



Session Builders

140 Three-Letter Words

Purpose/Objectives:

Whenever people are asked to think creatively or apply creativity to problem solving, it may be necessary to get “warmed up.” This exercise does that and more. It energizes the creative side of the brain and promotes freedom of expression and group cohesiveness. Participants are divided into small groups. Their task is to list as many parts of the body spelled with three letters (e.g., eye, toe, lip) as possible. They reconvene to compare lists and share observations about creativity and problem solving. Participants are then better able to apply creative energies to more complex issues or problems.

Type: Discussion Stimulator

Time Required: 30 minutes

Group Size: 8 to 50

Some ways to use this Session Builder include:

- An icebreaker or warm-up for a session on creativity or problem solving.
- An icebreaker or warm-up exercise for an actual on-the-job problem solving taskforce or employee participation group.

Preparation:

- No handouts or special equipment are required.
- Provide paper and pencils for each group.
- Make sure the room is flexible enough to accommodate simultaneous small group discussions.
- Have a chalkboard/chalk or flip chart/markers available to record group responses (optional).

Process:

- To prepare the group, read or paraphrase the following:

In order to be really creative or apply creativity to a problem situation, you really need to let yourself go. You need to temporarily abandon logical thinking and open up to new ideas and new ways of looking at things. But it's sometimes difficult to just "jump right into" creative thinking. So, in just a moment, I'm going to ask you to break into small groups and take part in a mind-stretching exercise. It may seem somewhat frivolous; don't worry about that. Its purpose is to energize the creative side of your brain and help you get a better understanding of the creative process.

- Using any convenient method, create small discussion groups that consist of four to six participants each.
- Have each group select a recorder, and make sure each recorder has pencil and paper.
- Tell the groups that they're to make a list of body parts that are spelled with three (and only three) letters (e.g., *eye, ear, toe*, etc.). They are to list as many as possible, as quickly as possible. The recorder is to write each part down as it is named.
- Allow about 10 minutes for the small groups to prepare their lists.
- Move about the room to monitor progress and provide encouragement and stimulation. If a group seems to be stymied, challenge them by indicating that there are nearly 30 parts of the body that are spelled with three letters.
- Expect some amusement as groups think of "street names" that fit the requirement.

- Other groups have compiled this list of three-letter body parts:

Arm	Lap
Leg	Fat
Ear	Sac
Toe	Oil
Lip	Bag
Eye	Tip
Hip	Gas
Lid	Rod
Pit	Pad
Gum	Wax
Egg	Ham
Ova	H2O
Rib	Jaw
Gut	

Note that some are substances (oil, gas), not truly body parts. Define "body parts" as broadly as you wish for your participants.

Discussion:

- Reconvene the session by asking each group how many items they have listed. While it's not necessary to call for or record all possible responses, groups with shorter lists will be interested in what groups with longer lists have written. Let the discussion flow somewhat freely back and forth at this point.
- Begin to focus the discussion by asking groups with longer lists how they were able to do so well. Ask groups with shorter lists what seemed to block or inhibit their creative energies. You may now wish to concentrate on either creativity in general or creative problem solving in particular.
- Here are some suggested questions for a discussion that's related to creativity:

How is your own personal creativity affected by the ideas of others?

How well do you listen to other people's creative ideas?

How do you feel/react when you suspect others are not listening to your ideas?

To what degree do you hold back ideas you feel may be unacceptable to the group?

Are people more creative when working individually or as members of a group?

What are some of the requirements for a group to be creative? (The group should mention things like freedom from status or ego threats and political positioning, deferred judgment, eagerness to participate, and good listening.)

What, if anything, can you do to be more creative on the job?

- The following are some suggested questions for a discussion about creative problem solving:

Did group members assume different roles in solving the problem (e.g., leader, active, passive, or serious participant, etc.)?

Ask several participants, **What role did you assume? Why?**

Did some or most members of the group feel any frustration during the exercise? Why? How did the group respond to and handle this frustration?

What are the advantages and disadvantages of working on a problem in a group as opposed to trying to solve it individually?

What can each person do to improve group problem solving on the job?

- Ask several members of the group to help you summarize the main points of the discussion.

Options/Variations:

- With some groups, you may sense a need to process the entire list of three-letter words. To do so, go from group to group asking each recorder to share two or three from the list. You may wish to write the responses on a flip chart or chalkboard. Handle the "street names" delicately to minimize any potential embarrassment. Use a dash or other symbol to avoid writing them out completely on the chart.

Notes:

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TRC Interactive, Inc.
Five Miller Road
Harrisburg, PA 17109
1-800-222-9909
In PA (717) 652-3100