

Be AGILE Strategy: Using Flashcards

What are flashcards?

Flashcards are small note cards used for testing and improving memory through practiced information retrieval. Flashcards are typically two-sided, with the prompt on one side and the information about the prompt on the other. This may include names, vocabulary, concepts, or procedures. Usually there are several flashcards that, as a group, represent a category of information you're trying to remember, learn, and master.

What are the benefits?

Using flashcards can be a very effective self-testing approach. Even the act of making flashcards is a way to “work” the information, challenging you to think about which information to have on one side and the related description on the other. Flashcards are often part of spaced practice, and repetition helps you figure out what information you can remember easily and what needs additional effort.

How do I use this approach?

Traditional use of flashcards is for memorization only. While there is some value to remembering key terms and other information, it's important to remember that in college there is far less memorization than in high school, as learners need to be able to apply and make meaning of information. Below are the steps to create your flashcards, along with approaches to test memory and make meaning of the information as you go along.

Making Flashcards

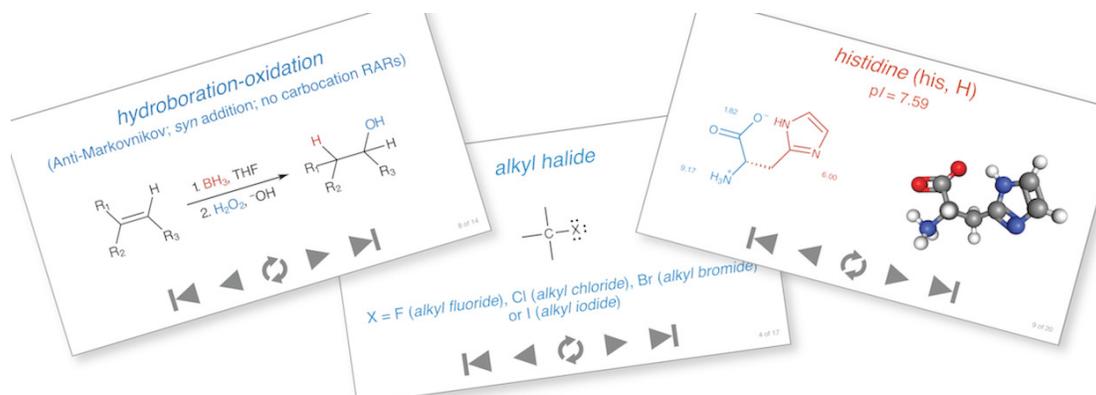
- Buy or construct your cards. A set of index cards is usually inexpensive to purchase. You also can print off cards from a template.
- Choose the category of information for your “deck” of flashcards. Instead of turning every piece of information from the class into a card, consider making a deck of related terms, facts, or formulas.

Memorizing Individual Cards

- Look at the prompt on the first card, and explain the related information listed on the back without peeking. Try to say the information out loud, and then flip over the card to see if you were correct and thorough.
- If correct, move the card to a separate pile. Make sure not to fool yourself by peeking when you get stuck. If not correct, put the card on the bottom of the pile to revisit again during that study session. This helps you to spend more time with what you remember the least.

Are there any related technologies?

There are several websites that can be used to create flashcards. In addition to making physical cards, you also may choose to use a platform to make virtual cards. If you are taking a group approach, you can use Google Docs to construct the cards together. There are also apps (such as Quizlet or StudyBlue) for use on smart phones, which can be very convenient for accessing your flashcards from anywhere.



Where can I get more information?

For more detailed information on making flashcards, memorizing individual cards, and making meaning, please visit our website. A Learning Commons tutor can also work with you on this strategy. To make your free appointment with a trained tutor, visit usm.maine.edu/learningcommons.

CollegeInfoGeek offers a video on flashcard study tips: <https://collegeinfo geek.com/flash-card-study-tips/>.

What does it mean to be AGILE?

We want to help you, as a USM student, avoid common learning challenges, and instead increase your memory, understanding, and academic performance. These strategies will involve self-testing, active practice, making connections between ideas, all of which will maximize your academic time both inside and outside of the classroom.

The mantra we want you to remember is: “Be an AGILE learner” (Academic Gains through Improved Learning Effectiveness).

At first, some of these approaches may seem like “more work”, but that’s normal! Any time we try a new behavior with any area of our life, it takes more thought and effort. By practicing these strategies, you will see improvements very quickly, and soon these habits will become your “new normal”.

For more detailed information on this active learning strategy, visit: usm.maine.edu/AGILE.