

# The Last Day of Class

University of California, Berkeley. <https://teaching.berkeley.edu/last-day-class>)

Make the last day count. Too often, the last day of a class can be taken up with housekeeping-information on the final, last minute details, and course evaluations. But as Richard Lyons, author of several books on college teaching says, "the final class is a key student retention milepost."

Below is a potpourri of ideas from Berkeley faculty: (Center for Teaching and Learning.

1. Overview. Do an overview/synthesis of the course: look back over the topics covered and try to weave them together, and identify common themes, recurring issues.--Nancy Van House, School of Information

2. Talk about what went well or badly in the course. Tell them that it's useful for your revisions to the course to have a discussion about it. Stress that you want to hear from them what will help you and future students.--Nancy Van House

3. Final presentations. A number of courses make the last day the culmination of the semester's project. In EECS, John Lazzaro's students present the results of their semester-long projects "Students address the presentation to next semester's students. I take their PowerPoint, and use selected slides to illustrate points about the project for the following semester's class." It is, he says, a great morale booster for the next group of students, to whom the project is always daunting at first. We might add that having a concrete audience besides the instructor is also valuable.

4. Game Show Final Review. In Chem 1A, Michelle Douskey uses a game show (with teams and prizes) that serves as a review for the final. It's patterned after "Win Ben Stein's Money," with tacky puns and segues and wacky categories (e.g., "If Beyonce gains any more weight, they will have to change the name of the band to Density's Child.")

5. Research. Talk about your own research and/or an area of currently active research, to remind them of how much there is still to learn in the field. Talk about opportunities for undergraduate research.--Eliot Quataert, Astronomy

6. Follow-up. In a seminar, follow up on a topic that generated a lot of interest.--Jeff Perloff, Agriculture and Resource Economics

7. Famous people in the field. In Sociology 5, Irene Bloemraad ends with a slide show of people who went on to fame and fortune after being undergraduate sociology majors. She includes people from all walks of life.

8. Concluding remarks. This is not meant to be detailed bits of information, but broader issues: the importance of assumptions, the power of economics to explain real world events, and so on. Try to fit the class experience into the broader context of life.--Martha Olney, Economics

9. Students' concluding remarks. After providing your own remarks (see number 8), ask for theirs. According to Amy D. Kyle of Public Health, "some years the comments focus more on the class itself, some years on the major topics we have discussed, and some on the challenges that they face in finding ways to contribute to the world. But we have always had a conversation that distills where we have been as a group and bears on where they want to go."

10. All questions-related-to-the-topic answered. This is not in preparation for a final, but is a way to let them ask about things that may have been unclear, or unfinished.--Steven Botterill, Italian.

11. Read aloud. In College Writing 110, students each read aloud for 2-3 minutes from a piece that they have written during the semester, followed by applause from the class.--Jane Hammons, College Writing Programs

12. Thank the class. Ani Adhikari of Statistics says, "I take some time to thank the students for their part in the course and to tell them what they did to make my job easier (e.g. worked hard, asked questions, were cheerful, etc.). Many of them will go on to do statistical analyses in other fields, perhaps a few semesters down the road, so I encourage them to keep in touch."

13. All questions answered. Students can ask any questions at all, from material in the course to any other topic except religion or politics. It's a wonderful way to get out of the confines of the course. - Donald Knuth, Stanford, via Steve Evans, Math. CAVEAT: It has been pointed out that this can leave you open to personal questions to you that you might not want to answer, e.g., "Did you ever smoke pot?"

14. Final portfolios. In College Writing 300, Gail Offen-Brown compiles an anthology of the students' projects and distributes it the last day.

### **School's Out! Almost. Strategies for the Last Day of Class<sup>1</sup>**

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Stanford Teaching Commons <https://teachingcommons.stanford.edu/teaching-talk/school%E2%80%99s-out-almost-strategies-last-day-class>

Use metacognitive reflection exercises, or those that promote "thinking about one's thinking." Reflection exercises can reinforce students' sense of the value of the class and can also give you useful feedback about what concepts might need better explanation next year. A straightforward technique is to have students write down their answers to a short series of questions, and then discuss them as a class. Dietz-Uhler & Lanter (2009, p.38) developed four versatile questions that encourage students to "analyze, reflect, relate, and question" material they've learned.

- Can you identify one important concept, research finding, theory, or idea that you learned while taking this class?
- Why do you believe that this concept, research finding, theory, or idea is important?
- Apply what you have learned from this class to some aspect of your life.

Other good activities for the last day of class might include:

- Have students write a letter to next year's class with advice on how to succeed in the course.
- For courses where students have produced a body of writing or art, have them give short 'portfolio presentations' to explain themes in their work to the rest of the class.
- Ask students how they could make a difference in the world with the knowledge they've gained.
- Thank students for their contributions to the course and ask them to share what they learned from each other.
- With any activity, it never hurts to bring snacks!

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<sup>1</sup>Dietz-Uhler, B. and Lanter, J. R. (2009). Using the four-questions technique to enhance learning. *Teaching of Psychology*, 36 (1), 38-41.