



Three Minute Thesis (3MT™) Student Handbook



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Introduction

Three Minute Thesis (3MT™) is a research communication competition developed by The University of Queensland in 2008.

It provides a unique opportunity to profile and celebrate the innovative research conducted by postgraduate students from around the world, and provides you with the opportunity to enhance your communication skills.

In 2011, 43 universities participated in the Trans-Tasman 3MT and students from the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada and Hong Kong took part in their own regional events.

La Trobe entered this competition for the first time in 2012 and our inaugural winner was David Rayner from the Faculty of Science, Technology & Engineering.

We hope you enjoy participating in the 2013 3MT competition and we look forward to learning more about your research.



Professor Keith Nugent,
Deputy Vice-Chancellor
(Research)



Professor Andrew Brennan,
Pro Vice Chancellor
Graduate Research



Mr Mark Clisby,
Director Research
Services



Professor Annette Street,
Director RED Unit
Research, Education &
Development

Event Overview

What is it?

Three Minute Thesis (3MT) is a research communication competition developed by The University of Queensland. Research higher degree (PhD and MPhil) students have three minutes to present a compelling oration on their thesis topic and its significance. 3MT is not an exercise in trivialising or 'dumbing-down' research, but challenges students to consolidate their ideas and research discoveries so they can be presented concisely to a non-specialist audience.



“The 3mt competition was a great way to simplify my thesis to the most basic elements: what I’m trying to do, why I’m trying to do it and how I’m planning on doing it. And hopefully make it entertaining and easy to understand. Simple!”

**David Rayner – La Trobe University – 3MT Winner 2012
Faculty of Science, Technology & Engineering**

History

The first 3MT was held at The University of Queensland in 2008 with 160 RHD students competing. Enthusiasm for the 3MT concept grew and its adoption by numerous universities led to the development of an international competition.

The inaugural Trans-Tasman 3MT was held at UQ in 2010 with 33 universities participating. In 2011, 43 universities were represented at the Trans-Tasman 3MT that was hosted by The University of Western Australia, and for the first time students from the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, and Hong Kong took part in their own regional events.

In 2012, Tim Paris from The University of Western Sydney was the winner. As the winning competitor’s university has the opportunity to host the event the following year, The University of Western Sydney will welcome participants for the Trans-Tasman 3MT in 2013.

Why participate?

During your Research Higher Degree there is a strong focus on the production of your thesis. The ability to communicate the importance of your research project and articulate your findings is very valuable. Three Minute Thesis provides you with the opportunity to:

- communicate your ideas effectively to the wider community;
- describe your research findings to a non-specialist audience;
- crystallise your thoughts about your thesis;
- increase your profile within the La Trobe University research community, staff and wider community; and
- network with other RHD students.

Prizes

The winners of the La Trobe 3MT will be awarded with the following prizes:

First Prize:	\$5000 research travel grant
Runner-up:	\$2000 research travel grant

The winner of the competition will go on to represent La Trobe at the Trans-Tasman 3MT where the winners will be awarded with the following prizes:

First Prize:	\$5000 research travel grant
Runner-up:	\$2000 research travel grant
People's Choice:	\$1000 research travel grant.

Key Dates

Date	Item
13 July	All School semi-finals to be completed by this date
August	Faculty Heats
19 September	La Trobe Final
27 September	Deadline for notification of entrants to The University of Western Sydney
18 October	Trans-Tasman 3MT Competition - The University of Western Sydney

Media

What if your thesis topic starts to get noticed? How would you deal with the media if they approached you to talk about your work?

La Trobe University Media and Communications Unit is an award-winning, professional group which offers a 2 hour practical media training session to all 3MT participants for free.

During the session you will learn:

- Why dealing with the media is important, and how it can help your career
- The different types of media and how to approach them
- How to get your ideas into the media
- How to deal with tricky or difficult questions

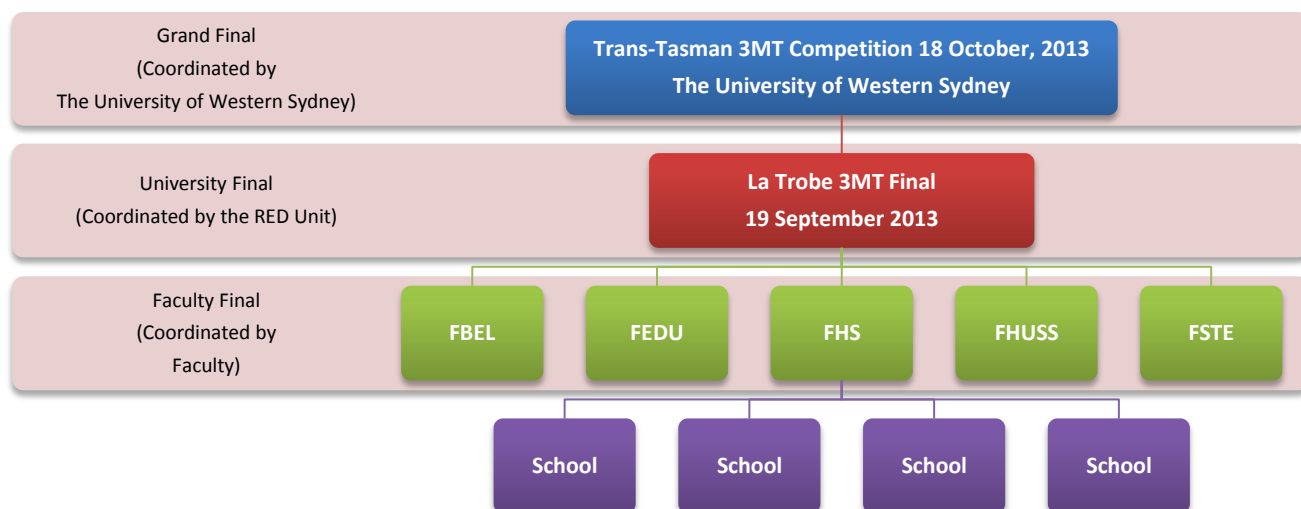
Practical media training will help you with how best to communicate, one of the most important functions in the contemporary workplace.

Information on these sessions can be obtained from Carol Burnett at the RED Unit:

c.burnett@latrobe.edu.au

Progression

The following chart outlines the progression of students throughout the competition and highlights key contacts for each event.



Please note that the winner of each heat or final is expected to represent their Faculty/La Trobe at the next stage of the competition. If the winner is for some reason unable to attend the final, the runner-up will proceed to the next round of the competition.

NOTE: it is extremely important for participants to have several attempts at the presentation to gather experience and feedback. It is for this reason that we suggest School heats and the Faculty heats.

“It provided a good means for me to synthesise and focus my research presentations as well as meeting others in the same situation. I enjoyed the process and meeting the other researchers”

**Colin Hoad - La Trobe University
Outdoor and Environmental Education
Faculty of Education Runner Up 2012**



Competition rules and guidelines

Eligibility

Anyone who is active in a PhD* or MPhil* program (including thesis under submission) will be eligible to participate in 3MT. Graduates are not eligible.

Competitors who are eligible on the date of their first presentation in their local competition shall remain so for the Trans-Tasman 3MT irrespective of subsequent changes to their status (e.g. those who subsequently graduate before the date of the Trans-Tasman 3MT event).

** Note: degree must be at least two thirds research (definition drawn from Grant Guidelines 2006 for Higher Education Support Act (HESA) 2003)*



"I am thankful to La Trobe University for organizing the 3MT, which gave me the opportunity to condense and convey my PhD thesis just in three minutes. Now I can communicate the essence of my research to anyone, which I believe is an essential skill for a PhD student".

Dinithi Ranasingh – La Trobe University – 3 MT Runner-up 2012 - Faculty of Business, Economics and Law

Judging Criteria

At every level of the competition each competitor will be judged on the three judging criteria listed below. Please note that each criterion is equally weighted and has an emphasis on audience.

1. **Comprehension:** did the presentation help the audience understand the research?
 - Did the presenter clearly outline the nature and aims of research?
 - Do you know what is significant about this research?
 - Did the presentation follow a logical sequence?
2. **Engagement:** did the oration make the audience want to know more?
 - Was the presenter careful not to trivialise or dumb down their research?
 - Did the presenter convey enthusiasm for their work?
 - Did the presenter capture and maintain their audience's attention?
 - Would I like to know more about the speaker's research?
3. **Communication style:** was the thesis topic and its significance communicated in language appropriate to a non-specialist audience?
 - Did the speaker use sufficient eye contact and vocal range, maintain a steady pace, and a confident stance? Did the speaker avoid scientific jargon, explain terminology that needed to be used, and provide adequate background information to illustrate points?
 - Did the presenter spend the right amount of time on each element of their presentation – or did they elaborate for too long or were rushed?
 - Did the PowerPoint slide enhance, rather than detract from, their presentation – was it clear, legible, and concise?

Rules

The following rules have been developed for the competition:

- A single static PowerPoint slide is permitted (no slide transitions, animations or 'movement' of any description, 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 movement or speech.
- The decision of the adjudicating panel is final.

“The 3MT was an exciting format in which to present my research. This helped me actually understand my research questions succinctly, such that I could communicate this to a lay person”

**Venkat Narayanan – La Trobe university
Faculty of Business, Economics and Law - Runner-up, 2012**



Preparing your 3MT presentation

Even the world's best public speakers prepare before important presentations. To assist you with your preparations, please find a few suggestions below that will help you in writing your presentation, creating your slide and while practising your verbal presentation.

Making the Most of Your Three Minutes

Congratulations on deciding to have ago at the Three Minute Thesis competition – you will have an absolute ball I am sure and along the way you will acquire some extremely useful communication skills.

If you can crystallise your years and years of intense study into three minutes that will captivate, entertain and educate a non-specialist audience, I'd say there isn't a grant you can't get or a job you can't secure. Good luck!

Your preparation for the 3MT should be divided into two phases: let's call them pre-production and performance. But before that there is one big question you might like to consider: do you want to tackle this on your own? 3MT can be a real challenge and you might like to think about assembling a pit crew – a group of friends who will give you honest and critical feedback (“great opening line, but the purple floral shirt sucks”) as you progress through the competition. Just a thought – I'll leave that one with you.



“Entering the 3MT competition not only encouraged me to conceptualise my thesis in a whole new way, but it got my research out to a wider audience. I experienced a particular joy in memorising and performing my work and was rewarded with appreciation and recognition”

**Karina Quinn – La Trobe University
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences – Winner and
People's Choice 2012**

And now on to 3MT glory...

Pre-Production

There are FIVE factors over which you have varying degrees of control in the 'pre-production' phase.

These are:

1. the venue
2. the technology
3. the judges
4. how you look
5. how you sound

Let's take them one by one – the first three are elements with which you need to become familiar and the last two are elements over which you have total control. The main aim - particularly with the first three - is to become as familiar and comfortable with the situation in which you will be speaking as possible.

1. The Venue: You need to find out where each heat, semi-final or final is taking place and check out the venue before you actually take to the stage. If the first time you see a venue is when you arrive to speak there, you are not taking this seriously! Look at where you will stand, where your audience will sit, where your slide will be projected and take note of the acoustics of the room. Become thoroughly familiar with the venue.

2. The Technology: This is, as far as you are concerned, the microphone that you will use. Projection of your slide will be someone else's responsibility so you needn't worry about that. This is, again, an exercise in becoming familiar with the environment in which you will be performing. There are four

possible microphone types you may be confronted with: Static, wired, on a stand – just remember to keep your mouth six inches or so from the mike and not to move too far from it. While these types are not overly directional, if you move your head too far to one side, you will 'go off mike' and not be heard.

Wireless, hand-held (a.k.a. the ice-cream cone) – same distance rules apply, but it's very hard to go off mike with this one. However, just be aware that you'll lose one of your hands for gesturing in this situation so, if your presentation culminates with a version of the 'fish that got away was this big' story, you're in trouble, to put it mildly.

The bug, wired or wireless – the little bug-sized thing they pin on newsreaders, usually on a lapel or shirt collar. Just make sure you don't brush this one during your performance and avoid wearing dangly jewellery that could get tangled with it or, worse still, rub against it while you are speaking. Synthetic fibres can be a problem here, but let's just assume you have too much good taste to be seen out wearing nylon and you'll be fine.

The boom, over-the-ear, 'Madonna' mike – not a lot you can do if the venue uses these; if you have a choice say a polite 'no thank you,' but if you have to wear one, just try not to look too silly.

With all mikes - whether they are on a stand, in your hand, pinned to your clothes or over your ear – there are two golden rules: the first is - don't touch them! Ever!! This makes a horrible noise and looks unprofessional (there is nothing more amateurish that a public speaker can do than to walk up to the microphone stand and fiddle with it).

“Entering the 3MT competition was a valuable experience as it helped me gain more confidence with public speaking. It also presented the challenge of being creative with my scientific research, by describing it in an interesting and engaging manner instead of just presenting facts and figures.”

**Nicole Butler - La Trobe University
Faculty of Science, Technology and Engineering Runner-up, 2012**



Secondly, always assume all microphones are always 'on.' Many a politician has come to a sticky end by assuming a mike is off and I'd hate you to be overheard muttering unflattering comments about your judging panel. Not the best way to get a high score, I can assure you!

And there is, of course, the possibility that – particularly in a small heat – that you may not even have a microphone. In this situation, just make sure you speak clearly to the person in the back row.

- 3. The Judges:** Before you begin your heat you should find out who will be judging you. Universities are small places and chances are you will know or at least recognise the people judging you. There's not a lot more you can do about this factor – bribes, threats and coercion being generally frowned upon – but knowing who your judges will be is part of feeling totally comfortable with the situation when you do make your presentation.
- 4. How you Look:** You might only be speaking to the audience and the judges for three short minutes, but for all intents and purposes you might as well be taking part in a one hour job interview. How you look is vitally important and can convey some very positive and equally some very negative messages about you and your sense of professionalism. Find a friend and try staring at him or her for three minutes: you will be amazed at how much you see in that person and how many subliminal messages you receive from the way they are dressed and the way they look. Just as the suit and tie at the job interview convey that sense of professionalism that sends the message that you are the best person for the job, the right look for your three-minute pieces performance will convey very similar messages to the audience and, more importantly, the judges.



“Participating in the Three-minute Thesis Competition has challenged me to understand my research better. It improved my communication skills when presenting thoughts to a more diverse audience in a wider scope”.

**Made Hery Santosa - La Trobe University
Faculty of Education Winner 2012**

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- 5. How you Sound:** Again, there are some very important subliminal messages conveyed in the way that you sound to your audience and your judges; if you need to warm up your vocal chords you should do this before the performance as you need to sound absolutely at your best from the moment you begin speaking. If your voice is even in the slightest bit croaky try any of the variations on good, old-fashioned honey and lemon or that favourite of opera singers - a small slug of brandy (just make sure you have gum or mints handy in this case – there's another subliminal message you don't want to be sending!). Clearing your throat or coughing during the performance - particularly a nervous cough - sends a very negative critical message to your audience and to your judging panel.

Performance

Now we know how you are going to say it, let's look at what you are actually going to say during your "all important" three minutes of fame - what we are going to call the 'performance.'

When you come to write the script for your three-minute thesis presentation it is absolutely vital that you remember that you are presenting to a non-specialist audience. Probably the best way to think of this audience is to imagine that they are just as intelligent as well-informed as you are, but that they haven't had time to do the research that you have. Crucially, this means not dumbing down your content and not patronising or condescending to your audience in any way whatsoever. There are a few simple rules you should bear in mind when writing the script for your 3MT presentation, rules which also apply to pretty much any writing for a non-academic audience.

Writing for a non-specialist audience means...

Using shorter words, shorter sentences and shorter paragraphs - if you aren't clear as to the impact of this sort of writing can have, just go and read any good journalism or even read a good writer of fiction like Ernest Hemingway - someone who is an absolute master at using shorter words in shorter sentences in short paragraphs to absolutely dynamic effect.

Choosing active verbs over passive verbs: when speaking to a non-specialist audience you should never hide behind the impassive verb - all those 'it is thought that', 'it is proposed that', 'it has been suggested that', etc. First of all you only have three minutes to get your message across and to use more words than is necessary is basically a waste of time and, secondly, in the eyes of the non-specialist audience member, the impassive verb is tantamount to an act of linguistic cowardice - if you really think something, then at least have the guts to tell us that with two simple words - 'I think.'

Avoiding jargon, acronyms, etc. - the whole point of using jargon and acronyms is to enhance that sense of exclusivity which academia seems to thrive on. However, when you're speaking to a non-specialist audience there is nothing worse than projecting a sense of exclusivity through the use of jargon and acronyms. This is guaranteed to instantly turn that audience off so, when you're speaking to your 3MT audience, you need to be as inclusive as possible. So - wherever possible avoid anything that the general public might not understand and, if you can really find no alternative word, then qualify or explain what it is you are talking about.

Qualifying unknown concepts, people, places, etc. - never make assumptions about your audience for a non-specialist presentation, particularly assumptions that they will automatically know what you are talking about. This is a classic academic trap - "I understand subject x and find it absolutely fascinating, therefore everyone understands subject x and finds it absolutely fascinating." WRONG! Not just wrong, but lazy too. With names, for example, there are very few people who are universally known; once you get past the Pope, the Queen, Michael Jackson or the Beatles - at a pinch, Madonna - then anyone of lesser celebrity probably needs some sort of qualification when mentioned to a non-academic audience.

So, you might know that Sir John Smith is the leading authority in your field, but the rest of us will almost certainly have never heard of him or his earth-shattering discoveries. This means you need to qualify him when you introduce him - Sir John Smith, one of the world's leading authorities on ... etc. Afterwards by all means namedrop as often as you like, but the first time around tell us who he is. The same goes for places, institutions, events, etc. - never assume we know what you are talking about because chances are we won't.

Avoiding 'academic' words – make sure you avoid using words that are specific to academia and which will not be understood by a non-specialist audience; 'discourse' is a classic academic word which has virtually no place in the non-academic world. While there is nothing wrong with using it in the academic context, as soon as you use a word like this in a non-specialist context, you potentially alienate your audience and, as a result, fail in your attempt to communicate to them. Essentially, if you use words like this, you might as well wave a big flag over your head that has 'wanker' written on it.

There are many, many different techniques you can use when writing for a non-specialist audience; here are just a few useful ideas to get you started...

Make sure your presentation has a beginning, middle and an end – after all you are telling a story and there is nothing more satisfying for an audience to listen to.

"The 3MT competition was definitely a difficult challenge BUT it was also a worthwhile experience. In preparing for it, I had to organise my research and summarise it concisely which has hugely benefitted my writing and has helped in formatting my thesis!"

**Casey Peiris - La Trobe University
Faculty of Health Sciences 2012 - Runner Up**



Think about a circular structure - a piece of writing that begins in one particular place, which then goes off in various directions tell a story but then ends up in the same place as it started is also a very satisfying structure.

Bring your piece to life – there is nothing like a few quotes or anecdotes to bring a piece of writing to life - even the most clinical, impersonal of subjects will have some relationship to the outside world if you look hard enough and a few words from those potentially affected by it will always bring a subject like this to life.

Include human interest – put some people into your story; again, even the most impersonal stories will by necessity have some relationship to the real world and the people that live in that world and any link that you can make to this world will bring the story closer to your audience.

Be aware of rhythm and pacing - there is actually a lot that can be learned from good stand-up comedy - the rhythm and pacing of a good story or joke told by a classy performer can actually give you great insights into how to address any audience. Watch how a great comedian builds up to and then delivers a punch line and imagine the effect you could have if you delivered your academic punch line with the same sense of pace, rhythm and timing.

Use humour... but use it carefully; there is nothing like humour to bring even the most serious of subjects to life - one quick look at Shakespeare will show you how this can be done well - but make sure you use your humour carefully and make sure you're prepared to deliver it well. Don't forget that, if you do well in the competition, you may well end up telling the same story or reciting the same joke three or four times at various heats, semi-finals and eventually in the grand final. It takes a great performer to deliver a joke with spontaneity more than once so, if you do decide to bring humour - particularly jokes - into your presentation, just be sure that this is something you will be able to do well and that your humour won't come across as stale and fall flat the second time around.

Write too much and then cut back – distil, distil and distil again; it is always better to write six minutes worth of presentation and cut it back to three than to write two minutes worth and have to pad it out to three. Cutting back, distilling and crystallising your presentation will always make for something that is punchier, more dynamic and more effective.

Read out loud to yourself - the easiest way to ensure that your writing sounds good is to read it out loud to yourself. And this doesn't just apply to these 3MT, of course; the easiest way to spot any linguistic laziness or simply a poor turn of phrase is to read your writing out to yourself.

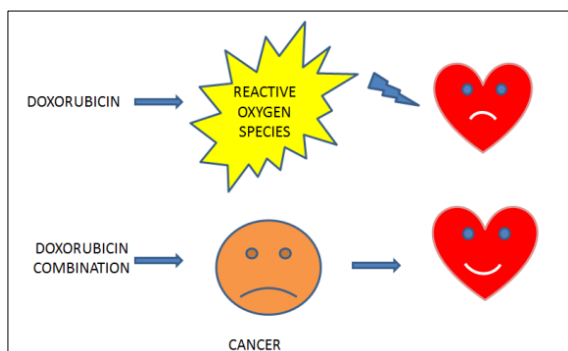
The 'hook' – this is a trick from journalism to get a reader involved in what you are saying – start with something that is of relevance to your audience to 'hook' them into your story. This can be something very personal, very emotive, or very human. Have a look at the 3MT YouTube examples from 2011 and see how many of the speakers start with a 'hook' that builds a bridge between the everyday experience of the audience and the very academic material they are about to present. The word 'imagine' can be very useful here, as can a link that takes a seemingly clinical subject, but relates it to something that is part of everyone's lives. Have a look at the examples and see how knee injuries came to life courtesy of the World Cup.

The Slide

Essentially your slide is a backdrop for a performance. Think of it as a tiny, two dimensional theatrical set, if you like. It needs to work at a fairly visceral level – it certainly doesn't want to be competing with you in terms of information communication.

Before you start work on your slide, you should take the following rules into account:

- a single static PowerPoint slide is permitted;
- no slide transitions, animations or 'movement' of any description are permitted;
- your slide is to be presented from the beginning of your oration; and
- no additional electronic media (e.g. sound and video files) are permitted.



LESS IS MORE

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

**Slide: David Rayner – La Trobe University
2012**

An engaging visual presentation can make or break any oration, so you want your slide to be legible, clear and concise. You may like to consider some of the following suggestions.

Think clean, clear images with minimal text typeset in a striking font. An image that evokes an instant emotion can attract the audience's attention, but it must not be gratuitous – it needs to reflect the topic.

While you and your speech make up the majority of the presentation, you do have the luxury of having a slide projected behind you. Don't waste this opportunity - when preparing your slide, you need to think very carefully about what its function is and how it can support, and not detract from, your three minute presentation.

PERSONAL TOUCHES CAN BE EFFECTIVE

Personal touches can allow your audience to understand the impact of your research.
Slide: Hery Santosa – La Trobe University 2012



Again – a few ideas/hints that you can take in, or ignore when preparing your slide...

- **“... and now a word from our sponsor ...”** – while it is creditable that you want to acknowledge all the sponsors and supporters of your research project, your 3MT slide is not the place to be doing this. All that happens is that you end up with a very messy, overly busy slide that detracts from your overall presentation.
- **How much text is enough? How much is too much?** This is a tricky question, but generally speaking very little text is what is required. Most of the text should be coming from your presentation and the text on the slide should just support this and act as a reminder of a few crucial points – your name, your topic and maybe one or two key phrases to reinforce the message - but very little more.
- **We can read your slide – you don't need to do it for us!** It might sound obvious but it has been known for a speaker to read out loud the content of a slide that has far, far too much text on it. This is slightly less interesting than watching paint dry and should be avoided at all costs.
- **The advantages and disadvantages of not having a slide** – or, as I like to call it, the huge disadvantages of not having a slide. I have only seen this attempted once and it worked initially, but then backfired terribly thereafter. One presenter I saw thought they would make huge impact by – unlike everyone else – not using a slide at all. It worked the first time and even caused quite a ripple through the audience. However, the second time, the person operating the projector thought there had been a mistake so hastily advanced to the slide of the next speaker's slide and the time after that, even though a blank slide had been inserted into the sequence, the screen saver kicked in half way through the three minutes and the audience had to try and concentrate on the speech while the Microsoft logo swooped around the screen. The moral of the story? It's a nice idea, but one which has the potential to backfire on you hugely. Use a slide!

Role Models

So who should you be looking emulate when you present your three minute thesis? TV presenters (particularly from non-commercial stations), public speakers, commentators and public intellectuals, such as David Suzuki, Alain de Botton, Simon Schama and Stephen Fry are good examples, but I am sure you won't need to look far to find great examples of people who can speak well, accessibly and in a lively, intelligent and engaging manner.



WORK YOUR MESSAGE

Think about how your slide might be able to assist with the format and delivery of your presentation – is there a metaphor that helps explain your research?

Slide: Venkat Narayanan – La Trobe University 2012

What not to do

Of course there are some definite 'NO-NOs' – some spelled out in the rules of the competition and some not.

- **Costumes** – just dress as though you were going for a three minute job interview, OK? You don't need to dress any more than that. If the judges sense even the hint of a costume, out you go!
- **Props** – same as costumes; a very big no-no in the rules. It's the power of your words and your oratory we are looking for, not your skills with a deck of cards or a baton!
- **Slide transitions** – don't even think about it. Not even a tiny, sneaky automatic one. If your slide so much as changes one pixel – again: out you go!
- **Muttering** – if we can't understand you, we can't give you a good mark, can we? Same 'job interview' rules apply – there is very little point in writing a magnificent speech if no-one can hear it. Speak up. And, if speaking up doesn't come naturally to you, practise!
- **Looking at the floor** – eye contact is crucial here; an old speaker's trick is to aim to make eye contact with everyone in the audience (judges included) at least once during your speech. You'd be amazed how much more personal – and, therefore, effective – this makes your speech.
- **Sex, religion and politics** – the three great dinner party conversation starters/stoppers. Just remember: you don't know anything about your audience's or your judges' belief systems, morals, ethics, standards, etc., so raise these subjects at your own risk – you might get away with it with a dash of humour or as your 'hook,' but do it carefully. Very carefully.
- **"ums", "ahs" and "ers"** – come on, people; you've only got three minutes! Get yourself a recorder (audio or video) and record yourself. Play it back and become aware of when you um and ah. Then practise, practise and practise until you have eliminated this.
- **Hands in pockets or hyper-gesticulation!** Find the middle ground with your hands – don't tuck them away in your pockets as that looks unnatural, not to say slightly shifty, but equally avoid looking like an operatic tenor on steroids. Back to good on-screen talent such as foreign correspondents for that one, I think.

What you are aiming for

- Confident
- Calm
- Likeable
- Humble
- Genuine
- Credible
- Authoritative
- In Control

Remember...

Every good performance – even the most spontaneous looking ones – is the result of a great deal of careful preparation and an enormous amount of rehearsal.

You've only got three minutes.... so make every second count.

Good luck!

"The 3 Minute Thesis was a really enjoyable and challenging experience that helped me to articulate my research in a succinct and interesting format. I loved having the opportunity to meet other PhD students and hear about their research. I recommend participating in the 3MT competition to all PhD students."

**Carmel Hobbs – La Trobe University
Faculty of Health Sciences – People's Choice Winner - 2012**



10 Hints for Improving your 3MT Presentation

Danielle Fischer – The University of Melbourne

1. Forget everything you know about giving scientific presentations: You must tailor your talk to your audience (“an intelligent but non-specialised audience”). Don’t introduce yourself, don’t acknowledge your lab members or funding bodies and don’t show data! We really don’t care about the intricacies of your results. Your audience for this presentation wants to know the bigger picture. By all means, explain what you’re doing, but leave out the detail, thanks!
2. Start your talk by introducing your little pocket of research in the grander scheme of things; thinking about why this topic would be of interest to any person off the street (e.g. does this help with finding a cure for cancer? Will it solve global warming? Will it help our understanding of the universe) Even if your little bit of research is a far stretch from curing cancer, for example, it is important to make it relevant to your audience, so that they will be bothered to listen in the first place.
3. Carefully think about what you should include on your PowerPoint slide. Only include things that are relevant and ensure that any images you use are of good quality (don’t use images with watermarks – they are copyright protected). Don’t overcrowd your slide as this looks unprofessional and confusing, and avoid distractions like flashing lights or super brightly coloured backgrounds.
4. Analogies are great, but make sure your analogy is something that with which everyone will be able to identify, otherwise it’ll just end up complicating the matter further. Keep it simple.
5. Speak in an engaging manner. If you don’t sound like you’re interested in the topic, why would we be? Most people aren’t very confident when they do public speaking, but you need to get over yourself and fake it until you make it! It’s only 3 minutes of your life!
6. I hate to say it, but physical appearance does matter – but only so far as to ensure that you don’t wear anything distracting, otherwise people will focus on that instead of your talk.
7. Body language is really important. Keep in mind if your hands are flailing around, as this can distract your audience. Don’t stand behind the safety of your lectern staring into the computer, praying for the three minutes to pass! Get out and about, engage with your audience, look each of them in the eye (but don’t stare at just one person the whole talk – this is a pet hate of mine!). And smile!
8. Finish your talk by summing up what you do in the greater scheme of things. How will your research contribute to the grander goal?
9. Now practise, practise, practise! Practise on your lab friends, practise on your grandmother. And get feedback and advice. If both parties can understand it and are interested in it, you’re on to a good thing.
10. Make sure you use your time, but don’t go over it.

Your audience is there because they want to hear about what you do. Inspire them, and enjoy the opportunity you have been given to share your research with people... Have fun and good luck!

Frequently Asked Questions

The University of Queensland has developed the following FAQs to assist students wishing to participate in 3MT.

What proportion of my RHD has to have a research component for me to be eligible to compete?

Two-thirds of your degree must be research.

I was a student at the time of my competition at my School; however, I will graduate before the Trans-Tasman 3MT. Am I eligible to enter?

If you are eligible at the time of your local School/Institute competition, you will remain eligible, regardless of your program status, for the Trans-Tasman 3MT.

I have participated in 3MT before. Can I participate more than once?

As long as you didn't win your Faculty Final, you are welcome to enter 3MT again.

Can I present my oration via Skype?

While this decision rests with each School/Faculty/University, we would discourage remote presentations. As an important aspect of the competition is audience engagement, anyone who would choose to present via conferencing facilities would be at a disadvantage compared to other competitors. The winner of the Faculty/University Final will be expected to attend the La Trobe Final and the Trans-Tasman 3MT in person.

Can I present my oration as a poem, rap or song?

No. While we appreciate everyone has a different presentation style, the purpose of the activity is to "engage the audience without reducing research to entertainment value alone". 3MT is primarily about developing a student's oration skills. It is important that the competition is not seen as trivialising research or science.

Can I use a laser pointer?

Yes. A laser pointer is not considered a prop. However, the emphasis is on the oration.

Does my slide have to be in PowerPoint?

No, however it is our preferred format as all slides will be collated into a single PowerPoint presentation for competition.

How many transitions or animations can I have in my slide?

None. The slide must be static and not change in any way during the presentation. Your slide must be displayed for the duration of your presentation.

Do I have to use a slide?

No. The slide is optional as the emphasis is on the oration.

What happens if my presentation is longer than 3 minutes?

In the Trans-Tasman 3MT Final, a 20 second warning will be provided to competitors (a coloured board held up by timekeeper) and a bell will sound at the three minute limit. If a presenter continues to speak after the bell they will be automatically disqualified.

Is there a dress code?

There is no stipulated dress requirement such as 'smart casual'. Some have worn suits with ties, others t-shirts and jeans. Please wear whatever is comfortable for you. NO COSTUMES (including hats, masks, Dame Edna specs, etc.)

Will I be able to see a countdown-timer at my final?

As each competition is organised by each School/Faculty/Institute, we would recommend that you contact your event coordinator for further information.

Can I win more than one category?

Yes, it is possible to win a place (First, Runner-Up, etc.) and win the People's Choice award.

What happens if I cannot attend the Final?

The winner of each heat or final is expected to represent their School/Institute/Faculty/University at the next stage of the competition. If the winner is unable to attend the final, the runner-up will proceed to the next round of the competition

Created by the University of Queensland, adapted by Carol Burnett - RED Unit - La Trobe University and using material from Simon Clewes - The University of Melbourne