CREATIVE CARD DECKS
for Language-Learning & Teaching

K ***INDS OF CARD DECKS.*** "Flash Cards" are useful for educational purposes. Each card "stands alone" because it can be used independently. A flash card set might display *letters of the alphabet*, *words* or *phrases*, *numbers*, *icons* or *pictures*, *questions* (with *answers* on the back), or a combination of elements. The cards can be used for symbol recognition in reading-readiness activities, for presentation or review of information, and/or for "testing." Such decks of one-sided or two-sided cards are easy to create and produce. They can be of any size.

A second "non-traditional" card deck format might be called "Domino Cards." Cards of this type are divided on their face into two parts—like domino "tiles." Each half of each card can be matched to half of another card. As card players or language-learners place the cards into a "chain" or "step" arrangement, they learn how words, pictures, or other linguistic items fit together. Other kinds of card decks for language learning are closer in design to the classic card deck arrangement:

♣ decks made up of "matching cards"—pairs of cards that go together in some way. A full deck can contain up to 27 of these pairs.

♦ decks comprised of "quartets," sets of four card images that are "four of a kind"—up to thirteen sets per deck.

♥ decks consisting of cards in some sort of sequence, up to thirteen images per sequence and up to four sequences per deck.

♠ decks in the traditional format, with four "suits" of thirteen cards each, in sequence, and thirteen "quartets" (four cards that match in some way).

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CARD DECK FORMATS. For uniformity and flexibility of use—and to help players learn game rules and strategies more quickly—it's probably best if the educational card decks you create have similar formats—at least in size, shape, and the number of cards per deck. Decks containing 52 or 54 cards each are perhaps ideal. For "Flash Cards" or "Domino Cards," the number of cards in a deck doesn't matter, so large decks can be divided into smaller sets of cards for group activities. A 54-card deck of "Card Pairs" can contain 27 matches, and a deck of "quartets," thirteen sets of four— with two extra cards. A deck of cards in sequence could contain four sequences of thirteen cards each (with two blanks), six sequences of nine cards each,   or nine sequences of six cards each. In a 52-card deck of traditional format, the two extra cards, if they exist, can be used as jokers" or "wild cards" or for game instructions.

The number of cards per deck might depend on the card size and shape you choose. A good reason for producing 54-card decks is that it is easy to fit nine cards—three rows of three cards each—on a sheet of 8.5 by 11 inch paper or card stock to be cut apart. Without space between them, the individual cards end up being approximately 2.75 inches in length by 3.66 inches in width, about the size of the cards in most commercially-produced playing-card decks. Fifty-four equally-sized cards fit on six pieces of paper or card stock, with no wasted material.

Of course, thirteen sheets of card stock would produce 52 *large* playing cards—each of the four cards per page 4.25 by 5.5 inches in size. With *six* cards per sheet, nine pieces of paper or stock sheets could hold 54 cards—"fat" cards if the page is set up lengthwise or long, tall cards on a vertical set-up. Here's how some of the possible vertical set-ups for card-deck creations might look:
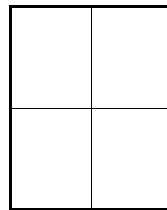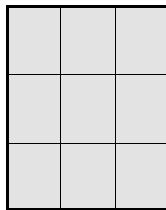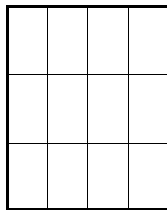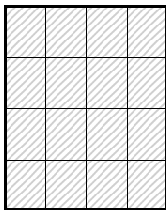
Here are some possibilities for horizontal layout.
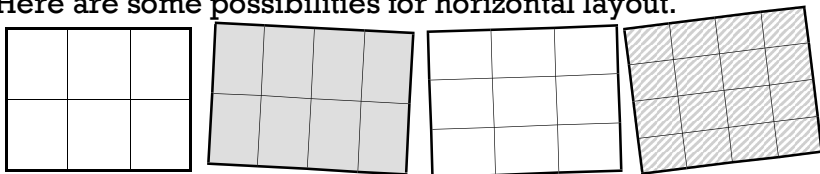
> **Of all the possible set-ups for the creation of playing card decks, the nine-rectangle (3 rows x 3 columns) vertical format is probably the most productive. Of course, if images are drawn or pasted onto *index cards* of various sizes, there is no need for layout planning.**

CREATING CARD DECKS BY HAND. Perhaps the simplest way to create learning cards is with index cards or card stock, felt tip markers, scissors or a paper cutter, and glue sticks.

♣ Get index cards of a suitable size or cut large cards in halves, thirds, or quarters. If more than one deck will be used during the same learning session, produce each set on cards of a different color.

♦ Write or draw the appropriate symbols, numbers, letters, or words on one or both sides of the cards.

♥ For accurate icons or pictures you'd rather not draw yourself, you can cut out and paste up the appropriate image(s) on each index card.

♠ On the other hand, if you plan to make multiple copies of the *same* card deck, it's more efficient to paste up images on an 8.5 x 11" piece of paper, divided into squares or rectangles of the chosen card size. Reproduce the images on card stock and cut the cards apart.

CREATING CARD DECKS BY MACHINE. Hand-drawn card decks look less "professional" than purchased learning materials. They seem less polished than computer-created decks. On the other hand, commercial materials cost money and are not custom designed for your own specific purposes.

Computer materials require appropriate software or downloads for layout, illustrations, drawing, or painting. Desktop publishing also requires knowhow and—often, patience, at least during the "learning curve" of creating the first "product." On the next two pages are some suggestions for computer-created card decks.

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♣ It's probably best to work on an 8.5 x 11" page. Choose either a vertical ("portrait") or a horizontal ("landscape") orientation. Leaving margins as narrow as your printer will allow, divide your page into "grid cells" of the size and shape of the desired cards. If you don't want square cards, do you want the height of each card to be greater than the width, or vice versa? Your decision is likely to depend on the content of the cards. Experiment.

♦ Will the cards of each deck be printed one-sided or two-sided? If you want two-sided cards in which each *back* corresponds to a different card *face*, be sure to create "mirror-imaged" pages. Remember that the images for the back of the cards must be in reverse order from those on the front, as the diagram shows:

1	2	3	3	2	1
4	5	6	6	5	4

Images for fronts of cards	Images for backs of cards.
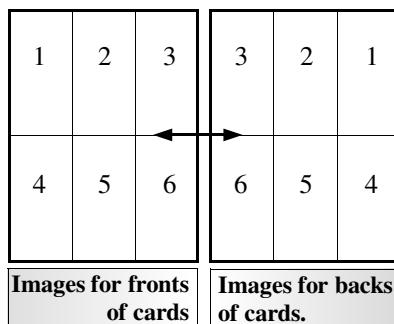
♥ With text (numbers, letters, words) and graphics (clip art, photos, etc.), fill in the boxes or "cells" of each page as your computer software allows or dictates. Center the content of each square or rectangle both horizontally and vertically. To make it easier to cut the cards apart evenly, leave sufficient space of all four sides of each image.

♠ Continue producing pages as described above until you have created the desired number of cards for one deck. For example, a fifty-four card deck will require six pages of nine cards each or nine pages of six cards each. A 52-card deck will include two blanks.

♠ Print out your masters directly on card stock, if your printer allows. According to your layout, choose "Flip on long edge" or "Flip on short edge." Alternatively, you can print the masters out on white paper and then photocopy them one-sided or back-to-back on card stock. To make it easier to keep cards together later on, you can print out each deck on card stock of a different color.

♦ With a paper cutter or scissors, cut the cards apart. Try to make all of the cards of each deck close to the same size and shape—so that they will be easier to handle and actually play games with.

♥ Finally, be sure to keep the cards of each deck together with a rubber band and/or in a paper or plastic envelope of the appropriate size.