METAPLAN METHOD

Purpose	The *Metaplan Method* is a technique for visualizing and organizing information that uses labeled notecards. The strategy opens up various possibilities for working with prior knowledge. When working inductively, the structure for organizing information will be created while completing the task; when using the technique inductively, the task is to assign prior (likely unstructured) knowledge to specific predefined categories. A detailed description of the inductive organization of the material, i.e. clustering, follows below; the deductive approach is explained under option 5.
Directions	The instructor presents a content-driven task or question. Every participant writes down three to five key terms on the notecards and in the color assigned to them, making sure to write legibly. Students then take turns presenting their key terms to the whole group and attach them to a pin board, whiteboard, or an empty wall. As much as possible, new terms should be grouped with fitting ones already present. All participants then discuss the clusters thus created. As a final step, the instructor joins the discussion and summarizes or reflects on the results so far.
Parameters	Group size: 10-35 participants Time required: 20-40 min. Setup: flexible Materials: pin board or empty wall; note cards or letter-sized paper cut in half; thick permanent markers, pins, sticky tape for labeling
Helpful Tips	The instructor should be careful not to interfere too much with the students' organization of information into clusters. If many cards have already been hung up, however, it is easy for students to lose track; at this point, it is advisable and often necessary for the instructor to step in and offer help (e.g. suggesting stepping back from the board to survey it as a whole, naming/pointing out a card the student is looking for, providing enough time, etc.). If discussions arise about where a specific card belongs, instructors should not insist on one ideal arrangement, but provide room for different interpretations, or else students will feel frustrated quickly. Key terms that are not easily incorporated into the existing structure can be placed to the side for later consideration. If key terms are unclear, however, it is better to ask for clarification immediately. Instructors should also ensure that the results of the clustering process are incorporated logically into subsequent class content. Variants Option 1: Evaluating Individual Importance Participants are asked to rank their notecards in order of importance and to only contribute their most important card to the structure being developed by the whole class.

	Option 2: Anonymous Metaplan Presentation Participants turn their notecards upside down and the instructor collects them before pinning them onto the board one after the other. Students comment on the anonymous contributions and discuss where to place them within the structure developed so far. Option 3: Continuing with Placed Cards The cards can be re-arranged later. Option 4: Evaluating the Placed Cards When working with complex topics, the Metaplan Method can subsequently be employed in a feedback activity with sticky dots in which the dots are used for highlighting key points. All participants receive the same number of sticky dots and select which notecards or columns they consider most important by placing a dot on them. Option 5: Deductive Organization (“preconceived Metaplan”) Participants do not organize cards according to criteria created by them in the process, but according to predetermined categories. Students assign their cards to specific categories after a short discussion. If there is disagreement, notecards can be placed to the side for further discussion later or can be collected as their own category of misfits to see if a new (missing) category emerges.
Online Implementation	— via padlet.com

Adapted from:
Macke, G., Hanke, U., & Viehmann, P. (2008). *Hochschuldidaktik*. Weinheim: Beltz Verlag.