



THE UNIVERSITY
of EDINBURGH

THREE MINUTE THESIS

Handbook





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The Competition

The Three Minute Thesis (3MT®) is an international competition celebrating the exciting research conducted by PhD students. Developed by the University of Queensland in 2008, the competition requires contestants to condense their research into a three-minute, one-slide presentation for a non-specialist audience.

The exercise cultivates students' academic, presentation, and research communication skills. In 2013, the competition expanded to include the first Universitas 21 (U21) 3MT® competition, where several universities from around the world compete in a virtual competition. The first University of Edinburgh 3MT® took place in 2013 and since then our students have competed both at UK and international level.

This handbook

This handbook will provide you with all of the important technical details (contained in the INFORMATION section) you need to know about the 3MT® competition. It also offers advice and tips, as well as contributions from previous finalists (which you can find in the ADVICE section), to help you prepare a successful presentation. We have addressed the most frequently asked questions from contestants and hope you find it useful. Good luck in the competition, may you enjoy it as much as we do.

The IAD Researcher Development Team



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INFORMATION

Being forced to condense my ideas and distil my thesis down into the most essential three minutes has been absolutely invaluable. I participated before I was done writing, so it was very helpful first off to ask myself: what actually is the point of this? Why should anyone care? What am I adding to knowledge?

Alison Wheatley, 2014 University Finalist

Who is eligible?

Active PhD and Professional Doctorate (Research) candidates who have successfully passed their confirmation milestone (including candidates whose thesis is under submission) by the date of their first presentation are eligible to participate in 3MT competitions at all levels, including the Asia-Pacific 3MT competition. Graduates are not eligible.

What are the rules?

- Only a single static PowerPoint slide is permitted
- No slide transitions, animations or ‘movement’ of any description are allowed
- The slide is to be presented from the beginning of the oration
- No additional electronic media (e.g. sound and video files) are permitted
- No additional props (e.g. costumes, musical instruments, laboratory equipment) are permitted
- Presentations are limited to 3 minutes maximum and competitors exceeding 3 minutes are disqualified
- Presentations are to be spoken word (e.g. no poems, raps or songs)
- Presentations are to commence from the stage
- Presentations are considered to have commenced when a presenter starts their presentation through either movement or speech
- The decision of the adjudicating panel is final



Does your talk tell a story? Does it progress logically? Have you explained why your work matters, and what the implications are of your findings? Have you left the audience lost in undefined terms and acronyms? Have you caught their interest by making your talk relevant to them?

Emma Hodcroft, 2014 University Winner and People's Choice Winner, UK

How will I be judged?

The presentations are judged by a diverse panel of judges from a range of disciplines. The exact composition varies each year, but we always make sure they are experienced academics. It is unlikely that they will be experts in your field, so they are also part of the 'intelligent, lay audience' which is at the core of 3MT®. The panel chooses the winner and the runner up in the competition.

There is also a People's Choice award, where each audience member votes for their favourite. We always encourage the audience to be impartial and follow the criteria outlined on the next page.

The judging criteria centres on four key sections: comprehension, content, engagement and communication and should be the focus of your presentation.

Comprehension and content

Did the presentation provide an understanding of the background and significance to the research question being addressed, while explaining terminology and avoiding jargon?

Did the presentation clearly describe the impact and/or results of the research, including conclusions and outcomes?

Did the presentation follow a clear and logical sequence?

Was the thesis topic, research significance, results/impact and outcomes communicated in language appropriate to a non-specialist audience?

Did the presenter spend adequate time on each element of their presentation - or did they elaborate for too long on one aspect or was the presentation rushed?

Engagement and communication

Did the oration make the audience want to know more?

Was the presenter careful not to trivialise or generalise their research?

Did the presenter convey enthusiasm for their research?

Did the presenter capture and maintain their audience's attention?

Did the speaker have sufficient stage presence, eye contact and vocal range; maintain a steady pace, and have a confident stance?

Did the PowerPoint slide enhance the presentation - was it clear, legible, and concise?

What happens when?

The competition runs across the year and you can find an approximate timeline below. Please be aware that the actual dates may vary from year to year. For additional information please see <http://bit.ly/29b3nky>





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ADVICE

You need to make it simple enough to understand, without underestimating your audience and being condescending. I found that the best thing to do was give my talk to friends and family who weren't scientists and see how they felt about it.

Amelia Howarth, 2016 University Finalist

But what should I say?

Designing your presentation should be done with your non-specialist audience in mind, whilst conveying your enthusiasm for your research. Remember to stick to the three minute, one slide limits!

We've listed a few suggestions below to help you write and create your own presentation.

Language

Avoid jargon and academic language and ensure you explain concepts and people important to your research. At the same time, be careful not to dumb down or devalue your research. If appropriate to your research, make sure you use respectful language when talking about people whose lives are linked to the topic of your research.

Structure

You may like to present your 3MT® with a beginning, middle and an end or in smaller sections, such as an introduction, key points, and a summary.

Hooks

Get us excited about what you are doing as quickly as possible with a hook. A hook is something that builds intrigue, suspense or raises a question in the audience's mind.

Slide

Think about your slide: text and complicated graphics can distract your audience – you don't want them to read your slide rather than listen to your 3MT.

Revise

Proof read your 3MT presentation by reading it aloud to yourself and to an audience of friends and family.

This allows you to receive some critical feedback, and check your grammar and writing style. Don't be afraid to ask your audience if your presentation clearly highlights what your research is and why it is important. If relevant, try presenting to someone with lived experience of the things you're talking about - does your work resonate with them?

And how should I say it?

Effective presentations are not just about content; your verbal communication and body language can have a major effect on how an audience understands and responds to your research. The delivery of your presentation also makes up an important part of the 3MT judging criteria, and we've collected some tips below to help you think about your public speaking skills.

The IAD offers training for those who want to take part in the competition. Courses range from the 'Three Minute Thesis - Competition Preparation' course to wider presentation skills workshops.

The winners from the College heats will also take part in a number of sessions developed for the finalists. For more information on IAD workshops visit: <http://bit.ly/29xJmIF>

To get a flavour of what a good 3MT® presentation should look like, you can watch previous finalists' recordings on YouTube (pre-2016) or Media Hopper.



A great talk, a convincing speech, a captivating presentation, has nothing to do with luck or sheer talent. It has very little to do with being a gifted speaker, or with being blessed with an exciting topic. A great talk is simply hard work, nothing more and nothing less. It is practice, and more practice, and then some more practice....

Mara Götz, 2013 People's Choice Winner

There is no one right way to deliver a presentation, but here are some practical tips:

Practice, practice, practice

- Feeling nervous before you present is natural, and sometimes a little nervousness can even be beneficial to your overall speech. Nonetheless, it is important to practice so you can present with confidence and clarity

Vocal range

- Speak clearly and use variety in your voice (fast/slow, loud/soft)
- Do not rush - find your rhythm
- Remember to pause at key points as it gives the audience time to think

Body language

- Stand straight and confidently
- Hold your head up and make eye contact
- Never turn your back to the audience
- Practise how you will use your hands and move around the stage. It is okay to move around energetically if that is your personality, however it is also appropriate for a 3MT presentation to be delivered from a single spot on stage

P Previous Winners



Finally, we asked some of the University of Edinburgh's finalists for advice and tips on presenting for the competition.

If you are not quite convinced to participate in the competition I can highly recommend going to the workshops offered by the IAD in February before any of the competition heats take place. They motivated me to actually sit down and conceptualise ideas. I believe, I wouldn't have taken part if I hadn't gone to the workshops!

Tomke Kossen-Veenhuis, 2016 University Finalist

As Einstein says: "You do not really understand something unless you can explain it to your grandmother".

Mandan Kazzazi, 2015 University Finalist

Practice, over and over, until you can say it in your sleep. Write down things the way you would say them, not the way you would write them, so it feels and sounds natural. Nobody wants to listen to a stilted recital. Add some jokes. Pause for the laughter. Test out your speech on friends and family who are not in your field, since it's lay people that you need to be speaking to.

Alison Wheatley, 2013 University Finalist

There's no right or wrong way of presenting- be yourself and let your personality/ enthusiasm for the topic help guide the way you prepare your talk. Once you're happy with it, try practicing it in front of friends, family, colleagues, and in as many different places as you can. This helps to ensure it's relevant and engaging to a broad audience, and that you're comfortable delivering your talk in any environment.

Madeleine Long, 2016 University Winner

P Previous Winners



Although the 3MT is aimed at an intelligent lay audience, begin by simplifying your research to a level where you are explaining it to your 10 year old. This really helps you to think about the very basics of your research.

Priya Hari, 2016 University Runner-up

You don't have much time so make sure you really use your words carefully. It can be tempting to try to fit too much in; in my opinion it's better to say less but say it well rather than rushing. And other than that I think it's all about practice.

Donald Slater, 2015 University Finalist

Practice, practice, practice! Once you know the content your talk really well from memory, you can start to work on the delivery of your talk. If you have a good handle on both of these, you'll have more confidence - which will come in useful when you're faced with the audience! Also, you never want to walk away from something feeling you could have been better prepared. Practice as much as you can, and you'll know you've done your best.

Amelia Howarth, 2016 University Finalist

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