



THE UNIVERSITY
of EDINBURGH

THREE MINUTE THESIS

Handbook





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INSTITUTE FOR
**ACADEMIC
DEVELOPMENT**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Information

Introduction	1
Rules & Eligibility	3
Judging Criteria	4
Stages	6

Advice

Writing	8
Presenting	9
Previous winners	11



3MT[®] THREE MINUTE THESIS

FOUNDED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF QUEENSLAND

The Competition

The Three Minute Thesis (3MT[®]) is an international competition celebrating the exciting research conducted by the 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

I had to ensure that I was optimally balancing describing my research in a coherent and clear manner with delivering a well-paced presentation within the strict three-minutes. It took a few attempts to get both the script and delivery on point.

Zahra Jaffer, 2020 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. The competition is most suited to later stage PhD students. It is recommended you take part in the competition when you are approaching the end of your PhD. 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

Use of Generative AI

Currently, there is no formal guidance regarding the use of Generative AI in the Three Minute Thesis (3MT) competition. Participants are advised to adhere to their respective institutions' policies on the use of AI, including guidelines on referencing and academic integrity.



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 focuses on comprehension, content, engagement and communication and should be the focus of your presentation.

Comprehension and content

Presentation provided clear motivation, background and significance to the research question

Presentation clearly described the research strategy/design and the results/findings of the research

Presentation clearly described the conclusions, outcomes and impact of the research

Engagement and communication

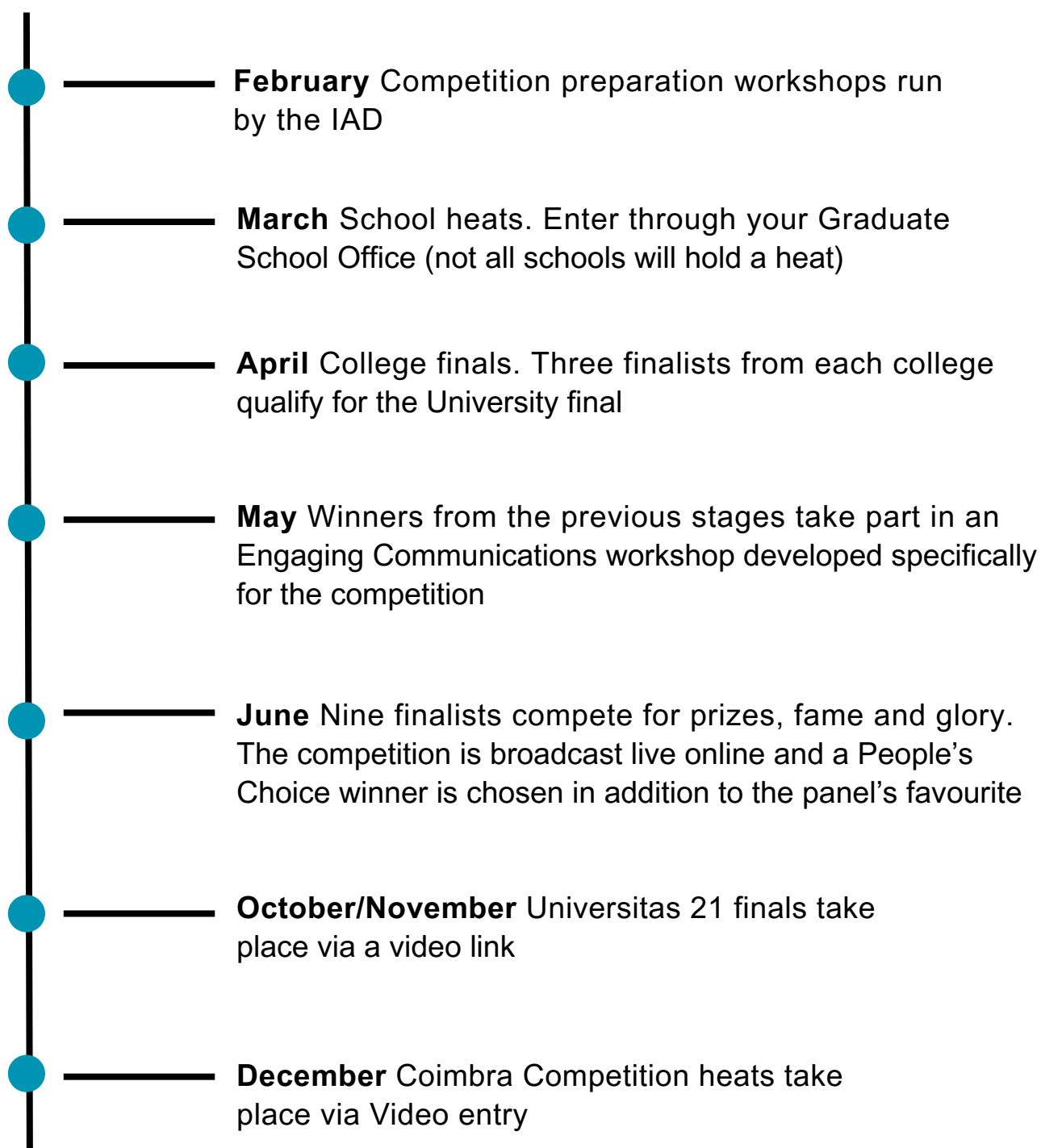
The oration was delivered clearly, and the language was appropriate for a non-specialist audience

The PowerPoint slide was well-defined and enhanced the presentation

The presenter conveyed enthusiasm for their research and captured and maintained the audience's attention

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

I wrote my 3MT script at the same time I was writing the first draft of my conclusion, and they both fed into each other. Distilling the core findings of my research, and why they are important, was immensely beneficial in helping me to shape the main arguments in my conclusion.

Julia Smith, 2021 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, keypoints, 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.



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!

Amelia Howarth, 2016 University Finalist

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

Previous Winners



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

My top tip for preparing for the 3MT competition would be to practise the presentation as often as possible in front of a small audience such as family, friends, and colleagues. Not only will this help you to feel comfortable presenting your 3MT to an audience, but it will also help make sure that your presentation is clear and easy to follow for people who are not necessarily familiar with your research topic. I also found the 3MT training courses that are offered as part of the IAD programme very useful. They have a lot of great advice and tips on how to deliver your presentation and design your slide. But most importantly, just try to have fun with the 3MT as there are no limits to your creativity!

Michaela Raab 2022 University Winner

What did you find, and why should we care? Once I had the answers to these two questions, I could focus much more on what I needed to include in the script. Talking to people outside your field is also really important: it's easy to speak to other people in your field about your work, but explaining it to someone without that contextual knowledge will help you to figure out how to 'pitch' your research in terms of the amount of detail you need, and the language you use to talk about it.

Julia Smith, 2021 University Finalist

Create a script of your presentation and memorise it. Draft the script how you intend to say it and add stage directions, e.g., pause here for 'x' seconds or highlight which words you need to emphasise in your speech. Keep your script short to allow a good pace and incorporate strategic pauses. Get feedback on your presentation before the competition. The Peer Practice Training Session offered by the IAD is incredibly helpful for this. Embrace your creative side and have fun!

Zahra Jaffer, 2020 University Finalist

P Previous Winners

Focus on the bigger picture! It's not about the analysis or the data, it's about why this research matters, and what answering this question could mean for people. Sharing is caring! You want to share this research because you care about it. If your research question comes from indignation, sadness, or curiosity and surprise, if your findings could (maybe) make the world a better place, let all of this shine through. Bring your enthusiasm to the presentation!

Bérengère Digard, 2019 University Finalist

Practice in front of people who have no idea what you do. It's really hard to take complex science (or any subject, for that matter), and make it understandable in a short amount of time. Really the only good test, is to test it.

Gavin Woolman, 2018 University People's Choice winner

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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