

Before Reading	True/False	After Reading	True/False
<p data-bbox="235 289 488 548">1. The beginning of a class period is the best time for maximum retention of the lesson.</p> <p data-bbox="235 604 500 863">2. Students can benefit by having the very last minutes of a class period to relax.</p> <p data-bbox="235 919 488 1136">3. By dividing a class period into 2 short blocks, students can retain more.</p>			

## The Primacy-Recency Effect

Research and anecdotal records prove that what is presented first in a lesson is best remembered. What is presented last in a lesson is remembered second best. What comes in the middle of the lesson is remembered least. So what do most school classrooms do in the beginning of class? Attendance, announcements, check homework, and other clerical matters. The meat of the day's lesson doesn't start until 15 minutes into the period. What do students remember? Who was absent, when clubs are meeting, how many problems they got wrong on page 242. When is the critical point of today's knowledge presented? In the middle where it will be remembered least effectively. Let's change this.

Sousa calls this the "Primacy-Recency Effect," and he says the portions of the lesson at the beginning and the end are "prime time" for brain learning. Because we know about this, we need to change what we do. This means we should present the lesson's most important points, the big truths, within the first 5 to 10 minutes. It's okay to do this without students knowing how we arrived at the big truths. We can do that part later in the lesson. The important thing is to give them the essential and enduring knowledge when it is most likely to be remembered—at the beginning. Be careful not to ask students to brainstorm what they know about a topic as you start a lesson. Inaccuracies may be presented and the brain will more than likely remember them and not your corrections of them.

Think about this one: You finish five minutes early and want to give your students a free time as a reward for paying attention and working hard. You tell them they may sit quietly, talk, and even listen to music until the end of the period. Sousa points out that this is prime time for the brain. It will be remembered more than the great truths of your lesson. In these free times at the end of classes, what do students elevate to long term memory storage? Staring out the window, doodling, the song that was playing on the radio and the latest classroom gossip. Your wonderful lesson on habitat carrying capacity was moved to the limited learning zone of the middle portion of the lesson. If you're going to give students a break, therefore, do it in the middle of your lesson, not at the end. Save the end for summarization and reflective activities so students take the learning with them. You can also teach two twenty-minute lessons, rather than one long 45-minute lesson. You increase the amount of prime time for the brain. You have two beginnings and two ends this way. With one longer lesson, you only have one beginning and one ending.