

Crafting a winning 3-minute thesis presentation

Three-minute thesis presentations require a 3-minute presentation for a general audience accompanied by one PowerPoint slide.

In this presentation, we'll cover:

- Planning the presentation
- Preparing the presentation
- Delivering the presentation

Planning the presentation

The problem: Identifying “the problem” is really about answering the audience’s question: Why should I care? What’s in it for me? When writing a research paper, you can be cautious and hedge: “The problem here, might possibly be X”. But in a short presentation like this, your research problem must highlight a pressing, crucial and fundamental issue that is in dire need of a solution or resolution. The way you state the problem, the way you articulate it makes a big difference. For example, *Doctoral students experience problems with writing vs Universities are losing doctoral students because they won’t acknowledge the writing problem*. You increase the tension, the more you articulate the topic as a calamitous problem. This is tricky to do because you want to stay true to your research but you definitely want to highlight the significance and importance of doing this research.

Tip: Set a timer for 10 minutes then brainstorm, using a spider-map/concept map all the problems you can think of. Write your problem in different ways. Exaggerate. Once you have all your thoughts written down, then sift through, select and discard until you find the best way to describe your problem.

Your solution/resolution: Your solution or resolution to the problem must change or save the world. This presentation is about impact and there is no place for caution here. How is your research going to provide a solution or resolution? The solution has to be more than gap-filling, such as, “little research has been conducted on this before”. The solution/resolution has to be big. How will this resolution change the way we think? (Potentially) change our daily lives? Make links between your research and real-world solutions and showcase the uniqueness of your research.

Tip: Use the same brainstorming process to think through your solutions, play with words and language. Ask yourself: Why am I doing this research? Why it is important to me? What has surprised me about this research? What was unexpected?

The key message: The key message is the one, strong central idea that you want your audience to take away from your presentation. If the audience had to say: *This presentation was about...*, what would that be?

Tip: Write down as many key messages as you can think of. Write them in different ways. Try to shorten the sentences until you find a punchy phrase that really gets the message across.

Preparing the presentation

Now we come to telling the story and the story is what your audience will hear. Think about:

The narrative – how you want to tell this story. You have already set up a crisis-problem-solution narrative. There are two ways of telling a research story: 1) how you, as a researcher, came upon the problem and found the solution; or 2) how the problem unfolded in the real world which led to finding a solution.

The opening hook - This will grab the audience's attention. You can use an anecdote, a question, a quote, a statistic, a controversial statement, a bold opinion – anything relevant to pull your audience in.

Use demystifying devices

- Relate your complicated research concept to popular books, box-office films, well-known fairy tales, accessible (but not overused) metaphors, interesting animal behaviour, etc, you will go a long way to connecting to your audience. See: <https://youtu.be/j3icM767Fmo> Science 2015 3MT winner: Freda Rothschild
- Translate your complicated jargon into words and phrases that the audience will understand. You can use specific terms for concepts but tag them with explanations: “We call this...”. Watch *Winning tips for preparing a successful three-minute thesis* for examples of this https://youtu.be/D_1MK3Ub9QM
- Classify and divide your concept into chunks and show how it fits into the big picture. Big picture – smaller picture – your concept/dissertation. Watch: <https://youtu.be/JRnCZg-FABM> 3MT 2015 “Quantum computing with atomic transistors” – Sam Hile.
- Illustrate with examples. Use examples to build to complexity. <https://youtu.be/7YesMSG9izE> 3MT competition 2018 Winner - Willemijn Doedens.
- Assume that your audience has no prior knowledge. Don't talk down to them but rather delight in explaining what fascinates you so much about this topic. The audience will be interested if you are interested. Watch https://youtu.be/1TPu7rL_Z2A Jacob Ross 3MT.

Tip: Don't use all of these, rather select one or two to help you communicate your research. But why not try a few before you settle on one. Try to imagine one audience member as you prepare – a classmate, a friend, someone not in your field.

Delivering the presentation

Pay attention to your slide. Use an image that conveys what you can't say. Use simple fonts, if you have text. Don't overload the PowerPoint slide with images. The image must be integral to your presentation and should help convey the key message. Refer to the image in your presentation. Watch: *3MT: Three tips to help you prepare a winning presentation* <https://youtu.be/U9czKztZK1I>.

Practice. Practice the presentation at least 10 times out loud. Present it to your friends. Present it to family members, especially granny – because if she doesn't understand, she'll tell you. Listen to the feedback.

Be brave. Keep your inner critical voice quiet. Focus on the importance of your research and what you want the audience to understand to appreciate the significance of your research. Face the audience and make eye contact. Stand boldly, take up space – don't hunch and try to be small.

Overview:

Break up your preparation into smaller steps:

- Planning the presentation – think about how to articulate your research problem, solution/resolution and key message
- Preparing the presentation – use techniques to tell a story that is captivating and connects to your audience.
- Delivering the presentation – the visual can convey a message, so think carefully about what to show. Practice, practice, practice.

Read: *3 easy rules for making complex subjects simple* <https://www.charlesleon.uk/blog/3-easy-rules-for-making-complex-subjects-simple28102019?fbclid=IwAR0UUAH9vhoEq4-DbK438Js8Ogm-IR8vhGoY5P07uitn18DGLekXp6QaW5Q>

Watch: *3MT: The 3 most common mistakes:* <https://youtu.be/nr9yRkqYNOs>