



# How to write a powerful Position Paper



**Webinar**

**March 2, 2022**

held by Mechthild Bülow

## What makes your Position Paper powerful?

### How to...

- 1. Find the best way into politics:**  
*What decision-makers want and need from scientists*
- 2. Communicate complex issues:**  
*The Position Paper from start to finish*
- 3. Make compelling arguments**  
*for written and verbal reports*
- 4. Deal effectively with objection...**  
*... or rejection from the other side*

## What makes your Position Paper powerful?

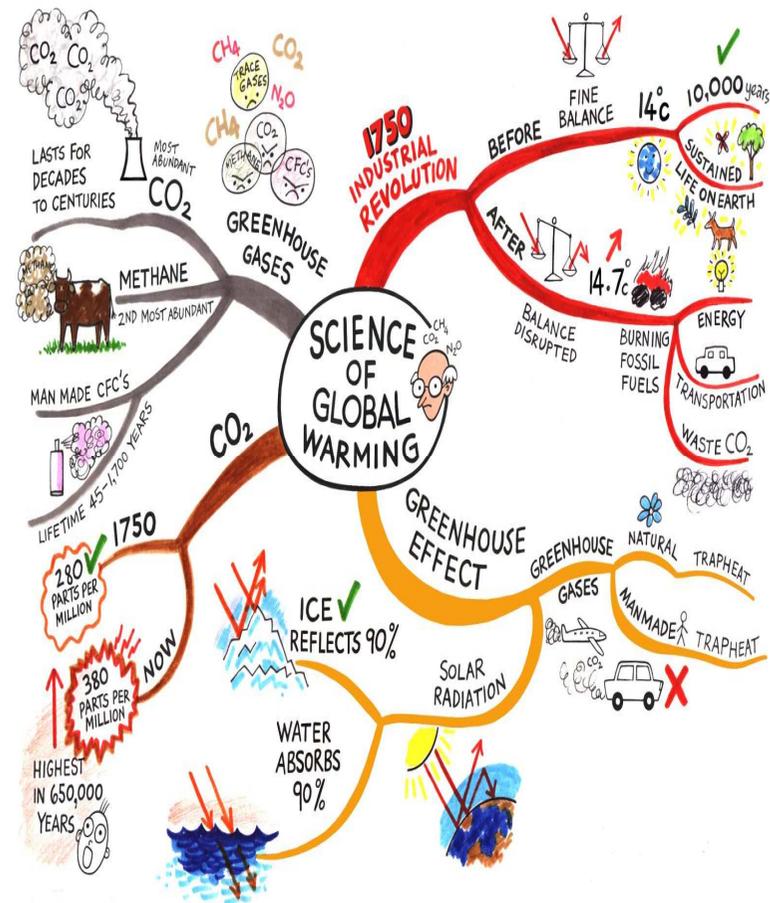
- **Concentrate on target person/group: decision-maker/s**
- **Focus on argumentation**
- **Forget information**

# Forget information?

But we are **SCIENTISTS!**

*In our essay or research paper, we:*

1. *Name topics and tasks*
2. *Describe a status quo based on statistics*
3. *Present problem/s, analyse and interpret data*
4. *Show our solution based on argumentation*



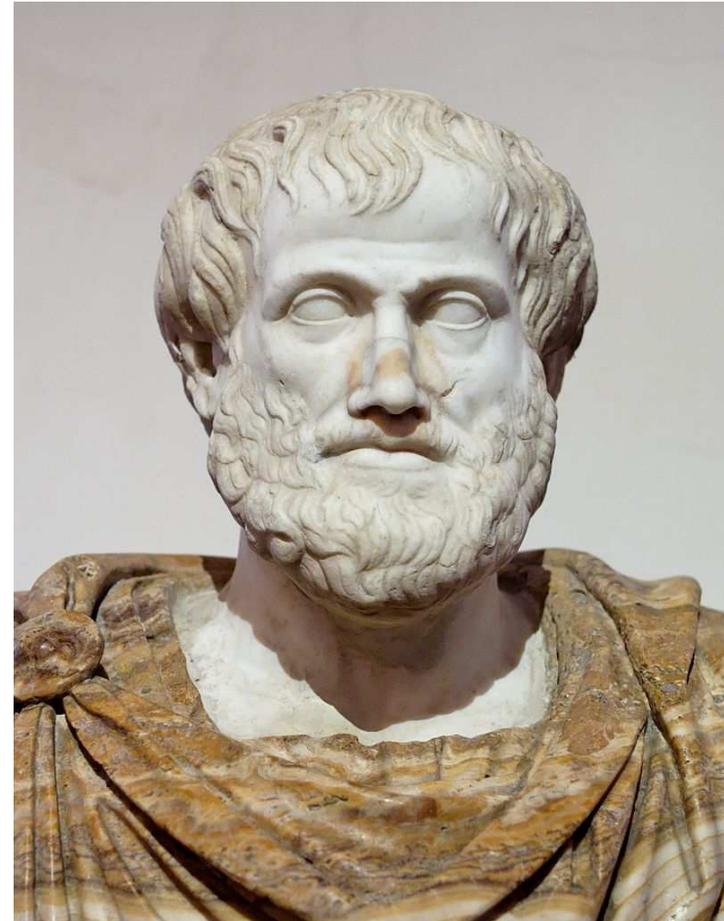
- **Focus on argumentation**

Scientists know how to  
make logical arguments

and follow

scientist & philosopher

**Aristotle**



- **Concentrate on target person/group: decision-maker/s**

He/she might be:

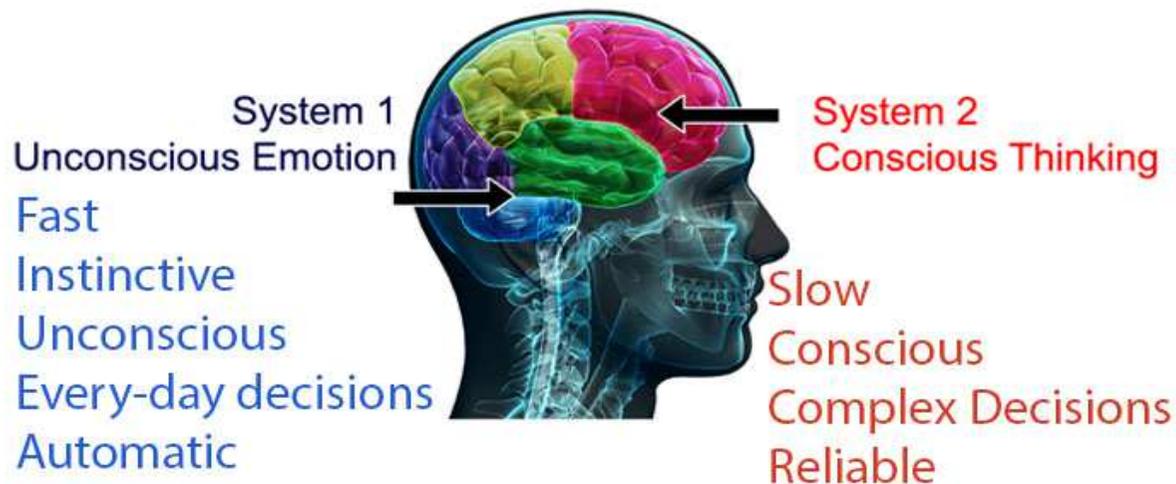
a politician  
a government official  
a lawyer  
an economist  
ex-military



## How does decision-making work?

“Research of the last decade reveals that emotions constitute the most potent (...) drivers of decision making.” \*

### Two Decision Making Routes



\*Source: Herbert Simon, Nobel Laureate Scientist

# What makes your Position Paper powerful?

## Synchronize communication!

Scientists have	Decision-Makers need
Scientific information	Facts that can easily be reprocessed and repeated
Logical arguments	Eristic arguments with lifelike examples
Analysis	Interpretation; context
to contribute to knowledge	to contribute to processes and politics
Consistency in communication	'Confetti' in communication

- 1. Find the best way into politics:**  
*What decision-makers want and need from scientists*

## **1. Find the best way into politics:**

- ✓ **Check out your decision-maker/s**
- ✓ **Collect the objections to your project**
- ✓ **Gather any questions you and your decision-makers might have**
- ✓ **Determine your ideal starting point**

## 1. Find the best way into politics:

- ✓ **Identify your decision-maker or decision group**  
*Biography, age group, professional background, national/ international experience...*
- ✓ **Obstacles and objections your decision-makers might raise**  
*No money! Boring! Politically irrelevant!*
- ✓ **Questions your decision-makers may well ask you:**  
*What's in it for me? How can we protect the findings?  
Do we need patent protection? Where do we get funds?  
Who should be involved in developing the project?  
Who benefits most if the project succeeds?*

## **1. Find the best way into politics:**

✓ **Your ideal starting point:**

**What am I the answer to?**

**... based on questions decision-makers ask you**

**What if... decision-makers have no questions AND are dead against my project?**

## **2. Communicate complex issues:** *The Position Paper from start to finish*

## **2. Communicate complex issues:**

*The Position Paper from start to finish*

### **Write...**

#### **the topic**

*... in one sentence*

#### **a clear objective**

*... describing the outcome/achievement: your visible success*

#### **the benefit or goal**

*... detailing the reason why your project should be decided upon*

#### **the strategy**

*... showing the way you want to go  
AND your argumentation*

#### **your recommendation for next steps towards a decision**

*... to be taken by you and/or your decision-makers*

*Please imagine the following scenario...*



*As the head of a research team, you are specialized in electrolysis. Your experiments have now been successful in extracting oxygen from carbon dioxide in a Martian atmosphere.*

*Your discovery could make life on Mars possible. You need more funding to speed up your project development for the next European-Russian mission. 'Exomars' will take your experiment to Mars by the end of 2022.*

*First of all, your Position Paper will have to convince your Ministry of Science and Research.*



## Position Paper elements:

### Topic

What is my topic in one sentence?

Does my decision-maker understand this?

**A**

## Position Paper elements:

### Topic

**SCENARIO**

What is my topic in one sentence?

Does my decision-maker understand this?

We want to contribute to the next Russian Mars mission 'Exomars' and show that we have found the missing link that will make life on Mars possible.

**B**

## **Position Paper elements:**

**My interest = objective + benefit/goal**

1. *Objective*
2. *Benefit to decision-makers*

**B**

## Position Paper elements:

**My interest = objective + benefit/goal**

**SCENARIO**

1. *Objective*

To send our break-through experiment on electrolysis to Mars

2. *Benefit to decision-makers*

We will be the first scientists to solve this problem,  
our country will be famous and we will gain sponsors.



## Position Paper elements:

### Background information

Should be short, include diagrams

Footnotes and links convey complex information

Think about **alternative formats** for detailed information:

Additional question-and-answer catalogue

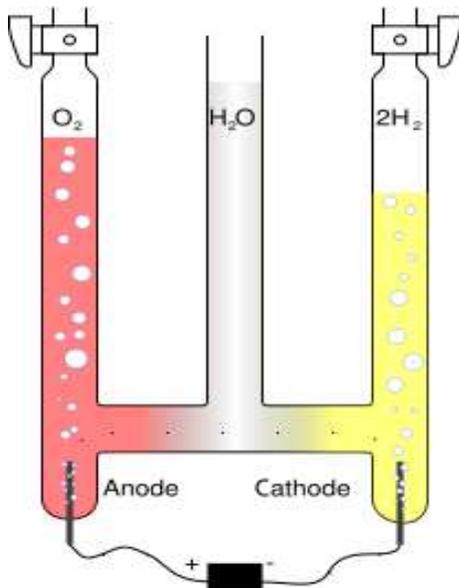
Separate fact sheets

C

## Position Paper elements:

### Background information

SCENARIO



**Electrolysis** is the process of separating a chemical compound by passing an electrical current through it.

It is effective, because water is available in large quantities on Mars. Electrolysis can be used to produce oxygen as part of the atmosphere required for an artificial habitat.

The oxygen can also be used in a propulsion system, for technical installations and vehicles. The hydrogen produced can be used for hydrocarbon synthesis, yielding synthetic materials for space suits etc.



## Position Paper elements:

### Argumentation

I \_\_\_\_\_ *Thesis*

because \_\_\_\_\_ *Reason*

for \_\_\_\_\_ *Proof*

how \_\_\_\_\_ *Example*

therefore \_\_\_\_\_ *Conclusion*



## Position Paper elements:

### Argumentation\*:



**We** *need to contribute to the 'Exomars' mission now*

**Thesis**

**because** *the Russians have almost solved the electrolyses problem*

**Reason**

**for** *we know this from our science contacts and peer reviews*

**Proof**

**(how)** *(Function of contacts and names of publications)*

**Example**

**(therefore)** *if not now, 10 years of research was in vain!*

**Conclusion**

**E**

**Position Paper elements:**

**Recommendation to your decision-makers**

**Suggestion for possible next steps:**

***Allocate funds***

***Provide personnel***

***Speed up decision-making process***

***Clarify our international contribution in relevant panel/s***

***Give the 'Go' to (e.g.) continue research with a deadline***

**E**

## **Position Paper elements:**

### **Recommendation to your decision-makers**

**SCENARIO**

#### **To be decided by Minister of Science and Research:**

Should we contribute our electrolysis experiment to 'Exomars'?

Your decision is needed by March 31

*To participate in 'Exomars' we would require:*

*\$20.000 for documentation*

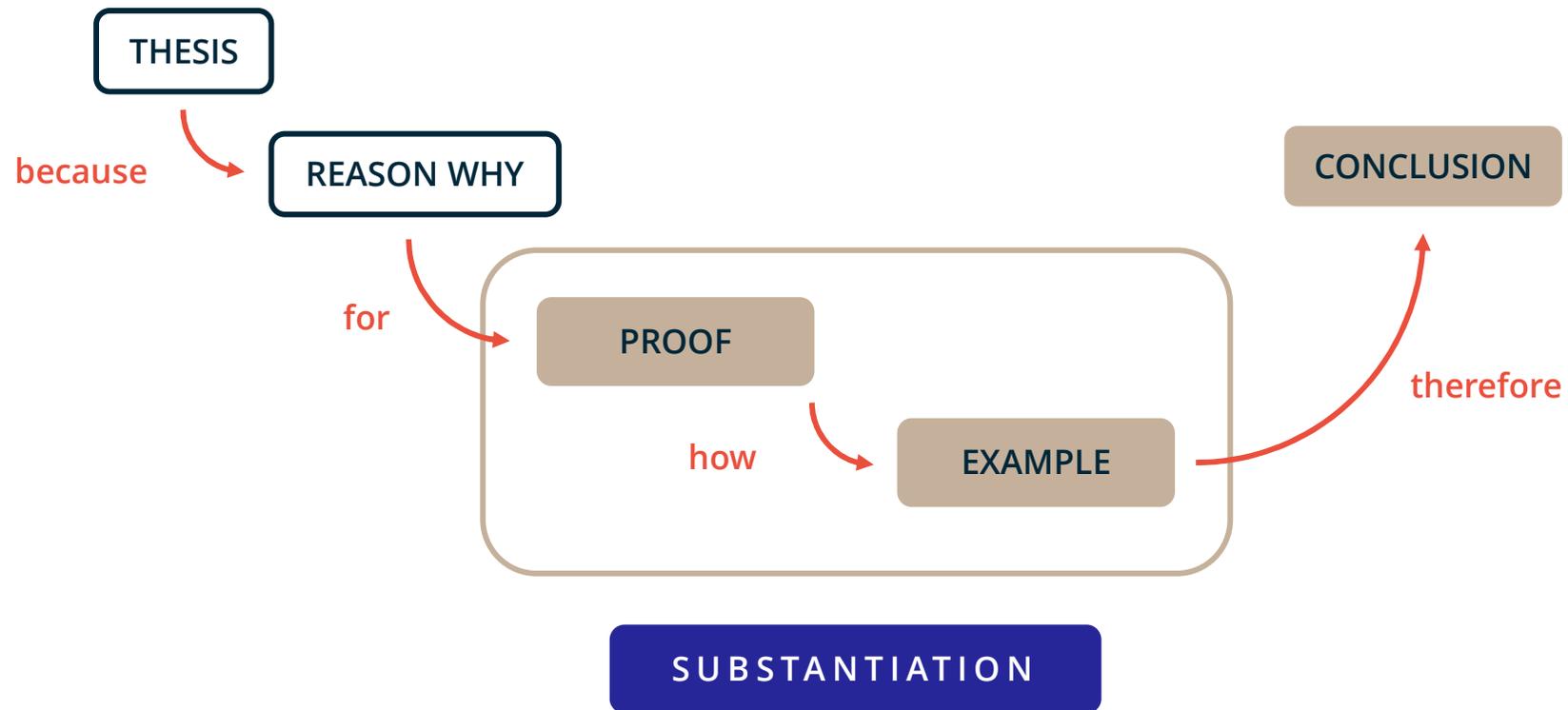
*1 extra researcher*



	Decision-maker/s	
A.	Topic	
B.	Objective	
B.	Benefit/goal	
C.	Background	
D.	Argument against	
D.	Argument for	
E.	Recommendation	

**3. Make compelling arguments,**  
*for written and verbal reports*

## Use classic argumentation, follow Aristotle



**4. Deal effectively with objection...**  
*... or rejection from the other side*

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*... or rejection from the other side*

### **Good to know:**

Objections are in most cases emotions

Example: sentences beginning with: "But..."

**What if... I am not sure?**

**Is my decision-maker producing emotions or factual content?**

## **4. Deal effectively with objection...**

*... or rejection from the other side*

### **Step 1: Try arguing – the other way round**

#### **Ask questions in order of argumentation**

What is the main point of your opinion?

Reasons for your opinion?

What proof can you give me?

What example illustrates your point?

What is your conclusion?

What do you see as the next step?

#### **4. Deal effectively with objection...**

*... or rejection from the other side*

### **Step 2: Ask open questions (except with 'Why'), follow with 'I'-sentences**

"This is something we've never done before!"

*Where are your concerns? I can offer...*

"It's out of the question!"

*What do you mean? I suggest...*

## **Some Do's and Don't's for your Position Paper**

### **Be brief!**

*The best position paper contains only what cannot be left out.*

### **No Infodump, please.**

*Everything you know is fairly uninteresting to non-scientists.*

### **Use lifelike context.**

*Add everyday examples to your arguments*

### **Make yourself understood.**

*"The worm must taste good to the fish, not the fisherman."*



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**Thank you!**

**Webinar**  
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