



# 3 Minute Thesis

HANDBOOK

Competition at James Cook University

25 Aug 2023 | 1-3pm  
C2-15 | JCU Singapore

For more info, please email  
[researchsupport-singapore@jcu.edu.au](mailto:researchsupport-singapore@jcu.edu.au)

[f jcu.singapore.fanpage](#) | [yt jcusingaporevideo](#) | [tw @jcu\\_singapore](#) | [ig @jcusingapore](#) | [in @James Cook University Singapore](#) | [st @jcusingapore](#)



Brisbane | Cairns | Singapore | Townsville

1 university • 2 countries • 4 distinct locations  
Creating a brighter future for life in the Tropics and beyond, through  
education and research that makes a difference locally, and globally.



Cert No.: EDU-1-1001  
Validity: 10/04/2023 - 08/04/2027

SINGAPORE  
QUALITY CLASS  
STAR



James Cook University Australia offers pathway, undergraduate and postgraduate programs at the Singapore campus of James Cook University.  
James Cook University | 149 Sims Drive, S(387380) | CPE Registration No.200100786K | Period of Registration: 13 July 2022 to 12 July 2026

# Three Minute Thesis is back!

**3MT: One Take, One Slide, No Props**



*(JCU Singapore 2022 3MT winner, PhD candidate Jeffrey Ling)*

*Communicating your research simply and directly in ways that a wide range of non-experts can understand is intrinsic to research practice.*

The Three Minute Thesis (3MT®) is an academic research communication competition developed by The University of Queensland (UQ), Australia. JCU has a proud history of participating in the event.

An 80,000 word PhD thesis would take 9 hours to present. The 3MT time limit... Three minutes! Compete with our best and brightest to battle it out for the 3MT title.

## Why We Do It

At JCU, we think it is important to encourage and showcase the research efforts of our higher degree research (HDR) candidates.

3MT develops academic, presentation and research communication skills, while developing research students' (and academic researchers') ability to explain their research effectively in language appropriate to a non-specialist audience.

Visualisation of research opens myriad ways to capture and convey key messages and findings and substantially increase the reach and potential impact of the research through social and mainstream media, YouTube and other platforms.

**To provide just a little incentive, JCU will award the winner of each category with a prize for our 3MT event on 25 August 2023.**

### Prize for category A, B, C:

Certificate, Plaque  
SGD500 voucher

### Prize for category D:

Certificate, Plaque

### Categories:

- A. HDR Candidates
- B. Academic/Research Staff
- C. External Partners
- D. People's Choice

## JCU Singapore 3MT Event

When | Friday 25 August | 1:00pm to 3:00pm (Singapore time)

Where | C2-15, JCU Singapore Campus, 149 Sims Drive, 387380

### Your JCU 3MT entry must include the following:

- Name
- Category of Submission
- Mode of attendance
- Academic Discipline Area/Institute
- 3MT Presentation Title
- 3MT Abstract (100 words)\*
- 3MT PowerPoint (one slide only) in the template provided\*
- Passport Size Photo (high res)
- Mobile/Phone Number

- Entries close Wednesday 16 August 2023
- Submit to [researchsupport-singapore@jcu.edu.au](mailto:researchsupport-singapore@jcu.edu.au)
- \*Email [researchsupport-singapore@jcu.edu.au](mailto:researchsupport-singapore@jcu.edu.au) to request the Abstract Form and PowerPoint template

# 3MT Competition Rules and Guidelines

## HDR Candidates

Active Higher Degree by 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.

JCU Singapore-enrolled pre-confirmation PhD candidates who are active in their program will still be eligible to participate in the JCU Singapore 3MT competition but cannot advance to the JCU 3MT Final.

## Rules

- 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 considered to have commenced when a presenter starts their presentation through speech.
- The decision of the adjudicating panel is final.

# Judging Criteria

At every level of the 3MT competition, each competitor will be assessed on the judging criteria listed below. Please note that each criterion is equally weighted and has an emphasis on audience.

## 1. Comprehension & 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?

## 2. Engagement & 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?

# Additional Information for Competitors

## Suggestions

- Less is more – text and complicated graphics can distract your audience – you don't want them to read your slide instead of listening to your 3MT.
- Personal touches – can allow your audience to understand the impact of your research.
- Creativity drives interest – do not rely on your slide to convey your message – it should simply complement your oration.
- 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?
- An engaging visual presentation can make or break any oration, so make sure your slide is legible, clear and concise.

## Write for your audience

- 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.
- Highlight the outcomes of your research, and the desired outcome.
- Imagine that you are explaining your research to a close friend or fellow candidate from another field.

- Convey your excitement and enthusiasm for your subject.

## Tell a story

- You may like to present your 3MT as a narrative, with a beginning, middle and end.
- It's not easy to condense your research into 3 minutes, so you may find it easier to break your presentation down into smaller sections.
- Try writing an opener to catch the attention of the audience, then highlight your different points, and finally have a summary to restate the importance of your work.
- Have a clear outcome in mind.
- Know what you want your audience to take away from your presentation.
- Try to leave the audience with an understanding of what you're doing, why it is important and what you hope to achieve.

## Revise

- Proof your 3MT presentation by reading it aloud, to yourself and to an audience of friends and family.
- Ask for feedback.
- Ask your audience if your presentation clearly highlights what your research is about and why it is important.

## Practice, practice, practice

- Feeling nervous before you present is natural, and 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. Practicing will also help you gauge the timing of your 3MT so that you keep within the time limit.
- Practice how you will use your hands and move within the allocated space so that the audience – including the judges – are able to always see and hear you. It is OK 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. Keep this in mind for your presentation.
- When standing to present, do not make the common mistake 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.
- When standing to present, avoid standing you too far away from the microphone if one is provided. It is important that you can be heard clearly. Do a test run with a friend or family member prior to the event day.

## 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.

## Body Language

- Stand (or sit) straight and confidently.
- Hold your head up and make eye contact.
- Never turn away from the audience.

## 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.



## Look to the stars!

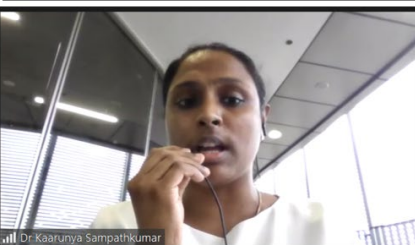
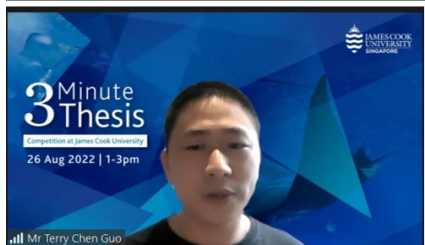
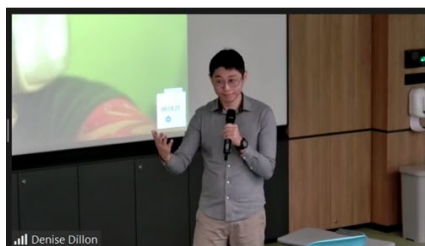
- Watch your role models such as academics, politicians and journalists, and break down their strengths and weaknesses.
- Analyse how they engage with their audience.
- View presentations by previous 3MT finalists – check out the UQ and JCU 3MT websites.

## Dress

- There is no dress code. If you are unsure how to dress, you may like to dress for a job interview or an important meeting. It is important that you feel comfortable so you can focus on your presentation.
- Do not wear a costume of any kind as this is against the rules (as is the use of props).

## Further assistance

- A/Prof Liz Tynan will run a 3MT coaching session in the week of the competition. JCU HDR candidates and academic staff are eligible to register for the workshop.
  - <https://www.jcu.edu.au/research/celebrating-research/3-minute-thesis-competition>



*Clockwise from topleft: The winners of our JCU Singapore 3MT 2022 competition | Dr Jeffrey Ling (Category A & D), Prof Andreas Lopata (Category B), Dr Kaarunya Sampathkumar (Category C) & Mr Chen Guo (Category D)*

- View their winning presentations at this link: <https://www.jcu.edu.sg/research/celebrating-research>



# Making the Most of Your Three Minutes

---

**Simon Clews**

Director Writing

Centre University of Melbourne

# 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!

## **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 nonspecialist 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 or the Queen or Michael Jackson or the Beatles or, 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, a middle and an end** – after all you are telling a story and there is nothing more satisfying for an audience to listen to.

**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, and very human. Have a look at the 3MT YouTube examples from 2010 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

Now 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.

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. Again – a few ideas/hints that you can take in or ignore on 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.

### **Less is more – a slide can be too busy.**

Think clean, clear images with minimal text typeset in a striking font.

Probably the best slide I have ever seen was for a talk on a near-extinct language in Tibet. A beautiful image of a village in Tibet that bled all the way to edge of the slide simply bore the speaker's name and the presentation title in a clean, clear font in the bottom right hand corner – simple, dignified and highly effective.

**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 to emulate when you present your three minute thesis? TV presenters (particularly from non-commercial stations), public speakers, commentators and public intellectuals, such as Natasha Mitchell, Brian Cox, Emma Johnston and Genevieve Bell 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.

## 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 hypergesticulation!**

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 onscreen talent such as foreign correspondents for that one, I think.

— James Cook University —

149 Sims Drive Singapore 387380

+65 6709 3888 | +65 6709 3889 | [admissions-singapore@jcu.edu.au](mailto:admissions-singapore@jcu.edu.au) | [www.jcu.edu.sg](http://www.jcu.edu.sg)

CPE Registration No. 200100786K | Period of registration: 13 July 2022 to 12 July 2026