

Argument mapping

Assessments such as essays and oral presentations often require you to make an argument, which is an opinion backed up by reasons and evidence. Learning to make and defend an argument is important because it demonstrates critical thinking, one of the skills most valued by universities and employers.

What is argument mapping?

Using study diagrams or graphic organisers is an effective learning strategy, and argument mapping is a highly effective way of mastering making an argument and demonstrating and reflecting on critical thinking processes.

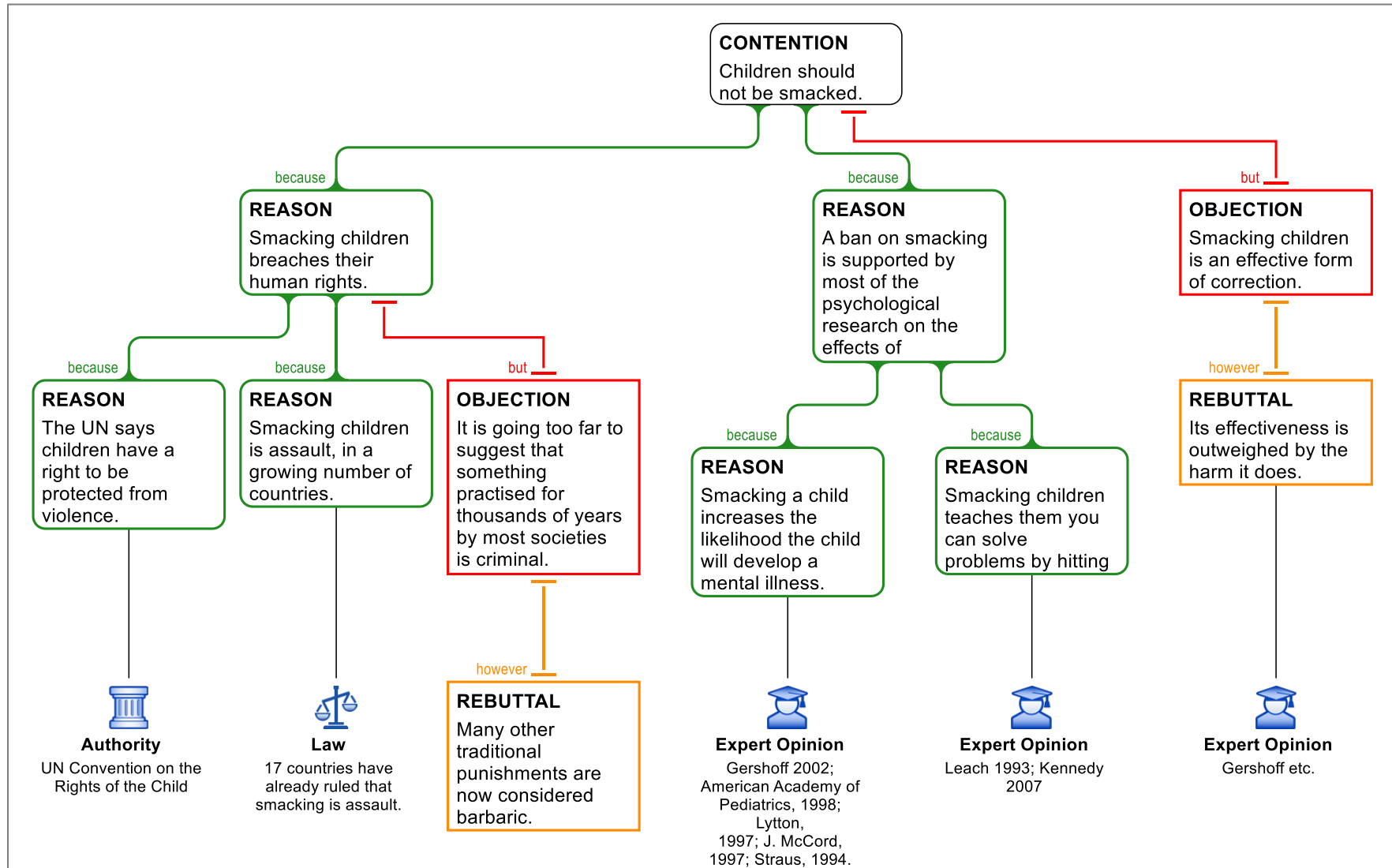
- An **argument map** is typically pyramidal, with the contention at the top.
- Under this are your **claims** (also called ‘supporting arguments’ or ‘reasons’).
- **Objections** to claims (or ‘counterarguments’) can be mapped, and so can **rebuttals** of those objections.

Figure 1 shows an example of an argument map that reads:

‘Children should not be smacked (by parents) **because** it breaches their human rights **and also because** a ban on smacking is supported by most of the psychological research on the effects of smacking’ ... and so on down to the evidence on which each line of reasoning is based.

In academic assessments, every line of reasoning must end in valid evidence (e.g. peer-reviewed journal articles, legislation, reputable government statistics).

Figure 1 Argument map for ‘Children should not be smacked’



Turning a map into an essay

You can use argument maps to plan your own assessments, or you can use them to unpack and evaluate someone else's argument.

If you are writing an argumentative essay, the **contention** (also called a 'thesis statement') would appear in the introduction in a one sentence thesis statement. The supporting reasons or 'main claims' in the level under the contention tend to be stated in the topic sentences (first sentences) of each body paragraph. Objections can be acknowledged and conceded or rebutted under the claim they relate to, or else in a separate paragraph, as shown in Figure 2.

If you get the structure of your argument right in a map before you start writing sentences and paragraphs, you will have to do less rewriting and reorganising later on. Figure 3 shows an example of a written draft drawing on the argument map in Figure 1.

Figure 2 *The rebuttal of an objection*

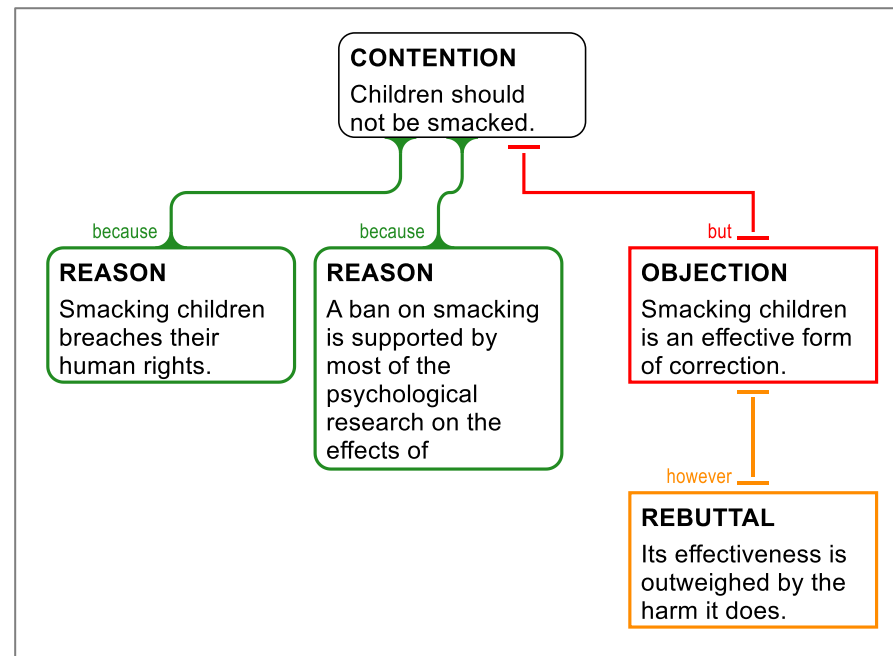


Figure 3 Example of three paragraphs with contention, main reasons, objection and rebuttal – based on argument map in Figure 1

| | | |
|-----------------------|---|--|
| I N T R O | <p>The question of whether adults have the right to punish children by smacking them has been in the news following a recent report from the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child contending that the practice constitutes a breach of a child’s human rights. While a few psychologists maintain that smacking is an effective form of discipline, the majority argue that it teaches violence and increases the risk of a child developing a mental illness in later life. This essay considers the arguments for and against smacking, in terms of psychology, human rights and the law, with reference to Australia. It argues that children should not be smacked under any circumstances.</p> | <i>Contention</i> |
| P A R A 1 | <p>A ban on smacking is supported by most of the psychological research on the effects of smacking. The view that smacking is an effective form of correction (Clancy, 2002; Li, 2005) has been debunked by a large number of studies that find this supposedly non-injurious form of corporal punishment increases a person’s chances of developing a mental illness in later life (see e.g. American Academy of Pediatrics, 1998; Gershoff, 2002). Moreover, the injury tends to have intergenerational ramifications, because when adults smack children they teach those children that this is an acceptable way to solve a problem or settle an argument (Lytton, 1997), and the likelihood that the smacked children will smack their own children roughly doubles (Higgins, 2012).</p> | <p><i>First main reason</i> <i>Objection</i> <i>Rebuttal</i></p> |
| P A R A 2 | <p>In light of the psychological evidence that smacking is capable of inflicting long-term injury, there is a growing acceptance that smacking children is a breach of a child’s human rights. Article 19 of the United Nations Convention on the rights of the child (1990) states that ‘Parties shall take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of</p> | <i>Second main reason</i> |

What do I need to make a mind map?

You can make a map on paper or a whiteboard, or using software such as:

- [Rationale](#) (see also these [online tutorials](#) on mapping)
- [Mindmup](#) (see also this [guide to using Mindmup](#)).

Need some assistance with starting your next assessment task?

Get one-on-one assistance from [Deakin Study Support](#).

Acknowledgements

Examples of argument maps made using [Rationale](#).