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Call for Competitors for the 2020 Coimbra Group Three Minute Thesis Competition



The final of the CG Three Minute Thesis (3MT) will be held at the CG Annual Conference at the University of Montpellier, on 10-12 June 2020. Member universities are encouraged to hold their own competitions to select their best candidate for entry into the CG 3MT Competition.

On behalf of the Coimbra Group Doctoral Studies Working Group:

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Background to the 3MT Competition

In 2008 the University of Queensland in Australia held a competition called ‘Three Minute Thesis’ (<http://threeminutethesis.org/start-3mt>) where PhD candidates explain their research to an ‘intelligent lay audience’ in three minutes with only one slide. Over the years following, the 3MT competition has become a global phenomenon and has been held in multiple institutions across the world.

In June 2017, the Coimbra Group held its first 3MT final during the annual General Assembly at the University of Edinburgh.

Some member universities ask the winner and runner up of their own competition to present annually to the university senate and at the university induction event for new doctoral researchers, as well as at other events. These presentations always receive positive feedback.

CG 3MT Competition Format

The CG 3MT final takes place at the CG Annual Conference. Prior to this, each participating university must select its best candidate and send a video recording of their presentation to the Doctoral Studies Working Group (DS WG), who will then select, from these videos, the 3 finalists who will compete in a live competition at the Annual Conference.

Working backwards from the CG Annual Conference, to be held in June 2020, competing universities will have to submit a video of their competitor by the end of March, in order to allow sufficient time for the DS WG to select the top 3 for the final. The timing of events up to the submission of the video recording is flexible and may be adjusted to suit the requirements of each participating university. However, for guidance, a suggested timeline follows.

Timeline

Date	Information
Proposed (member institutions to choose):	
October – November 2019	Announce date of institutional final and start to promote
January – February 2020	Department/School/Unit level competitions
March 2020	Institutional finals
Fixed:	
31th March 2020	Deadline for video submissions for Coimbra Group Final
1st – 3rd April 2020	Eligibility check by the group of technical experts
4th – 17th April 2020	DS WG members vote for top 3 entries
10th – 12th June 2020	Coimbra Group Final

Resource implications

Activity	Resource implications
Promotion	Staff time
Organisation of institutional level competitions	Staff time, training of finalists, venue, prizes, judges
Entry into video based competition	Staff time, hiring of videographer



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Institutional Level Competitions

University of Edinburgh Model

At the University of Edinburgh, the final competition is centrally organised by the Institute of Academic Development (IAD). The three Colleges Humanities and Social Sciences, Medicine and Veterinary Medicine and Science and Engineering are each expected to organise heats and choose 3 finalists to go forward to the University final. The IAD provides information and guidance for the Colleges and contestants. This includes:

- Information on the webpages (including eligibility, criteria for the presentation, FAQ, <http://www.ed.ac.uk/institute-academic-development/postgraduate/doctoral/3mt/entrants/criteria>);
- Links to videos of past competitions;
- A pack which includes judging sheets/ timer/ people's choice voting sheets etc.

The IAD also provides training in presentation skills to interested contestants and more individualised training for the finalists.

The competition is filmed and placed on the University YouTube channel.

Rules for the Coimbra Group 3 Minute Thesis Competition

In principle, the University of Queensland Rules for videos apply to the Coimbra Group competition and have only been slightly modified for uniformity, comparability and technical simplicity (<https://threeminutethesis.uq.edu.au/resources/competition-rules>).

1. Presentations are limited to 3 minutes and competitors exceeding 3 minutes are disqualified.
2. A single static slide is permitted (no slide transitions, animations or 'movement' of any description). As regards the video submitted to the CG Office, the slide must not be included/merged into the video, but must be submitted as a separate PDF file. A title slide containing the name of the university, the name of the contestant, the title of the presentation and the research area should be submitted along with the slide illustrating the talk.
3. The video **must be filmed at an institutional live 3MT event**, and not be a "studio" recording. It must have **only one camera angle filmed from one static position**. Zoom in and out from the static position is acceptable. The presentation by the doctoral researcher must stand for itself: oral introductions at the event shall not be included, nor any opening credits by the producers.
4. The 3-minute audio must be continuous – no cuts, edits, breaks etc.
5. No additional props (e.g. laser pointer, costumes, musical instruments, laboratory equipment, animated backgrounds) are permitted.
6. Presentations are to be spoken word (e.g. no poems, raps or songs).
7. Presentations are considered to have commenced when a presenter starts their presentation through movement or speech.
8. No additional electronic media (e.g. sound and video files) are permitted within the video recording.
9. Video submissions not following the rules above will not be accepted. A group of technical experts will decide upon such cases. Eligible videos will be judged by the jury. Its decision is final.



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Judging Criteria

While any research topic from any research field can be presented at 3MT, there are judging criteria that determine the quality of a presentation:

<https://threeminutethesis.uq.edu.au/resources/judging-criteria>

These criteria shall be applied in the local events, the initial procedure to determine the finalists as well as in the finals.

In judging the presentations it should be understood that scholarly and scientific research is at the core of the activity. Thus the findings, results and the evidence for it must play a significant role in the presentation. Mere claims and overstatements of any kind regarding the scientific findings and their consequences or relevance must be avoided.

List of useful information and things to consider

The following is a list of items which should be considered before setting up an institutional level competition. These are based on the experience of running the competition over several years.

Booking/ Tickets

It is a good idea to have free tickets for the event so that you can easily monitor attendance (e.g. Eventbrite). You should think about a strategy for recording attendance on the day.

Catering

This depends on the time of day you choose for the event. The break (when the judges deliberate) can be used for a wine/soft drinks and nibbles reception. There are number of ways to do this, but it should be planned so that there is some possibility for networking and if possible to give the judges some time to make their decision.

You should also ensure that you have water and cups available on the table for the judges.

Compere

You will need to arrange for someone to introduce the event and the speakers on the day. This person should be knowledgeable about the competition and a good public speaker.

Contestants

Contestants should send the organiser the title and slide for their presentation in advance. Titles should be understandable to an intelligent lay person and free from jargon.

Filming and editing

As the event is being filmed you will have to get written permission to use these images from each contestant. This should be done in advance of the event. It is also courteous to ask the judges if they accept being filmed/ photographed.

Judges

You will need to organise a panel of judges. You should start to look for appropriate people a couple of months in advance of the event.



A Tradition of Innovation

You should think carefully about the judging panel. Ideally, it should comprise up to 5 people and have gender and academic discipline balance. It is good to have a lay member on the judging panel and also consider academics with public engagement profiles.

Judging is not a terribly onerous task but they should be sent the judging sheets, rules and information before the event to give them some time to prepare if they wish.

On the day, the judges will all need a judging pack which includes the following:

- A programme
- A copy of the rules
- Judging sheets for each contestant
- A summary judging sheet
- A pen
- Some paper
- A plastic wallet

You should think carefully about where the judges should sit during the presentations. They should have a clear view of the presenter, but should not be overlooked by the audience.

IT Equipment

At the very least you will require two laptops (one for the main presentation and one for the timer), a projector and several memory sticks with the slides and presentation. It is a very good idea to put all the slides together to make one seamless presentation.

Online streaming

The University of Edinburgh final is streamed live from the webpages. This gives an opportunity for those who cannot attend in person to watch the competitions live.

People's Choice Competition

This gives the audience a chance to vote for their favourite presentation. It could be done in several different ways and is not essential. At Edinburgh, audience members are given a voting sheet as they arrive and asked to complete this in the break and hand to an organiser, or put in a marked box. You should arrange for some people to count these in the break.

Prizes

Depends on budgets. At Edinburgh we have a prize for the winner, runner up and the people's choice winner.

Promotion/ Advertising

A strategy for effective promotion of the competition should be planned well in advance. It could include leaflets/ social media/ presence on various webpages and other channels.

Timer

One of the key elements of the competition is that the presentations should be no longer than 3 minutes. This is a rule which must be strictly enforced. There are different ways of timing the competition but to add to the excitement and suspense it is good for the audience to be aware of the time counting down. This should be arranged so that it does not distract the presenter or distract the audience from the presentation. At Edinburgh we set up the timer slides so that they project on to a wall to the side of the presenter. You should arrange for one of the organisers to be in charge of this timer during the event and check the slides in advance. Alternatively, you can also create sheets which alert the presenter to 1 minute and 30 seconds to go. Again, you should have someone ready to hold these up on the day.



A Tradition of Innovation

Venue

An appropriate venue should be booked well in advance for the competition. It will require to be big enough, have good acoustics (for filming) and be accessible.

It is also strongly advised to arrange for there to be a separate room for the judges to go to deliberate during the break.