Faculty Matter Teaching Tip #17:  
The Last Five Minutes of Class

A significant literature on college student success points to the importance of helping students develop the skills and dispositions needed to monitor and guide their own learning. (see, for example, Major, Harris & Zakrajsek, 2016 Teaching for Learning: 101 Intentionally Designed Educational Activities to Put Students on the Path to Success.) While some recommendations entail relatively complex and protracted “interventions”, others are much easier to implement. For example, the last five minutes of class time represent a critical opportunity, often squandered, to help students assume more intentional control of their own learning, by reflecting on the material they have just covered, by identifying points that were unclear, by noting connections to topics or ideas covered earlier or elsewhere, and by positioning themselves for what will come next in the course. Today’s Faculty Matter Teaching Tip consists of suggestions of things you might do with the last five minutes of your classes.

Make sure that students have the chance to engage in some kind of reflection or synthesis, as this kind of active manipulation of course materials can enhance their active engagement with their learning – or in other words, it can help them take responsibility for their own academic success.

- Some of us have very well-honed time management skills and can anticipate with great precision how much time each element of our “lesson plan” will require. To the degree that this is the case, we can plan and execute fairly elaborate “wrap-up exercises” for the day.
- Others of us have some difficulty predicting how far we will get in any given day, or we opt, quite intentionally, to depart from our plan as student interest and other considerations warrant. This may mean that we need to be rather nimble in deciding on a good “stopping point” for the day, and we may also need to plan to be flexible about how we will reach closure in a way that allows students to tie things together in a meaningful way.

Close with a recap of the day – Reserve a few minutes at the end of class (or as the final step on an on-line module) to summarize key points. But rather than you providing the summary, have students state what they think were the main ideas.

- Have students “turn-and-talk” with seat-mates, to compare notes. (This can be adapted to for implementation in on-line courses by using LMS discussion features.)
- As ideas are proffered, acknowledge them, expand on them, invite brief discussion of them as you see fit. Be sure to correct inaccuracies as warranted.
- Consider having them do this without consulting their notes or other materials. Such “retrieval practice”, as it is termed in research in the learning sciences, will give them a chance to “practice remembering,” a strategy which has been shown to promote learning.
• If you began the class by posing a “question of the day”, consider soliciting “answers’, in light of the day’s activities.

Close with a few minutes for students to reflect in writing on the day’s class, and to identify any points of confusion or lack of clarity.

• Allocate one or two minutes for students to write about the day’s class (“one-minute paper”). You may want to provide a more specific prompt, to focus them on something you want to be sure they consider. You may want to leave this assignment fairly open-ended, to see what meaning they are making of the material you are covering (e.g., “Today I learned...” or “The most surprising thing about today’s class was...”).

• Allocate a few minutes for students to identify areas where they would like more information or clarification (“muddiest point” questions, such as “I am still confused about...” or “I would like more information about...”). Gather these writings and begin the next class with a guided discussion to address common themes or critical misconceptions.

For additional suggestions, see http://www.chronicle.com/article/Small-Changes-in-Teaching-The/235583. Please add your own strategies using the comment link on the Provost's Academic Spotlight blog under the category “Faculty Matter”.