

End Workshops on a High Note

Elaine D. Luther

Don't end your workshops with a pile of quickly-scribbled evaluations and a rush out the door, running overtime, with the person who wants to lock up hovering impatiently. There is another way: end your workshops on a high note!

How do you END the workshops you teach? Too often, workshops conclude in a flurry of forms after hurrying to finish projects. I recently took a workshop on improving the evaluation process. The instructor made a simple but profound point. She reminded us that we want these forms. They let us know how we can improve (and some art centers require them) yet when we leave them until the last two minutes of class, we send the message that they are unimportant. Simply setting aside an adequate amount of time to complete the form in a thoughtful way will improve the quality of responses.



Elaine demonstrates firing in one of her PMC workshops

Time & Opportunity

Another way of ending a workshop gracefully is to pass out the forms in the afternoon of the last day (or the last hour of a short course) and ask students to fill them out before they leave.

A class-closing technique borrowed from college art classes is a version of the critique. In non-credit classes the last half-hour or so involves more sharing than critiquing. At the end of a class I ask students to gather up all their completed and in-progress work and put the items on a clean piece of paper. I also ask each student to talk about the process of making each piece, to discuss what they learned, and to consider what they would do differently next time.

Reflection & Sharing

The sharing benefits students. It's a wonderful time for them to learn from each other and see one another's work. This technique also helps bring the class to an official close and prevents early departures. I recommend spending 15 to 30 minutes on evaluations (do those first) and sharing at the close of each workshop. The length of time depends on the number of students.

Students often leave a class wondering, "Oh great, I just learned all this stuff, but will I ever be able to do this again?" This is especially common in weekend workshops. To help my students feel less lost, I've created a brochure with guidance on what to do after the class. I have one version for my traditional metalsmithing courses and another for PMC courses. In the PMC brochure I list *Studio PMC* and other magazines that have published PMC articles in the past. I list other resources that they might seek out and offer hints on setting up a home work space.

Remember your students are new at using PMC and might not know where to go for more information. A few simple phone numbers, websites, and book titles can give your students confidence and goals as they walk out your door. I hope that these suggestions help you in your PMC workshops!

Elaine D. Luther is a past contributor to Studio PMC. She is a self-employed studio jeweler who has taught PMC classes professionally since 1997. She teaches at the University of Illinois at Chicago's Center Studios, other Chicago art centers, and the Indianapolis Art Center.