

PROFESSIONAL EDGE



# GREAT THINGS

*from the*  
**little things**

## Incredibly Scripted Starts & Finishes

BY LAWRENCE BISCONTINI, MA

The AFAA Primary Group Fitness certification arms group fitness instructors with the tools they need to conduct safe and effective classes for the majority of apparently healthy adults who visit studios today. Still, instructors oftentimes fail to realize that true excellence starts from rehearsing and practicing the little things they can do, both during the official start and during the class conclusions, to expand their traditional group fitness instructor responsibilities in terms of customer satisfaction, member retention, and even instructor popularity and professionalism.

Petra Kolber, recipient of the 2001 IDEA Instructor of the Year Award, says that “people may not always remember all of the actual choreography of a class, but research shows that they will always recall the first and last five minutes. Since we only



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have one chance to make a great first impression and conclusion each day, being prepared for the start and end of sessions is key for success." This shows the importance of starting class with as many little special additions to the group fitness instructor traditional responsibilities as possible. To be sure, choreography is choreography, and grapevines, burpees and kettlebell lifts all will figure into necessary exercises from their respective disciplines. *How* some instructors both start and conclude their classes, however, not only sets them apart, but Kolber's observation emphasizes how participants will remember these starts and finishes above all things.

Just like Hollywood script writers give actors award-winning lines, instructors should write out—and memorize—their starts and finishes. Especially important because these are the most controlled aspects of class, as they usually consist of a more "lecture-style" delivery, instructors should professionally plan these announcements. In order to make these *scripted* announcements as polished and perfected as possible, instructors should spend time preparing and rehearsing in an effort to deliver a signature product. Throughout this article, the words in CAPITALS form key points instructors should script into their starts and finishes.

## **STARTS**

Instructors do more than break the ice when they WELCOME. They also exude excellence in customer service by making guests feel special. Since Kolber tells us these are the moments students most will recall after class is finished, having unique starts proves of merit. "Hey, gang, I'm the one who's going to make you dramatically stronger in the next 30 minutes," or "Good morning, my friends; the next hour is an invitation to burn over 300 calories if you accept" are unique examples of nontraditional ways to start class in the WELCOME. Mentioning any NEWCOMERS in the START also gives these individuals the opportunity to feel noticed but not uncomfortable at being new, and lets all participants know that the instructor is aware of everyone in the class, including those with any special ISSUES.

A trick to welcoming everyone is a "verbal hug," in which an instructor only need know the names of three participants in different areas of the classroom. Mentioning "I'd like to welcome each and every one of you today, from Bobbie (in the front right), to Jack (in the back), to Hazel (in the front left), and everyone in between" metaphorically and spatially includes everyone without the instructor having to know more than three names.

Instructors should identify some degree of DIFFICULTY during the class so people know the expectations. If the instructor of group cycling has prepared a recovery ride, for example, that explanation of today's difficulty would be dramatically different from the instructor explaining how hard students should work in a "Caffeinated Boot Camp." Giving students some possible measurement of INTENSITY could also help them discern this DIFFICULTY, such as the talk test, perceived exertion chart or heart rate monitoring.

Before pressing "play," also in the scripted START should be the instructor's mention of the MUSIC & TOOLS of that day, wherever applicable. Explaining "Today you're going to need your pair of Gliding™ Discs and a step setup in the orientation, just the way I have mine here," shows students not only what they will be using during that workout, but also indicates spatial orientation cues about the same. In addition, this is an ideal time to mention any specific reference to the prepared MUSIC playlist, if appropriate. If an instructor has prepared a playlist in which every song connects in some way to the theme of love for Valentine's Day, or strength for Boot Camp, for example, the instructor should mention this to the students so they appreciate the instructor's extra time and attention put into creating that day's lesson.



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Instructors can build excitement about each day’s workout if they include a FORESHADOWING teaser about that day. Jay Blahnik, recipient of the 1996 IDEA Instructor of the Year award, co-creator of Indo-Row® and new rowing program “ShockWave,” foreshadows a race at the onset by telling people they will finish class this way. “Planting that seed at the start of the class builds excitement, and lets them know that they are all part of a team and that all aspects of the class will come together for one larger purpose at the end.” Foreshadowing an element of class specifically does not reference why they have *come* on any given day, but it points to at least one reason why they should excitedly *stay* with anticipation.

Instructors wishing to stand out from their peers should consider a class FOCUS for each session. From pre-choreographed programming to freestyle, whether the actual sequence of moves and music from week to week changes or remains constant, the FOCUS certainly can change. Consider four weeks of an identically taught workout with only the difference of the instructor inviting students as follows: “Today I invite you to focus on your \_\_\_\_\_ more than last week.” FOCUS dramatically changes the feel of an entire workout. Among possible words to fill in the blank are:

- Balance
- Concentration
- Determination
- Form precision
- Intensity
- Intention
- Range of motion
- Speed
- Weight

Whether students are seasoned veterans or newcomers, stating in each and every class the PURPOSE for that class helps everyone understand the overall blueprint that an instructor has for that particular lesson. Helping all students achieve the purpose should then be the goal of each instructor after pressing play. Examples of purpose can range from the super-evident (e.g., cardiovascular, strength or flexibility) to the super-specific “decreasing the imbalance between your stronger and weaker sides of the body in single-leg standing positions.” In any case, offering the purpose reminds them of the overall game plan for that lesson so that students cannot fault the instructor’s approach. This proves especially important in disciplines such as yoga or step training, when there are so many different types of approaches from which to choose.

## FINISHES

Instructors can add the following elements of style into their scripted finishes of class to raise their level of customer service.

GRATITUDE goes a long way when it is sincere, so instructors should make an effort to give specific and immediate feedback to

those who attended on any particular day. Reiterating the “verbal hug” of the first five minutes, especially when using the names of three *different* students from those chosen during the start, makes everyone feel included, appreciated, and thanked for making it through the entire experience. The verbal hug in this instance also helps everyone feel that, although each entered individually as the pronoun “I,” they leave collectively as a team with the pronoun “We.”

FORESHADOW again. As the foreshadowing teaser in the scripted start excites the students about why they have to *stay* for today’s class, a FORESHADOW inserted into the scripted finish can make the students excited about the next class, and serves as an explanation and incentive about why they need to *return*.

Inserting a moment of EDUCATION about the class into the scripted finish can also help underline the instructor’s role as educator. Just simple statements such as, “Remember the alignment we refined in the squat today when getting up and down to do your Facebook® later,” or “Try to take this *ujjayi* breathing technique from yoga back into your work life when you feel stressed to help you invoke this same sense of calmness” makes the fitness work transcend the confines of the classroom and underscores the instructor’s true role as educator. The key is to take one concept of the day’s lesson and teach truly functional exercises by making that concept serve as HOMEWORK TRANSFERENCE into the lives of the students.

## IN CONCLUSION

Taking a few moments to script and memorize STARTS and FINISHES for group fitness classes can help instructors set themselves apart from others by polishing the two most important parts of classes that the students will remember—the first and last five minutes. Incorporating the concepts outlined here in CAPITALS serves as practical examples of items to script—and rehearse—for every class.

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