



INSTRUCTOR'S GUIDE



Teaching Technique 40

Crib Cards

ACTIVITY TYPE

- Active/Engaged Learning

TEACHING PROBLEM ADDRESSED

- Cheating
- Surface Learning

LEARNING TAXONOMIC LEVEL

- Application: Analysis & Critical Thinking

Crib Cards

Crib Cards are three-by-five inch index cards that students create to use on exams, on which they write whatever information they believe will be useful to them.

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- 1 Clarify your teaching purpose and learning goals for *Crib Cards*
 - 2 Craft essay questions that require higher-order thinking
 - 3 Set assignment parameters; consider sharing sample *Crib Cards*
 - 4 Develop a plan for learning assessment or grading
 - 5 Communicate assignment instructions to students
 - 6 Implement the technique
 - 7 Reflect upon the activity and evaluate its effectiveness

Step-By-Step Instructions

In this section we provide you with guidance on each of the seven steps involved as you consider this technique.

STEP 1: CLARIFY YOUR TEACHING PURPOSE AND LEARNING GOALS

Consider why you are using *Crib Cards*. This technique allows students the time they need to think a problem through in advance. They require students to select and organize information they believe will be most useful as a support structure. They help alleviate the issues of test-taking anxiety and surface level learning. They also can cut down on student cheating, as they provide students with a teacher-sanctioned way to bring information they expect they will need to know with them to a quiz or exam.

STEP 2: IDENTIFY THE LEARNING TASK'S UNDERLYING PROBLEM AND PROMPT

- Identify several essay exam topics that students need to engage in higher order thinking to be able to answer.
- Consider the kinds of information that students could bring with them, rather than having to memorize.
- Craft essay questions that test for high-level thinking (application, synthesis, and evaluation) rather than recall of facts.
- Write out a model answer yourself, tracking the time it takes you so that you can estimate how long it will take students to write theirs (generally, 2-3 times as long).
- Revise the question as needed and follow the same process for additional questions.

STEP 3: SET ASSIGNMENT PARAMETERS

Decide whether students will create a 3 x 5 inch or 4 x 6 inch index card for each question. Determine whether they can write on one side only or both sides. Consider sharing sample cards with students.

Develop guidelines for grading and create a handout that includes directions, the essay questions, and any grading rubrics for the cards or essay responses.

Consider creating a few sample *Crib Cards* showing a range of styles (e.g., outline, list of key topics or principles, graphic organizers with facts and data for support arguments) that students can use as models.

Step-By-Step Instructions (CON'T)



STEP 4: DEVELOP A PLAN FOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT OR GRADING

You can assess *Crib Cards*, both the ones that they use and the ones they create but don't use, to gauge students' levels of understanding of basic content. A simple tally system for accuracy is an efficient way to keep track of and synthesize data from student responses.

STEP 5: COMMUNICATE ASSIGNMENT PARAMETERS TO STUDENTS

Announce the activity in class and share sample cards with students.

STEP 6: IMPLEMENT THE TECHNIQUE

- Distribute the handout that includes directions, essay questions, and grading rubrics to students early in the term.
- Explain the process, giving students guidance on how to create the *Crib Cards* and distributing the model *Crib Cards* for students to review.
- On the day of the exam, collect both the essays and all of the *Crib Cards* (including those for questions not asked).

STEP 7: REFLECT UPON THE ACTIVITY AND EVALUATE ITS EFFECTIVENESS

When reflecting on the activity and how effective it was, consider the following questions:

- Did the technique match the course learning goals and objectives?
- Did it meet my goals for this learning module?
- Was it appropriate for the students?
- Did the technique keep the students engaged?
- Did it promote student learning?
- Did it provide me with information about student understanding?

If you answer yes to all or most of these questions, next consider how you might improve the activity for the next use.

Support Materials

The materials in this section are intended to help you with the process of implementing this technique.

VARIATIONS AND EXTENSIONS

Exam Preparation Journals are an alternative strategy but with a similar goal of helping support students during the exam process. Early in the course, teachers give students a list of essay questions from which the midterm and final exam questions will be drawn. Students are instructed to divide a journal into sections, with each section corresponding to one of the essay questions. As the course material builds and develops, students write in each journal section the appropriate facts and ideas they acquire from the readings, lectures, and discussions that will enable them to answer the questions. Teachers can choose to allow students to use their preparation journals during the exam, walking around the room and perhaps assigning bonus points to students who have done a conscientious job of responding to each question (Bean, 1996).

Consider asking students to prepare the *Crib Cards* as an in-class activity, whether as individuals or in groups, but tell them that they won't use them on the exams. The idea is for them to simply think through the most important content, their own gaps in knowledge, and the most complicated content. This variation will avoid the potential issue of having students rely too heavily on their *Crib Cards*, and instead use deep learning approaches.

Technique Template

Following are two templates to assist you as you think through how you might implement this technique in your own class. The first is a completed template, providing an example of how Claire Major adapted *Crib Cards* in her course, *Technology in Higher Education*. The second is a blank template for you to fill out to tailor this technique for your course.

Technique Template

Sample Crib Cards Completed Technique Template:

Content from Claire Major

Technology in Higher Education

Course Name

COURSE CHARACTERISTICS

What are the situational factors that impact this course? For example, is it on campus or online? How many students? Is it lower division or graduate? Are there student attributes such as attitudes, prior knowledge, reasons for enrolling, and so forth that should be taken into account as you consider this technique?

This is a graduate level course that my institution offers as part of masters in Higher Education Administration. The course has approximately 15 students enrolled each term. This course serves as an elective. The class typically meets once per week.

STEP 1: CLARIFY YOUR TEACHING PURPOSE AND LEARNING GOALS

Why are you choosing this technique? What do you hope to accomplish?

I often choose this technique because sometimes students stress about exams or quizzes. They know the information, but testing makes them nervous. Crib Cards help them feel more relaxed. In addition, I think the process of creating the Crib Cards is a great way to help them learn. They have to think through what should go on the card—that in itself is a learning opportunity.

STEP 2: IDENTIFY THE LEARNING TASK'S UNDERLYING PROBLEM AND PROMPT

What is the question you want learners to address, or problem you want them to solve?

In a Technology in Higher Education course, I might, for example, have an essay question related to the kinds of knowledge that teachers need to have to be able to use technology effectively. There are several models of teacher knowledge that they could draw on in order to respond to the question—students might record information about the different models on their cards.

STEP 3: SET ASSIGNMENT PARAMETERS

What are the assignment logistics? For example, will this be assigned individually or is it group work? How long will the assignment take? Will students be submitting a product? What materials, resources, or additional information do you anticipate needing?

I typically ask students to create cards on a 4 x 6 inch index card (this provides them with more space for writing than a 3 x 5 inch card, and I think it's important for students who might have handwriting disabilities to have the extra room). I often put them into groups to brainstorm ideas about the questions and about what to put on the index cards.

STEP 4: DEVELOP A PLAN FOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT OR GRADING

If you decide to assess learning, how will you determine that learning has occurred? For example, will you use a simple +/check/- grading system? If you use a rubric, will you use an existing one or create one? What will be your criteria and standards?

I typically use a plus/check/minus tally system for assessing the cards. I use a rubric to grade the essay question responses.

STEP 5: COMMUNICATE ASSIGNMENT PARAMETERS TO STUDENTS

How will you communicate assignment parameters to students? For example, through a handout? A prompt on a presentation slide? Assignment instructions in your online course?

I typically announce the activity in class, and I describe the process. I give students time to brainstorm their ideas. They typically create the final cards as a homework assignment.

STEP 6: IMPLEMENT THE TECHNIQUE

How will you adapt steps/procedures for your students? Are there any additional logistical aspects to consider?

I simply ask students to bring their cards to the exam. I collect the cards at the end of the exam.

STEP 7: REFLECT UPON THE ACTIVITY AND EVALUATE ITS EFFECTIVENESS

Note: This step will be completed after you have implemented the technique.

Did this technique help you accomplish your goals? What worked well? What could have been improved? What might you change if you decide to implement the activity again?

To reflect on the technique, I try to determine whether the activity met the goals that I had for it and if so, how I might improve the activity going forward.

Technique Template

This template is intended for use when planning to implement **Crib Cards** in your class. Fill in the blanks below, and use the information provided elsewhere in the Instructor’s Guide to assist you in your thinking.

Course Name

COURSE CHARACTERISTICS

What are the situational factors that impact this course? For example, is it on campus or online? How many students? Is it lower division or graduate? Are there student attributes such as attitudes, prior knowledge, reasons for enrolling, and so forth that should be taken into account as you consider this technique?

STEP 1: CLARIFY YOUR TEACHING PURPOSE AND LEARNING GOALS

Why are you choosing this technique? What do you hope to accomplish?

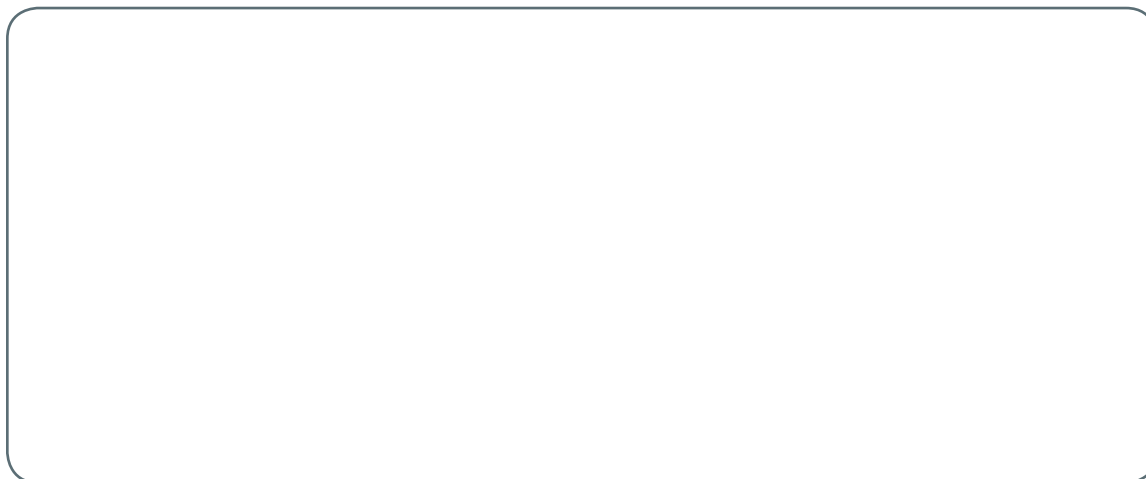
STEP 2: IDENTIFY THE LEARNING TASK'S UNDERLYING PROBLEM AND PROMPT

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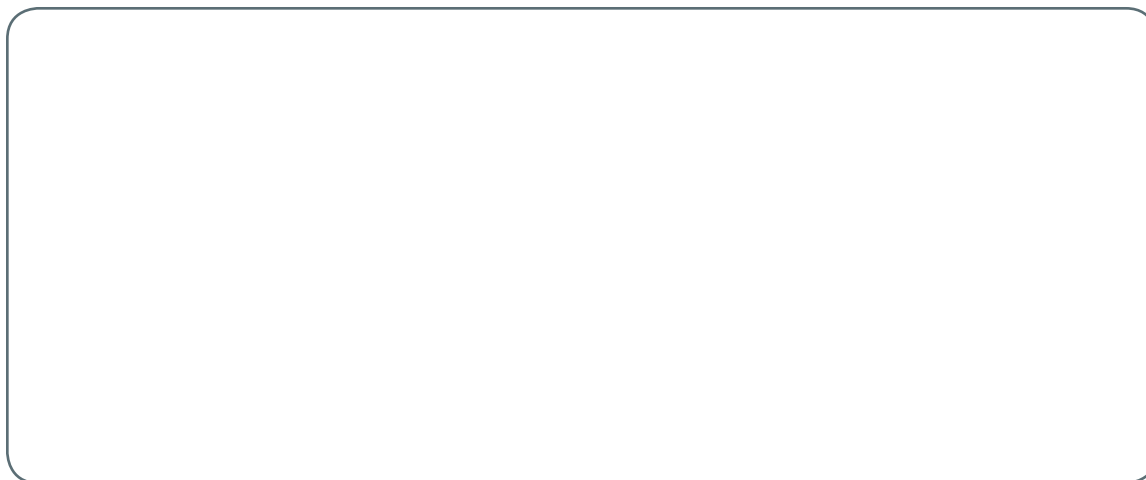
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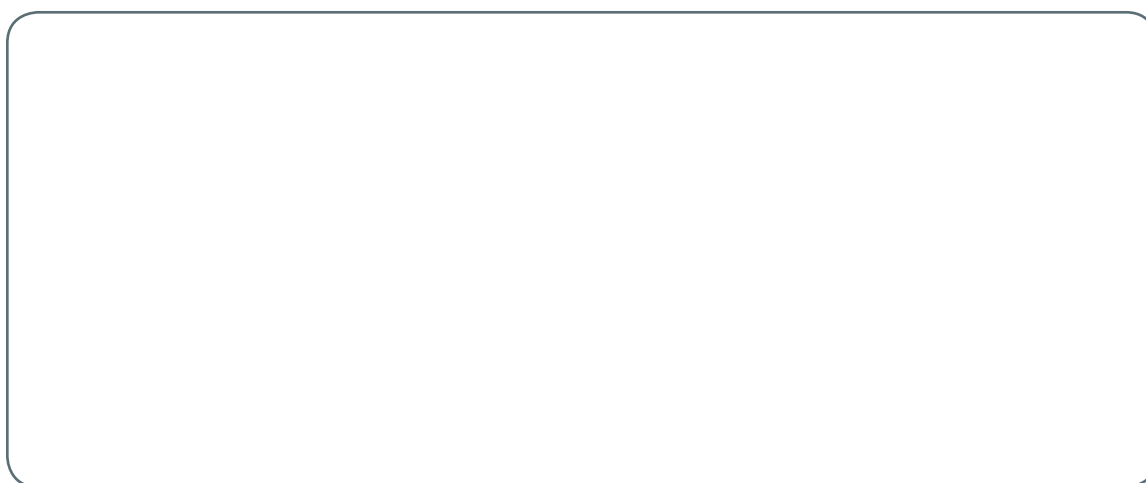
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STEP 5: COMMUNICATE ASSIGNMENT PARAMETERS TO STUDENTS

How will you communicate assignment parameters to students? For example, through a handout? A prompt on a presentation slide? Assignment instructions in your online course?



STEP 6: IMPLEMENT THE TECHNIQUE

How will you adapt steps/procedures for your students? Are there any additional logistical aspects to consider?



STEP 7: REFLECT UPON THE ACTIVITY AND EVALUATE ITS EFFECTIVENESS

Note: This step will be completed after you have implemented the technique.

Did this technique help you accomplish your goals? What worked well? What could have been improved? What might you change if you decide to implement the activity again?



References and Resources

PRIMARY SOURCE

Content for this download was drawn primarily from “Student Engagement Technique 48: Crib Cards” in *Student Engagement Techniques: A Handbook for College Faculty* (Barkley, 2010), pp. 351–353. It includes material that was adapted or reproduced with permission. For further information about this technique, including examples in both on campus and online courses, see the primary source:

Barkley, E. (2010). *Student Engagement Techniques: A Handbook for College Faculty*. San Francisco, CA: Wiley/Jossey-Bass.

CITATIONS AND ADDITIONAL SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

- Bean, J. C. (1996) Engaging ideas: The professor’s guide to integrating writing, critical thinking, and active learning in the classroom. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, p. 190.
- Burns, K. C. (2014). Security blanket or crutch? Crib card usage depends on students’ abilities. *Teaching of Psychology*, 41(1), 66–68.
- Funk, S. C., & Dickson, K. L. (2011). Crib card use during tests: Helpful or a crutch? *Teaching of Psychology*, 38(2), 114–117.

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