# eTools: Using Kialo in the Classroom

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## Introduction

Clearer, more comprehensive and critical thought are prized learning outcomes in many communication studies classrooms.  Traditionally, rhetoric teachers assigned *outlines* as a method for capturing and logically organizing the relationship of ideas (subordination, coordination, super-ordination).  Nevertheless, argument diagramming may be accomplished in a variety of ways.  While outlining met many idea-modeling needs of previous centuries, it is limited in its capacity to represent fuller relationships of ideas and in engaging the imagination of contemporary students who inhabit a cloud-based intertextual social world that they co-construct using a non-liner, hypertextual, argumentative logic.

## What is Kialo?

Understanding the relationships of ideas (in which some are supported and others supporting) is a key to effective communication in a wide variety of contexts and in many communication courses.  However, an appreciation of these connections is not always easy for students to apprehend.  For most, it will take work and system for explicating those relations in a way they can visualize.

True argument mapping discloses the full field of ideas—pro, con, and mutual. Because it is detailed and reveals subtlety in the relationship of ideas, argument mapping has been difficult to use in the undergraduate classroom.  But it became easier with argument mapping software.

The *Kialo* website has put free, easy-to-use, argument mapping software at an educator's fingertips—and those of their students.  On the site, the users introduce a statement, and then invite "pro" and/or "con" replies.  Each of those can then receive its own pros/cons, these their own replies, and so on. Users can click on each point to see the pros and cons directly below it, and they can keep track of where they are in the larger argument by referencing a clickable map of the complete idea field at the top of the page.  Kialo is useful in mapping the relationships of ideas—making it easier to describe, analyze, interpret, compare, engage and evaluate the reasons for/against any proposition.

**How can I get Kialo for use in the classroom?**

Go to https://www.kialo.com/ and sign up (upper right corner).  On your homepage "Create a Discussion" (same corner).  On the "Create a New Discussion" pop-up, select "Private" (only for your class).  From there you will have a few more options.  I encourage you to select the easiest path for you to start populating your own test topic with specifically related ideas.

**How can I use Kialo in the classroom?**

People "give" implied or asserted arguments—or at least trigger assumed or inferred belief—in nearly all communication contexts. Therefore, argument mapping can supply critical perspectives on many communication practices (even those that are not obviously argumentative). Outcomes for argument mapping include (1) deeper appreciation for the role of reason-attribution in communication cognition, (2) enhanced critical thinking aptitude and, (3) greater understanding of the role of reason-sharing in generating new ways of thinking about—and collaborative, integrative, win-win solutions to—otherwise divisive problems. The particular rationales for including argument mapping assignments in our courses will vary based on the role of the specific course:

(1) If we are teaching a course in *Argumentation and Debate*, argument mapping software expands the canvas for practical applied academic argument allowing for students to construct arguments on either (or both) sides of a topic, to engage arguments on the "other" side, and perhaps, involve some classmates (as many as you want) in collaborative discussion-deliberation-debate—in the classroom with aid of group laptops or classroom projector, and/or on-demand on your own screen.

(2) If we are teaching a course in *Persuasion*—or a unit on persuasion for a *Speaking* course—we understand that contemporary persuasion research suggests the superiority of arguments and other cognitively-engaging

appeals for attitude-change that is long lasting, resistant to counter-persuasion, and predictive of behavior. Traditionally, persuasion curriculum has also long emphasized the importance of organization and highlighted the role of argument in persuasion (e.g. Aristotle's Rhetoric, Toulmin's Model). Argument maps are an excellent way to develop such arguments.

(3) If we are teaching a course in *Presentational-Public Speaking*, argument mapping is useful in scaffolding outline content. Proper outlining delivers extemporaneous speakers with on-demand just-in-time content and authentic delivery adapted to in-the-moment situational needs of the audience. In identifying levels of support (subordination) and potential in-situation redundancy (co-ordination), outlines allow speakers tremendous flexibility in adapting to emerging understanding of audience and situation. True outlines are immensely useful for extemporaneous adaptation since they empower speakers to both dive deep into support structure when the audience seems unconvinced and to easily skip back to super-structure when the audience is demonstrably on-board. Argument maps, like those powered by Kialo, generate, organize and privilege relevant content for inclusions as main points, subpoints, supporting material and so on. They are useful in the invention, arrangement and language selection stages of the rhetorical canon. The *Speaking* teacher might (a) present students with a complete argument

map and ask them (individually or in groups) to organize it into an outline from which any of them could give a pre-prepared extemporaneous speech and/or (b) assign a group mapping project in anticipation of students later making their own individual maps and (c) require an argument map pre-assignment to an Outline requirement.

(4) If we are teaching a course in *Negotiation* or *Conflict,* argument mapping allows fuller exhaustion of categorical concepts without stifling brainstorming of new concepts.  It systematizes the search for the pros and cons prior to decision-making and visualizes processes of careful decision-making.  A commitment to identifying interests (reasons) rather than position (conclusions)—and to identifying areas of agreement—are central aspects of conflict management and win-win negotiation.

(5) If we are teaching a course in *Communication and Culture* (e.g. *Media and Society, Media Literacy or Criticism*), we are no doubt reacting against the reality that popular media/cultures do not often invite us to consider the reasons undergirding our ideological assumptions or the cultural consequences of those beliefs.  Explicating the implicit reasons for inferring beliefs is the purpose of argument mapping.  It allows students to see how popular entertainment media give us reasons to believe—even when that is not their intent—and that we have all been conditioned to react to a verbal

appeal less as a conveyer of good reasons and more as a word soup of stylized language, emotional connection and charisma.  Argument mapping helps render that transparent.  Imagine asking a class to come to consensus on a few things they are most sure of, picking one from their list and then asking them to map their reasons for believing.

## Conclusion

Well, I imagine all of you teach classes where bad reasons and good deliberations make a difference.  The important thing is that you check Kialo out.  Take an argument for a test drive!  Once you do, I'm sure you'll see both (1) many ways that Kialo makes it easy to deliver some content in a more engaging way than sequential slides and, (2) how argument mapping unlocks active learning opportunities for your students in the classroom and beyond.