Making Flash Cards

Description:
1. 3 x 5 index cards are commonly used.
2. Put the term or piece of information on one side and the definition or answer on the other side.

Advantages:
1. Flash cards force you to concentrate on a single bit of information that needs to be learned.
2. They aid recitation (self-testing) because the answer is hidden from view.
3. They are flexible and portable.
4. They can be categorized so that items within a category can be compared and contrasted.

Steps:
1. As you come across an important term (that is, a potential test item) in your readings or lecture notes make a flash card. Here are some clues to importance:
   - Text book – italicized, bold face, treated in some detail;
   - Lecture – written on the board, treated in some detail, professor expresses enthusiasm.
2. As you make the cards and as you review periodically, recite to learn the information. Every time you recite the answer correctly before looking at the answer, put a check mark in the corner of the card to indicate success.
3. Numerous checks on a card means that you are approaching or have achieved mastery of information.
4. As you gather cards, look for ways to sort them into logical categories. Here are some clues that might help the sorting:
   a) chapter titles and subheadings, lecture topics, etc., coding the cards to show what categories they fall into – one method would be to use a color code with a different color or color combination for each category;
   b) make up an outline, diagram, or some other codings. Here is a simple example for:

   Biology
   - Blue coded flash cards: “family”, “societies”, “populations”, “species”
   - Red coded flash cards: “queen bee”, “drone”, “worker
   - Green coded flash cards: “symbiosis”, “mutualism”, “commensalisms”, “parasitism”

The above flash cards fit under categories which might be represented as follows on the next page:
5. Thus, the “key” (diagram, outline, or whatever form suits you) and the flash cards develop together.

6. In more complex schemes, a flash card might be coded under more than one category. *For example*, supposing that you had flash cards on a number of scientists. On one side of each card would be a scientist’s name and on the other side would be his/her contribution to science. These cards might be categorized by area of science that the scientist was in [e.g., physics, chemistry, etc.]. Remember that how you classify the cards depends to a great extent on how you expect to be tested in the course.

7. Once the cards have been classified, recitation can involved both of the following methods.
   a. Group the cards into categories and study by comparing and contrasting cards in a common category.
   b. Simulate a test situation by reviewing the cards in random order, the way you will have to deal with the information on a test

**Note:** Don’t make the mistake of waiting until the last minute to start making the cards. If you wait until right before a test, you are likely to spend too much time making the cards and not enough time studying them. Try to make the cards as a regular part of your study routine.