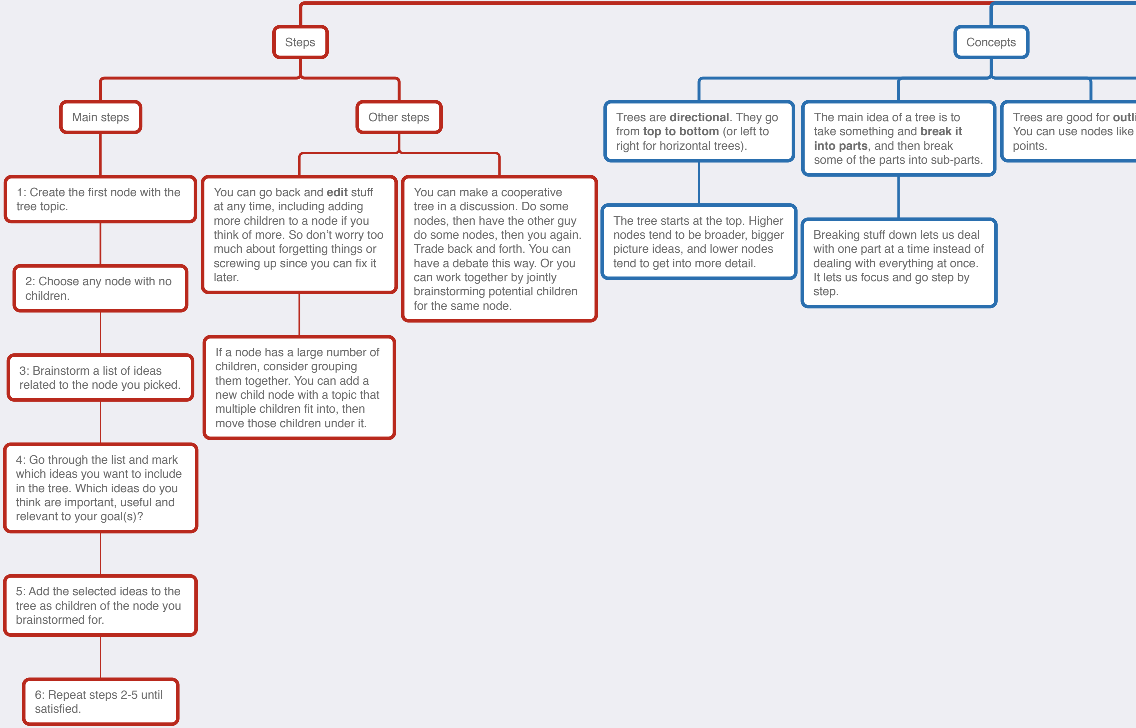
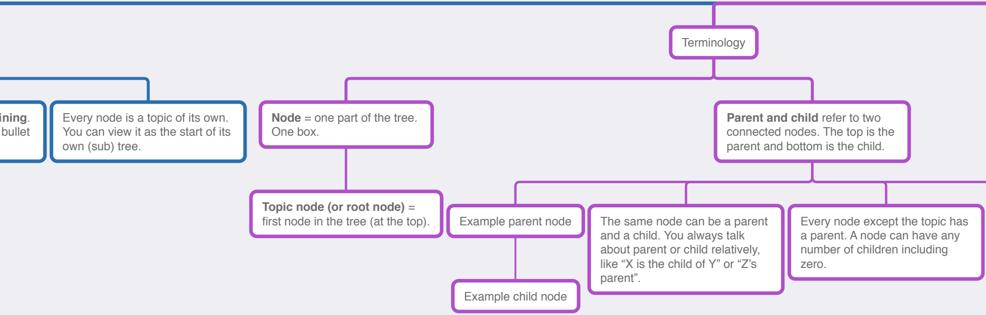


- Steps
  - Main steps
    - 1: Create the first node with the tree topic.
      - 2: Choose any node with no children.
        - 3: Brainstorm a list of ideas related to the node you picked.
          - 4: Go through the list and mark which ideas you want to include in the tree. Which ideas do you think are important, useful and relevant to your goal(s)?
            - 5: Add the selected ideas to the tree as children of the node you brainstormed for.
              - 6: Repeat steps 2-5 until satisfied.
  - Other steps
    - You can go back and **edit** stuff at any time, including adding more children to a node if you think of more. So don't worry too much about forgetting things or screwing up since you can fix it later.
      - If a node has a large number of children, consider grouping them together. You can add a new child node with a topic that multiple children fit into, then move those children under it.
    - You can make a cooperative tree in a discussion. Do some nodes, then have the other guy do some nodes, then you again. Trade back and forth. You can have a debate this way. Or you can work together by jointly brainstorming potential children for the same node.
- Concepts
  - Trees are **directional**. They go from **top to bottom** (or left to right for horizontal trees).
    - The tree starts at the top. Higher nodes tend to be broader, bigger picture ideas, and lower nodes tend to get into more detail.
  - The main idea of a tree is to take something and **break it into parts**, and then break some of the parts into sub-parts.
    - Breaking stuff down lets us deal with one part at a time instead of dealing with everything at once. It lets us focus and go step by step.
  - Trees are good for **outl** You can use nodes like points.



Terminology

…ining.
…bullet

Every node is a topic of its own. You can view it as the start of its own (sub) tree.

Node = one part of the tree. One box.

Topic node (or root node) = first node in the tree (at the top).

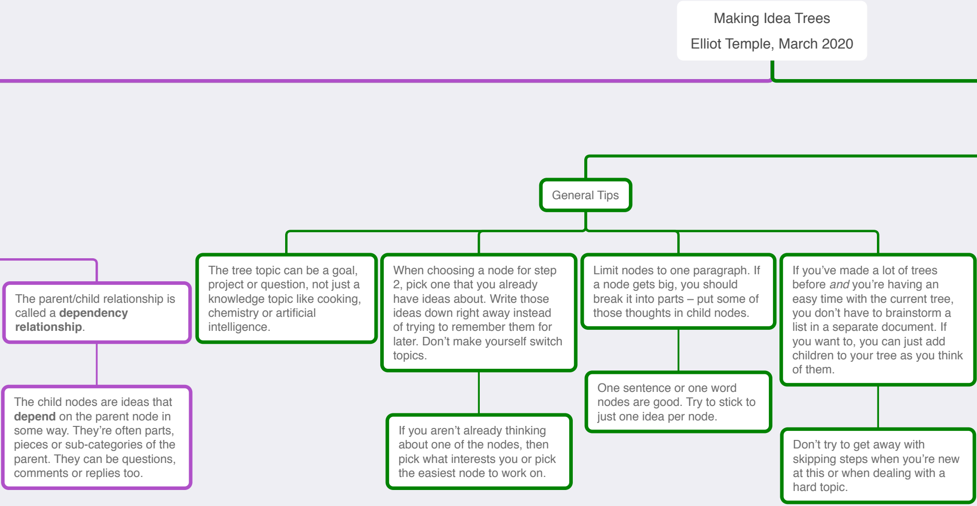
Parent and child refer to two connected nodes. The top is the parent and bottom is the child.

Example parent node

Example child node

The same node can be a parent and a child. You always talk about parent or child relatively, like “X is the child of Y” or “Z’s parent”.

Every node except the topic has a parent. A node can have any number of children including zero.



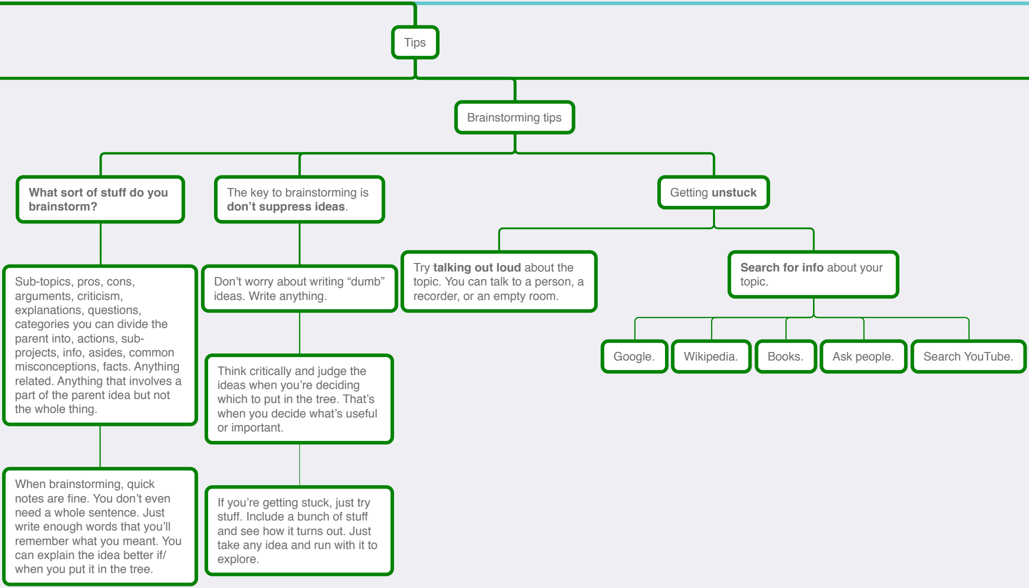
Making Idea Trees

Elliot Temple, March 2020

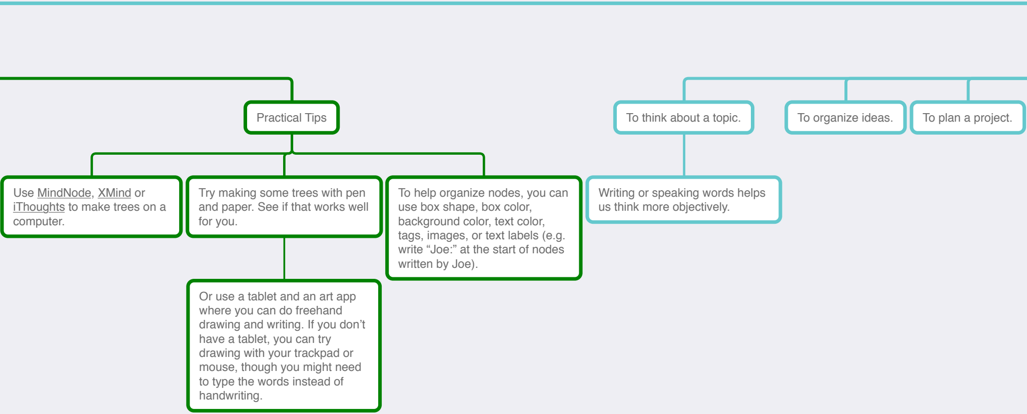
- The parent/child relationship is called a **dependency relationship**.
  - The child nodes are ideas that **depend** on the parent node in some way. They're often parts, pieces or sub-categories of the parent. They can be questions, comments or replies too.

General Tips

- The tree topic can be a goal, project or question, not just a knowledge topic like cooking, chemistry or artificial intelligence.
- When choosing a node for step 2, pick one that you already have ideas about. Write those ideas down right away instead of trying to remember them for later. Don't make yourself switch topics.
  - If you aren't already thinking about one of the nodes, then pick what interests you or pick the easiest node to work on.
- Limit nodes to one paragraph. If a node gets big, you should break it into parts – put some of those thoughts in child nodes.
  - One sentence or one word nodes are good. Try to stick to just one idea per node.
- If you've made a lot of trees before *and* you're having an easy time with the current tree, you don't have to brainstorm a list in a separate document. If you want to, you can just add children to your tree as you think of them.
  - Don't try to get away with skipping steps when you're new at this or when dealing with a hard topic.



- Tips
  - Brainstorming tips
    - **What sort of stuff do you brainstorm?**
      - Sub-topics, pros, cons, arguments, criticism, explanations, questions, categories you can divide the parent into, actions, sub-projects, info, asides, common misconceptions, facts. Anything related. Anything that involves a part of the parent idea but not the whole thing.
        - When brainstorming, quick notes are fine. You don't even need a whole sentence. Just write enough words that you'll remember what you meant. You can explain the idea better if/when you put it in the tree.
    - The key to brainstorming is **don't suppress ideas**.
      - Don't worry about writing "dumb" ideas. Write anything.
        - Think critically and judge the ideas when you're deciding which to put in the tree. That's when you decide what's useful or important.
          - If you're getting stuck, just try stuff. Include a bunch of stuff and see how it turns out. Just take any idea and run with it to explore.
    - Getting **unstuck**
      - Try **talking out loud** about the topic. You can talk to a person, a recorder, or an empty room.
      - **Search for info** about your topic.
        - Google.
        - Wikipedia.
        - Books.
        - Ask people.
        - Search YouTube.



Practical Tips

Use MindNode, XMind or iThoughts to make trees on a computer.

Try making some trees with pen and paper. See if that works well for you.

Or use a tablet and an art app where you can do freehand drawing and writing. If you don’t have a tablet, you can try drawing with your trackpad or mouse, though you might need to type the words instead of handwriting.

To help organize nodes, you can use box shape, box color, background color, text color, tags, images, or text labels (e.g. write “Joe:” at the start of nodes written by Joe).

To think about a topic.

Writing or speaking words helps us think more objectively.

To organize ideas.

To plan a project.

- Why make a tree?
  - To debate an issue.
  - To summarize or outline.
  - To do problem solving.
  - To figure out steps to achieve a goal.