

# Crew Inspecting Heat Shield, Preparing for Landing

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STS-116 Mission Specialist Joan Higginbotham retrieves items from a drawer on the middeck of the Space Shuttle Discovery during flight day six activities.

Image Credit: NASA TV

The STS-116 crew is conducting a final inspection of Space Shuttle Discovery's heat shield today and preparing for landing.

STS-116 Commander Mark Polansky, Pilot Bill Oefelein and Mission Specialist Nicholas Patrick are using the shuttle's robotic arm and boom extension sensor system to check the heat shield for any space junk or micrometeoroid hits that may have occurred while the orbiter was docked to the International Space Station. The routine inspections are conducted after undocking in preparation for landing, which is scheduled for 3:56 p.m. EST Friday at the Shuttle Landing Facility in

Florida.

Mission Specialists Bob Curbeam, Christer Fuglesang, Joan Higginbotham and Thomas Reiter are stowing items in preparation for the return to Earth.

Tonight, two small scientific satellites will be deployed from the payload bay. The Microelectromechanical System-Based PICOSAT Inspector (MEPSI) mini-satellite will be released from Discovery's cargo bay at 7:16 p.m. MEPSI will demonstrate the use of tiny, low-power satellites to observe larger spacecraft by testing the function of small camera systems and gyroscopes.

The Radar Fence Transponder (RAFT) satellite will be released at 8:56 p.m. RAFT is a student experiment from the United States Naval Academy that uses picosatellites to test the Space Surveillance Radar Fence.

Discovery undocked from the station Tuesday, ending an eight-day stay at the orbital outpost. While there, the crew continued the on-orbit construction of the station with the addition of the P5 spacer truss segment during the first of four spacewalks. The next two spacewalks were devoted to the rewiring of the station's power system, leaving it in a permanent setup. A fourth spacewalk was added to allow the crew to retract solar arrays that had folded improperly.

Discovery also delivered a new crew member and more than two tons of equipment and supplies to the station. Almost two tons of items no longer needed on the station will return to Earth with STS-116.

Source: NASA

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