

1. Where, who, what and why?

The first thing you do is make a rough assessment of the how and the why of the presentation. These questions seem so easy to answer that most people simply skip them and open PowerPoint straight away. Don't! Often it is not at all obvious what the purpose of a presentation is.

What is expected of you? Is the aim to inspire, to convince or to inform? About what? Who is the presentation intended for? What is the level of the audience and their background knowledge of the subject? Where and when is the presentation? Do you have enough time to prepare? Refuse outright if you have too little time to prepare, and estimate this time generously. Allow at least two weeks for a half-hour presentation. You will not use all of this time, but you will certainly need those days.

What is the venue like? Are there several speakers and what will they be talking about? Always offer to be the first or the last speaker; the audience is at its freshest during the first talk, and the last words heard will also stick well. If you have to speak after lunch, take this into account. The audience will be more tired than in the morning.

Why is a presentation the best form for this aim? Why are you the best presenter for this presentation? These two questions are very important. Simply transferring information is never sufficient reason to give a presentation. The audience could just as easily read an article, memo or book on the subject. In a presentation, more happens. It is a moment of contact between you and the audience. The subject is given a face: yours. This can be a great advantage. Why you? What is your involvement with the subject?

Three examples of presentations and their goals and presenters.

Michel, human resource manager at a large company. Asked to give a presentation on a new personnel policy relating to an upcoming merger. There is a buzz among the staff about possible compulsory redundancies. This is not the case, but there will be a shift in the vision of the company culture and a number of new rules of conduct.

Aim: To inform the staff about the changes surrounding the upcoming merger (no redundancies, but a different vision) and to convince the staff that the changes are for the better.

Is the audience waiting for this: Yes, it is about their future.

Why Michel: He is the human resources man, the staff know this and know him. He has a reputation as a decent chap with a heart for his people. He is the obvious person for the job.

Why a presentation: For this subject, a presentation is better than a memo. The staff are addressed directly and feel involved in the subject. Michel can see the reactions

and the mood immediately, any misunderstandings can be put right on the spot and any negative reactions can be answered straight away.

Bas, IT process developer at a medium-sized company. Asked to present a newly developed application to the management team and the sales department of his company.

Aim: Informing the management team and the sales people about how the new application works and what it can do. Being proud of the development department. Is the audience waiting for this: Yes, for the sales people it is essential that they know something about the products, and for the management team it is just as essential that they know what is going on in their company.

Why Bas: Bas is the best developer. He is a super nerd, never seems to get outside and is recognisable by the cup of coffee he always has with him. He is the obvious person for the job, because he is the heart of the development department.

Why a presentation: For this subject, a presentation is better than a written article. The audience does not share the same background and is unlikely to read something technical voluntarily. Seeing the developer in person will also contribute to a sense of involvement.

Carlijn, independent filmmaker. Together with a few other people she has come up with a project for a new film. She has been chosen to give a presentation to potential financial backers.

Aim: To convince the investors that this film is worth investing in.

Is the audience waiting for this: Yes, but conditionally. They first have to be convinced that it really is a good investment.

Why Carlijn: She is the driving force behind the project. It is her passion. She is the obvious person for the job.

Why a presentationA promotional leaflet will never be able to convey the message the way standing face to face with one of the initiators can. There is an opportunity to respond directly to questions from the investors and possibly do business straight away.

Assignments: Where, who, what and why

For these exercises you will need blank cards or sheets of paper. (Do not use the computer) Take your time to complete the exercises and add things as they occur to you later on.

1. Write the word Aim on one sheet of paper. On it, write down what the aim of your presentation is. What do you want to achieve? Is it informative, argumentative or inspiring? What do you want the audience to remember? If necessary, break the aim down into sub-aims, as Michel should do: what are the most important things the staff need to know afterwards. Below that, on the same sheet, note

down the advantages of a presentation over a written memo or article for this purpose.

2. On one sheet of paper, write down the word Audience. What do they expect and who are they? Write down everything you know about the audience. Size of the group, background knowledge, mood, expectations. In Carlijn's case, the audience will be small with a great deal of knowledge and a wait-and-see attitude. They expect to be inspired. In Bas's case, it will be a larger audience with little knowledge, and they expect to leave the presentation knowing more.
3. On one sheet of paper, write down the word Circumstances. Write down everything you know about the circumstances of the presentation. Where is it? How long does it last? When is it? What kind of room is it? Which audiovisual aids are available? What happens after the presentation? (such as drinks, for example)
4. Write your own name on one sheet of paper. On it, write down what your **personal** involvement is with the aim of the presentation. Why were you asked? What is your contribution to the presentation? Where does your passion lie?
5. Once you have written out the assignments above, write down on a separate card, in a single sentence, what the aim of the presentation is: the objective sentence.