

# Higher Levels of Learning

at the end  
of the semester

Towards the end of the semester, students and instructors alike are often worn out and tempted to take one of two avenues:

SHIFT INTO HIGH GEAR

TURN ON CRUISE CONTROL

1) They may be enticed **to turn on cruise control**, check out mentally, and start winter break a few weeks early. This first option may be particularly attractive when final class sessions are devoted to student presentations. If students are not required to engage their classmates' presentations actively, they may be inclined to listen to each presentation only passively. Make sure all students have something active to *do* while they listen to their classmates' work, such as a presentation evaluation. In the future, also try not to pack all presentations into a few final weeks; if presentations are spread out more evenly across the second half of the semester, each class may include a combination of activities.

2) Students and instructors may be enticed **to shift into high gear**, to overwork and cram as much as possible. This second option lures students who have been slacking and instructors who have fallen behind schedule. Cramming helps no one. Students who slack and then cram may succeed in memorizing facts, but will miss out on higher levels of learning. Instructors who fall behind and then cram content into the last days of class only overwhelm their students. Moreover, they miss the crucial moment afforded by the end of semester when higher levels of learning can happen, like synthesis and application. In the future, leave open days in the semester for catch up in order to save the final class days for review, reflection, and higher levels of learning.

**To promote higher level learning** at the end of the semester, while avoiding both cruise control and shifting into high gear, help students reflect on their learning from the whole semester:



Revisit the course's learning goals introduced at the beginning of the semester. Have students take a moment and consider to what degree they have accomplished these learning goals.



Ask students to create final exam essays/questions which would measure student comprehension of the course's learning goals.

☐ Invite students to synthesize their learning through a creative project (e.g., a diagram, a timeline, a concept map, creative writing, or visual art).

☐ Revisit readings and/or assignments from the beginning of the semester so that students can appreciate what and how much they have learned.

☐ Ask students to prepare answers to questions such as: What are the most important things that you learned in this course? How will you apply this learning in your life?

☐ Have students compose a letter to future students of the course, advising them on what they need to know and how they should best go about learning it.

☐ Invite students to reflect on their development as learners, thinkers, and writers. Have students answer questions such as: What did you learn about yourself as a student this semester? Did you learn (or implement) any study strategies this semester that helped you be successful? What would you have done differently if you had to repeat this semester?

## Resources

For those who are interested in this topic, variations of many of the tips offered here today, as well as dozens of other good ideas, can be found on many academic blogs and articles on the web; I encourage you to peruse the following:

Ball State University. [Teaching Tip: Ending a Course](#).

Columbia University. [Ending the Semester on a Positive Note](#).

Connor, P. [Managing the End of the Semester](#).

Eggleston, T. J., Smith, G.E. (2002). [Parting Ways: Ending Your Course](#). *Observer* 15 (3).

Walsh, M. [Five Tips for Wrapping Up a Course](#).

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