

## Activities for the Last Day of Class

Given the frantic pace of the semester's end, we often rush into final classes without much forethought. We try to cram in too many concluding "essentials," breathlessly remind students of impending due dates and rubric criteria, or trudge through an overly detailed and less-than-stimulating review for the final exam. Here's a different approach: View final classes as an opportunity for reflection. Something (many things!) were learned, tasks were accomplished, barriers were overcome. Perhaps one or more of the following ideas might help you and your students pause and consider the journey you've taken together over the course of the semester.

**Reflection essays:** James Lang, author of [Small Teaching: Everyday Lessons from the Science of Learning](#), suggests using the [last five minutes](#) of a typical class for a "minute paper," a brief essay in which students jot ideas about the most important thing learned in that class period. Turn that minute into 15 or 20 and ask students to respond to a set of questions about the class as a whole, e.g., what material from this class will be most helpful to you, or to your major/personal life/future career; on which student learning outcomes did you make most progress; what personal goals did you set for yourself that you achieved; what surprising/interesting/unexpected/memorable things did you learn; or when were you most engaged as a learner?

**Chalk talk:** Try a more public but silent variation of written essays using this technique popularized by Stephen Brookfield. Write your favorite reflection questions on sheets of poster paper (one per page) and tape them around your classroom, asking students to circulate and respond to each. Take pictures of the final products and upload them to your class LMS site as a bit of inspiration before the final.

**Letters to future students:** Ask students to write brief letters to future students explaining what they'll be learning and doing in your course, and providing them with advice or tips for success. (Ask for permission to use the letters; advice from past classes of students seems to carry more weight than our advice.) As an added bonus, ProfHacker blogger Brian Croxall maintains that a [variation on this assignment](#) can boost course evaluations!

**Elevator speeches:** If oral competency is a goal of your course, try brief presentations on the last day: Tell students to imagine being asked by a friend, family member, or future job interviewer what your class was "all about." How would they respond in 1-2 minutes? If class size makes individual responses impossible, ask students to practice delivering their "pitches" in small groups. (Note: This idea may come from a source I no longer remember; if so, my apologies.)

**Gratitude activities:** From positive psychology research, we know that [practicing gratitude increases well-being](#). Simple expressions of gratitude from students about rewarding experiences in your course are certain to end class on a high note. What are students glad to have learned? What did they appreciate about someone else in the class? What authors of course materials would they like to thank for their work? If time is a concern, it's not necessary to read students' ideas aloud for the gratitude effect to take place; it's the moment of being grateful that seems to have the impact.

**Review:** Finally, if last-class review is essential, experiment with a more active style of review session. Check out [Five Ways to Improve Exam Review Sessions](#) for ideas.

### References

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