UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO
FACULTY OF DENTISTRY

Laboratory Medicine & Pathobiology
UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

HOW TO BE A GREAT COACH OR JUDGE FOR THE 3-MINUTE THESIS (3MT)

The 3MT (or 3-Minute Thesis) is an academic research communication competition developed by The University of Queensland, Australia in 2008.

It is one person presenting their research project in one slide and 3 minutes to a non-scientific audience. They should communicate why they are doing their research and what they hope to achieve with it.

As a coach supporting someone preparing for it, or as a judge for any stage of the competition, here are some tips on what you are looking for in a good 3MT.

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GENERAL TIPS

The 3MT is a communications or presentation competition, not a research competition.

Focus on the structure and backstory and consider if it makes sense to non-scientists.

Watch examples of good 3MT presentations.

A good example is Emily Majestic who won the U of T 3MT in 2023 https://youtu.be/o8VovRK92Ak

You can see more examples on the Centre for Graduate Professional Development website.

As a coach or judge you DO need to:

- Understand the spirit of the competition and its rules (see the judging criteria)
- Be able to give constructive feedback
- Be receptive to the research of others and be able to ask yourself if it makes sense.

As a coach or judge you DON'T need to:

- Be a communications expert
- Have coached or judged 3MT before
- Know anything about the presenter's research area (or research at all).

STRUCTURE

The structure of the presentation is important, as the presenter needs to tell the story of their research.

How much time they spend on each section, or even the order of these sections, can vary.

ANCHOR
Why you're doing it

THE RESEARCH
How you're doing it

THE CLOSE
How it relates to the real world. The "so what?"

Anchor
- Anchor your story with facts or topics of general public interest or a personal story
- Transition to your field of research: Bring out the lay science justification of the research to support your research question

The Research
- What you are going to do to address your research question (lay terms, no acronyms or complicated or scientific terminology). You, not your lab or team
- Your plan in no more than 3 steps
- The quick wins (what you have achieved so far or soon) and what long-term success looks like

The Close
- What is the point of your project?
- Why you are telling people about your research
- Loop back to your anchoring statement

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THE SLIDE

SHOULD ✅ DO'S

- Be a single, static, PowerPoint slide
- Be self explanatory and obvious
- Tell the story of your pitch
- Be accessible: easy to understand, good sized fonts and colours that can be easily read

SHOULD NOT ❌ DON'TS

- Use transitions, animations, video or music
- Include data, graphs and charts
- Use disturbing or copyrighted imagery
- Use too much text
- Include affiliations, references to labs, collaborators, sponsors etc.
- Distract from your talk

WHAT PRESENTERS SHOULD AVOID

- Using any technical jargon
- Using non-obvious acronyms (e.g. DNA is probably OK, but RNA is not)
- Using complicated words or sentence structures (a grade 8 should be able to understand the presentation)
- Using language that is too colloquial or familiar (e.g. "like", "stuff")
- Expressing personal opinions
- Going into data explanation
- Being vague and non-specific or being too ambitious (although this is a communication competition, the context of the research is important and has to be realistic)
- Improvising or not practicing enough

THE RULES

- Presentations are spoken word only (e.g. no raps, songs, or poems).

- The 3 minutes begins when the presenter starts moving or talking. Competitors who go over the 3 minutes are disqualified.

- A single, static, PowerPoint slide is permitted – no transitions or animations, and no video or music.

- No props are permitted (e.g. costumes including clinical gowns, laboratory equipment etc.).

JUDGING CRITERIA FOR THE U OF T 3MT

COMMUNICATION

- Did the presenter use language and terminology that was clear and understandable?
- Was the pace of the talk effective?
- Did the presenter use non-verbal communication (e.g. eye contact, voice modulation, body language, etc.) effectively?
- Did the slide enhance, rather than detract from, the talk — was it clear, legible, and concise?

COMPREHENSION AND CONTENT

- Did the talk help you to understand the research being undertaken and its potential impact?
- Did the presenter clearly outline the nature and purpose of their research?
- Did the presenter clearly indicate what is fascinating or compelling about their research?
- Did the talk follow a logical sequence?

ENGAGEMENT

- Was the talk engaging?
- Did the talk inspire you to want to know more?
- Did the presenter convey enthusiasm for their work?
- Did the presenter capture and maintain your attention?

FIND OUT MORE

LMP 3MT   U of T 3MT