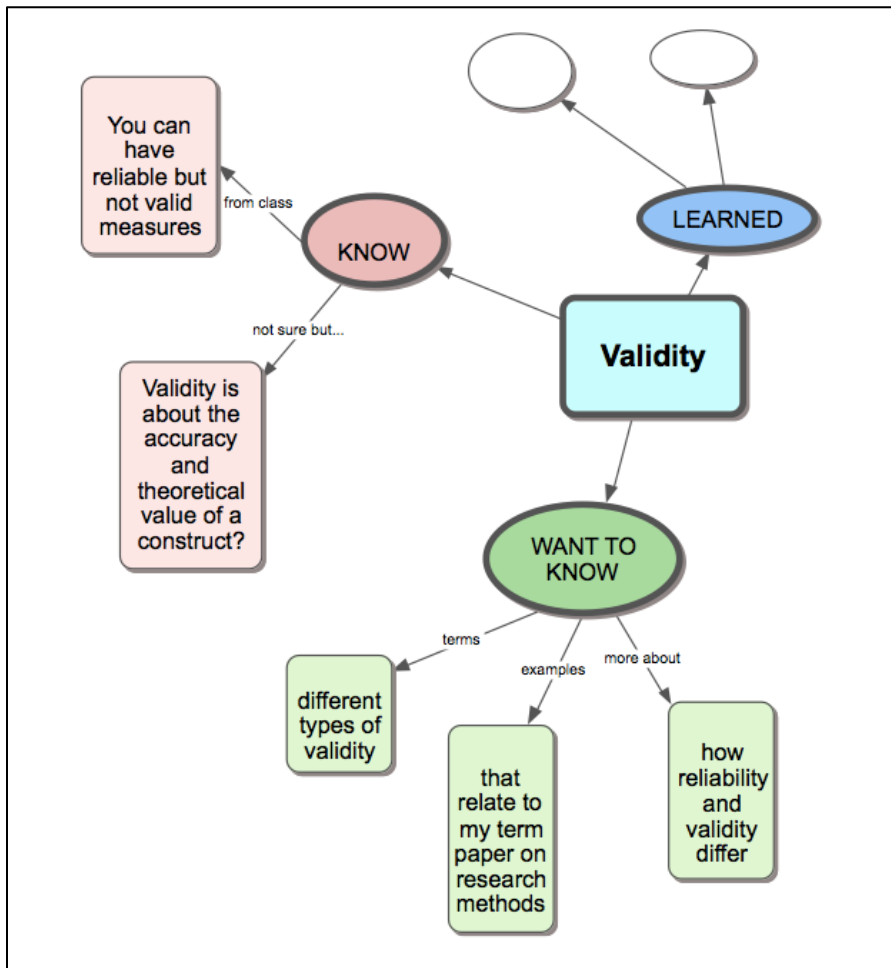
Some people like to expand on the strategy – KWLS (What I **KNOW**, What I **WANT** to learn, What I **LEARNED**, and What I **STILL** want to learn). Try building your own KWL map, or check out our blank templates in PDF or ISF format. Email us at learning@uvic.ca. You also could try our KWL grid.

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CONNECT CONCEPTS

Sometimes a concept map can help you decide how the topics, themes and units in a course all fit together. Some students find it useful to create this type of map before studying for tests and exams.
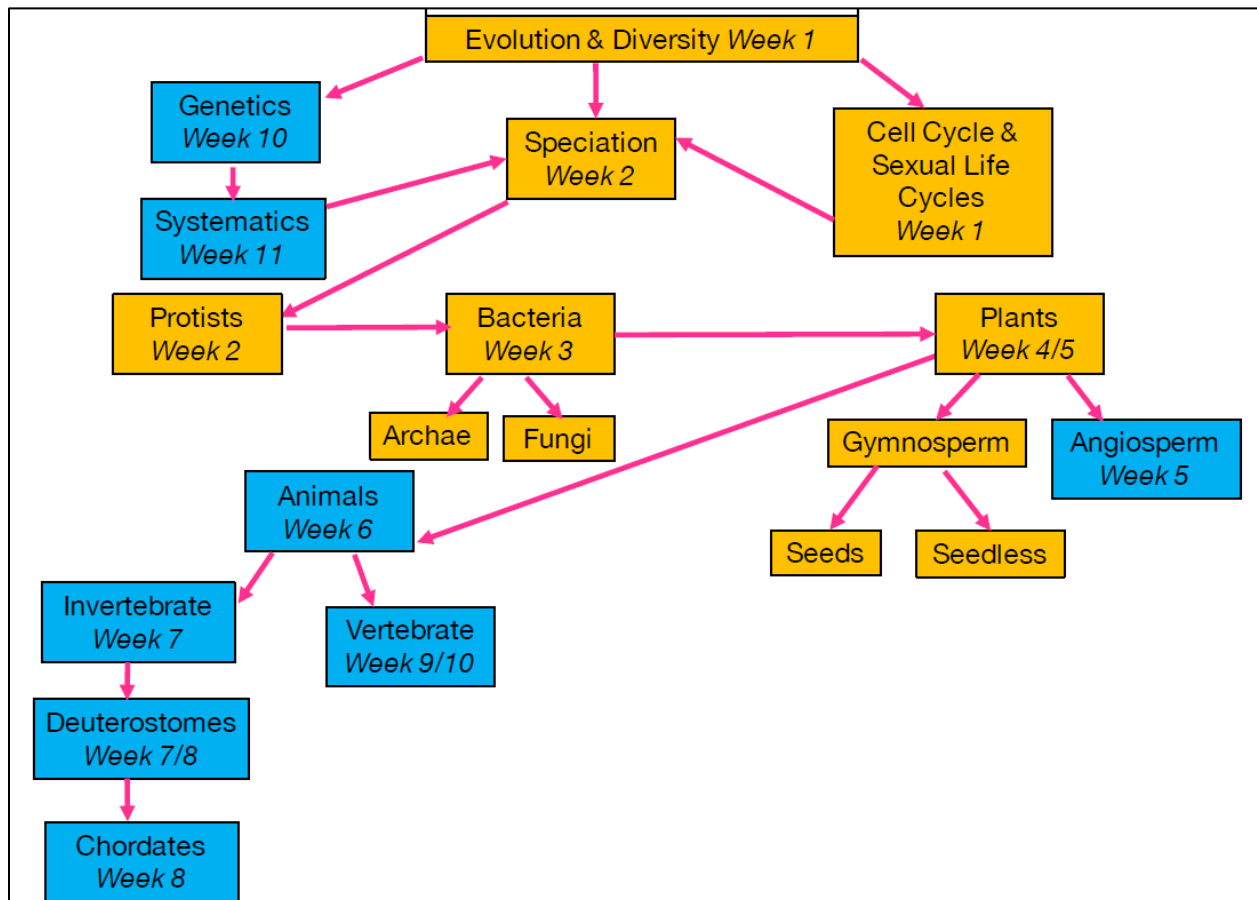
Special thanks to **Gerry Gourlay**, one of our past Biology tutors, who developed a graphic syllabus to connect course concepts and themes.
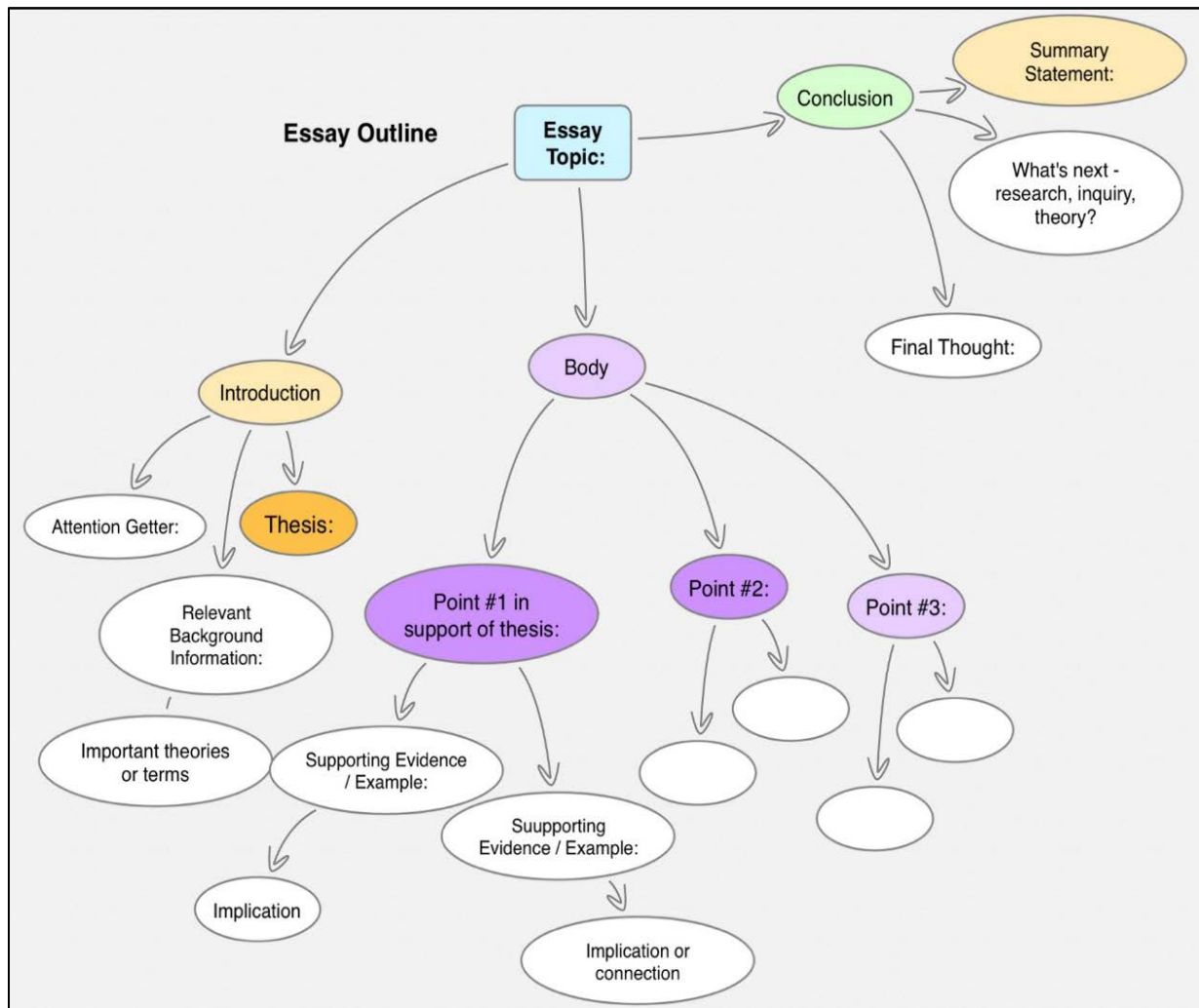
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PLAN AN ARGUMENT

When you're writing a paper, detailed research notes can come in handy. Sometimes students find they need to step back from all of the facts and fine details in their notes and think about how they can use those ideas in a writing assignment. A concept map can help you to "take inventory" of the ideas, arguments or sections you might need to complete your project. The map below shows how you could plan a basic concept map template, and use it to keep track of the key information you might collect as you get ready to write.
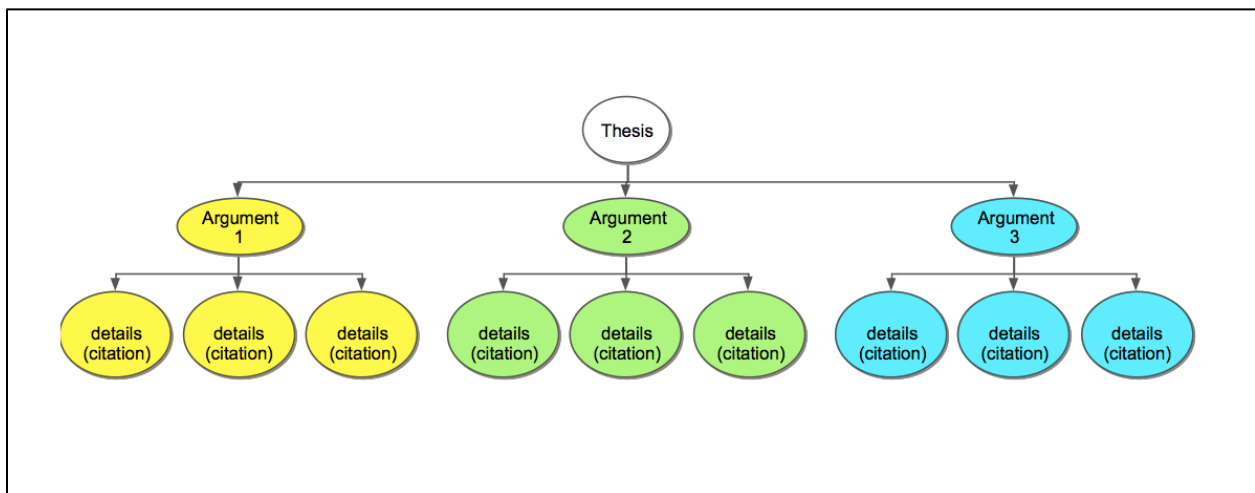
This approach is a basic inventory. The idea is to track the nuts and bolts, or the evidence to support your arguments or points. This map structure doesn't necessary outline HOW you will connect and frame the information. Our next map gives an example of how you could use a concept map to engage more with the logic and flow of a paper. (See the next page)

PLANNING AN ARGUMENT (II)

Compared to the last example, which was strictly about evidence, this map engages more deeply with the genre expectations, including components and sections of a specific writing assignment. Here, the approach is to plan more explicitly how you will organize and execute each section.

Essay Outline

- Essay Topic:
  - Introduction
    - Attention Getter:
    - Thesis:
    - Relevant Background Information:
      - Important theories or terms
  - Body
    - Point #1 in support of thesis:
      - Supporting Evidence / Example:
        - Implication
      - Suupporting Evidence / Example:
        - Implication or connection
    - Point #2:
    - Point #3:
  - Conclusion
    - Summary Statement:
    - What's next - research, inquiry, theory?
    - Final Thought:

*See the next page for an example of how you can convert maps into linear outlines in [Inspiration](#) software.

One thing to keep in mind as you plan… within and across disciplines, writing assignments vary in the structure or genre expectations (i.e., critical reflection, literature review, lab report, thesis). If you plan a paper using our evidence inventory template for **research and planning**, keep in mind that our template might not match the genre expectations in your course or discipline.

PLANNING AN ARGUMENT (III)

Here's an example of how you could convert the concept map on the previous page into a simple, linear outline. This outline was created using Inspiration software for iPad. The original map converted to list format with a single tap.

iPad 📶   2:02 PM

Essay Outline   Essay Outline

▼ **Essay Topic:**

▼ I. Introduction

    A. Attention Getter:

▼   B. Relevant Background Information:

        1. Important theories or terms

    C. Thesis:

▼ II. Body

▼   A. Point #1 in support of thesis:

▼   1. Suupporting Evidence / Example:

            a. Implication or connection

▼   2. Supporting Evidence / Example:

            a. Implication

▼   B. Point #2:

        1.

        2.

▼   C. Point #3:

        1.

        2.

▼ III. Conclusion

    A. Summary Statement:

    B. Final Thought:

    C. What's next - research, inquiry, theory?

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BRAINSTORM FOR A RESUME

Writing resumes and CVs can be difficult. Sometimes students prefer to brainstorm before jumping straight into the writing process. The example below shows how a map can help identify skills, competencies and next steps for professional growth.
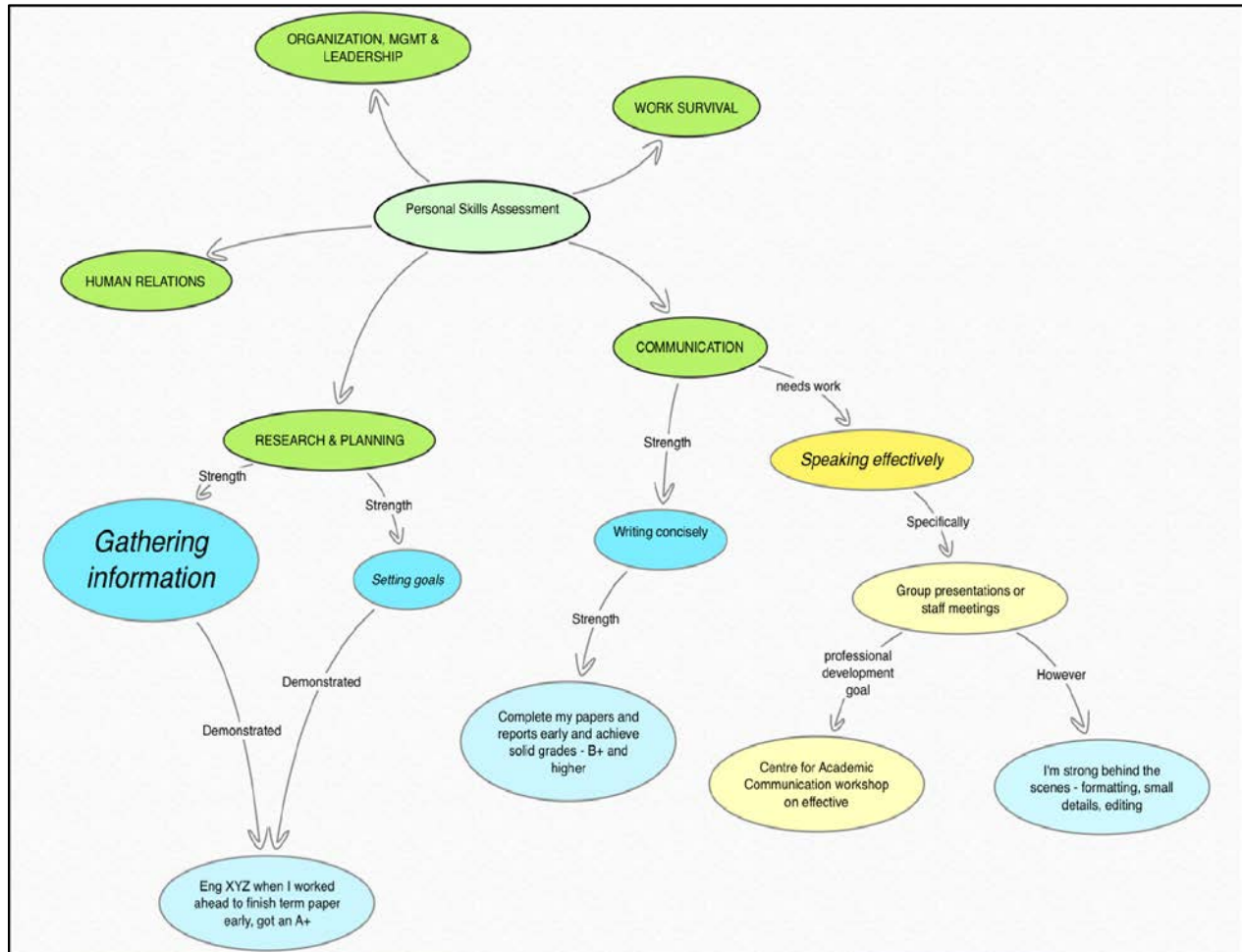
For an example of how we built this map from start to finish, send us a note at learning@uvic.ca. We can schedule an appointment for you with a Learning Consultant.

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CREATE AN ACTION PLAN

In the previous examples, we looked at concept maps for reading, writing and professional development. You could also try a concept map for planning and goal setting. Here's an example of how a student could make plans to tackle the early stages of a thesis research project.


what's best for my study?

research methods

what methods are common in my area?

trends, gaps, themes?

research in my topic area

my interests?

Undergrad thesis: what I need to know

supervisor etiquette

⚑ **can I hire an editor?**

★ **university and department expectations**

what is the format for a thesis?

specific paradigms for my research?

what's coming in my courses?

theories in my discipline

⚑ **my supervisor's suggestions?**

** This map represents one student's approach to their thesis. Yours might look very different. ☺

As in the example above, you could try planning in a more graphic format, and convert your end result to a nice, tidy checklist to follow up on. We created this example using MindMeister.

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CREATE A QUICK REFERENCE FOR WRITING

Here's a strategy to vary and expand your writing vocabulary. Make a wish list of the words you would like to use more often in your writing projects. Keep a concept map or diagram near your workspace for quick reference while you write.
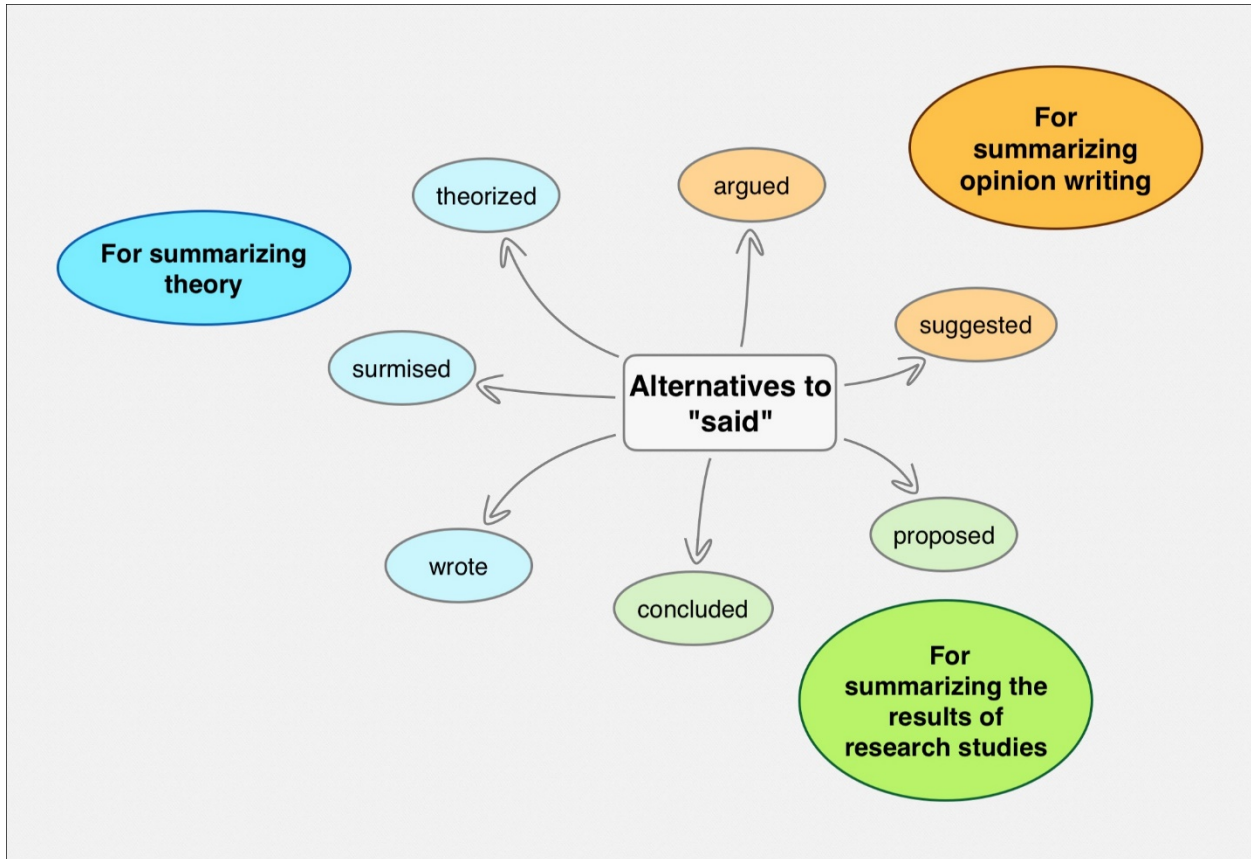
This strategy can be especially useful once you've received a little bit of feedback from your professors about how to write more effectively in your discipline. Apply some of the comments and suggestions from your last assignment to the ones you're working on for the future.

More about the Learning Assistance Program

Learning Strategist Program

Looking for strategies to strengthen efficiency, organization and success in your coursework? We can connect you with a trained Learning Strategist.

- Develop personalized learning strategies
- Reading, writing and notetaking tips
- Time management skills
- Test prep skills
- Identify your strengths
- $40 per hour

Specialized Tutoring

Enhance your learning in a specific course with a graduate student from your department or area of study.

- We have tutors available for most subjects
- Be prepared for your tests, exams and assignments by meeting regularly with a tutor
- We hold a complementary, in person introductory meeting with students and their prospective tutors, to discuss how they can best support the student and evaluate whether it will be a good fit
- $40 per hour

Contact learning@uvic.ca to find out more or visit us online:

https://www.uvic.ca/services/cal/

https://onlineacademiccommunity.uvic.ca/lap/

*Some students may be eligible for funding to cover the costs of tutoring or learning strategist services.

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