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Excellence in Flashcards Done Right Tuition

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Flashcards Done Right

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Study Skills

16 entries

Flashcards combine active recall and spaced repetition, but only if you make and use them well. Here is how, including the Leitner box system.

Make good cards

One idea per card	Keep each card to a single fact, definition or step. If a card has three things on it, you will half-learn all three. Split it into three cards instead.
Ask a real question	The front should pose a question your brain has to answer, not just a topic. Write 'What does the mitochondrion do?' rather than the single word 'Mitochondria'.
Keep the back short and in your own words	The answer should be a sentence or two you can recall in full, phrased the way you would explain it to a friend. If you cannot say it out loud, the card is too big.

How to study them

Answer before you flip	Always say or write your answer first, then turn the card over to check. The effort of pulling it from memory is what builds the memory.
Be honest about right and wrong	A near miss is a miss. If you forgot a key word or got the detail muddled, mark it wrong and review it again soon.
Shuffle and space it out	Studying cards in the same sequence means you learn the order, not the content, so shuffle the pile. Ten focused minutes most days also beats a two hour cram once a week.

The Leitner box system

Set up the boxes	Use three to five boxes, real or drawn on paper. Every new card starts in box 1. The box a card sits in tells you how often to review it.
Review on a schedule	Study box 1 every day, box 2 every few days, box 3 about once a week, and any later boxes less often still. Cards you find hard get seen the most.
Promote when you are right	Get a card correct and move it up one box. A card you keep getting right slowly climbs to the boxes you rarely open, which is exactly where it should be.
Send mistakes back to box 1	Get a card wrong and it drops straight back to box 1, no matter how high it had climbed. You then see it daily again until it sticks.
Why it works	The system spends your time on the cards you keep missing and stops wasting it on the ones you already know. That is spaced repetition done by hand.

Paper vs apps (Anki)

Apps space the cards for you	Anki and similar apps run the same idea automatically, choosing which cards are due each day so you never have to sort boxes yourself.
Paper is simple and distraction free	Real cards need no login, no battery and no notifications. Writing them out by hand is also a first pass of revision in itself.

Pick one and stick with it

Both work. The worst choice is hopping between systems every week. Choose paper boxes or an app, then keep using it daily.

Common mistakes**Making cards but never testing**

Writing a lovely stack of cards feels productive but teaches you little on its own. The learning happens when you test yourself against them.

Cramming all boxes at once

If you review every box every day, you throw away the whole point of Leitner. Trust the schedule and leave the higher boxes alone until they are due.