

Intentional Course Endings:
Planning for the Last Class of a Psychology Course (adapted from Fuentes et al., 2025)
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Every psychology course has a natural ending typically occurring in the last class. While the APA Ethical Code (2017) offers guidance to psychologists on how to end research involvement through debriefing or a clinical encounter through termination counseling, little guidance is offered on how to properly end a course. Intentional course closure promotes continued engagement and supports lifelong intellectual growth (Keith, 2011), reinforces learning and encourages application beyond the classroom (Stone et al., 2020), fosters dialogue and facilitates course improvement (Styles & Polvi, 2022), and helps students recognize the real-world relevance of their knowledge (Samson, 2025). In short, reflecting on the totality of a course, both cognitively and emotionally, can foster a sense of closure and the integration of new skills for students and instructors alike.

Guided by the APA Ethical Code (2017) and adapting Howes' (2008) termination questions, I suggest structuring the last class of the course in the following way:

- First, instructors can discuss the termination standards of the APA Ethical Code (2017), review Howes' (2008) termination guidance, and then share that you will be doing an adaptation of this work in the last class.
- Through a pair and share, students are invited to answer the following questions:
 - ***What have you learned as a student and as an individual?***.
If students have a standard course partner, they can also thank their partner for their support throughout the semester and say goodbye.
- Next, in small groups, students are asked to answer the following questions:
 - ***Which goals, if any, were not fully realized in this course and how might you address them?***
 - ***What is your 'aftercare' plan - what are your next steps beyond this course?***
Small groups are then invited to report out to the rest of the class. Here the instructor can address any remaining questions and provide additional guidance. Again, if students have semester-long small groups, they can express gratitude and exchange farewells with each other.
- Then, using a “round-robin” approach, all students are invited by the instructor to answer the following prompt:
 - ***What was the most meaningful moment for you in this class?***
As often done throughout the semester, I always give students the option to pass, if they prefer. Few, if any, pass on this prompt. What is often revealed by students is powerful! Small gestures by the instructor or a classmate, like doing an administrative check-in at the beginning of each class or offering supportive insights, are often highlighted as having a significant impact on students.

- Finally, students are asked to reflect on what this course ending means to them. Guided by the following prompt: *Explore and process the emotional conclusion of the academic relationship, acknowledging any additional feelings or memories this ending evokes*, students share any relevant reflections. Students may share personal losses or graduating seniors may reflect on the end of their academic journey.
- I often end the course with an invitation to keep in touch by saying something like this: *“Just because this course is coming to an end does not mean we have to come to an end. Please keep in touch. If there is anything I can do to further support you, feel free to reach out. I would also love to hear about all the great things you are up to as well!”*

As advised by Thakkar et al. (2024), this exercise helps faculty to address aspects of the APA Ethical Code (2017) in their courses, while creating a formal, strategic, and thoughtful way to end the course. This activity can be easily adapted for most psychology courses.

Questions and comments can be directed to fuentesm@montclar.edu.

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