

The “Rule of 3” to improve your speaking: September 2015

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I write about success, leadership and communications.

As a communications coach, I strongly recommend using the ‘Rule of 3’ in all areas of communications: marketing, pitches, and presentations.

“3” is the most persuasive number in communications.

Since three is easier to remember than four, or seven, I suggest sticking to the Rule of 3 whenever possible. If your listener will only remember about three things from your conversation, presentation, or email, why overwhelm them with twenty-two key messages? Longer lists are complex, confusing, and convoluted.



The Rule of 3 is everywhere. The next time you are standing in the security line at a U.S airport, pay attention to the TSA instructions. The “3 simple steps to security” are: Show ID and boarding pass, take out liquids, and take off shoes and jackets. A former Air Force pilot approached me after a presentation on improving communication skills and said it reminded him of the “3 rules of surviving captivity”: **fellowship** with other prisoners, **survive**, and **return** with honor.

Steve Jobs' love of threes.



Steve Jobs using the Rule of 3

Steve Jobs applied the Rule of 3 in nearly every presentation and product launch. In 2007 Jobs introduced the first iPhone as the “third” of Apple’s revolutionary product categories (the first two were the Macintosh and the iPod). He even said that Apple would be introducing “three” revolutionary products—a new iPod, a phone, and an Internet communications device. Jobs repeated the three products slowly until the audience finally figured out he was talking about one device capable of handling all three tasks.

In 2010 Jobs introduced the first iPad with a slide showing the new tablet as a “third device” between a smartphone and a laptop. The iPad, he told the audience, would also come in “three models”: 16, 32, and 64 GB of flash storage.

In 2011, Jobs introduced the iPad 2 as “thinner, lighter, and faster” than the original. The three adjectives so accurately described the new device, thousands of blog and newspaper headlines included those three words.

Try to apply the Rule of 3. Divide a presentation into three parts. Introduce a product with three benefits. Give me three reasons to hire you! The rule of 3 worked for famous people such as Thomas Jefferson, it worked for Jobs, and it will work for you.

Homework Question:

1. Using the “Rule of 3 technique, write down “your take” on the “Rule of 3?”
2. PRINTOUT your homework.
3. Bring your homework to class next week.
4. Be prepared to present your data in a meeting situation next week.
5. Good luck!