Starting and Ending Lessons

Beginnings and endings matter.

They have particular significance for lessons. A ragged start leaves students lost and unclear on what they are meant to be learning. A ragged ending can leave both teacher and students with a de-motivating sense of anti-climax. Both scenarios can also lead to otherwise avoidable disruptive behaviour.

Here are some thoughts on starting and ending sessions.

Get in, get on and get out

Disruption can often occur around the margins of a session – beginnings, endings or any transitional phase of the lesson. These phases therefore demand our attention as teachers. Classroom management should be clear and purposeful, but also calm and unrushed.

Feedback on Issue 2 of Sharing Excellence

A colleague writes:
“Thank you for the suggestions on questioning games. I have often found that Family Fortunes works well for my ITEC Anatomy and Physiology lessons as it lightens the students’ spirits. We have the ‘Muscular Family’ and the ‘Skeletal Family’ and the students are asked questions such as “Name a structure found inside a cell” - there are around 10 structures that the students could decide from. I even use buzzers! This is an old favourite of mine that I have also adapted to suit my Health and Social Care groups. I will try and have a go at the Blockbusters game as this certainly brings back memories! Thank you”
Outside the room

Teachers in schools have learnt that a lesson ‘begins’ outside the classroom. This concept can be worth borrowing with really lively groups. In other words, settle the group down before letting them into the room and establish the expectation that everyone enters the teaching and learning space in an orderly and sober manner. This can save a great deal of “settle down please” time and is especially pertinent in a workshop environment where there is expensive and potentially dangerous equipment.

Beginnings and endings are memorable – this is useful

Research into the attention spans of learners consistently shows that everyone remembers ‘firsts’, ‘lasts’ and ‘high points’ most. Therefore by starting and ending sessions well you leave learners with a positive impression of their learning and your lessons.

Signposting

More than this, however, it suggests that we need to create more ‘firsts’ and ‘lasts’ and hence more ‘high points’ during our lessons.

You can do this by having a variety of different activities in any session, and creating miniature beginnings and endings at the transition between each activity. Use the stated outcomes in your introduction as ‘signposts’ that you can refer back to - “We will now look at our second objective today…”

Dip for the tape, don’t flop over the finish line

Ever had your enjoyment of a film or book spoilt by a tame or unsatisfying ending?

A good ending is just as important as a good beginning in any lesson. Never just teach until you run out of time and stop. Plan for and implement a clear end that gathers the learning from that session together and recaps. This is important for reinforcing learning, but also leaving learners with a clear sense of achievement.

Most of the time all that is required is a five minute Q&A session to recap learning and check on understanding. During this recap questions should be directed to individual learners.

Mastery Quizzes

Use ‘mastery’ quizzes to check on learning and energise the class for a good finish.

A mastery quiz should ask relatively ‘easy’ questions – recall of facts taught in that session or repetition of simple tasks or processes covered in that lesson. They are a particularly good way
to end a session because every learner should be able to experience success. Research shows that finishing with a mastery quiz sends learners away with a recent memory of achievement and a positive feeling about the lesson. It is therefore highly motivating.

In issue two we looked at some questioning games like: Who wants to be a millionaire, 15:1 and Blockbusters, these would make ideal mastery quiz formats.

**Learner Self Evaluation - Muddy bits**

At the end of every lesson distribute some paper or post-it notes and ask the learners to anonymously record their ‘muddy bits’ – the parts of the lesson that are still not completely clear for them. Encourage them to say what they would like you to do again, or explain more about, or approach in a different way. Implementing this idea can take courage, but if used regularly it can be really empowering for everyone.

**Promoting students’ self-evaluation of their learning is potentially valuable in several ways:**

- It helps learners assess where they are with their learning
- It helps learners plan actions they need to take to improve
- It can inform ILP target setting during 1:1 tutorial
- It gives you detailed feedback on the groups’ learning
- It provides you with accurate data to help you plan future sessions – what needs to be recapped or revisited
- It gives you feedback on strategies to try in your teaching
### Summary

- Plan beginnings and endings carefully to avoid unnecessary disruption
- Start outside the classroom by ensuring learners enter in an orderly fashion
- Always introduce a session by listing its main learning outcomes
- Always contextualise the lesson by linking these outcomes to previous lessons, work place practice or final assessments
- Consider writing the outcomes on the board and ticking them off as the lesson moves forward
- Create extra ‘beginnings’ by explaining when you are moving from one outcome to the next – “Having finished...we are now going to...”
- Finish with a bang not a whimper – end each session with a brief recap question and answer session
- Consider using a quiz or game format for this end of lesson Q&A
- At the end of each lesson ask learners to reflect on their learning, record anything that they are not clear about and feed that back anonymously

### What Ofsted say...

These quotes are taken from recent reports on FE Colleges in London East

“In weaker lessons, students are sometimes not clear what the aim of the lesson is”

“Students were given no directions or structure to help their understanding. They were keen to contribute, but by the end of the lesson, they had received no clear picture of what they needed to learn”

“In the weaker lessons, teachers do not link the activity being undertaken to practice in the workplace. As a consequence, students are sometimes not clear what the aim of the lesson is.”

“Aims and objectives are shared with students at the beginning of most lessons, but few teachers review these during the lesson or confirm their achievement at the end.”

“In good lessons, constant links are made between the work being done and the wider vocational context in which the skills being developed will be employed.”

### Let us know what you think

If you wish to give any feedback, make a contribution yourself or have a suggestion for topics of future issues then please contact Kit Jillings, Assistant Director Teacher Training at Kit.Jillings@lewisham.ac.uk or ext. 3271

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**In Issue four...**

We will revisit the topic of starting lessons by exploring the use of mental starters and energisers.