Maastricht University
Presenting with PowerPoint

Presentations are a highly direct and personal form of communication, with the key aim being for your audience to understand your message. This is why it's important, just as with any other type of communication, to do first things first: focus, then shoot.

1. Purpose & message

You don't have much time: you'll be in and out in half an hour at the most. So what is the take-home message of your talk? What is it that you're trying to persuade your audience of? The answers to these questions should form the starting point in planning your presentation. Don't spend an eternity trying to come up with an original format. Focus instead on the content – because although not everyone is a fan of PowerPoint, it does exactly what we want: it allows us to support our story with images in a short period of time.

2. Audience & context

Who are your listeners? Why have they come to your presentation? What are their interests and what keeps them up at night? Remember that the audience is there for you and your story, not for the projector screen. So avoid starting your presentation with complicated flowcharts and the like. Nobody is keen to see this right off the bat, and your talking time (and their listening time) is too precious to waste!

3. Structure & content

Now that you've identified your message (step 1), split it into parts and order them logically. Structure your presentation using the format head-body-tail: say what you're going to say (head), say it (body) and then say what you've said (tail). Don't cover the screen with tables, matrices and long chunks of tiny text – slides overflowing with information are distracting, and you'll have a tough time getting your audience's attention back. Better to opt instead for inspiring photos or illustrations.

4. Powerful & vivid

An effective presentation takes no more than fifteen minutes. No one knows exactly how much of what you say your audience will actually remember, but it certainly won't be all of it. So make sure you use text and images that stand out and drive your message home, but aren't too cliché. It doesn't matter how many slides you use, as long as they all have added value. Twenty single words or images presented in rapid succession can say more than one slide of carefully worded text.

5. Scrap & summarise

Kill your darlings! Often we want to present too much information, in too many slides. The 5x5 rule is a good rule of thumb: no more than 5 words per line and 5 lines per slide. You won't always manage to stick to this, but it's a good target to help you achieve clear and concise slides. Summarise the information and present it in telegram style. And remember: you don't have to say everything. Sometimes it's better to dwell on the few things you really want your audience to remember.

6. Practise & prepare

You can only read out the points on the slides if you're facing the screen and have your back to your audience – so don't! Your presentation is a visual coat hook. Talk around it and zoom in on select points. For the rest, your audience will be focused on the tone of your sentences, the way you move or the colour of your shoes. Before the talk, be sure to test all the connections and check whether the presentation is working properly. And always take your own cables, adapter and backup on a USB stick.

7. Make contact & keep it

Make use of the space and look at the audience as you speak. Give them the chance to ask questions, and summarise your key points at the end. If the technology just won't cooperate, distribute your handouts before instead of after the talk. Make sure your name, position and email address is on the last slide. Afterwards, put your presentation on SlideShare (content and copyright permitting) so that others can share it via social media.

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Practical tips

Save document as template
Open PowerPoint. Go to "Save" and select "PowerPoint template (.potx)". You will be automatically directed to the folder "My templates". Press "Save". You will now be able to select the desired template from the folder "My templates".

Format
The UM PowerPoint template is available in standard (4:3) and widescreen format (16:9). Check in advance which format you'll need.

Master slides
If you want to add a new slide, you can choose from a number of master slides (e.g. title slides, text slides, image slides). Go to "New slide" and select the slide with the desired layout.

Slide numbers and user
You can show or hide the slide numbers and department name or brand under "Insert" > "Header & Footer".

Images, photos, articles, videos

Photos
UM has its own image bank on the intranet that can be accessed via um.brand-spot.net. To make use of these images you have to set up an account with the House Style Office; you can do this by sending an email to support-platform@maastrichtuniversity.nl.

There are also many online databases that supply stock images. These are the main image banks that provide photos free of charge:
Freeimages.com – Created by GettyImages, this image bank contains around 350,000 photos. The search results tend to include many images from iStockPhoto, Getty's paid image channel, but if you don't mind sifting through these you can find lots of nice, free photos.
123RF – With over 33 million stock photos, illustrations, videos and copyright-free music, 123RF is a Valhalla for anyone in need of free material. But beware – many of these stock images really look like stock images.
Flickr Creative Commons – The photo site Flickr is one of the largest providers of free images, with photos allocated to different copyright classes. Those classed under Attribution License are the most useful for our purposes; often they only require you to identify the source of the photo. Check the details below each photo to see the uploader's terms of use.
Wikimedia Commons – Most of the images that appear in the online encyclopaedia Wikipedia are covered by the Creative Commons regulation, which means they are typically free to use.

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