

THREE, THREE, THREE

FROM THINKING IN THREES: THE POWER OF THREE IN WRITING

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Lights! Camera! Action

All good things come in threes
Norwegian proverb

Ready! Aim! Fire!

There is something special, maybe even magical, about the number three. It's everywhere. It's omnipresent. It's ubiquitous.

- Speech coaches explain to their students that the audience more readily remembers something if it is repeated three times.
- Military instructors teach their soldiers to limit their focus to three tasks or goals.
- Comedians use a three-part formula for jokes. First, they set up the situation; then they continue the theme; and finally they twist the theme around, delivering the punch line.
- Memorable historical speeches often include three-part lines:
Friends, Romans, countrymen . . . (William Shakespeare)
Government of the people, by the people, for the people. (Abraham Lincoln)
Free at last! Free at last! Thank God Almighty, we are free at last! (Martin Luther King)
- Good teachers know that people learn better in threes: reading about something, writing about it, and speaking about it.
- Advertisers create memorable slogans using three-beat lines: "The few, the proud, the Marines," or simple three-word catch phrases: "Just do it."
- Sales trainers teach their salespeople to give the buyer three reasons to buy the product, three benefits of the product, three testimonials from satisfied customers, and finally, three choices on how to purchase the product.

As you can see, thinking in threes is not hard to do because threes are all around us

JUST THREE WORDS

The three most lethal words in a traveler's lexicon are *you never know*. (Gerald Nachman)

The three most beautiful words in the English language: *We the people*. (Benazir Bhutto)

My three least favorite words are *I don't care*. (James Caan)

In three words I can sum up everything I've learned about life: *It goes on*. (Robert Frost)

The three most important words in the English language: *Wait a minute*. (Sam Raburn)

Student Activities

1. See how many things that come in threes your students can list, such as: breakfast, lunch, and dinner; knife, fork, and spoon; Lions, tigers, and bears.
2. See if students can come up with some sayings that use just three words similar to those listed above but related to their own lives, likes, and dislikes – or list familiar phrases like "knock on wood."