



# MAKING FLASHCARDS

## INTRODUCTION

Sure, this is a whole document about creating flash cards. They are an old-timey “app” for learning anything plus you never have to recharge their batteries.

To do a good job with flash cards, you need to know what information is important. That’s difficult when you are NEW to a topic so keep in mind the whole goal of learning things with flash cards: give yourself only a hint on one side that will force you to memorize and recall the data on the other side. For example, if you are trying to learn the year Rome was founded you put “753 BC” on one side and “Rome Founded” on the other. Keep it simple. Keep it focused.

Flash cards are great tools for learning vocabulary. This document will specifically walk you through making Latin flash cards. These lessons will work just as well for Greek vocabulary as well as any other data-rich topic you encounter in life. For Latin 1 (and Greek 1), there are going to be concepts that are entirely new to you—yet I’m going to ask you to include these concepts on your very first set of flash cards. So, let’s get started. I’m going to tell you what to do with verbs first, nouns second, and everything else last.

## HOW DO YOU EVEN FIND A **VERB** IN A LATIN DICTIONARY?

Consider the number of forms that each Latin verb has. Ok, that’s a trick question. **If you are new to Latin, you may not know that your run-of-the-mill law-abiding Latin verb can have 133 forms!** You should not be surprised that even an excellent Latin dictionary will not list more than a handful of forms for each verb (otherwise it would weigh 6 tons and cost a mind). What’s worse, you have to know the first “principal part” to find even the few forms that are listed in a dictionary. What gives? This is already sounding too complicated.

A normal Latin dictionary will expect you to look at any verb form and figure out (or backwards engineer) the first principal part of the verb you are looking for. Since you have not yet even started to master verbs you might think this idea sounds reckless: *I must backwards engineer a verb I know nothing about in order to find something out about it...and still get it correct!?*

Yes, now go get a drink of cold water and then come back and I’ll tell you how to live with this alarming fact.

As you let this news settle in, let me encourage you NOW to take Latin verbs seriously from the start. *Memorize and master each verb form as you are introduced to it each week, no exceptions.* Some crazy Latin programs (and even crazier Latin teachers) will NOT make you master verb forms and principal parts. They figure you can look it all up later when you are finishing your PhD in Latin, I guess. This approach (skipping verb form mastery) will make you feel super comfortable and happy with Latin at first, and super bitter and angry later. In the end, you will be completely clueless about Latin plus angry at all the wasted time and money. That is not going to happen here and not on my watch.

Do not believe that you can passively learn any verb by sleeping on your Latin text book or by finding them in a chart every time you translate a sentence. This will not work. You will fail. Do not try it. Alarm.

You MUST plumb the depths of your willpower to master an inflected language like Latin (this means the ends of the words change to show how they work in a sentence). *Many Latin students through the centuries have believed that he or she will "just sort of remember" verb forms without any real effort.* **NONE OF THESE INDIVIDUALS EVER MASTERED ANY REAL LATIN.** Make flashcards and practice with them every chance you get.

## WHY FLASHCARDS? ARE THEY NOT SO LAST-CENTURY?

*The best way to learn any new language is to involve as many senses as possible in the process.* Period. So, while this document is all about making flashcards, don't think that this the only way to master Latin: It is an important way. Software companies make zillions of dollars by making this flash card technique flamboyant and sparkly. The methods remain essentially unchanged and paper flash cards don't require electricity.

Flashcards can be created in a compact form and you can take them with you to use whenever there is a lull in the action of your day (a car commute or doctor's office).

Students frequently ask me about purchasing pre-printed flash cards. Save your money. Unless your handwriting is illegible or if you are physically unable to use flash cards (which may be true for you), the process of creating the cards is part of the benefit of flash cards. Don't shortchange yourself by skipping card making.

## HOW TO CREATE FABULOUS AND LOVELY VERB FLASH CARDS

1. Write out the flash card clearly and legibly. I like *Extra fine-point* Sharpies or colored *gel pens* or anything that makes marks to your liking (beware that thicker Sharpies soak through even good card stock). If you are clever, you might create a color code: maybe blue for verbs, red for nouns, green for adverbs—doesn't matter which color choice, just be consistent

[side 1]

*Write out the present active indicative 1<sup>st</sup> person singular form, aka the 1<sup>st</sup> principal part*

[side 2]

*Write out the 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, and 4<sup>th</sup> principal parts followed by the range of meanings listed in your textbook*

**Laudo**

Laudare, laudavi, laudatum  
I praise

2. Write the CORE verb form on one side (*laudo* in our example)—this is the first principal part known as the “dictionary form” because this is the only form you'll find in a real Latin dictionary. Everything starts here. Don't give yourself any other clues for this side of the card—less is more. Your goal is to unravel everything about this verb using only this one clue.
3. On the reverse side write:
  - a. The other three principal parts (*laudare, laudavi, laudatum*, in our example. Some verbs will have fewer, none will have more. This fact is quite different for Greek.)
  - b. The meaning of the verb (*praise*, in our example). BEWARE: a word may have a **wide range** of meanings. *Video*, for example, means: *to see; observe, understand*. In the textbook (and here in this example) there is a semi-colon separating the two different ideas of “seeing” and “understanding.” You must learn that the verb can represent both concepts. Don't skip any. Mark down the full range of meanings on the back of your card *so write small and neat words*.
2. Don't be stingy: if you mess up a card, throw it away and start over. This just means you have yet another chance to analyze and learn the word!

## USING FLASHCARDS EFFECTIVELY

In a minute we will talk about making flashcards for other types of words. Before we go any further, let's talk about *using flash cards*. I can hear some of you saying, “Duh! It only has two sides! How complicated can it be?”

*Wrongo, tiny ones!* Let me make it clear to you that when it comes to using flash cards properly, **YOU ARE GOING TO BE YOUR OWN WORST ENEMY**. For some of you, an evil twin (or triplet if you are already a twin) will frequently talk you into *lazy flash card use*. This will be your undoing and your Latin grade may depend on how often you listen to your evil twin.

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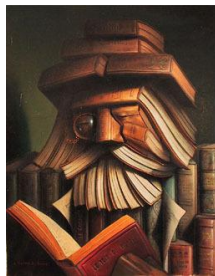
### SCENARIO 1 IN WHICH YOUR EVIL TWIN IS IN CHARGE OF THE FLASH CARD STUDY SESSION



You spend 10 minutes scrawling new flashcards for the chapter. You punch holes in the corners of each card and bolt them permanently into place with the other 40 cards you made earlier in the semester. You flip through the new cards and get 14 out of 20 *almost* correct. You flip through them a second time and get 16 out of 20 *correct-ish*. Good enough! You realize that you are thirsty and wander into the kitchen. Your flash card session ends unceremoniously, and *your quiz score is now doomed*.

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### SCENARIO 2 IN WHICH YOU, THE FIERCE LATINIST, IS IN CHARGE OF THE FLASH CARD STUDY SESSION



You spend 20 minutes creating new flashcards for the chapter using your cool color code for nouns, verbs, etc. and you say them aloud in an impressively booming tone that wakes your hamster, dog or cat (if you share a room with a sibling, choose a tone that will wake him or her as well). You pull your whole deck of flash cards out of your backpack or purse where you have them handy for dull moments during the day. You take the new cards and *shuffle them mercilessly into the deck of well-known vocabulary words*.

Now you go through each card with side 1 showing. Toss any card for which you hesitate for *more than the count of three* back into the review stack; victories get tossed onto a second pile that can be ignored until the next review session.

RESHUFFLE THE REVIEW PILE MERCILESSLY (*you can't reshuffle if you've punched holes and fastened them -- so just don't punch holes and fasten them. Rubber bands only!*) Repeat the exercise until you get down to a few stubborn words. For these you will need *mnemonic devices* (memory aids). You can remember that *quid* means "what" because now you picture yourself getting attacked by a giant squid and shouting "What!?!"



Keep reshuffling until you get the meaning correct for all 60+ cards (your original 20 plus all your old ones). You may want to repeat this process until you get all the principal parts, gender, conjugation, declension, etc., correct.

***YOU ARE GOING TO HAVE TO BE STRICT WITH YOUR EVIL TWIN WHO HAS BEEN URGING YOU TO GO DO SOMETHING ELSE AFTER THE FIRST 15 MINUTES HAVE PASSED:***

Flip the deck so that only side 2 is up. Now you are working backwards from the meaning to the dictionary form! Repeat the process of sorting and shuffling until you get through them all successfully (you can SPELL the dictionary form, too). Fasten them all together with a rubber band, toss them into your backpack or purse, and get something victorious and delicious to drink in the kitchen because now you have won your reward.

## TAKE THE STREETLIGHT CHALLENGE (FOR PASSENGERS ONLY)

1. Go through your set (periodically remove all the cards that you "pass" 100% of the time) in the amount of time it takes for a light to turn from red to green.
2. If you can't do it, study hard up until the next stop light and try it again until you can give yourself a 100%.
3. Shuffle, shuffle, shuffle. If you keep your deck in the same order, you can frequently remember a vocabulary word simply because of the card that precedes it. Who needs that? Shuffle!

## HOW TO LOOK UP A NOUN IN THE LATIN DICTIONARY

Latin grammarians made rules a long time ago about how to put together Latin dictionaries, but they did so only after consulting the people in the printing industry. Latin dictionaries are designed to be portable and economical. Listing every noun and verb form would be prohibitive (fancy word here meaning "impossible to carry").

When you look up a Latin noun, here is what you will see in a Latin dictionary:

1. Nominative singular form of the noun
2. Genitive singular form of the noun or the genitive ending (-ae, for example)
3. Gender of the noun (m., f., or n. stands for masculine, feminine and neuter)
4. English meaning(s) -- *Don't gripe about the range of meanings for Latin words. Any language that was spoken for over 1000 years on multiple continents is bound to experience a range of meanings.*

So, say you are translating a sentence with a noun in the accusative plural: You will backwards-engineer the noun to determine its nominative singular form. It is a system that works pretty well, and nobody has come up with any better ideas. So there's that.

## HOW TO MAKE A NOUN FLASH CARD

A noun flash card should contain all four items important to a dictionary entry (1. nominative singular form, 2. genitive singular form, 3. gender, and 4. meaning). Write only the nominative singular on side one, all the rest of the information on the side two. When you study this card, learn both sides, going both directions. Some like to add a doodle for nouns on side 2.

## HOW TO MAKE A FLASH CARD FOR EVERYTHING ELSE:

The general rule is to put a single Latin word or ending on one side, and any identifying data that you need on the other. Decide on (and write down) a system so that a certain color is only associated with a certain part of speech. If you don't know your parts of speech, set this document down and go learn them. It should only take about an hour. Now come back and develop your own system for making flash cards for grammar or endings—I like to use black for grammar and endings. With a bit of creativity, anything that needs to be memorized may be placed on a card.

| [side 1]<br>List the nominative<br>singular form | [side 2]<br>Genitive singular<br>form or ending,<br>gender and the<br>meaning(s) |
|--|--|
| <i>Puella</i>                                    | <i>Puellae</i><br>F.<br>girl   |

## REMEMBER

Flash cards are only useful if you remember to bring them and use them whenever you have a spare few minutes. Sure, some of you would prefer to zone out and stare off into space for that five-minute gap in the excitement. The rest of you who DO study flash cards will be busy getting an "A" in Latin.