# Riverland
## COMMUNITY COLLEGE

# Notecard Question & Answer Technique

To succeed in college, important ideas from lectures and textbooks must be *identified, organized, recorded, practiced and stored in long term memory* for recall when needed. The Notecard Question and Answer Technique (NQAT) helps learners do these important tasks required for learning. Using NQAT, many learners have uncovered a previously hidden ability to learn and remember better than ever before and earn higher grades.

NQAT is an easy way to gather and organize information to be learned. It also saves time because it speeds learning of information that may appear on quizzes and exams. Using NQAT may often result in better exam and final course grades.

## How Notecards Are Set Up

Notecards are set up by (1) turning main points from lectures and textbooks into questions and placed on one side of a notecards. (2) Answers are formed out of details given to explain main ideas and placed on the other side of the notecard.

This should be done as soon as possible after attending lectures to minimize your chances of forgetting the material. According to individual style, questions may be formulated before, during, or after reading text assignments.

The NQAT notetaking format encourages reading for the purpose of finding specific information to include in answers to these questions. This technique directly attacks the problems of poor concentration and forgetting what was just read. For lectures, NQAT is a simple way to reorganize notes into a format from which it is easy to learn and one that promotes, not hinders, learning.

*Unless recitation is done regularly, forgetting material for exams is normal!*

## Advantages of NQAT

1. Notecards are **portable**, making them convenient to review during short periods of time such as riding to and from school, between classes, during meals, etc.
2. Notecards are a fast way to review that **reduces study time**.

3. Material to be learned is **recalled and recited in the same manner as it is on exams**. That is, learners see questions and practice recalling answers from memory as notecards are recited and reviewed just as they would on exams. It is said that we become better at that which we practice. If learners practice seeing questions and recalling answers from memory, they become better at doing this at exam time.

4. **It's easier to recognize correct answers when seeing exam questions.** When instructors compose exams, they find main ideas, turn them into questions, and place them on exams. Learners must read questions and then recall answers from memory. Learners who formulate questions from main ideas in notes are doing what instructors do when exams are made. If learners have learned the answers ahead of time, they have the knowledge needed for earning higher grades on exams.

5. Learners can **show notecards to instructors** before exams to find out if the most helpful kinds of questions are being formed and if the answers are complete and curate. Many, but not all instructors are willing to help learners refine the skills for better learning. Ask.

6. Notecards are easily **rearranged and recategorized** which provides a variety of ways to respond to a question no matter how it is asked on an exam.

7. Learners **find out what has and has not been learned before an exam or quiz**, when something can still be done about it. Learned and unlearned material is readily visible and can be easily separated into two stacks of notecards:"learned" and "not yet learned." This way, it is easy to determine where to concentrate one's time and energy on the "not yet learned" material.

8. Learners have **fewer problems with concentration while reading textbooks** because they are actively involved in seeking specific information in the form of questions and answers.

9. Learners can **conquer the "Blank Mind Syndrome."** Many learners read by stroking words with their eyes or highlighting sentences. With this method of reading, they are often not able to remember what was just read or recall the main ideas and important details at exam time. Making questions from main ideas and reading for details from which to make answers, makes it easier to remember what was just read.

The following are examples of well-organized notecards. The topic used is the Frontier Vocabulary System from How To Study In College (3rd ed.) by Walter Pauk, pp. 292-300.

## How Notecards Look

<div align="center">Question on front:</div>

Text p. 292

What is the Frontier Vocab.
Sys. (FVS)?

<div align="center">Answer on back:</div>

Sys. To master new vocab.

| Text p.293-294 | 1. Look for somewhat |
|---|---|
| How does the FVS work? | familiar words |
| | 2. Learn meanings |

| Lecture 10/30/08 | 1. Frontier words are easiest to learn. |
|---|---|
| Why use the FVS? | 2. Foundation for other frontier words. |

| Example of one of my Frontier words? | Prodigal- reckless, wasteful, lavish, wanderer |
|---|---|

For easiest review, there should be 1 main idea per notecard, that is, 1 notecard for each question and answer. After the important points have been placed on notecards in question and answer form, the next step is to recite.
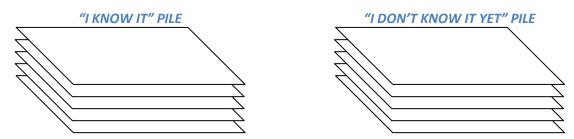
## How to Recite Notecards

**STEP 1.** Read a question ALOUD from a notecard.

**STEP 2.** Recite the answer ALOUD as completely as possible from memory as if lecturing a class. Some learners prefer to write an answer from memory as if taking a test. The best way is to do both but at different times.

# Learners should recite ALOUD because it...

a. ...helps **organize potential test material** in the mind, thus increasing recall at test time. Organized material is easier to remember. Reciting aloud as if lecturing a class also makes writing essay answers much easier because answers are written just the way they were recited. No time is wasted organizing answers, deicing what to include, or in writing too much.

b. ...**increases the speed of learning** and improves recall at test time because recitation requires utilization of auditory (hearing) and visual (sight) senses in learning. Learning is enhanced as more senses are used.

c. ...**provides an immediate self-test on how well material has been learned** before a test is taken when something can still be done about it. This becomes readily apparent because answers can either be spoken or written correctly, or they cannot. This eliminates "believing" or "feeling" the material has been learned when it has not.

d. Allows practice to organize answers before taking exams which improves organization of actual exam answers. In other words, exam answers are written the way they have been practiced during recitation; somewhat like and actor who acts the part the way it was rehearsed. The better the rehearsals, the better the performance. For learners, better recitation leads to better performance on exams. Learners who recite notecards regularly also spend less time organizing answers on exams, leaving more time for recall and writing.

**STEP 3.** Turn the card over and CHECK the accuracy of the answer.

**STEP 4.** If stated correctly, place the card in the "I know it" pile.

**STEP 5.** If an answer is not recalled or is recalled incorrectly, look at it and read it ALOUD. Turn the card over, reread the question and write or recite aloud as much of the answer as possible from memory. Do this step as many times as needed until the answer is recited or written correctly from memory. Then, place this notecard in the "I don't know it yet" pile and go to the next notecard.

*"I KNOW IT" PILE*          *"I DON'T KNOW IT YET" PILE*



**STEP 6.** Review the "I don't know it yet" pile at least every other day. Review "known" notecards every 2-3 days to prevent you from forgetting them. As you increase the number of repetitions of review, your ability to recall will be faster and more accurate.

# General Suggestions

1. Place only 1 question and its answer per notecard. This makes it easier to organize and reorganize the ideas into meaningful groups, categories, or sequences, if needed.
2. Avoid complete sentences or spelling out every word. Use short phrases for sentences and symbols and abbreviations for words. This results in greater condensation of ideas which leads to less review time and less total substance to recall.
3. Indicate where the information on each notecard is from by jotting down page numbers (if from the text), or dates (if from lecture). This permits quick reference should there be confusion or uncertainty.
4. Keep notecards separate for each course using rubber bands or different colored cards. Use rubber bands to keep the "learned" cards separate from the "yet to be learned" cards in each subject.
5. When making questions for notecards, use the clues to main ideas and important details that authors and lecturers provide. Below are some examples.

## In textbooks

- Bold, italicized, colored or highlighted words and phrases
- Chapter title
- Sub-headings
- Graphs, charts, diagrams
- Lettered or number items
- Chapter summaries
- Items with symbols
- Chapter questions
- Listing or outline of the main ideas in the chapter

## In Lectures

- Topics to be covered listed on the chalkboard at the beginning of class
- Verbal listing of topics to be covered that day
- Clue words:     First, Next, Furthermore, In contrast, Last, More importantly, Then
- General clues:   Repeated words or ideas; Gestures; Questions asked in class; assigned reading; handouts; speed and volume of speech

After a test, use your detective skills in a **post-test survey** and look for the causes of incorrect answers. If this is not done, you are condemned to repeat the same ineffective skills for learning over and over. That means grades will not likely improve. The investigation is done by comparing information in missed questions to information on notecards. The location (lecture dates or textbook page numbers) of missing or incorrect information on exam questions will point toward areas where learning skills need modification for better grades on future exams.

## Three Steps in a Post-Test Survey:

**STEP 1.** If information for correct answers IS NOT on notecards but appears in the text or was given in lecture, this suggests that more attention is needed to spot the indicators of main points in lectures and textbooks and record them.

**STEP 2.** If information for correct answers IS on notecards but missed on the exam, this suggests that a greater number of recitations and reviews are needed, a distractive study environment needs changing, or there may be personal concerns which need resolution before more effective learning can take place.

**STEP 3.** Any incorrect information on notecards should be corrected *immediately*. Missing information should be added to notecards and learned in preparation for subsequent exams and for more knowledge. This is especially valuable if there is a comprehensive final exam scheduled.

Investigating the source of errors in the learning process will lead to remedies, and mistakes in notetaking or recitation that lead to lower grades will not be repeated.

## One Notecard Technique Variation

One variation of the notecard technique, called the Cornell System, involves the use of notebook paper. A line is drawn 1/3 of the way from the left side of a sheet of paper. Main ideas and/or questions are placed to the left of this line and details/answers to the right.

| *Questions on this side* | *Answers on this side* |
|---|---|
| Text p.292<br>What is Frontier Vocab. Sys. (FVS)? | Sys. For mastering new vocabulary |
| Text p. 293-294<br>How does the FVS work? | 1. Look for somewhat familiar words<br>2. Learn these |
| lecture 10/30/07<br>Why use the FVS? | 1. Frontier words: easiest vocab. To learn<br>2. Foundation for learning other frontier words |
| Example of one of my frontier words. | Prodigal – reckless, wasteful, lavish, wanderer |

Adapted with permission from Dennis Congo, Certified Supplemental Instruction trainer, University of Central Florida