

3 Sum Closest

To solve the 3 Sum Closest problem, you can adapt the classic 3 Sum two pointer technique, but instead of finding a triplet that sums to exactly 0, you'll track the closest sum to the target seen so far.

Strategy Overview:

1. Sort the array `nums`.
2. Iterate through each element `i`:
 - use two pointers: `left = i + 1`, `right = n - 1`
 - for each triplet `nums[i] + nums[left] + nums[right]`, check:
 - if `sum == target`: you've found the exact answer → return it
 - else, if `abs(sum - target) < abs(closest - target)`, update `closest`
 - move `left` & `right` based on whether `sum < target` or `sum > target`
3. Return the best closest sum at the end.

Initialization: Use a large dummy value like:

```
int closest = nums[0] + nums[1] + nums[2];
```

Pointer Movement Logic:

- If `sum < target` → try larger sums → `left++`
- If `sum > target` → try smaller sums → `right--`

Time Complexity:

- Sorting: $O(n \log n)$
- Two pointer loop: $O(n^2)$
- Efficient enough for $n \leq 500$