FLASHCARD ACTIVITIES

Introduction

One teaching tool that has been around a long time is the indelible flashcard. Flashcards earned their popularity as a convenient way to drill material to be memorized. For this reason students often use stacks of them to study things like multiplication tables, historical names and dates, and, of course, vocabulary. Here we will explore more engaging ways to use vocabulary flashcards with young learners, both in group choral practice and activities that require students to respond individually. Many of these activities can be adapted to allow sentence pattern practice as well. Most modern English language learning courses for children now come with vocabulary flashcards. This workshop will show you how to use them to the fullest.¹

Vocabulary Practice

Group Practice Activities

When introducing a new set of vocabulary, it is better to start with a group practice activity. Such activities allow children to respond chorally as a group or to answer individually only when they are comfortable doing so. These low-stress activities give the students time to become familiar with the new vocabulary before being singled out to produce the words individually in a subsequent consolidation exercise.

The activities described here range from those that function a lot like traditional flashcard drills to those that look more like party games. All of them, however, allow for intensive, repetitive vocabulary practice that keeps children interested and engaged, thus lowering their affective filter. It is the teacher’s role to select activities that are appropriate for the dynamics of his or her class and to facilitate them in such a way as to provide efficient vocabulary practice. Perhaps most importantly, any flashcard activity should be stopped before the children bore of it; then there will be no complaints should the teacher decide to use the same
activity later for practice of other sets of words.²

*Flash*—Cover a stack of flashcards with a blind. Face the stack of cards towards the students and very quickly pull the blind up and bring it back down. Encourage the students to call out the word you flashed. If they can't get it, flash it again. Continue with other cards. Points can be kept for teams, or praise can be given to individuals who respond correctly.

*Keyhole*—Using a utility knife, cut a keyhole shape out of a piece of card paper. Place the keyhole blind over a stack of flashcards. Students in teams race to identify the vocabulary words by what they can see through the keyhole. Once a word has been identified, fully expose the card and have the class repeat the word a few times in unison. Come prepared with a second blind that has a smaller key-hole. When the students start to get good at the game, switch to the smaller keyhole.

*Figure 1: Keyhole*

*Picture Slit*—This game is similar in nature to Keyhole, but instead of cutting out a keyhole from a piece of card paper, a slit is cut in a legal size file folder. A flashcard is put inside the folder such that a long,
narrow, vertical strip of the card is showing on the front of the folder. The teacher then holds up the folder and gradually draws the card along behind the slit so that students see only a moving sliver of the picture. The first student to identify the card wins a point for their team. The card is then shown fully, and all of the students re-peat the word several times in unison.

**Slowly Revealing**—Prepare a stack of flashcards you want the students to practice. Cover the top card with a blind. Slowly begin drawing the blind away. The students try to figure out what picture is being revealed and call out the word. When the correct answer is called, reveal the entire card and have the class repeat the word with you several times. Continue with the next card and so on. To make it more interesting, vary the direction in which you slowly remove the blind.

**Guess What's Next**—Hold up a stack of vocabulary cards. Have students identify the top card, then guess which one is next. When a student guesses correctly, show the next card, moving the first one to the back of the stack. Continue this through the stack preserving the order of the cards. Then start to go through them again. Some students may remember the order the second time through. Go through the cards again and again so that more and more of the students can guess what the next card will be each time. Once the entire class knows the card order well, start pulling cards from the back of the stack rather than from the front. This will challenge them to mentally reverse the order in order to correctly guess which card is next.

**Observe and Remember**—Separate the class into two teams. Place a number of flashcards on the chalk rail, asking the students to identify each as you go. Now go back to the first one, have students say the word again and pick the card up. Continue with the second, third, and so on. Go back again to the spot where the first one was and have the first student on one team try to recall what the card was. If the student guesses correctly, they are given the card, and the next student on the same team is given a chance to guess the second one. Continue until the team makes a mistake, then switch to the other team until they make a
mistake, then go back and so on. The team with the most cards at the end wins. You might want to add more cards and do the activity again, this time starting with the other team. To make this activity appropriate for various age groups, use fewer cards for younger groups and more cards for older children. Also, if you prefer to do activities that are non-competitive, this activity can just as easily be done with the entire class as one group rather than in competing teams.

What’s Missing?—Place several vocabulary flashcards on a chalk rail or on the floor. Have all the students turn their backs so that they can’t see the cards. While the students are turned away, quickly remove one of the cards and hide it behind your back. Have the students turn around again. The first student to identify the missing picture is recognized. Repeat with other cards to continue. Make the game more challenging by also switching the places of several cards while the students’ backs are turned.

Swat—On the floor, lay vocabulary flashcards that fit in the target pattern. Have the class identify each as you go. Give each student a fly swatter. (In a large class, separate the class into four or five teams and have only one student from each team play at a time.) Call out one of the words pictured on the flashcards. Players should try to be the first to swat the card picturing the vocabulary word that is substituted in. Recognize the winning student and take their fly swatter. That student calls the word for the next round and takes the swatter from the new winner. Play continues.

Car Race—Arrange some flashcards the students have studied in a big oval shape on the floor or on the board. As you put down each card, have the class identify the items pictured. Make a checkered flag finish line. Also insert a picture of an explosion a few cards from the end of the track. Make two paper racecars of different colors. Use toy cars instead if you have them. Also prepare a numbers die. Separate the class into two teams. Have the first student on one team roll the die. That student moves their team’s car one space for each dot shown on the die. Have the student, or the student’s entire team, identify each vocabulary card
as they move their car. The other team then plays. If a car lands on the explosion, it is sent back two spaces. If a car lands on a space occupied by the opposing team, the opponent’s car is knocked back three spaces. The first team to cross the finish line wins. (If you like, you can have the race go for more than one lap in order to give each student a chance to throw the die.)

**Horseshoe**—Separate the class into two teams. On the floor, make a horseshoe-shaped line of flashcards. At one end of the line of cards, place a differently colored marker for each team. Allow a student on one team to roll a die. That team can move their marker one space for each dot
shown on the die, identifying each card they pass on the way. Then the other team gets a chance to roll. As they approach the end of the horseshoe, they must try to roll the die such that they land exactly on the end square, otherwise they skip back to the beginning of the horseshoe on the other side. The first team to land exactly on the last square of the horseshoe wins.

**Individual Consolidation Activities**

Once students have become fairly proficient with a set of vocabulary through group practice, you can progress to activities that require individuals to identify cards in turn. This not only ensures that each child is participating in oral practice, but also allows you to check each student’s knowledge of the vocabulary as well as their pronunciation. Some of the activities described here rotate through students in order. In others, turns to practice occur rather randomly. Although the former guarantee that students get equal practice, the latter tend to keep students more engaged because they can’t anticipate when they will be required to respond. In these random-response activities, the teacher should take measures to ensure that each child is given roughly equal play.³

*Pair Flash*—Separate the class into two teams. Have one student in each team come forward. The two students stand back to back. Hand each a review vocabulary flashcard. When the teacher says, "Go!" the

![Figure 4: Pair Flash](image-url)
two students spin around holding the flashcards and try to be the first to call out the other's word. The first to do so gets a point for his or her team and then two new students play.

Still Standing—Separate the class into two teams. Have one student from each team stand. Show a flashcard. The first student to correctly identify the word earns one point for their team and may sit down. The slower one remains standing to play a new opponent, and a new flashcard is exposed. Play continues.

Two Lines—Have the students form two unequal lines facing the teacher. The teacher shows a flashcard for the first two students to identify. The first to say the word wins a point for their team. If there is no clear winner, have the students race on another card and another until a clear winner can be determined. Once a winner is determined between a pair of students they each go back to the end of their line and the next two students step forward to play.

Easy/Hard—Prepare two large stacks of flashcards. Sort them into an easy stack and a hard stack. Separate the class into two teams. Select a student to start and ask if they want to try an easy card or a hard card. Easy cards are worth one point; hard cards are worth two points. Then show them the next card in the stack they chose. If the student gets it right, points are added to the team's score, one for easy, two for hard. If incorrect, however, the same number of points is subtracted from the team's score. Continue until each student has had a couple of chances to play or until you've gone through all the cards.

Tic-Tac-Toe—Put nine flashcards on a magnet board or on the floor in a three by three grid. Separate the class into two teams. The first child on the first team selects a square on the grid by saying one of the vocabulary words. The teacher then covers that card with a piece of colored paper representing that team. Play then goes to the other team. The other team's square is marked with a different color. The object of the game is for a team to get three squares in a row vertically, horizontally, or diagonally. The first team to do so wins.

Tic-Tac-Toe—Put nine flashcards on a magnet board or on the floor
in a three by three grid. Separate the class into two teams. Each team has a set of three magnets or pieces of colored paper of their team color. Team representatives take turns calling squares in which to place one of their team’s magnets or papers by calling the desired square’s vocabulary word. This version differs from regular tic-tac-toe, which is really too simple for most students, in that once the team gets their three magnets on the board, they must move one to a new square on each turn. To do this, players must first call a square already occupied, then call a free square. For example, saying “banana, apple” moves their magnet from the "banana" square to the "apple" square. The winner is the first team to get their three magnets lined up in a row vertically, horizontally, or diagonally.

![Diagram of Tic-Tac-Toe](image)

*Figure 5: Tic-Tac-Toe*

*Shopping*—Show the students a small selection of noun flashcards. Then ask one student to "go shopping" with you. You and the student say "good-bye" to the others. If the students have enough English ability, you can have the class ask in unison, "Where are you going?" You and your shopping buddy answer, "We're going shopping at (Local Name) Department Store." You and the student then leave the room and the student is allowed to select one of the noun flashcards and hold it behind their back when the two of you re-enter the room. The class then asks, "What did you buy?" and the shopper says, "Guess!" Students take turns guessing which card the student selected. The first student to guess correctly wins the right to be the next shopper.
Quick Draw—Separate the class into two teams. Have one member of each team come forward. Place a soft object like a board eraser or a beanbag on a table between them. Both students stand facing the table with their hands behind their backs. Quickly show a flashcard. If the students can identify it, they quickly grab the object on the table. The student to grab the object first is given the chance to identify the card. If correct, that student's team gets a point. If in-correct, the team loses three points. Two new children come forward and play continues. It’s a good idea to slip in some very difficult cards, even cards from future levels, so that kids will really think before grabbing.

Reverse Charades—Have a student come forward. Put a headband around the top of his or her head. Stick a flashcard up inside the headband such that he or she doesn’t know what the card is but the rest of the class can see it. The rest of the class must silently act out the word such that the playing student can guess what his or her card is.

Pass it On—Separate the class into two groups and have each group form a circle. Give one student in each group a card. The students race to pass the card around the circle, each student saying the pictured word as they pass it. The winner is the first group to pass their card all the way around. Continue with other cards.

Hot Cards—The students form a circle. Give one student a card that he or she will identify then pass to the left. Other students identify the card and pass it on clockwise. As soon as the first student passes the card, give him or her another card to identify and start around the circle counter-clockwise. The student who is unfortunate enough to end up with both cards at the same time, must stand, use both words in a target structure, and is out of the game. Play again and again with other cards until just a few students remain and can be declared winners.

Scissors, Paper, Stone—Lay a row of five or six flashcards on the
floor and separate the class into two teams. Have one team line up at each end of the row of cards. At the word "go" the first student from each team steps in front of the card closest to them, identifies it then moves on to the next card, then to the next and so on. Near the center of the row of cards, the two students will come together. Where they come together, they must play Scissors, Paper, Stone. The winner stays there having a head start on the next play, but the loser returns to the end of his or her team's line and the next team member must start again from the first card. If a student manages to get all the way up to the card nearest the opposing team's line and wins the Scissors, Paper, Stone, he or she picks up that card claiming one point for his or her team. Then both teams will be starting again from the first cards, but there will be fewer cards in the line. Play continues until all the cards are gone. The team with the most cards wins.

**Figure 7: Scissors, Paper, Stone**

*Off the Top of My Head*—Select four flashcards that the students need to practice. Approach a student, place three tokens in front of him or her, and hold a flashcard on top of the child’s head such that he or she can't see it, but the other students can. The student must try to guess which card is above his or her head without seeing it. If the student guesses correctly on the first guess, he or she gets to keep all three tokens. If, however, the player guesses incorrectly, take one token away and have him or her try again. If the guess is incorrect again, another token is taken away. If the student guesses incorrectly three times he or she
doesn’t get to keep any tokens and play goes on to the next student.

**Figure 8: Off the Top of My Head**

*Pass the Buck*—Arrange students’ desks in a semi-circle. Hold up the flashcards one-by-one for the students to identify. As each card is identified, give it to a student along with a piece of tape, and have them tape the card hanging from the front of their desk. Continue until all of the students have flashcards on their desks. Take out a toy hammer or a rolled up newspaper. Call out one of the words shown and race over to pound the surface of that student's desk. That student must quickly yell out someone else's card before their desk is hit. The student whose card is called then yells out another, and so on. If a student's desk gets smacked before he or she can call out another word, that student must do something silly or sing an English song then become *It* for the next round.

*Slap, Clap, Snap*—Arrange students in a semi-circle. Attach a different flashcard to the front of each desk. Select one end of the semi-circle to be the champion seat. The seats decrease in desirability going away from the champion seat. The seat at the opposite end of the semi-circle is the worst seat to be in. The activity begins with the entire
class slapping their thighs twice, then clapping twice, then snapping their fingers twice in slow rhythm. As fingers are being snapped the teacher calls out one of the vocabulary words. The beat continues uninterrupted as students repeat slapping, clapping, and snapping. The student sitting in the desk with the called vocabulary card taped to it must repeat his or her word and call out another vocabulary word on the beats as fingers are being snapped. When the beat comes back to the point where fingers are snapped again, the newly called student must repeat his or her word and call another student's vocabulary word and so on. If any student fails to repeat his or her own word and name another student's word on the beat while fingers are being snapped, he or she must move seats to the worst seat, and other students move over one to fill the void left. As play continues, the rhythm can be gradually sped up. Students will frequently call the vocabulary word of the person in the champion seat in an effort to dethrone him or her. The student who is sitting in the champion seat when the activity is stopped is the winner.

Sentence Pattern Practice

The use of flashcards needn’t be limited to vocabulary practice. Often the vocabulary activities described above can be adapted for use in sentence pattern practice. Usually, it’s just a matter of having students use the vocabulary within a target sentence pattern rather than uttering the word alone. If you are teaching a question and answer pattern, be sure to give students practice in asking the question as well as providing the answer. Often this can be achieved by having one team ask the question chorally while the other team responds.

Here we will revisit some of our vocabulary practice activities and explain how they might be adapted to teach sentence patterns. Although only a few such adaptations are detailed here, most of the other activities can be adapted in a similar manner. For purpose of example, we will assume we are teaching the question and answer pattern, “What’s your favorite fruit?” and “I like bananas.”

*Flash*—Before you expose a card, have the entire class ask in
unison, “What’s your favorite fruit?” After the flash, students who think they know the answer should respond by inserting a word into the answer structure, “I like *apples*.” Then have the children chant the question again to trigger the flashing of the next card.

**Guess What’s Next**—Divide the class into two groups. Have the first group ask chorally, “What’s your favorite fruit?” Allow students from the other group to volunteer guesses by inserting various fruits into the answer pattern. When a student guesses correctly, have the groups switch roles such that the second group is now asking the question and the first group offers guesses.

**What’s Missing?**—While students’ backs are turned, have them all chant, “What’s your favorite fruit?” They then turn and try to identify the missing fruit by inserting it into the answer pattern, “I like *oranges*.”

**Swat**—Have all of the players chant the question. Then answer the question inserting a fruit into the structure, “I like *lemons*.” The children race to slap the lemon card. Take the winner’s flyswatter. The group asks the question again and the student without a swatter provides an answer using another of the fruits.

**Horseshoe**—Have the non-playing team chant the question, “What’s your favorite fruit.” After their role, the players on the other team provide an answer for each card they pass as they count. (e.g., If they roll a three, they might say, “I like *apples.* I like oranges. I like *bananas.*”)

**Easy/Hard**—After having a player decide between trying an easy or a hard card, have the previous player ask, “What’s your favorite fruit?” After the card is shown, the player must insert his or her answer into the question pattern, “I like *bananas.*”

**Tic-Tac-Toe-Tac-Toe**—Have the previous player on one team ask the question to the next player from the other team. To choose a square, the player must insert the fruit pictured in that square into the answer pattern. If the team already has all three of their markers in play, you can introduce the negative structure and have the player use the negative structure to indicate which of their team’s markers to move.
(e.g., Saying “I don’t like bananas; I like apples,” moves their marker from the banana box to the apple box.)

**Quick Draw**—After a student has grabbed the object, their opponent asks them, “What’s your favorite fruit?” and the player who won the draw must answer, “I like oranges.”

**Off the Top of My Head**—The class chants the question and the player guesses using sentences such as, “I like bananas?” You can then have the class respond either, “Yes, you do,” or “No, you don’t,” depending on whether or not the guess was correct.

Note that it is very difficult to adapt some vocabulary activities for sentence pattern practice. This is especially true for those in which students race to respond first. Full-sentence responses are much longer, and students often just rapidly mumble approximations of the pattern in order to get it out quickly. This is counterproductive, so for pattern practice, stick to those activities that don’t rush the children’s responses.

### Notes

1) **Introduction (抽认卡教学法)** 长期来，抽认卡（又称闪卡）一直是人们普遍使用的一种教具，因其能简便地对教学内容进行识记操练。因此，学生常用一叠抽认卡来学习诸如乘法表，历史名词和年代，以及单词。本单元将探讨使用抽认卡教儿童集体或单独认字的各种巧妙的方法。抽认卡也可用来进行句型操练。如今，绝大多数儿童学习英语的课程都使用单词抽认卡，本单元将充分展示如何在课堂里使用抽认卡。

2) **Group Practice Activities (小组练习活动)** 教生词时，最好先进行小组练习活动，因为孩子们可以齐声回答，也可以自告奋勇地单独回答。这些活动压力较小，因此孩子们有时间逐渐熟悉生词，然后才让他们在随后的强化练习中一个个叫起来认读生词。

本单元涵盖了从传统抽认卡操练到类似集体游戏的一系列活动。这些活动可以反复用来进行词汇的强化操练，孩子们会感到饶有兴味和津津乐道，从而降低其反感。
教师的作用在于选择适合于学生的活动，以此提供足够的词汇练习。至关重要的是，当孩子们感到厌倦时，活动必须停止。这样，教师以后如果用同样的活动进行词汇操练，学生也会接受。

3.) **Individual Consolidation Activities (个人强化活动)** 通过小组活动，学生已熟悉了生词，教师即可进入要求学生轮流单独认读词卡的活动。这不仅确保每个孩子都能参与口头练习，也可让教师检验每个孩子掌握词汇意义的程度和他们的发音。这里所说的活动，有些要求学生按次序轮流参加，有些则随机轮流进行。前者可保证每个孩子有相等的练习机会，而后者更有利于吸引孩子的注意力，因为他们感到随时可能被教师提问。但在进行随机提问的活动时，教师应采取措施确保每个孩子的操练机会大致相当。

4.) **Sentence Pattern Practice (句型操练)** 抽认卡活动不应仅局限于词汇练习，也可应用于句型操练。这通常要求学生在目标句型中使用这些词汇，而不只是单独读出这些词汇。例如，在教授问答句型时，教师要保证学生问句和答句都得到充分练习，可以让一组学生集体提问，另一组集体回答。

本节将回顾一些词汇操练的活动，并探讨如何将其应用于句型教学。这里仅提供有限的几个例子，但大部分活动都能以类似的方式用于句型教学。例如，教授问答句型--问：“什么是你最喜欢的水果？”答：“我喜欢香蕉。”

**Acknowledgements**

Special thanks to Dr. Clifford Hill of Teachers College, Columbia University for his input and guidance toward the development of this unit. Additional thanks to Dr. Jo Anne Kleifgen, also of Teachers College, for her thorough review and feedback concerning the activities presented here.