

Intricacies of Using Spaced Repetition Tools

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I was intrigued by the article by Cooper et al.,¹ which described how spaced repetition study techniques improved GPA, USMLE Step 1, and COMLEX Level 1 scores. I also appreciate the authors' efforts to raise awareness of this valuable study method, which has been shown to enhance academic performance.² However, I would like to highlight a few concerns regarding the use of this approach, particularly the proper use of the software and factors that may have influenced the study's results.

First and foremost, Anki—like any software—must be used correctly and efficiently. As a medical student, I have spent hours trying to figure out how to use the program effectively. This can be frustrating, and the time lost could have been better spent on other learning strategies, such as active recall,³ which is also known to improve grades. Furthermore, improper use of Anki may result in lower scores for students who don't have their settings optimized. For example, the option to configure timers for tracking the actual interval of "spaced repetition" is available, but the settings page can be difficult to navigate. Without external help, students are more likely to make errors. Your insights underscore the complexities of integrating Anki into

medical education, emphasizing the need for user training. However, it's worth mentioning the availability of tutorials through various online resources such as blog posts, social media videos, and Anki's own support service.

Second, the results reported in the study may be more reflective of the intelligence of the students using Anki rather than the tool itself. To improve the study's objectivity, the authors should have addressed this factor in the statistical analysis. The article assumes a direct relationship between using Anki and higher scores, but it's possible that the students who use Anki are already more academically inclined. Distinguishing between correlation and causation regarding Anki usage and academic success is indeed crucial. Nonetheless, it's important to note that the study already acknowledges some limitations in establishing causality and calls for further investigation, which mitigates some concerns raised. Finally, while the study represents a significant advancement in research methods, it's crucial to understand how to use the software properly when publishing data and to consider the unique characteristics of each student.

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