

ANKI ESSENTIALS

THE COMPLETE GUIDE TO REMEMBERING ANYTHING WITH ANKI

Anki Essentials

Copyright ©2013 Alex Vermeer. All rights reserved.

This book contains no affiliate links. If you enjoy this book, please consider telling your friends about both [Anki](#) and [Anki Essentials](#).

All layout and content by Alex Vermeer. This is version 1.0.

Disclaimer: I am not responsible for any losses or damages you may experience when using Anki (not that I expect *either* to happen). Also, Anki—a free piece of software written primarily by the brilliant Damien Elmes—is constantly being developed and improved, so some of the information contained in this guide *may* be out-of-date. Of course, I take every measure to prevent this from happening.

Table of Contents

1. Introduction
2. The What and Why of Anki
3. Installation & Configuration
4. Creating Your First Deck
5. Anatomy of a Collection
6. A Day in the Life of a Deck
7. The 20 Rules
8. Getting to Know the Deck List
9. Everything You Need to Know About Creating Notes
10. Cards: Tweaking Layout and Style Using Card Templates
11. Studying 101
12. Advanced Studying and Retention
13. Getting Familiar with the Card Browser
14. Enhancing Notes with Images, Sounds and Other Media
15. Math, Equations, and Scientific Markup Using LaTeX
16. Sharing Decks
17. Creating Notes in Bulk
18. Syncing with AnkiWeb
19. The Secret to Speed: Keyboard Shortcuts
20. Beware these Common Beginner Problems
21. A Collection of Other Possible Uses for Anki
22. Expanding Anki with Add-ons
23. Creating Multiple User Profiles
24. A Quick Overview of Anki's Settings and Preferences
25. Keeping it All Clean and Tidy
26. Conclusion
27. About the Author
28. Acknowledgements
29. Additional Resources

Chapter 1

Introduction

Let's face it: the human memory *sucks*. We forget in a month even the most important ideas in that excellent book we read. We cram the night before a test, only to forget everything in a week. We forget the Five Big Things we're supposed to remember when assessing a project proposal. We never get around to remembering all those guitar chords with their many variations and configurations. The list goes on.

What can we do? Our memory, despite its limitation, is still a powerful tool in the human arsenal. Sure, a new and better brain might be nice, but until that's possible we must focus on making the most of what we have. Many methods for improving human memory retention exist, but one that stands out above the rest is *active recall testing*. Active recall testing is, basically, repeatedly exposing you to material to force yourself to recall it. If recall succeeds, the memory is strengthened; if recall fails, you refresh the memory and recall it again.

Enter **Anki**, a handy little *free* piece of software available on all major platforms—Windows, Mac OS X, iPhone, Android, and so on. Anki is an invaluable tool for creating, learning, and reviewing practically anything with some “structure” to it. From guitar chords to philosophical arguments to languages to productivity advice, Anki can help you remember it all. Anki is both *flashcard* software and *spaced repetition* software. In short: it presents you with a question (Who was the sixteenth president of the USA?). Once you've recalled the answer (Abraham Lincoln), this *card* will be presented again right when Anki thinks you're about to forget, thereby refreshing and strengthening the memory.

Sounds too simple, you say? Well, there is a *bit* more to it than that—and much more you can do with Anki—but that's the basic idea.

The Goal

The goal with this book is to teach you how to become an Anki master. I want to show you how easy it is to improve your memory and recall with a minimal amount of time and effort. The goal is *not* to help you develop a perfect memory. I don't know how to do that, and you should distrust people who claim they do. What I'm providing is a *tool* for getting more from the brain you already have, not a new brain. Still interested? Let's get started.

Key Terms

There are a bunch of key terms I want to highlight before we delve into using Anki. These words are used throughout the book. Don't worry if these aren't completely clear yet, we'll be talking about them a lot in the upcoming pages.

- * **Notes** – A *note* is a bunch of information that belongs together. A single note could contain, for example: “Who was the sixteenth president?” and “Abraham Lincoln.” A more complex note might contain “Abraham Lincoln,” “Honest Abe,” “16th,” “2-Term,” and “1861–1865.”
- * **Note Fields** – Note *fields* are the different parts of information contained in a note. This could be simple *question* and *answer* fields, or more complex fields such as *name*, *nickname*, *order*, *terms*, and *years* for the above note example.
- * **Note Types** – Notes come in various *types*. A note type is a group of note fields used to make up certain kinds of notes. For example, a “Basic” note type may simply contain a *front* and *back* field. A “Presidents” note type may contain the fields in the above example (*name*, *nickname*, etc.). An “Elements” note type may contain the fields *symbol*, *atomic number*, and *valence electrons*.
- * **Card Templates** – Notes come in different shapes and sizes. A note with various fields can be presented in different ways. For example, if you created a card template called “President Nicknames,” you could display only the president's *name* and ask for the *nickname*. Card templates are used to define exactly what to display when and where.
- * **Cards** – Each card template creates a card from a note. By making a bunch of card templates, multiple cards will be generated from a single note.

- * **Decks** – Decks are *groups* of *cards* unified under a single name, much like files in a folder. You may have a deck called “Presidents” that contains 44 notes for every US president, resulting in 220 cards (assuming you had five card templates per president).
- * **Collection** – A collection is the sum total of all the decks in Anki. Every Anki user has their own collection, and multiple collections can be configured for one installation of Anki (such as if you have multiple people using the same computer).
- * **Tags** – Tags are optional labels you can give to individual notes. For example, you could tag the 44 president notes in the above example with the century in which they were president.
- * **Studying** – Studying is the general process of going through a group of decks or cards and either learning them if they’re new, or reviewing them if they’ve already been learned.
- * **Anki** – Whenever I talk about Anki, I’m referring to the free, open-source, spaced repetition software created by Damien Elms. As of this writing, Anki 2.0 has just been released. Unless I specify otherwise, when I refer to “Anki” I mean Anki 2.0—the latest and greatest—not an older version.
- * **AnkiWeb** – [AnkiWeb](#) is the online side of Anki where you can create a free account and sync your Anki collection between computers and devices.
- * **SRS** – SRS stands for *spaced repetition software*.

What’s Covered

Anki Essentials attempts to cover seven general areas:

1. **Getting Started** – The absolute bare-bones basics of using Anki, from installation, to setting up an account with AnkiWeb, to creating your first deck.
2. **Getting Familiar with Anki** – The inner-workings of Anki; how decks are organized, how notes and cards are edited, and how your collection is managed.
3. **Creating & Editing** – The world of creating Anki decks. It covers note types, note fields, card templates, images and sounds, importing and exporting decks, and adding scientific markup.

4. *Learning & Reviewing* – Specifics about studying, scheduling, and reviewing in Anki. Cramming, learning statistics, filtered decks, study options, and other topics are covered in depth.
5. *Specific Applications* – Taking what you've learned so far and presents a variety of sample applications.
6. *Expanding & Enhancing* – An assortment of other topics for getting the most out of Anki, including creating multiple user profiles, configuring Anki's settings, and using advanced card templates.
7. *Additional Resources* – Some final comments, as well as listing a bunch of available external resources and reference appendices.

In general, I suggest you go through *Anki Essentials* chapter by chapter. If you are new to Anki, this is especially important for the first few chapters of the book. After that, however, if you reach a chapter that doesn't apply to your situation or tickle your fancy—such as the chapter on LaTeX equations—don't hesitate to skim or skip it all together.

And now, without further ado, let's get started.

–Alex

Chapter 2

The What and Why of Anki

Say hello to your brain. Many methods for improving human memory retention exist, but one that stands out above the rest is *active recall testing*. The easiest way to do active recall testing is to use *spaced repetition software* that manages the spacing of material for you and makes it easy to create, edit, and delete content.

Your brain needs repetition to internalize material. This is where Anki helps.

What is Anki?

Anki can be summed up with two bullets:

- * *Questions & Answers*. Anki presents you with a *question*—be it a fill-in-the-blank, a definition, or a standard question-marked sentence—and your job is to recall the correct answer.
- * *Scheduling*. Based on how difficult or easy it was to recall the answer to the question, Anki determines the best amount of time to wait before asking you the same question again, thereby strengthening the memory at just the right moment.

Why Use Anki?

Anki is not the only SRS out there, or even the only good one. Some other popular ones include Mnemosyne, Metric, and iSRS. However, Anki is my software of choice for a few reasons:

- * *Free.*¹ Anki is completely free, thanks to the hard work and dedication of its primary creator, Damien Elmes.
- * *Wide availability.* Anki is available on most devices, including Android and iOS smartphones.
- * *Easy syncing between devices.* AnkiWeb hosts all of your Anki content, making it possible to synchronize your information across all devices.
- * *Extensive use of shortcuts.* Everything in Anki has an easy keyboard shortcut, making it possible to be very efficient at using it.
- * *Extremely customizable.* Anki gives a *lot* of control over what material to store and how to display it.

Anki isn't a cure-all; it won't work for everything. As we'll see in later chapters, information must be formatted in certain ways for it to be effectively learned and memorized. But the things it works well for, it works *very* well.

Learn More about Spaced Repetition

If you're interested to read more about spaced repetition, the best place to start is the article *Spaced Repetition* by Gwern: http://www.gwern.net/Spaced_repetition. This is by far my favorite article on the topic, a must read for anyone interested in knowing *why* spaced repetition works so well.

¹ *Except* for the iOS app, which is currently priced at \$25.

Chapter 3

Installation & Configuration

I know you're itching to get started mastering your memory and becoming super-human, but before you can do any of that (because you will) you need Anki!

Download & Install

Head over to <http://ankisrs.net> and grab a free copy of Anki. On the right side of the web page there is a list of download links for various platforms. Anki is available for Windows, OSX, and many others, however this book focuses on the Windows and Mac version of Anki. Everything in this book should be easy to follow if you are on a different platform.

Installation Instructions

1. Download the Anki installer from <http://ankisrs.net>.
2. Run it (*Windows*: anki-2.0.x.exe, *OSX*: anki-2.0.x.dmg).
3. Follow the onscreen instructions.
4. Run Anki (*Windows*: Start Menu > Anki, *OSX*: \Applications\Anki.app)

Note: If you are *upgrading* from an older version of Anki, simply follow the onscreen instructions to update your existing Anki database.

Anatomy of Your Installation

Just for your reference, once the installation is complete the following files will now exist on your computer:

- * (My) Documents\Anki\collection.anki2 – This is the main Anki file that contains all the facts, cards, decks, and templates in your collection.
- * (My) Documents\Anki\collection.media – This folder contains all media files that are added to your decks, such as images and sounds.

Run Anki

If you haven't yet, go ahead and start up Anki for the first time! You should see a home screen like the one to the right.

Create an Account at AnkiWeb

Before you start creating content, you need an account at ankiweb.net.

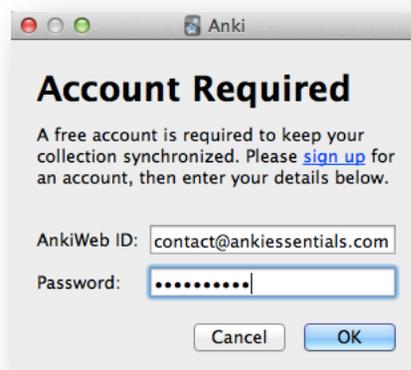
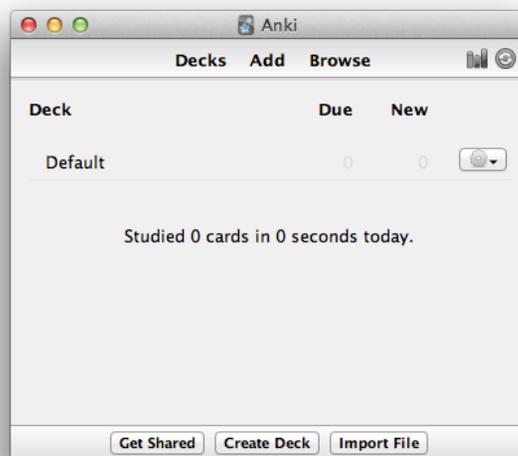
In the top right corner of the Anki window there is a Sync button that looks like .

Clicking this button, or pressing Y, will tell Anki to sync with AnkiWeb. Since there is no account set up yet, the screenshot below should appear.

If you already have an AnkiWeb account then log in using your existing credentials and hit OK. Otherwise, click on the sign up link or go directly to ankiweb.net and create an account. Then return to Anki, enter your account information, and hit OK.

A small window will briefly appear as your new (empty) account is linked to AnkiWeb.

Welcome to Anki! Wasn't that easy?



Chapter 4

Creating Your First Deck

The main Anki window is the Decks page. Here you get a complete overview of *everything* contained in your collection. There's not much here, because we haven't created any decks or notes to learn from yet. But, not to worry, we'll be getting to that.

There are bunch of other features and links on this page, but for now we will ignore these and get started making our first deck.

Creating a New Deck

Let's make a deck for learning the capitol cities of European countries.

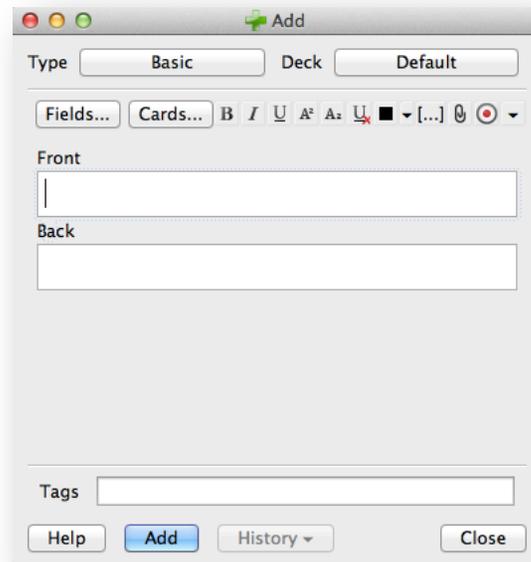
Learning European Capitals

From the Decks page, click the Add button in the top menu to add some notes. Notes—the stuff you want to learn—are turned into *cards* and organized into *decks*, which act a lot like folders for files on your computer. The Add window should appear, looking something like this:



Here we can see:

- * The current **Fact Type** (“Basic”) – Anki comes with two basic fact types: Basic and Cloze. We’ll only be using Basic for now.
- * The current **Deck** (“Default”) – By default, you are adding facts to a Default deck.
- * The available **Formatting** options – bold, italics, font color, etc.
- * The available **Fields**, given this Fact Type (“Front” and “Back”).



You don't want to add facts to the Default deck; you want to make a deck specifically for *European Cities*. So, create a new deck by clicking on the Default deck button. A list of all the available decks appears (nothing much to see here yet). Hit Add and enter the name European Cities, followed by OK.

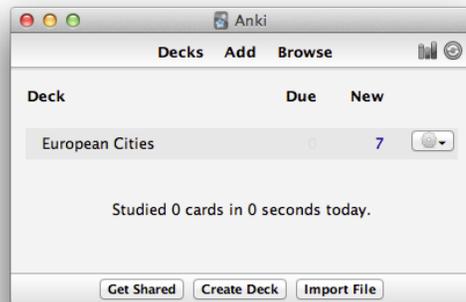
Now the Add window shows that our current deck is European Cities. It's time to add some content.

The **Front** field is what is displayed on the front of the card; it's the *question* Anki will ask. The **Back** field is the *answer* that you will be required to recall. In the Front field textbox put “What is the capital of Greece?” and in the Back field textbox put “Athens.” Now hit Add. Congratulations, you just added your first fact!

Add a few more facts to fill out the European Cities deck, such as:

- **Front:** What is the capital of Serbia?
Back: Belgrade
- **Front:** What is the capital of Germany?
Back: Berlin
- **Front:** What is the capital of Belgium?
Back: Brussels
- **Front:** What is the capital of Romania?
Back: Bucharest
- **Front:** What is the capital of Hungary?
Back: Budapest
- **Front:** What is the capital of Denmark?
Back: Copenhagen

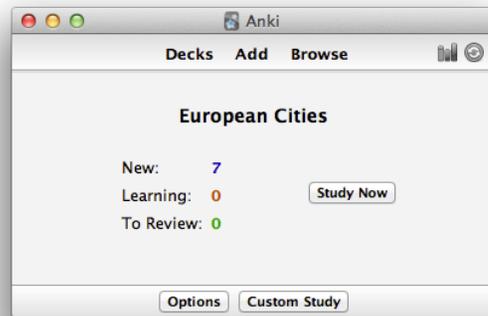
After adding a bunch of facts, hit the Close button to return to the Decks window, where you will now see your newly created deck:



You can see that there are (in my case) 7 **New** facts to learn, and 0 **Due** for review (because I haven't learned them yet). Now that you have some material, it's time to do some learning.

Learning & Reviewing

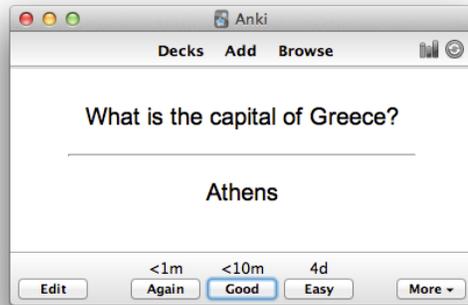
From the Decks window click on the *name* of your new deck. This takes you to the main **Study** window. Here again we see that there are 7 New facts to learn, 0 facts in the middle of learning, and 0 facts awaiting review.



Hit the **Study Now** button to begin studying.

By default, Anki presents new cards for learning in the order they were added. So, the first card you are presented with should be from the fact you added asking about the capital city of Greece.

Think you know the answer? When you're ready, click on Show Answer (or press SPACEBAR).



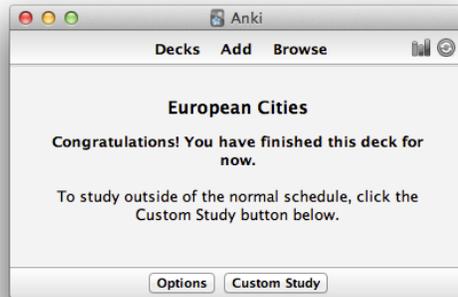
Was it easy? Hard? Did you completely forget? You now have a set of options that are presented after every new card:

- * **Again** – Click this if you got it wrong (or press 1)
- * **Good** – Click this if you got it right, but it took some effort (or press 2)
- * **Easy** – Click this if you got it right and it was easy (or press 3)

There are other options in the Review window, such as Edit and More, but don't worry about these yet. Once you make a selection (Again, Good, or Easy), you will be presented with the next card in the deck. Continue until you have completed all of the cards.

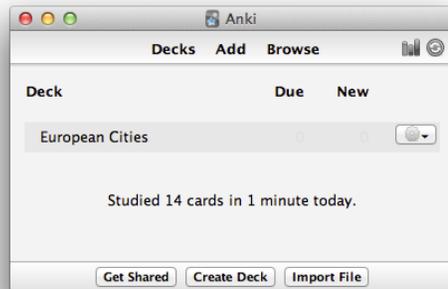
At this point, Anki tells you that you're done reviewing. Congratulation! You've started learning and memorizing useful information with Anki!

NOTE: You may be required to answer the same card multiple times; this is because if you only answered Good and if this is a new card then Anki will ask more than once before delaying the card until tomorrow.



Click the Decks link (or hit D) to return to the Decks window. Since this material is new, and assuming you completed the deck, there should be zero cards due in the Getting Things Done deck—all the cards will be due for review *tomorrow*. As you get the answers correct more frequently and more easily, Anki will wait longer and longer before presenting the same card again, eventually reaching delays of weeks and months.

The Decks window also shows how many cards were studied today and for how long—in my case, 14 cards in 1 minute.



By default, Anki will never ask you to answer more than 100 cards per day. You don't have anywhere near that many yet, but you'd be surprised how quickly they can add up.

Syncing with AnkiWeb

Now that you've created the start of a simple deck and reviewed it, it's time to sync your collection with AnkiWeb. This way the contents of your decks, as well as all your review and study information, will be backed-up online, accessible online, and accessible from any other device or computer where you have Anki installed.

Clicking this Sync button (or pressing Y) will cause Anki to sync everything in your collection with AnkiWeb; it should only take a few seconds.

And that's it! Now your entire collection is accessible from ankiweb.net.

* * *

There you have it. Those are the *bare bones* of using Anki. Of course, there's still *so much more* we're going to cover, but by now you have already succeeded in creating your first deck and reviewing it. Give yourself a pat on the back.

Now take a deep breath, and let's move on!

Chapter 5

Anatomy of a Collection

How does Anki *work*? How is everything organized? Lets spend a moment fleshing out the inner workings of Anki. This may seem a bit confusing or convoluted at the start, but trust me, you'll be glad in the long run if you take the time to understand this stuff.

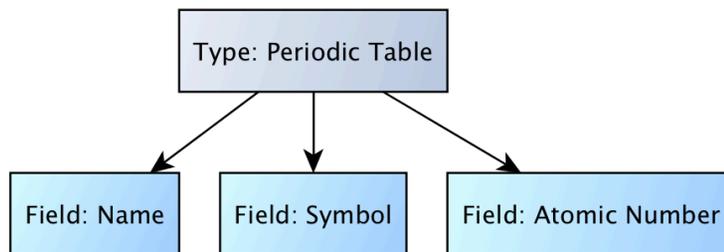
It All Starts With Notes

Notes are the most fundamental pieces of an Anki collection.

Let's say I want to learn about chemistry—specifically, the first twenty elements on the periodic table and their important properties, such as the name, symbol, and atomic number.

Notes, Types, and Fields

To do this, we would create a **Note Type** called “periodic table” with the three **Note Fields** “name,” “symbol,” and “atomic number”:



Note Types define what *groups of information* you can create, organize, and study. In the above example, the “periodic table” note type has three fields. You could also create a note type with generic “front” and “back” fields, or a more complex period table note type

End of Free Sample

Get the Rest of Anki Essentials

Interested in what you've seen here? Head over to the following URL to purchase the entire 120-page guide!

<http://alexvermeer.com/anki-essentials/>