



## **Three Minute Thesis (3MT™) Student Handbook**

UQ Graduate School

[www.uq.edu.au/grad-school/three-minute-thesis](http://www.uq.edu.au/grad-school/three-minute-thesis)

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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.

We are thrilled that this competition has grown so rapidly and every year we are amazed by the quality of the 3MT presentations at UQ and beyond.

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.

We hope you enjoy participating in the 2012 3MT competition and we look forward to learning more about your research.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Zlatko Skrbis'.

**Professor Zlatko Skrbis**  
Dean, UQ Graduate School

## Event Overview

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### 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.

### 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.

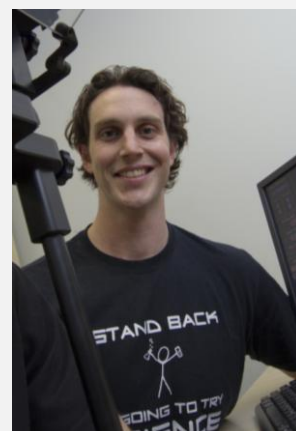
The inaugural Trans-Tasman 3MT was held at UQ in 2010 with 33 universities participating. In 2011, 43 universities were represented at the Trans-Tasman 3MT that was hosted by The University of Western Australia, and for the first time students from the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, and Hong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

In 2011 UQ's Matthew Thomson was awarded First Prize at the Trans-Tasman competition. As the university of the competitor who wins the competition has the opportunity to host the event the following year, UQ will welcome participants to its St Lucia campus for the Trans-Tasman 3MT in 2012.

### 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;
- crystalise your thoughts about your thesis;
- increase your profile within the UQ research community, staff and wider Brisbane community; and
- network with other RHD students.



*"The main reason I took part in the Three Minute Thesis competition was to tell a wide audience about my research. The fact is that not everyone reads scientific publications, and I feel that as a researcher I have a responsibility to the general public to communicate with them what I do, and what I discover."*

Will Harrison  
School of Psychology  
UQ 3MT Runner-up,  
2010

## Prizes

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

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

The winner of the UQ competition will go on to represent UQ 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; and
- People's Choice: \$1000 research travel grant.

## Key Dates

Date	Item
24 August	All School and Institute semi-finals to be completed by this date
31 August	All Faculty and combined Institute finals to be completed by this date
6 September	UQ 3MT Wildcard Final
18 September	UQ 3MT Final
11 October	Trans-Tasman 3MT Competition

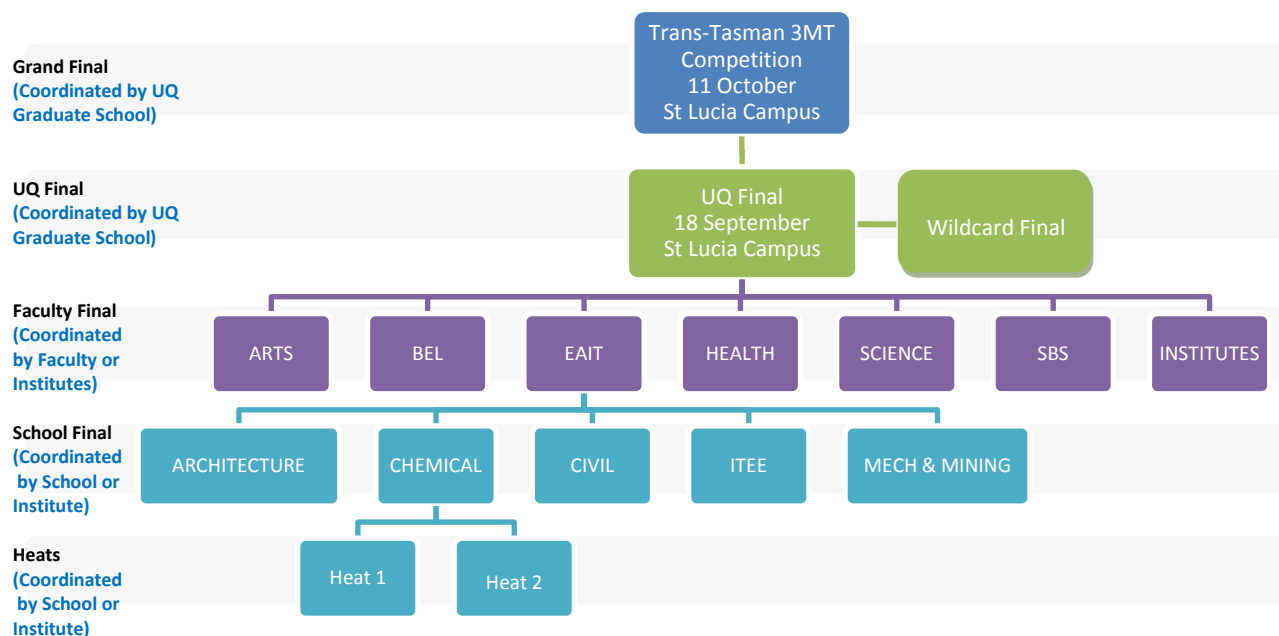
*"I am not surprised by the rapid growth of the Three Minute Thesis competition. The benefits for competitors are simply too good to pass up. Incredible networking opportunities, improved self-confidence, prize money ... how can you not get involved?"*

David MacDonald  
School of Health and Rehabilitation Sciences  
UQ 3MT Runner-up, 2009



## Progression

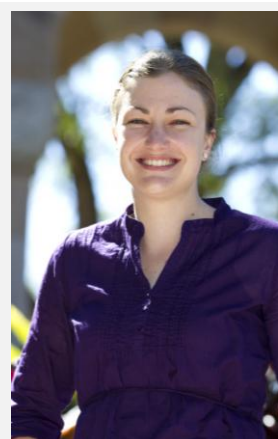
The following chart outlines the progression of students throughout the competition and highlights key contacts for each event.



Please note that the winner of each heat or final is expected to represent their School/Institute/Faculty/UQ 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.

*"I was also surprised last year just how many people were actually interested in my research and approached me afterwards. I found that my family and friends—whom I usually spare from the details of my daily research—were genuinely interested in what I do after listening to me practise my talk or after hearing the presentation on ABC Radio."*

Emma Gagen  
Faculty of Natural Resources, Agricultural  
& Veterinary Sciences  
UQ 3MT People's Choice Winner, 2009



# Competition rules and guidelines

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## 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)*

## 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?*



*“Participating in the 3MT competition has been an incredibly valuable experience, one that has changed the way that I think about my PhD. I was forced to consider the social and economic impacts of my research, and how our lives might be improved as a result.*

*Seeing the bigger picture gave me new purpose and motivation for all those late nights in the lab.”*

Matthew Thompson  
School of Psychology  
UQ & Trans-Tasman 3MT  
Winner, 2011



## 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 (eg. 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.



*“My supervisor actually pushed me to participate as I wasn’t very confident with giving presentations. I found the 3MT competition fantastic as it made me think about how to present my work in a fun and interesting way and in a very short amount of time.”*

Dr Ashley Wilkinson  
School of Pharmacy  
UQ 3MT Runner-up, 2008



## Preparing your 3MT presentation

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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.

### Writing your 3MT

#### 1. Write for your audience

One of the judging criteria looks for evidence that you can explain your research to a non-specialist audience. To do this you may like to:

- avoid jargon and academic language;
- explain concepts and people important to your research - you may know all about Professor Smith's theories but your audience may not;
- imagine that you are explaining your research to a close friend or fellow student from another field; and
- do not dumb down or devalue your research, what you are doing is exciting and you should convey enthusiasm for your subject.

#### 2. Have a clear outcome in mind

Know what you want your audience to take away from your presentation. Ideally, you would like the audience to leave with an understanding of what you're doing and why you're doing it.

#### 3. Tell a story

You may like to present your 3MT like a story, with a beginning, middle and an end. It's not easy to condense your research into three minutes, so you may find it easier to break your presentation down into smaller sections. Try writing an opener to catch their attention, then highlight your different points, and finally have a summary to restate the importance of your work.

#### 4. What not to do

- Do not write your presentation like an academic paper. Try to use shorter words, shorter sentences and shorter paragraphs.
- You can use humour, however be careful not to dumb down your presentation.

#### 5. Revise

You may like to proof your 3MT presentation by reading it aloud, firstly to yourself and then to an audience of friends and family. This allows you to not only check your grammar and writing style, but it will allow you to receive critical feedback. Don't be afraid to ask your audience if your presentation clearly highlights what your research is and why it is important.



*"It forced me to think about the big picture, truly define what I do, and how to explain this to others, simply and succinctly."*

Vicki Metzis  
Institute of Molecular  
Biosciences (IMB)

## Creating your 3MT slide

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

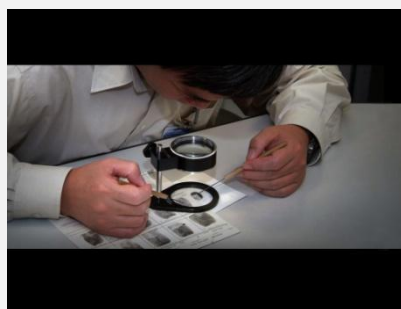
- a single static PowerPoint slide is permitted;
- no slide transitions, animations or 'movement' of any description are permitted;
- your slide is to be presented from the beginning of your oration; and
- no additional electronic media (e.g. sound and video files) are permitted.

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.

### 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: Matthew Thompson, 2011



### PERSONAL TOUCHES CAN BE EFFECTIVE

Personal touches can allow your audience to understand the impact of your research.

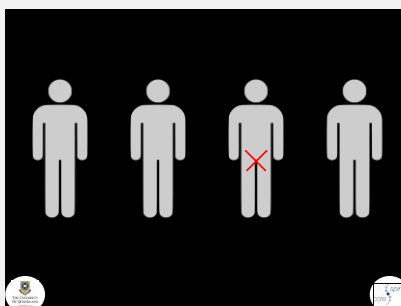
Slide: Vicki Metzis, 2010



### CREATIVITY DRIVES INTEREST

You do not have to have a slide, so do not rely on your slide to convey your message – it should simply complement your spoken oration.

Slide: Ryan Stafford, 2011



### 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: Dr Michael Imelfort, 2008



## Practising your 3MT presentation

We hope you find the following tips useful as you prepare your 3MT oration.

### 1. 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.

### 2. 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 about what you are saying.

### 3. 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.
- Do not make the common mistakes of rolling back and forth on your heels, pacing for no reason or playing with your hair as these habits are distracting for the audience.

### 4. Record yourself

Record and listen to your presentation to hear where you pause, speak too quickly or get it just right. Then work on your weaknesses and exploit your strengths.

### 5. Look to the stars!

- Watch your role models such as academics, politicians and journalists, and break down their strengths and weaknesses. Analyse how they engage with their audience.
- Visit the [3MT website](#) to view presentations by previous 3MT finalists.

### 6. Dress

- While there is no dress code, if you are unsure of how to dress you may like to dress for a job interview or an important meeting.
- Do not wear a costume of any kind as this is against the rules (as are any props).

### 7. Practice using a microphone

- While each School/Institute or Faculty competition may vary, at the UQ Final you will have the choice of a lectern microphone or lapel microphone. If you haven't used a microphone before, instruction will be provided.



*"3MT was a good opportunity for me to improve my public speaking skills ... It also feels great to know that others are interested in my research work. Now I can tell my family and friends or anyone who is interested in my work what my PhD is about in 3 minutes."*

Tina Wu  
School of Pharmacy  
UQ 3MT Winner &  
People's Choice, 2010

## Frequently Asked Questions

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The University of Queensland 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 the 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.

**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 form 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.



*I knew participating in the 3MT would force me to express my research ideas in a clear and concise way which everyone could understand.*

*I would strongly encourage other research students to participate in 3MT. If early career researchers do not possess the skills to present their research in a clear and engaging way, our message, and the implications of our research, could be lost/*

Ryan Stafford  
School of Health and  
Rehabilitation Sciences  
UQ Runner-up and People's  
choice Winner, 2011

**What happens if my presentation is longer than 3 minutes?**

In the UQ 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 students have worn suits with ties, others t-shirts and jeans. Please wear whatever is comfortable for you. Please note that no costumes are allowed (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 [3MT 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 is the Wildcard Final?**

The People's Choice winner from each Faculty/Combined Institute final will be given the chance to compete in a Wildcard Final hosted by the Graduate School. If the Faculty winner is also the People's Choice, the runner-up will proceed to the Wildcard Final. The top-two wildcard finalists will be offered the opportunity to compete in the UQ 3MT Final.

**What happens if I cannot attend the final?**

The winner of each heat or final is expected to represent their School/Institute/Faculty/UQ 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.

## Further information

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If you have any queries about 3MT please contact your contact your [3MT Event Coordinator](#) or the Graduate School by email [3MT@gradschool.uq.edu.au](mailto:3MT@gradschool.uq.edu.au) or phone +61 7 3346 0508