



ENDING COURSES

By Mario Rinvoluceri

When I used to work at the Cambridge Academy, in Girton, Cambridge, I would teach three term-long courses between October and June, and then three or four summer courses. In my work at Pilgrims Language Courses, Canterbury, this summer, I have had to say goodbye to nine groups between early June and mid-September.

In these circumstances, knowing how to close the work of a group is vital to easing the students back home and to maintaining the teacher's own equilibrium.

If I have a two-hour final session on the last Friday afternoon, this is the suite of closure exercises I sometimes use with Intermediate to very Advanced students or with teachers in training:

Your Front Door

I give the class a detailed description of my own porch and front door, going into structure, materials, colour, locks, bolts, hinges, etc. I then group the learners in 5's or 6's to each describe their own front door to each other.



Our Addresses

I give out to students copies of the list I asked them to fill in earlier in the day, giving their snail-mail and e-mail addresses, and their fax and phone numbers.

I ask one of the students questions about his/her family name(s), the street he/she lives in, the conventions used in that country to convey information about the flat, floor, block of flats or houses, etc. I ask historical questions about street names and the name of the village or town.

At first, some students think, "*Now he really has flipped!*" but they soon become aware of the mass of fascinating information encoded in the addresses of their classmates.

- What does 'c/' mean in a Spanish address?
- Why do many Spanish women's names come double-barrelled?
- Is the order of a wife's maiden name and her husband's name the same for Portuguese women?
- How come he is Dimitrov while she is Dimitrova?
- What does 'shi' mean in a Japanese address?
- What are the sequence differences between a Hungarian and a UK address?

I ask these address questions around the group, student by student, but keeping a good pace going.

How Are you Sure you Are Home?

I model this activity by telling the group what makes me sure I am really back home after a journey. In my case, it is going out into the garden with no shoes on (in summer) and watching how the plants have changed during my absence (grown, blossomed, gone wild, dried up, withered, etc).

Each person then tells the group how they really know they are back home. Here are some of the things my last group said:

- "*I breathe in the clean, clear, pure air.*"
(The person was from Nunk, Greenland).
- "*I fling my handbag in the corner of the room, even though I know my husband can't stand me doing it.*"
- "*My cat seems to sense my home-coming and is there to meet me at the bus-stop.*"
- "*Eating real, strong meat, like whale or seal.*"
(The person was from Greenland).



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- "Watering the plants on my balcony - when I have done that I know I am home."
- "My bed, lying down on my bed, just **my** bed."
- "I know I am home when I can sit on the toilet. I never sit on the toilet when I am away from home - I've been here four weeks!"
- "When I hear people speaking my language on the plane."

All the above activities share the one purpose of future-pacing the student and making him or her think forward powerfully to having completed the transition from *here* to *there*. They focus on aspects of home that are likely to be positive. These activities, of course, do not take away the pain of the participant for whom the return home is painful, like some young Japanese women who have really enjoyed being in the UK and out of Japan, or the recent widow who has come on a course to escape the dreadful loneliness of her flat.

Feedback Activities

1 Feedback to Self

I explain that we are going to do three kinds of feedback on the course, and the first kind is secret feedback to self.

I give each student an envelope and ask them to write their own address back home on it. I then ask each student to take a sheet of paper, and put at the top the time, place, day of the week and date. I ask them to write a one-page letter to themselves next week. They are to sign it with their own name. I ask them to please write in English.

I also sit down and write a letter to myself next week. The letters are collected and sent off by the school. (You will find many more good letter-writing ideas in Burbidge et al. *Letters* 1996 Oxford University Press).

2 Feedback to the Group and the Teacher

I provide squares of three differently coloured paper: blue, red and white. The students are asked to write two different things they have learnt from the course on two separate squares of blue paper. They write two things they wished had been different on two red squares. They take two white squares and write any other comments they want. They are *not* asked to identify themselves on the papers.

With the writing phase complete, students can either place their papers in the centre of the group silently, or they can read them out to everybody as they place them in the centre. This system, which I learnt from Bernard Dufeu, allows equally for self-disclosure and for anonymity. The choice is the individual student's.

3 Feedback to the Institution

The students fill in the school's end-of-course questionnaire.

Musical Ending

We end the course with a song or a circle dance. This is all the better for being led by a participant.

Hugs and goodbyes.

PS One way of easing the separation difficulty is to spend the last period together in another room, not the one you have worked in during the course. This frees you a little from the past of the group, and allows you to spend the last few minutes together in a neutral, transitional place.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This article was originally published in *Arena* Issue 24, 34-35, November 1999.

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Mario Rinvoluceri has worked for Pilgrims Language Courses, Canterbury on and off since 1974, its founding year. He is the editor of *Humanising Language Teaching* www.hltmag.co.uk. His last three books are *Ways of Doing* with Davis and Garside, 1999 (Cambridge University Press), *Letters with Burbidge, Gray and Levy*, 1996 (Oxford University Press), and *More Grammar Games* with Paul Davis, 1995 (Cambridge University Press). His first CD Rom, *Mindgame*, came out in 2000.