

10 Things to do with your Flashcards

Many language learners make 'flashcards' of the new vocabulary in their textbook – the Chinese character and/or pinyin on one side and the English (or a picture representing the word) on the reverse side. And as the student progresses through the textbooks, the flashcards pile up ... and pile up ... and pile up. So how can we use them to aid memory?

1. Place them on a table with the English (or picture) facing upwards and try to guess the Chinese; then try it the other way round. This game is more fun if two or three people play it together.
2. Take a small oblong-shaped box and divide it into sections. After learning the new vocabulary of the first lesson, place the flashcards in the front section of the box. Then move on to the next lesson. When you have completed that lesson, take out the cards in the front section and test yourself. Those that you remember, place them in the next section back (thus freeing up space for the new vocabulary cards); those that you failed to recall, leave them in the front section, and so on through the textbook. When you fail to recall the Chinese on any flashcard no matter where it is in the box, place that card in the front section. (see “Memorizing Vocabulary” where this is explained in greater detail)
3. Vocabulary which stubbornly refuses to stick in your long-term memory, place the flashcards in your top pocket (or purse/wallet) and go through them when you have a few spare moments (e.g. waiting for someone or standing in a line).
4. Place 10 flashcards on a table or desk, look at them for 1 minute, then cover them up. See how many you remember. It is more fun if two or three people play this together.
5. Name a topic, then see how many words you can say related to that topic.
6. Same as #5 above, but draw a semantic map of the vocabulary.

7. Place 20-30 flashcards on a table or desk, group them into categories, then explain how you decided which vocabulary word fits which category.

8. Same as #7 above, but this time you have to name the odd ones out.

9. Share your likes & dislikes, and try and say why.

10. Make two sets of the vocabulary cards, and then find the matching pairs.