



3MT®
Three Minute Thesis Competition

Handbook for Participating

Universities

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Postdoctoral Development Network, 2025



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Overview

The Three Minute Thesis (3MT®) is an internationally recognized competition for graduate students in which participants present the key findings and broader impact of their scholarly and creative activities in three minutes or less. The challenge is to present complex research in an accessible and compelling way with the assistance of only one static slide.

Created in 2008 by Dr. Alan Lawson at the University of Queensland, Australia, the 3MT® competition celebrates exciting and innovative graduate student research while promoting communication, public speaking, and storytelling skills. The competition offers an exciting professional development opportunity for graduate students, pushing them to consolidate their ideas and discoveries while honing their capacity to effectively explain their research activity in a clear and concise manner for a general audience. Graduate students also benefit from the opportunity to showcase their research broadly across their campus and among the broader public.

The 3MT® has become a popular research communication initiative in Canada and across the world, with more than 900 universities and institutions in 85 countries hosting competitions each year. The first 3MT® competition held in Canada took place at the University of British Columbia in 2011, and in 2014 the first national 3MT® competition was presented by CAGS. Today, dozens of Canadian universities and research institutes host annual competitions, with winners moving on to one of three regional competitions (Western, Ontario, Eastern). The top two winners from each regional event, plus the national winners of the *Ma thèse en 180 secondes* competition (ACFAS) and *The Storytellers* competition (SSHRC), advance to participate in the National 3MT® Showcase hosted by CAGS at its annual conference in November. The top two winners of this event advance to the North American 3MT® Showcase, hosted annually by the US Council of Graduate Schools (CGS) in early December.



New Edition Notes¹

In 2024, the Canadian Association for Graduate Studies (CAGS) and the Graduate and Postdoctoral Development Network (GPDN) formed a working group to update the 3MT[®] Handbook, aiming to enhance equity, accessibility, and inclusivity in the Canadian context while retaining the core framework established by the University of Queensland. The new edition introduces several key updates, including expanded eligibility for course-based master's students engaged in research, visiting students, postdocs, and, at the local level, undergraduates, provided they receive supervisor approval. Alternative research formats such as performances, cultural props, theatrical elements, or costumes may also be considered—provided they are core to one's work—at local and at regional competitions with appropriate approval (Regional Deans' approval).

The judging rubric has been revised to emphasize storytelling and communication impact rather than data or research conclusions, encouraging participation from students at all stages of their research journey. The new resource guide provides organizers with practical tools, including event planning strategies, technical considerations, logistical guidelines, and tips for facilitating judging. While local competitions continue to allow the flexibility to reflect each institution's culture and programming, regional and national events may enforce stricter criteria. Looking ahead, considerations include further accessibility, neurodiversity, and governance models such as the creation of a neutral oversight body and potential host city advantages. The annual National 3MT Showcase at the CAGS Conference will continue to celebrate research diversity across the 3MT[®], MT180, and SSHRC Storytellers competitions, with GPDN members acting as a feedback channel to support ongoing development.

¹ Special thanks to working group members who contributed to updating this handbook and creating the 3MT[®] Organizers Resource Guide: Colette Steer (retired), Queen's University; Kenisha Blair-Walcott, University of Saskatchewan; Robert Desjardins, University of Alberta; Megan Hébert, University of Lethbridge; Javier Ibarra-Isassi, Concordia University; Erin Sanderman, University of Alberta; Charity Slobod, Simon Fraser University; Ian Wereley, CAGS, and additional contributors: Jacqui Brinkman, University of British Columbia; Tara Christie-Kyle, University of Calgary.

Eligibility Criteria for Local, Regional, and National Competitions:

(It is important to note, that while these new opportunities exist at the local level, eligibility requirements may be more restrictive at the regional and national levels; see the Eligibility Criteria below.)

Local Competitions

- Local competitions are designed to be inclusive and may adapt eligibility criteria to reflect each institution's unique graduate student population and research culture.
- Full-time or part-time Master's or Ph.D. students registered and in good standing in thesis-based programs at the host institution are eligible to participate. Course-based students actively engaged in research or research-creation projects may be eligible to participate at the discretion of the organizers.
- Course-based or non-thesis students must have their research involvement verified by a supervisor, project lead, or equivalent.
- Visiting, exchange, undergraduate or postdoctoral scholars may participate at the discretion of the host institution of the local competition.
- Presentations must be based on the participant's own primary research or creative contribution.
- Graduate students at any stage of their program are eligible to participate.
- Graduate students who have defended but not yet convocated remain eligible to participate. Students who have convocated are not eligible.
- International and domestic students are eligible provided they are registered at a Canadian institution and are in good standing.



- Institutions may offer virtual or pre-recorded participation options to ensure accessibility for students unable to attend in person, provided the submission meets the official presentation regulations and time limit.
- Local organizers are encouraged to make accessibility accommodations, including support for neurodivergent participants and students with disabilities.
- Graduate students should conduct their presentation in English.
- Graduate students must be prepared to present in person, agree to be photographed and digitally recorded, and allow any recordings to be made public.

Notes Regarding Local Competitions

- **These eligibility criteria are to be used as guidelines only.** Universities hosting local competitions are free to establish their own eligibility criteria (e.g., including course-based and professional programs).
- French-language students are encouraged to participate in [MT180 \(Ma thèse en 180 secondes\)](#), a similar competition hosted by [ACFAS](#).

Regional and National Competitions

Eligibility requirements vary by stage of the competition. Institutions and organizers must **verify eligibility at each level**; that is, success in a local competition does not guarantee eligibility to advance to the regional or national stages. To advance beyond the local level, competitors should meet the following eligibility requirements:

- Participants should be registered in a thesis-based Master's or PhD program at a CAGS member institution (eligible for Tri-Council funding) and in good standing.
- Course-based, professional, visiting, exchange, postdoctoral or undergraduate participants are not eligible to advance beyond the local level. *Exceptions to*



this can be discussed with regional organizers/Dean's and CAGS representatives.

- Competitors who have defended their thesis but not yet convoked at the time of the local competition remain eligible to advance.
- Competitors should be able to participate in person or submit a digital recording that meets CAGS technical and presentation specifications (see Appendix B). Pre-recorded presentations must be discussed with the regional competition organizers in writing prior to submission.
- International students are eligible but should ensure their ability to travel during the dates of the regional and national competitions. Of note, they should remain able to travel if advancing to the North American showcase (usually takes place in the United States).
- Presentations must be delivered in English at the 3MT regional competitions.
- Presentations in French are accepted during the National CAGS showcase. French-speaking competitors wishing to advance to the North American showcase must be able to deliver their presentation in English.
- All regional and national participants must agree to be photographed and recorded, and consent to have their presentation made publicly accessible.

Notes Regarding Regional and National Competitions

- Institutions hosting local competitions may broaden participation criteria to include non-thesis and visiting students to support research communication training. However, advancement to regional or national competitions requires meeting the official eligibility criteria established by CAGS.
- A neutral advisory committee, organized by CAGS, may be consulted by institutions to clarify exceptional eligibility cases for regional and national stages of the competition.

Presentation Regulations

Student Presentations

- All presentations are limited to three (3) minutes; however, exceptions may be made for accessibility accommodations.
- Presentations should be spoken word and regular prose. Poems, slam poetry, raps, songs, or performances are not permitted. Minor elements of the above may be incorporated should it be the topic of research.
- Minor creative or cultural elements (e.g., gesture, posture, attire, or props) may be integrated when intrinsic to the research, provided they do not distract from clarity or accessibility.
- The presentation should be based on the participant's own research or research-creation work and should be understandable to a general audience.
- Presenters must use language appropriate for a non-specialist audience, avoiding disciplinary jargon or unexplained acronyms.
- Physical interactions with the audience are not permitted.
- Speaker notes on stage are not allowed; however, exceptions may be made for accessibility accommodations.
- The presentation commences when the competitor begins speaking or moving.
- If a graduate student's research includes confidential or culturally sensitive material, CAGS advises that competition organizers discuss the entry with the graduate student and their supervisor.

Accessibility and Format Options

- Presentations should be delivered in person before a live audience whenever possible.
- Host institutions may offer hybrid or pre-recorded participation options at the local level to accommodate accessibility needs, travel limitations or exceptional circumstances
- Virtual or video submissions must follow the same three-minute time limit, slide rules and technical standards used for in-person presentations.
- Organizers are encouraged to provide accommodations for participants with disabilities or neurodivergent needs (e.g., sensory adjustments, timing flexibility or support staff presence).

Presentation Slide

- A single, static slide is permitted for each presenter.
- The slide should be displayed from the beginning of the presentation and remain visible until its conclusion.
- The slide must not include transitions, animations, embedded videos, or audio.
- The slide design and content are left to the discretion of the competitor, provided all images and content used conform to Canadian copyright law.
- The slides should be created using the same aspect ratio, typically 16:9.
- The use of a slide is recommended but may be optional for local competitions, depending on institutional format or the creative nature of the presentation.
- The hosting university should provide an introductory slide consisting of the graduate student's name, graduate degree and program, supervisor, and 3MT® title.
- No additional electronic media is permitted during the presentation, including but not limited to sound and audio files emitted from the stage or audience.

Staging, Presentation Space, and Recording

- Presentations should take place in a theatre-style space or similar venue that ensures audience visibility and clear recording quality.
- It is highly recommended that a timing clock or timer be made visible for graduate students during their presentation.
- Local and regional competitions should ensure presentations are professionally recorded for archival and advancement purposes.
- Competitors advancing to regional or national competitions must ensure their presentation is recorded according to CAGS technical specifications (see Appendix B).

Props and Costumes

To preserve the focus on oral communication of the competition, the following guidelines apply to the use of props or presentation materials. Limited accommodations may be considered when related to accessibility, alternative research formats, or culturally grounded approaches to research communication:

- Physical objects, costumes, instruments, or laboratory equipment are not permitted.
- Any cultural attire worn for reasons of identity or tradition is permitted.
- All presentation materials must comply with the host institution's health and safety regulations and should not pose a risk to the presenter or audience.

Ethical and Cultural Considerations

- Presenters must ensure that the information shared is suitable for public dissemination and does not breach confidentiality, contractual, or cultural protocols.
- Participants presenting work involving Indigenous knowledge, community-based research, or culturally sensitive materials are encouraged to consult with their supervisor or community partners prior to participation.
- Institutions should provide guidance for ethical storytelling and representation of research participants or communities.

Virtual and Hybrid Presentations

- When permitted by the host institution, virtual presentations must use an approved platform (e.g., Zoom, Teams) and meet technical quality standards for sound and visuals.
- The participant must appear live or in a single, continuous recording without editing, cuts, or overlays.
- Virtual presentations are judged under the same criteria as in-person presentations.

Judging Criteria and Rubric

The following categories are guidelines for judging the presentations of each competitor. The weighting of each category is to be determined by the host university. The decision of the judging panel is final. *For further judging facilitation resources, please consult the [Organizers' Resource Guide](#).*

Communication

- Did the graduate student use non-verbal communication (i.e. voice modulation, body language) effectively?
- Did the graduate student use language that was jargon-free, or if jargon was used, was it accompanied with an explanation to make terms understandable to a non-expert audience?
- Did the presentation follow a logical sequence?
- Did the graduate student use their three minutes effectively? Did they elaborate too long on a particular aspect? Did the presentation feel rushed or incomplete?

Comprehension

- Did the presentation help you to understand the methodology behind the scholarly research being undertaken?
- Did the graduate student clearly outline the nature and purpose of their research?
- Did the graduate student clearly indicate the fascinating or compelling aspects of their research?
- Did the graduate student provide an understanding of the background and significance to the research question being addressed?
- Did the graduate student clearly describe the impact and/or results of the research, including any conclusions and outcomes, or further steps to be taken?

Engagement

- Was the presentation engaging? Did the graduate student use creative language and storytelling to capture and maintain the audience's attention?
- Did the graduate student convey enthusiasm for their work?
- Was the graduate student careful not to trivialise or generalise their research?
- Did the PowerPoint slide create intrigue without dividing your attention – was it clear, legible, and concise?
- Did the presentation inspire you to want to know more?



Prize Guidelines

The following prize structure and cash values should be used as guidelines only.

- First Place: \$1,000
- Second Place: \$500
- Third Place: \$250
- People's Choice (Optional): ~\$100 or equivalent gift

Competition Advancement

- Each local competition may choose their top-ranked competitor to represent their institution at the regional competition. Institutions should verify advancement eligibility.
- The top-ranked competitors from each regional competition will advance to the National 3MT Showcase, hosted annually by CAGS.
- The number of advancing competitors per region remains as follows:
 - Western region: Two (2) finalists
 - Ontario region: Two (2) finalists
 - Eastern region: Two (2) finalists
- Winners of local or regional People's Choice awards shall not advance to the national showcase, unless they have been selected by the judges as a finalist.
- Three (3) participants will be chosen as winners of the national showcase via a popular vote of in-person attendees of the event.
- The two (2) top-ranked participants of the National 3MT Showcase will be invited to move on to participate in the North American 3MT Showcase.

Notes on Advancement



- CAGS reserves the right to verify eligibility before confirming advancement. Institutions are encouraged to maintain transparent selection processes and communicate results promptly to facilitate registration and travel planning (if required) to the regional or national level.
- Questions related to eligibility or advancement may be directed to the advisory committee established by CAGS, which provides guidance and consistency across regions.
- The National 3MT Showcase hosts guests from other Canadian research competitions. Namely, the SSHRC Storytellers and the MT180 competitions. These guests are eligible to advance to the North American 3MT Showcase should they meet the eligibility criteria established by CAGS.

Additional Event Considerations

Selecting a Venue

In order to maintain consistency and fairness across all local, regional, and national 3MT® competitions, CAGS recommends that host institutions select a theatre-style venue appropriate for a live-audience performance. Ideal venues will include dedicated space for competitors, a seating area for the audience, and a head table for the judging panel.

It is essential that the competition space be suitable for professional digital recording equipment. Organizers of regional competitions must ensure that the digital recording team is able to view the graduate student competitors clearly and without obstruction from the audience or other features of the space. Audio recordings of the presentations must be clear and received directly from the graduate student's microphone through the venue's sound board.

Selecting a Judging Panel

The selection of judges is a decision made by each university. In the past, judges have been faculty members, university administrators, alumni, and notable members of the local community.

It is highly recommended that judges with a communications or media background be selected by host institutions.

Consider the following when composing your judging panel:

- Include between three to five judges on your panel.
- Aim to create a diverse and inclusive panel, considering factors of age, gender, ethnicity, area of expertise, disciplinary background, etc.
- It is also recommended to include a tie-breaker judge on your panel or have a contingency plan in case the decision ends in a stalemate.

3 Minute Timer

Each 3MT® competitor is given exactly 3 minutes to present their research. In order to maintain consistency and accuracy between all competitors, an official countdown or countup clock should be used. The type of countdown or countup clock used is a decision made by each university. In any case, the clock should be:

- Accurate
- Controlled by a dedicated member of the 3MT® competition staff
- Made visible to each competitor during their presentation (optional)
- Display both minutes and seconds

Introducing Presenters

In order to maintain consistency and fairness, 3MT® competitors should be introduced by the Master of Ceremonies *before* the start of their presentation. Competitors should be introduced in the following manner:

- Name
- Graduate student position (MA, PhD, etc.)
- Name of supervisor and co-supervisor



- Home Department/Faculty
- Home University (for regional competitions)
- Title of Presentation

Live Streaming and Photography

Many host universities choose to live stream their local and regional 3MT® competitions. Live streaming allows graduate students, faculty, friends, and family members to watch competitors in real time. In the past, live streaming has proven to significantly extend the reach and impact of 3MT® competitions to communities within the university and beyond.

CAGS highly recommends that host institutions live stream local and regional competitions, and that they promote the stream through their social media platforms. It is also recommended that a professional photographer be assigned to the competition in order to produce high quality images for the promotion of future competitions.

For assistance with live streaming, please contact CAGS.

Voting/Polling for People's Choice Award

There are several ways to organize the voting/polling for the People's Choice Award. This is a decision made by each university and is dependent upon a variety of factors. For more information about how to build a voting/polling tool, please contact CAGS.

Special Activities

Most institutions hold a variety of special activities before and after their 3MT® competitions. CAGS recommends that local and regional host institutions provide a reception (lunch, dinner, and/or wine and cheese) to introduce graduate student competitors to each other and to university and community stakeholders. In the past, these receptions have offered valuable opportunities to show off outstanding graduate students and their scholarly and creative activities.

Confidentiality and Intellectual Property Considerations

Note: It is highly recommended that each university provide all contestants with an official release form for photography prior to their presentation. Competitors must understand that the presentation of their scholarly and creative activity in a 3MT setting will be publicly accessible. Any data or information discussed or presented in public sessions shall be considered in the public domain.

The presentation of scholarly and creative activity at any stage of the 3MT competition will not affect any pre-existing rights except as stated below:

- Due to the nature of the competition, judges, reviewers, staff or the audience will not be asked to sign non-disclosure statements.
- If a competitor's research is being/has been conducted under contract with an outside sponsor, they must discuss the related contractual terms of confidentiality and intellectual property with their supervisor before participating in this competition.
- All public sessions of the competition, including but not limited to oral presentations, are open to the public at large; any and all of these public sessions may be broadcast to interested persons through media which may include the internet.
- If a competitor's research includes confidential material, CAGS advises that competition organizers discuss the entry with the competitor and their supervisor.
- Competitors are responsible for ensuring they hold the appropriate rights to all content used in their presentation and must provide documentation upon request.
- The use of generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools to create or **significantly modify** text, images, audio or video for the presentation, slide or recording of presentations is not permitted.
- Other uses of generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools including, but not limited to, idea generation or minor grammar refinements should be disclosed by naming tool used and generating prompt. Local organizers must ensure alignment with their institution's AI use policies.



Additional Resources and Information

- [CAGS/Canadian Association for Graduate Studies \(National 3MT® Competition\)](#)
- [University of Queensland 3MT® Page](#)
- [University of British Columbia 3MT® Page](#)
- [York University 3MT® Page](#)
- [Queen's University 3MT® Page](#)
- [University of Alberta 3MT® Page](#)
- [Western Canadian Deans of Graduate Studies \(WCDGS\) 3MT® Page](#)

Event Management Resources

NEW – The Graduate and Postdoctoral Development Network (GPDN), in collaboration with the Canadian Association for Graduate Studies (CAGS), has developed an open-access, [3MT® Organizers' Resource Guide](#) to support 3MT® event planning and management, specific to the North America competition stream.

The University of Queensland has developed resources to assist universities who wish to hold 3MT® competitions. These can be downloaded directly from the [University of Queensland 3MT® website](#).

Appendix A: Technical Specifications for Recording Regional Videos

- Top finalists are required to submit to CAGS a video file of their presentation recorded at the regional competition.
- The video should include a five-second title slide that features:
 - The name of the graduate student
 - The title of their presentation
 - The name of their sponsoring university
 - The official 3MT® logo
- CAGS recommends the following specifications:
 - Standard Definition (SD):
 - 4:3 Aspect Ratio
 - 640 x 480 px
 - 2,000 – 5,000 kbit/s
 - Standard Definition (SD):
 - 16:9 Aspect Ratio
 - 640 x 360 px
 - 2,000 – 5,000 kbit/s
 - High Definition (HD):
 - 16:9 Aspect Ratio
 - 1280 x 720 px
 - 5,000 – 10,000 kbit/s
- Codec: for best results, CAGS recommends using AAC-LC (Advanced Audio Codec-Low Complexity), with a data rate of 320 kbit/s.
- Encode the audio at a constant rate of 320 kbit/s, with a sample rate of 48 kHz.
- All videos must be accompanied by a transcript saved in a .docx format.
- When you are ready to upload/send your video to the National 3MT Showcase, please contact CAGS.



Appendix B: 3MT Respect in Competition Statement

As a participant in the Three Minute Thesis (3MT) competition, I agree to uphold the values of respect, collegiality, and academic integrity throughout the event. I understand that the 3MT is a platform for sharing research in a supportive and inclusive environment, and I commit to the following principles:

- **Respect for Fellow Competitors:** I will celebrate the diversity of research represented and treat all participants with fairness and professionalism, recognizing the effort and dedication behind each presentation.
- **Supportive Conduct:** I will contribute to a positive and encouraging atmosphere by engaging constructively with others and refraining from any behaviour that may undermine or disrespect fellow competitors, judges, organizers, or the audience.
- **Academic Integrity:** I affirm that the content of my presentation reflects my original research and that all sources and collaborators are appropriately acknowledged.
- **Commitment to the Spirit of 3MT:** I will honour the purpose of the competition — to foster research communication and build community — and participate in a way that reflects the highest standards of scholarly conduct.

By agreeing to this statement, I recognize the importance of maintaining a respectful and ethical environment for all involved in the 3MT competition.

3MT Respect in Competition Statement - for handouts or use in registration forms

As a 3MT participant, I agree to:



- Treat all fellow competitors, judges, and organizers with respect and professionalism.
- Celebrate the diversity of research and ideas shared.
- Uphold academic integrity in my presentation.
- Contribute to a supportive and inclusive competition environment.

I understand that 3MT is about clear, respectful communication and fostering a positive scholarly community.

Accountability and Conduct Statement (Multi-Institutional)

All participants in the Three Minute Thesis (3MT) competition are expected to adhere to the standards outlined in the **Respect in Competition Statement**. This includes maintaining professionalism, academic integrity, and respectful conduct toward all participants, judges, organizers, and audience members.

Any alleged violations of these standards — including but not limited to harassment, discrimination, academic dishonesty, or disruptive behaviour — will be referred to the participant's home institution. Disciplinary matters will be addressed under the Student Code of Conduct and relevant policies of that institution.

By participating in this multi-institutional event, each competitor acknowledges that they remain subject to their own institution's policies and agrees to cooperate with any conduct-related review or process initiated as a result of a reported incident.

Reporting Procedure

Concerns regarding participant conduct, including potential violations of the Respect in Competition Statement, should be reported to the 3MT event organizers as soon as possible. Reports can be made in person to a designated event staff member or submitted via email to CAGS (Ian.Wereley@cags.ca).



All reports will be handled with discretion. Upon receiving a report, organizers will document the concern and refer the matter to the participant's home institution for review under that institution's Student Code of Conduct and relevant policies.

Event organizers are committed to maintaining a respectful, inclusive, and safe environment for all participants.