

Better Endings: What to Do in the Last Day of Class

Most courses end for students with the final exam. (We leave it to you to determine if that is, for your students, a high note or a low one). However, an ending is not the same as closure, and teachers and students often leave courses with unanswered questions and unchecked emotions. Most of us have seen a number of tips on what to do on the first day of class, but we don't think about the importance of the last day as an opportunity for students to reflect on and fully synthesize their learning.

Here are some suggestions that might make the closing of your course as memorable as the opening.

- * Use the syllabus as a tool for course review.

- * Ask students to create a flow chart to graph relationships between/among concepts learned.

- * Ask students to revisit the goals they set for themselves at the start of the course. This works best if, at the beginning of the semester, you have students write goals on a note card or send you a memo describing their goals. Return the card/memo on the last day and ask students to assess how well they accomplished their goals, what means they used to do so, and the apparent outcome. They can discuss their accomplishments in small groups or write their observations in a memo to you. Reflect aloud on what students may not have fully understood-explain the benefits and costs of NOT understanding something.

- * Describe what YOU learned about teaching and about the subject of the course.

- * Ask students to write you a letter three months hence, telling you one thing they learned that they have actually used.

- * Ask students to write a letter to someone who will take the course next semester, providing a general introduction to the course, describing strategies that were worthwhile and those that caused problems, and offering advice for succeeding in the course. Seal the letters and deliver them randomly to students at the start of the next semester.

- * Use a team game format (Family Feud, College Bowl, Jeopardy) as an exam review tool. Give prizes (like candy).

- * Ask students to work in groups to construct a crossword puzzle using key concepts from the course. Exchange puzzles among groups for solving.

- * Ask students to bring on the last day of class several magazines (that they are willing to cut up), scissors and glue. Instruct them to work in groups to create collages of pictures that summarize the

ideas presented during the preceding weeks of the course. Display the collages and ask each group of students to explain the one they created.

* Require the students to come to the last class prepared to present (either graphically or verbally) a metaphor for the subject of the course.

* Ask students to work in pairs or trios to write a concise and complete response to the question:
What is (the name of your discipline)?

Compiled from suggestions found in:

* Maier, Mark H., and Ted Panitz. 1996. "End on a High Note: Better Endings for Classes and Courses." *College Teaching*, Vol. 44, No. 4.

* "How to End Courses With a Bang." 1995. *The Teaching Professor*, Vol. 9, No. 5.

* Source: *Teaching at UNL*, Vol. 19, No. 3, November 1997. Reprinted with permission

Additional reading from the library of the CTL:

Davis, B. G. (2009). *Tools for teaching*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass: 529-533.

McKeachie, W. J., Svinicki, M. D., & Hofer, B. K. (2006). *McKeachie's teaching tips : strategies, research, and theory for college and university teachers*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin: 353-355.

Uhl, C. (2005). The last class. *CollegeTeaching*, 53(4): 165-166 available [here](#).