

# Coup de grâce

A **coup de grâce** (/kuː də 'grā:s/; French [ku də grɑ̃s] for "blow of mercy") is a death blow to end the suffering of a severely wounded person or animal.<sup>[1][2]</sup> It may be a mercy killing of mortally wounded civilians or soldiers, friends or enemies, with or without the sufferer's consent.

Examples of *coup de grâce* include shooting the heart or head (typically the back of the skull) of a wounded, but still living, person during an execution or by humanely killing a suffering, mortally wounded soldier, in war, for whom medical aid is not available. In pre-firearms eras the wounded were finished with edged or impact weapons to include cutting throats, blows to the head, and thrusts to the heart. Other examples include the officer leading a firing squad administering a *coup de grâce* to the condemned with a pistol if the first hail of gunfire fails to kill the prisoner or a beheading to quickly end a samurai's agony after seppuku.

The phrase may also refer to the final event that causes a figurative death:<sup>[2]</sup> *The business had been struggling for years. The sharp jump in oil prices was the coup de grâce.*



19th century painting of Native American hunters gathering around a mortally wounded bison, and engaging in a victory shout before administering their "coup de grâce" to the animal.

## See also

- [Euthanasia](#)
- [Animal euthanasia](#)
- [Misericorde](#)

## References

1. Editors of the American Heritage Dictionaries, eds. *The American Heritage Guide to Contemporary Usage and Style*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2005. [ISBN 978-0618604999](#) p. 119.
2. Charles Harrington Elster. *The Big Book of Beastly Mispronunciations: The Complete Opinionated Guide for the Careful Speaker*. 2nd ed. Houghton Mifflin, 2006. [ISBN 978-0618423156](#) pp. 110–111.

## External links

-  The dictionary definition of *coup de grâce* at Wiktionary

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