Interview with Kyushu U 3MT Competition 2025 Winners

On July 28th, 2025, Kyushu University hosted its fifth 3MT virtual competition. The 3MT competition is a research communication contest where Ph.D. students use one slide and present their research in English to non-expert audience. It started in 2008 at the University of Queensland, our partner university, and is now held at over 900 universities in almost 85 countries and regions worldwide.

People's Choice: Amir Salama (left)
3rd year, Doctoral Course, Graduate School of Bioresource and Bioenvironmental Sciences
Winner: Chi T. Q. Tran (middle)
5th year, Integrated Doctoral Course, Graduate School of Systems Life Sciences
Runner-up: Sam Bessai (right)
1st year, Doctoral Course, Interdisciplinary Graduate School of Engineering Sciences

Interviewer: Prof. Natalie Konomi (Global Strategies Office)

Self-introduction and research topic

Chi (C): Hi, my name is Chi, and I'm in the final year of my PhD at the Graduate School of Systems Life Sciences. My research explores how our sense of smell influences perception and behavior. My 3MT presentation is titled "What We Breathe Can Shape How We Think."

Sam (S): I'm Sam Bessai, a PhD student from Canada at the Interdisciplinary Graduate School of Engineering Sciences. My research focuses on hidden contaminants in water and their health risks. The title of my presentation is "Not All Clean Water Is Clean."

Amir (A): My name is Amir Salama, and I am a veterinarian from Egypt. In Japan at Kyushu University, I am studying my PhD in animal reproduction, early embryonic loss, and failure of embryo elongation in cattle, which is a global issue. The title of my presentation is “From Vet to Researcher: Solving the Mystery of Lost Calves.”

1. What inspired you to participate in the 3MT this year?

C: I first participated in the 3MT Competition in 2022 to share my research with a broader audience and was fortunate to become one of the finalists. It was a valuable experience, so I decided to rechallenge myself this year. I am honored that I was selected as one of the winners this time.

S: When I talk to people in Fukuoka, they often ask about my research, and I tend to give long explanations. Last year, a friend introduced me to the 3MT competition. I thought it sounded easy, so I joined the orientation and decided to try. Condensing my research into just three minutes was challenging, but that’s how I got started.

A: I received an email about a 3-minute competition and, after researching it, saw it as a great opportunity to highlight my PhD work. My research focuses on microarrays and gene relationships—complex but impactful topics, especially since related work recently won a Nobel Prize. I’m excited to share how this science can benefit everyday people, like farmers.

2. What was your first impression of the competition?

S: I thought making a short video would be easy, but my first attempt was 15 minutes long. After several edits and feedback, I learned that pauses and storytelling add value. It gave me a new appreciation for media production. Eventually, I refined it to a clear, engaging 3-minute video that even non-experts could understand—and I felt proud of the result.

A: I create content for my clinic’s Facebook (250K followers) and YouTube. Making a 3-minute video in English for a competition was tough since Arabic is my native language, but after three tries, I succeeded and won the People’s Choice award—fitting for my large audience.

C: I found it is challenging to put a PhD project into just three minutes while still conveying the most significant points. I’ve also learned through this experience that delivery is just as important as the content itself. To keep the audience engaged and willing to find out more, the way we present must be clear and captivating enough. My impression is that 3MT really highlights the importance of both content and delivery.

3. When and how did you start preparing for your presentation?

S: After the orientation, I realized the importance of a strong hook for short-form content like TikTok. I took time to develop a clear, engaging idea using analogies and stories. Though I started filming early, I submitted at the last minute after 50–60 takes. My advice: use all the time you have, starting from the moment you get the email.

C: After competing in 2022, I knew I wanted to participate again in my final year. I started preparing a week before the first submission. First, I refined the script with my supervisor's feedback, then I moved on to filming. With a tendency to be a perfectionist, I recorded myself many times, probably close to a hundred takes, until I was satisfied. Even after editing the video, I waited a few days before submitting. It may sound a little intense, but overall, the experience was enjoyable.

A: I believe preparation is crucial. For a three-minute competition, I paused my lab work for over 10 days to focus fully on planning—writing the script, filming, editing, and designing slides. Though the video took just one day to shoot, the challenge was turning all that preparation into a short, impactful message.

4. Did you receive any support – maybe from your lab members or friends during this process?

C: For the initial submission, my supervisor gave me insightful feedback on how to highlight the most significant points and how to make my speech engaging for a wide audience. For the final submission, I received lots of encouragement and support not only from my supervisor but also from my lab mates, friends, and family. One of my family members even reminded me to relax and smile more, which helped me feel and look more comfortable in the final video. I believe the support I had helped make my final presentation stronger and more effective.

S: I wanted the video to focus on me, so I set up a black backdrop and improvised lighting with desk lamps and tissue paper. Despite a broken tripod, I managed to stabilize the camera. With help from colleagues and friends, I refined my tone through multiple takes. Though the final video is only three minutes, it was a team effort. Many people supported me, shared the video, and gave valuable feedback—including professionals from various industries—which helped improve my presentation.

A: I hesitated to share my idea at first, so I worked alone. After passing the first round and reaching the finals, I gained confidence and asked my professor and classmates for feedback. Their suggestions helped me improve my slides significantly. I want to say thanks to my wife for always encouraging and supporting me. Also, I want to thank all Egyptians who trust me and support me by voting in the finals to win the People's Choice Award and leave my fingerprint for the 3MT competition at Kyushu University 2025. In the end, collaborating with others made a big difference.

5. How did it feel to present at Kyushu University's 3MT competition?

C: I was really nervous up until my turn to the point that my smartwatch was alarming me of a continuous abnormally high heart rate. However, once the Q&A began, I suddenly felt relaxed. I think that's because I genuinely enjoy sharing my research. In the end, it turned out to be a fun and fulfilling experience.

S: Since my video was last, I watched others first and expected questions, especially from Lydia. I wasn't nervous until my video started and Lydia asked two questions. I quickly noted them and responded. Afterward, I asked a colleague for feedback—she said it was good but I could've added one more point. Despite a few regrets, I'm happy with the outcome.

A: I was nervous before my presentation as the second speaker with only two minutes to talk. I wasn't sure about the timing or questions. After the video, I focused on possible questions but only got one from Professor Lydia. When Professor Natalie said there were no more, I was surprised but relieved.

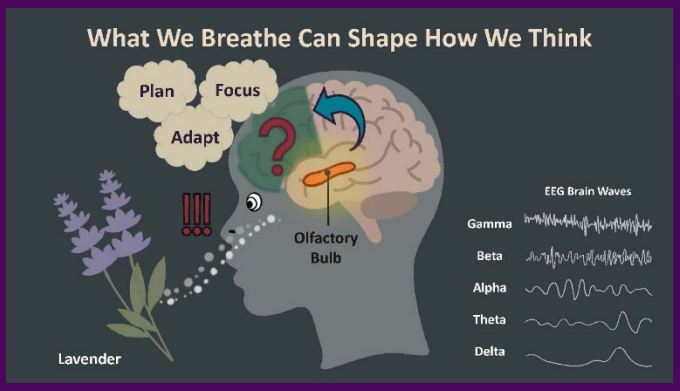
6. What advice would you give to students who are thinking about participating in 3MT?

A: Joining the three-minute competition helped me grow. I learned to express my ideas clearly and professionally, even in just three minutes. The experience was valuable, even without winning, and I'm truly grateful for the transformation.

S: Simplifying your presentation makes your research clearer—not just for others, but for yourself too. If you can explain it simply, you truly understand it. So don't hesitate—just go for it!

C: The 3MT Competition is absolutely a wonderful opportunity for any PhD student. It allows us to explain our research without technical terms and to make science accessible to everyone. I also believe you do not need to be fluent in English to participate. What matters most is clarity and the passion for your own research. Don't shy away because with practice, anyone can deliver a captivating talk. I believe if you have enough passion and convey your topic clearly, the audience will want to listen. Therefore, I truly encourage everyone to join 3MT!

Winners' Slides



First Prize:

Chi T. Q. Tran

<Title>

What We Breathe Can Shape How We Think.

Runner-up:

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