Background

3 Minute Thesis (3MT) is an exciting global academic competition celebrating the innovative research undertaken by PhD students, which was originally developed by the University of Queensland, Australia. 3MT participants present their research to a non-specialist audience in just 3 minutes using one slide, developing students’ academic, presentation and communication skills.

Why take part in 3 Minute Thesis at Heriot-Watt University?

The ability to communicate the importance of your research project and articulate your findings is extremely valuable. The 3 Minute Thesis competition provides you with the opportunity to:

- Communicate your ideas effectively to a wider community
- Describe your research findings to a non-specialist audience
- Crystallise your thoughts about your thesis
- Increase your profile within the research community at Heriot-Watt University
- Network with other PGR students
- Develop your transferable skills to enhance your personal effectiveness in line with the Researcher Development Framework (Domain B – Personal effectiveness, Domain D – Engagement, influence and impact)
Important Dates 2020

11th December 2019 – 3 Minute Thesis Info session (1 hour)
This optional information session will give further information on the 3 Minute Thesis competition, including who is eligible to take part, the rules and judging criteria, tips on how to prepare your presentation, training available, and Q&A. Book on PDMS.

17th January 2020 – Deadline for applications to be received
If you would like to be considered for a place on the 3 Minute Thesis Competition, please complete and submit this form by 12.00 noon on the 17th January. Applications will be assessed by a senior panel and 18 students will be selected to compete in the 2020 competition.

16th March 2020 – 3MT voice coaching
Workshop to improve your research communication skills covering engaging audiences, effective storytelling, speech and voice coaching, and making complex subjects simple will be provided for selected participants. Book on PDMS.
N.B. Competitors based at HWU campuses in Dubai, Orkney and Galashiels will have a 1:2 consultation. Booking details to follow.

2nd April 2020 – Heriot-Watt University competition
The Heriot-Watt University 3 Minute Thesis competition will be open to staff and students to attend, and will embed our four University values: belong, collaborate, inspire and celebrate. Registration will be available on PDMS in March.

July 2020 – Vitae semi-final (online)
Video entry will be submitted from the overall winner from Heriot-Watt University to the Vitae 3 Minute Thesis Competition. More information can be found here.

September 2020 – Vitae final
The 6 top contestants selected from the Vitae semi-final will compete in person at the Vitae conference in Birmingham.
Rules and Eligibility

Rules

• You must present your current PhD research project
• Presentation should be for a non-specialist audience
• 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

Eligibility

• You must be a current PGR student at Heriot-Watt University and be at least 18 months into your studies. Students who have submitted their thesis but who will not have had their viva by 2nd April 2020 are eligible
• Previous 3 Minute Thesis participants are ineligible to take part in subsequent 3 Minute Thesis competitions
• Students based at Edinburgh and Galashiels campuses must be available for the Heriot-Watt University 3 Minute Thesis Final on 2nd April 2020
• Students based at the Orkney and Dubai campuses should record their presentation in front of a live audience and submit the recording by 25th March 2020
• You must agree to your presentation being recorded
• If you win the Heriot-Watt University competition (UK and Dubai based students only), your recorded presentation will be submitted to the online Vitae 3 Minute Thesis semi-final
Judging Criteria

The 3MT presentations will be judged by experienced academics from diverse subject areas across the university. They are unlikely to be an expert in your area, so presentations must be aimed towards a non-specialist audience. Presentations will be judged on four key areas: comprehension, content, engagement, and communication. The panel will choose the overall Heriot-Watt University winner and runner up in the 3MT competition. The audience will vote for the People’s Choice winner. The People’s Choice prize will be awarded to the participant with the most votes, provided they have not already received a Judge’s prize.

Comprehension and 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?

Engagement and 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?
Preparing your 3MT presentation

Effective presentations are more than just the content. Your body language and verbal communication skills are also important for engaging with your audience. Research Futures Academy offers training for participants selected to take part in 3MT competition.

Some additional points to consider when preparing your presentation are listed below.

Know your audience

- Prepare your presentation with an educated, non-specialist audience in mind
- Avoid jargon and technical language
- Explain concepts important for understanding your research
- Highlight the outcome of your research
- Try explaining your research to a friend from another field
- Convey excitement and enthusiasm for your research
- Be careful not to dumb down your research or sound condescending

Tell a story

- Present your research as a narrative with a beginning, middle and end
- Try using an opening hook to catch your audience’s attention, build intrigue or suspense
- Highlight areas of your project and summarise the impact or potential impact of your work
- What are the key take-home messages from your presentation?

Practice

- Naturally, you will feel nervous before you present, so it is important to practice to ensure you can deliver your message with confidence and clarity
- Read your presentation aloud to yourself and a small audience
- Ask for feedback – is the message clear?
- Timing your presentation will also help ensure that you keep within the time limit
Vocal range

- Use variety in your voice (tempo, loud/soft) and speak clearly
- Take your time
- Pause at key points to give audience time to absorb your message
- Record your presentation – do you use variety in your voice? Are there enough pauses? Is it too fast/slow?

Body language

- Stand straight and confidently
- Make eye contact
- Never turn your back to the audience
- Practise how you will use your hands and move around the stage. It is also appropriate to deliver your presentation from one spot
- Do not distract the audience (e.g. playing with your hair, rocking back and forth, pacing unnecessarily etc.)

Effective slide design

- Less is more. Too much text or complicated graphics could distract your audience
- Personal touches will help your audience to understand the impact of your research
- Do not rely on your slide to deliver your message – your slide should complement what you are saying
- Can you use a metaphor to help explain your research?
- Ensure your slide is legible, clear and concise, and error free

For further advice on preparing your presentation, successful applicants can attend a 3 Minute Thesis training workshop with Research Futures Academy on 16th March 2020. Book on PDMS.