

DECEMBER 2020

LEARNING LOOP

A Teaching and Learning Lab Newsletter

December 3, 2020



Teaching Today: Ending Well

We often focus on a course's *beginnings*—planning the first day of class, sharing the syllabus, launching assignments and discussion sessions. But how we **bring the semester to a close** also has important consequences for learning. As Fall term winds down, this issue features strategies and best practices from HGSE and beyond for ending well.



Activities for Course Closure

This [May 2020 Faculty Focus](#) article emphasizes that bringing closure is particularly important in times of great uncertainty: "Trauma, chronic stress, and loss, challenges our sense of purpose, takes away our agency, and strains relationships. As we intentionally say goodbye, think of ways you can **give students a sense of purpose through making meaning of their hardships and accomplishments. Empower them by reminding them of the skills and strengths they possess.**" Strategies for doing so include making videos of learning, sharing contact information, incorporating personal statements and goodbyes into the final assignment, and holding space for sharing appreciations.

"[Parting Ways: Ending Your Course](#)" offers concrete strategies to **provide emotional and psychological closure, summarize course ideas, add to students' sense of accomplishment, stimulate further interest in the subject, and deepen class community.** Examples include: Projects, Letters, Brochures; Pre-Post Tests and Video Summaries; Lists, Games, and Objectives; and Reflections, Certificates, and Quotes.

"The pace of the semester can seem relentless in the best of times—add in a global pandemic as well as national and global unrest and it can be easy to



lose sight of essential questions like, 'What was the goal of this course?' 'Have we achieved it?' and 'How might we apply our learnings beyond the digital classroom?' As we move into the final weeks of this unique fall semester, I will share a move we utilize in qualitative research methods courses to foster student reflection on these important questions toward achieving closure. Called, '**I Used to Think, Now I Think...**' the activity asks students to respond to a prompt after free writing for five minutes. As a teaching team, we capture student responses in a note-catcher and ask individuals to read them aloud so the entire community can appreciate student growth in understanding, appreciation, and commitment to mission. Last fall, a student wrote: 'I used to think qualitative research is fluffy and easier than quantitative. Now I think qualitative research is an insightful, deep, difficult, iterative, enjoyable, and reflective learning process.'" For more guidance on this activity, see **Project Zero's thinking routine**.

Brandon N. Edwards, TF for Qualitative Research Methods (S504)

Feedback and Assessment

Assessing and providing feedback on students' work also play a crucial role in bringing the course to a close.

In **Responding to Student Writers**, Nancy Sommers describes a wide range of strategies for providing feedback both effectively and efficiently, including creating a link between the classroom and comments; steering clear of "overcommenting," and seeing comments through students' eyes.



For those who are assigning letter grades, two resources may be especially useful:

- This **Grading Student Work** guide (Vanderbilt Center for Teaching) provides specific strategies for Making Grading More Efficient and Maintaining Grading Consistency in Multi-Sectioned Courses.
- **Commenting and Grading Effectively and Efficiently**, a tip sheet from the **Harvard Writes Instructor Toolkit**, has timely advice for the end of a course, including a systematic 4-step process for arriving at grades, and the use of rubrics.

*Have a teaching tip or question to share for a future newsletter or workshop? **Let us know!***



From Our Students

Many HGSE students this year are participating from around the world; based on what they've shared about the challenges they face, the TLL created this resource on **Considerations for Students Living Outside the U.S.**, including safety issues, navigating blocked websites and content, camera flexibility, and more.

Technology Toolkit Updates



Music Breaks in Zoom

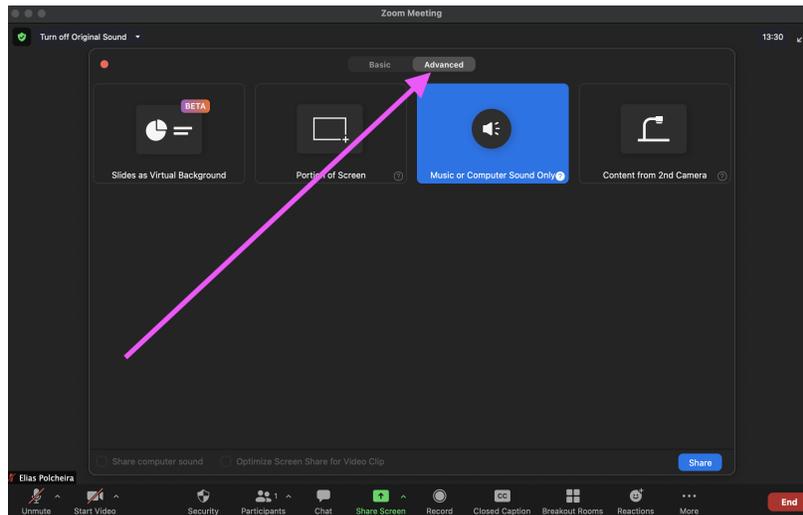
Instructors are increasingly interested in bringing music and movement into their Zoom classrooms. Read on for instructions and tips!



"There is something about music that enhances the vibe of any space, including a virtual one! It can offer moments of joy, learning, serenity, and fun to our classes—mixing things up, breaking up the routine, and giving us all a chance to stretch and move. I love to play music at a variety of moments in class: at the beginning as people arrive, during classroom breaks, while we work on activities that encourage reflection, and/or to close out a class session.

Sometimes I look for songs aligned with class content of the day, and at other times I focus on the general mood, choosing songs that will lift our spirits or provide a sense of peace. Taking student requests or creating a collaborative playlist on Spotify or Youtube can help us get to know our students through the songs they choose. Shout outs to Professor Aysha Upchurch and Dr. El-Amin who thoughtfully embed music in their courses that align with their syllabi, and who modeled this strategy for me as a TF. Since TF'ing their courses, I now try to bring some feel-good jams to all my courses!"

Parastoo Massoumi, Ph.D. candidate and TF



To share music playing from your computer during a Zoom session, click the green "Share Screen" button, then choose "Advanced" from the tabs at the top. Choose the **"Music or Computer Sound Only"** option. If you mute yourself, participants will still hear the music until you stop sharing.

From the TLL

The TLL is delighted to share the news that **Felipe Estrada-Prada** (Ed.M. '20) has joined the permanent team as **Senior Learning Technologist!** Felipe brings a wealth of insight, skill, warmth, and humor to his work helping HGSE instructors choose and use technologies in service of learning and engagement.



Have a suggestion, question, or request for the TLL? [Let us know!](#)

This email was sent to: mitsuki_nishimoto@gse.harvard.edu

This email was sent by: Harvard Graduate School of Education
13 Appian Way, Cambridge, MA, 02138, US

We respect your right to privacy - [view our policy](#)