brightstudy

FREE RESOURCE — GUIDE

# How to Write Flashcards That Work

The rules that separate flashcards that build memory from flashcards that waste time, with before-and-after examples and a card-writing worksheet.

| 8 | 5 | 30 | 1 |
|---|---|---|---|
| RULES | CARD TYPES | CARD DRAFTING SLOTS | ANSWER PER CARD |

ATOMIC CARDS · CLOZE · REVERSED CARDS · HONEST GRADING


PREPARED BY
BrightStudy

CATEGORY
Revision and memory

EDITION
2026, A4 PDF

LATEST VERSION
brightstudy.ai/resources/flashcard-writing-guide

# What is inside

Most flashcards fail for the same reasons: the front is too vague to have one answer, the back is a paragraph, or the card tests recognition rather than recall. This guide sets out the rules that matter (one question, one answer; cloze for facts; reverse cards for definitions; context on the front, never on the back) and shows each one with a bad card rewritten into a good one. A worksheet at the end lets you draft thirty cards for a topic and check them against the rules before you make them.

## SECTIONS

1. Eight rules, with examples
2. Card types and when to use them
3. Card drafting worksheet
4. Card drafting worksheet (continued)

## WHO IT IS FOR

Students using paper cards, Anki, Quizlet or BrightStudy who want their review time to count, and teachers setting up decks for a class.

## WHAT IS INCLUDED

- Eight rules for cards that build memory, each with a before-and-after example
- Card types explained: basic, reversed, cloze, image occlusion and "why" cards
- Common mistakes and how to spot them in your own deck
- Card drafting worksheet for thirty cards with a rule check column
- Review-session routine: how to grade yourself honestly

# 01

# Eight rules, with examples

| RULE | BAD CARD | GOOD CARD |
|---|---|---|
| **1. One question, one answer** | Front: Describe the heart. Back: (a paragraph) | Front: Which chamber of the heart pumps blood to the lungs? Back: Right ventricle |
| **2. Make the front precise** | Front: Photosynthesis? Back: 6CO2 + 6H2O → C6H12O6 + 6O2 | Front: Word equation for photosynthesis. Back: carbon dioxide + water → glucose + oxygen |
| **3. Short backs** | Back: The Treaty of Versailles was signed in 1919 and imposed reparations and territorial losses on Germany… | Front: Year the Treaty of Versailles was signed. Back: 1919 |
| **4. Context on the front, not the back** | Front: Define osmosis. Back: (Biology, cells topic) Movement of water… | Front: (Cells) Define osmosis. Back: Net movement of water across a partially permeable membrane from high to low water potential |
| **5. Cloze for facts in context** | Front: What is the capital of Australia? Back: Canberra | Both fine, but: The capital of Australia is ___ → Canberra, is quicker to write and keeps context |
| **6. Reverse definitions** | Only: Define mitosis → … | Also: Cell division producing two identical daughter cells is called ___ → mitosis |
| **7. Ask why, not only what** | Front: What happens to enzyme activity above 40°C? | Add: Why does enzyme activity fall above 40°C? Back: Active site changes shape (denatures), substrate no longer fits |
| **8. No lists longer than three** | Front: List the seven characteristics of living things | Seven cloze cards, each blanking one characteristic in the sentence |

# 02

# Card types and when to use them

| TYPE | BEST FOR | EXAMPLE |
|---|---|---|
| **Basic** | A question with one short answer | Front: SI unit of force. Back: newton (N) |
| **Reversed** | Definitions and terms you must produce both ways | Term → definition, and definition → term, as two cards |
| **Cloze** | Facts embedded in a sentence; sequences | In the Krebs cycle, acetyl-CoA combines with ___ to form citrate |
| **Image occlusion** | Diagrams, maps, anatomy | Cover one label on the diagram; name it |
| **Why / how** | Understanding, not just recall | Why does increasing temperature increase reaction rate? |

### MISTAKES TO LOOK FOR IN YOUR OWN DECK

- Cards you always get right instantly: delete or suspend them.
- Cards you always get wrong: the problem is understanding; go back to the explanation, then rewrite the card.
- Cards you can answer only because you recognise the shape of the text: rewrite the front.
- Cards copied word-for-word from a textbook: rewrite in your own words.

### GRADING YOURSELF HONESTLY

1. Say or write the answer before you flip the card. Thinking "I know this" does not count.
2. Compare with the back. Partially right is wrong.
3. Grade: Again (did not know), Hard (knew after effort), Good (knew), Easy (instant). Most cards should be Good.
4. Never grade Easy to make a card go away; it will come back right before the exam.

# 03

# Card drafting worksheet

Topic _____. Draft the cards, then tick the rule check once each card passes rules 1 to 4.

| # | FRONT | BACK | TYPE | RULE CHECK |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | | | | |
| 2 | | | | |
| 3 | | | | |
| 4 | | | | |
| 5 | | | | |
| 6 | | | | |
| 7 | | | | |
| 8 | | | | |
| 9 | | | | |
| 10 | | | | |
| 11 | | | | |
| 12 | | | | |
| 13 | | | | |
| 14 | | | | |
| 15 | | | | |

# 04

# Card drafting worksheet (continued)

| # | FRONT | BACK | TYPE | RULE CHECK |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 16 | | | | |
| 17 | | | | |
| 18 | | | | |
| 19 | | | | |
| 20 | | | | |
| 21 | | | | |
| 22 | | | | |
| 23 | | | | |
| 24 | | | | |
| 25 | | | | |
| 26 | | | | |
| 27 | | | | |
| 28 | | | | |
| 29 | | | | |
| 30 | | | | |

# Keep going

**BRIGHTSTUDY**

This resource covers the part of studying that happens away from a screen. BrightStudy does the rest: upload your notes, slides or recordings and it turns them into Study Docs, flashcards and exam-style questions, then schedules your reviews with spaced repetition. There is a free plan to get started.

## PAIRS WELL WITH REVISION AND MEMORY

| FEATURE | WHAT IT DOES | LINK |
|---|---|---|
| **Spaced Repetition** | Revisit your learning with scheduled reviews. | brightstudy.ai/features/spaced-repetition |
| **Flashcards** | Active recall with focused question-and-answer cards. | brightstudy.ai/features/flashcards |
| **AI Explanations** | Help understanding answers and remembering ideas. | brightstudy.ai/features/ai-explanations |
| **Deep Learning** | Explain your understanding and get feedback. | brightstudy.ai/features/deep-learning |

## RELATED RESOURCES

| RESOURCE | LINK |
|---|---|
| **Spaced Repetition Tracker** | brightstudy.ai/resources/spaced-repetition-tracker |
| **Active Recall Worksheet** | brightstudy.ai/resources/active-recall-worksheet |
| **Mind Map Templates** | brightstudy.ai/resources/mind-map-templates |



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