What is a good Argument Map?

ADVOCATING A CASE
WHAT MAKES AN ARGUMENT MAP GOOD?
This map illustrates some of the key steps and principles involved in mapping an argument. The “torture” example is just used for illustrative purposes: this map is not meant to be the final word on the topic.

Main Contention
A well articulated contention is crucial. Its meaning must be clear and precise. Express in a single succinct statement.

People around the world have used torture for thousands of years.

People would not use something that isn’t effective.

People’s practices are not always based on evidence.

The claim is widely believed.

ADVOCATING A CASE
Articulate assumptions
Make the reasoning clear by articulating premises that might otherwise be hidden.

Torture is not the most effective method of interrogation.

No one has offered proof that torture is more effective than the alternatives.

If anyone had any proof that torture is more effective than the alternatives, someone would have offered it.

The experts may have been selectively chosen by the liberal media.

There is no proof that torture is more effective than alternative methods of interrogation.

The experts are probably right.

Many experts have said that regular non-torture interrogation is more effective than torture.

Basis boxes
Basis boxes indicate the basis for particular claims. In a good map, basis boxes are provided wherever possible, and these are used correctly.

Articulating the opposing case
It’s good to show your awareness of strong arguments against your case - provided you can rebut them! The inference objection takes care of this opposition in this case.

Inference Objections
An inference objection is a rebuttal that shows that the objection above it, regardless of whether or not its stated premises are true, is not a good objection to the reason at the top. In this case, this counteracts the support given to the objection’s premise by making it irrelevant.

Larry Johnson, a former CIA officer and a deputy director of the State Department’s office of counterterrorism

Consider objections
It’s good to present objections which might be made your argument - provided you can rebut them. Generally, it’s best to present and rebut the strongest possible objections to your argument.

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The claim is widely believed.

Anyone who’s followed the media knows that this is true.

The media often choose what they want to portray.

If anyone could oppose the experts, either the media or the American government would have produced such a person.

Neither the American government nor the media have produced anyone to oppose the experts.

This diagram really just scratches the surface of good argument mapping. For take it further, a useful place to start is the Argument Mapping Tutorials, http://www.austink.com/reason/tutorials

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