

# Method #1 - Flash Cards

This method only really works if you follow these directions in their entirety - most people who tell me "it didn't work for me" don't follow through on the complete directions (especially the *out loud* part). Part of the reason why this method is effective is that it forces you to engage and encode the material in multiple ways making it easier to remember: if you don't follow all the directions you're limiting the method's efficacy.

Materials needed: a large # of A7 note cards (cue cards) - these can be cut down from larger sheets of paper or bought in packs. Only a single color is needed but I like having different colors for different units. Bigger cards (or smaller) can also work but I find A7's to be the right size most of the time. A6's work well if you're dealing with diagrams and using them for Method #2 (below).

1. Start by working through your class notes. Look for items you need to memorize (or should know) and turn them into questions. For each question, write the question itself on one side of a card and the answer on the other.
  1. Think small - reduce big topics or items into the smaller, bite-sized chunks. You want cards where it's easy to fit the answer on the back side. Too much on a card makes it very hard to use effectively. *For example, for the 12 cranial nerves, I would break them into sets of 4: my 1st card would be "Name cranial nerves #1-4."; my 2nd card would be "Name cranial nerves #5-8"; etc. I would ask the function of each cranial nerve on a separate card.*
  2. Don't use a computer! I find hand writing the cards much more effective because we have a tendency to just cut & paste computer text and that doesn't require any engagement. You're also creating more work in the long run if you use a computer because you will need to print, cut, and glue them to cards.
2. Once I have finished with my class notes, I would normally turn to the text book and work through the matching chapters looking for additional items I may have missed in my notes or things that clarify or add to what I have already covered.
3. After you've finished your stack, shuffle them and then start reviewing by reading the question out loud and then reading the answer out loud. The out loud part is important!
  1. You don't need to read all of them at once. In fact, I suggest spending no more than 20 minutes in any single session (20 minutes on, 40 minutes off is a good ratio to start with) working with the cards. Just work through as many as you can in that 20 minutes, moving each one you complete to the bottom of the stack, and then pick up with what you left off with in the next 20 minute session.
  2. You can practice (and all the other steps) anywhere - the the bathroom, on the tram, in the car, at the breakfast table. Use your "wasted time" efficiently and you won't need to use as much of your free time. You don't need to be seated to do this: try walking around while you're doing it, it often makes the time fly.
4. Once you have gone through the cards a couple of times, it's time to begin testing yourself. You do so simply by reading the question out loud and then attempting to answer it out loud. That last part is critical here - don't make the "I just think about it" mistake because that's cheating and ruins the method. Out loud. If you don't know the answer, think about it for a few seconds and then flip over the card and read the answer out loud. If you can say the answer, flip over the card and check if you're right, by reading the answer out loud.
  1. You don't need to do these by yourself! Get others to ask you the questions and check your answers: this includes parents, friends, & siblings.
  2. If you can work with another person in your class, test each other with each other's cards (i.e., have them ask you their questions). This really helps and often will reveal items you have forgotten to include.
5. After you've done this a couple of times, start sorting the cards into two piles - the ones you get right go into a pile that you will stop reviewing for the time being; the ones you're struggling with go back on the bottom of the review stack. Continue to work with the review stack and set the others aside for the next couple days.
  1. Over repeated trials with the cards, your review pile will shrink and the non-review will grow. This is a good thing.
6. A couple days before the exam, shuffle all your cards back together (review & non-review) and start again. This is your final review.
  1. Do not worry about cards you are still struggling with: often you will have no problem with the material later on.
  2. The day of the test, simply take out the cards and run through them one or two times before the test. Don't worry about compulsively reading them 10 minutes before the test - in general I would recommend not studying at all in the hour leading up to the exam because you're just getting yourself overly stressed.

How to make it more efficient: This method is time consuming up front because you need to make the cards and sometimes you will have a lot of cards to make. However, if you make your cards every day, spending a few minutes each day transferring that day's notes onto cards you'll find it very efficient. The added benefit is that you're in effect reviewing your notes each day and that will make you better in class the next day, not to mention help when it comes to actually studying later on.

Make sure you save the cards if you're going to have a mid-term or final exam in the class! In the DP, this means saving your cards for your 12th grade May exam. It's a life-saver!

## Method #2 - Draw it!

This method works for all kinds of diagrams or complex concepts where you need to know how different parts or facts link together. It can be used in conjunction with Method #1 if you simply turn these items into a card (A6 sized cards work better here) where the question is a command (e.g., "Describe the Krebs Cycle.") or a blank diagram to fill in (e.g., "Label the four lobes of the brain.>").

1. Make cards to test these concepts or diagrams. As mentioned above, you can make flash cards for these as well. Use normal sized (A7) cards for smaller diagrams; use A6 cards for more complex or bigger diagrams/concepts.
  1. This is the one particular type of card where it sometimes is better to print out a diagram and glue it to the card - I don't think you need to do this with most diagrams, but it makes sense to use it for some kinds. For example, I would probably use a blank outline of the brain diagrams so that I get used to seeing those figures while I'm reviewing.
2. Read the question out loud. However, instead of saying the answer, draw it. Take a sheet of paper or a white board (I love having my own white board in my office to draw things) and draw the diagram or figure, then label it. For example, draw a rough outline of the brain's shape and then color in the four lobes, labelling each. For an economics diagram, you would draw the actual graph, including the lines and labelling each part. For the cell membrane, you draw the various layers and label each.
  1. It should be obvious that artistic skill here isn't important but you want to be reasonably accurate so that you can label the diagram correctly. However, if a particular question relies on accuracy, practice drawing these correctly!
3. This technique works even better if you draw and explain each part (give the definitions that you've learned from your flash cards) to another person. Teach it.

How to make it more efficient: You can use this method to create outlines to essay or complex questions as well. If you need to know "Explain the effects of one hormone on human behaviour." you can create an outline with all the necessary parts of the answer (but without the details - these come from your flash cards!) and then test yourself on each question by writing out the outline on a board or sheet of paper. This is super useful for DP classes like History & Psychology because it lets you know exactly what you need to cover in a long answer as soon as you see the topic and that makes it easier to extract the fine details you've learned through the flash cards.