

Teaching Tip: 3-2-1 Bridge



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One of the greatest joys in teaching is watching your students go from a limited or basic understanding of a topic to a more informed and nuanced comprehension. Helping our students to see that development in themselves, can help them to understand how much they have learned.

The 3-2-1 Bridge activity has students write down some of their thoughts on a topic before and after learning something new. Then students are asked to look at their original thoughts and compare them with their new perceptions. This lets you and the students see how their thinking on the issue has progressed and developed.

The 3-2-1 Bridge exercise has been developed and presented by [Project Zero](#), of the Harvard Graduate School of Education, as part of their Thinking Routines. For more Thinking Routine activities check out the project's resources on [Visible Thinking](#).

3-2-1

Prior knowledge

To start the 3-2-1 bridge exercise have your students think about what they might already know on a subject and have them write down:

- 3 Words related to the topic
- 2 Questions they have on the topic
- 1 Example, analogy, simile, or metaphor of the topic

Once they have written down their thoughts you can have them discuss their 3-2-1 with a partner, a small group, or as a class. Use this time to show some of the different ways to think about the same topic. You can also collect your students' responses to get a picture of what they already know or are thinking about the topic.

New information

After your students have had the chance to write down what they already think about the topic, it's time to teach them something new. This exercise works best if you teach your students a very different perspective or approach to your topic. You can use their comments from the prior knowledge 3-2-1 to help you decide what would be a different way of approaching the information.

Post knowledge

After you have taught your students something new about the topic they should do another 3-2-1 activity. Without looking at their last responses, have the students write a new set of 3-2-1s. Just like the first round, once they have written down their ideas you can have them again share with a partner, group, or the class.

Bridge

The key to this activity is in the bridge. The 3-2-1 Bridge thinking routine is a [metacognitive](#) activity where students should look at how their thinking has changed and developed with new information. The bridge part of the 3-2-1 Bridge activity is to have your students look at their responses from before and after they learned the material. Have them compare the differences in the responses and consider why their thinking on this topic may have changed.