

How to ...

...help students to create flashcards for exam preparation.

What is a flashcard?

Flashcards are cards that provide a short content of information related to a subject and aim to promote student's active recall on the details of the topic. The short content can be words, phrases, questions, images, numbers, or even a small sketch, always related to the topic of study.

The basic version of a flashcard consists of two sides: a front side with a question, and a back side with the answer. The learner goes through them by answering the questions on the front side and verifying the answers on the back side of the cards.

Flashcards aid in quickly memorizing and therefore, are most useful for remembering and learning dates, vocabulary, short facts, historical events, scientific terms, processes and equations. On the other hand, they are not recommended for in depth analysis of a topic.

In either digital or in paper format, flashcards are most effective when they contain images or pictures next to the textual answer. Visual representation can make a real impact on visual learners and it is especially helpful for students with SLD.

Flashcards as a revision tool

- Flashcards are effective tools for both learning and studying tasks that requires memorization. In addition, they can provide a great method to review material and prepare for an examination.
- The added value of using flashcards as a revision tool, is that they summarise the information that has been learned at the classroom, and which can be tested later individually by the learner, or in a formal evaluation in the classroom (i.e. test). Hence, practicing with flashcards fosters student's autonomy in learning by being able to practice and review the material until they feel competent.
- Flashcards develop skills on visual representation of concepts, for example, using images or shechts to make the information more memorable. This is particularly essential for students with SLD, where flashcards are very handy resources for both students and teachers.

Tips for using Flashcards in the classroom

Below, we present some tips to include in your practice when using flashcards in your classroom for learning and revision purposes.

When the teacher provides flashcards to the pupils:

- Keep the flashcards simple and the message clear. Try to summarize the key points the students should remember and keep the content short, so that learners are able to absorb the information in a quick glance.
- Take time to prepare your cards and have them organized around one specific objective, theme or key idea (e.g. WWII). This will be an extra help to provide an outline in the beginning or the end of the lesson.
- Create decks of flashcards, limited to 20-30 cards, which deal with one subject matter. Breaking the topic into smaller units will facilitate student's memorization.
- Be systematic with using flashcards and make it a habit for your students. It will not be meaningful to use flashcards only once every now and then.

When students are creating their own flashcards in the classroom:

- Encourage and coordinate flashcard creation in the classroom. Get the students to make their own flash cards, that can be taken home for them to play with parents and family.
- Embrace creativity and illustration and allow experimentation. This will make the learning more fun and the card more interesting and personalized.
- It is important that students can have several options in material and online design platforms and formats, so they can differentiate their flash cards, and also, learn new techniques of creating flashcards.
- Repetition is key when trying to learn a new information. Create flashcards throughout the year and use them regularly for revision in the classroom. By the end of the semester, students will have an entire set of flashcards to study for a bigger examination.

General tips:

- Use one term/question per card, so that students can better retain information.
- Break down complex concepts into simple multiple questions.
- Mix images and text and make sure the images correlate to the information on the card.

- Since information (text or images) should be clearly visible in both sides of the flashcards, use only thick material (i.e. not transparent paper) for the flashcards, so that students don't get confused.
- Organise the flashcards in subjects and store them somewhere in the classroom where students can consult and play with any time they need to. For instance, you can have a 'geometry flashcards box' or a 'WWII flashcard box'.
- Encourage reading the flashcards out loud. Reciting terms and definitions help memorizing and have more chances to be remembered during an exam.

Tools recommendation:

- Online free flashcard editors (Flashcard Machine, Quizlet, Study Blue)
- Commercial phone apps (gFlashPro, Chegg Flashcards, Flashcards Deluxe)
- Cropped colorful or white thick paper
- Post it stickers (used two-by-two)

Some partners of the MOOC Dys project, work on developing the Flash Mind project, which will provide material to support teachers in using flashcards and other material in a visual and interactive way, for adapting content for students with learning disabilities. The project will be launched in 2020.