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## **ARTICLE** **COMMUNICATION**

# How to Present to Senior Executives

*by Nancy Duarte*

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Senior executives are one of the toughest crowds you'll face as a presenter. They're incredibly impatient because their schedules are jam-packed — and [they have to make lots of high-stakes decisions](#), often with little time to weigh options. So they won't sit still for a long presentation with a big reveal at the end. They'll just interrupt you before you finish your shtick.

It can be frustrating. You probably have a lot to say to them, and this might be your only shot to say it. But if you want them to hear you *at all*, [get to what they care about right away](#) so they can make their decisions more efficiently. Having presented to top executives in many fields — from jet engines to search engines — I've learned the hard way that if you ramble in front of them, you'll get a look that says, "Are you kidding me? You really think I have the time to care about that?" So quickly and clearly present information that's important to them, ask for questions, and then be done. If your spiel is short and insightful, you'll get their ear again.

Here's how you can earn their attention and support:

**Summarize up front:** Say you're given 30 minutes to present. When creating your intro, pretend your whole slot got cut to 5 minutes. This will force you to lead with all the information your audience really cares about — high-level findings, conclusions, recommendations, a call to action. State those points clearly and succinctly right at the start, and then move on to supporting data, subtleties, and material that's peripherally relevant.

**Set expectations:** Let the audience know you'll spend the first few minutes presenting your summary and the rest of the time on discussion. Even the most impatient executives will be more likely to let you get through your main points uninterrupted if they know they'll soon get to ask questions.

**Create summary slides:** When making your slide deck, place a short overview of key points at the front; the rest of your slides should serve as an appendix. Follow the 10% rule: If your appendix is 50 slides, create 5 summary slides, and so on. After you present the summary, let the group drive the conversation, and refer to appendix slides as relevant questions and comments come up. Often, executives will want to go deeper into certain points that will aid in their decision making. If they do, quickly pull up the slides that speak to those points.

**Give them what they asked for:** If you were invited to give an update about the flooding of your company's manufacturing plant in Indonesia, do so before covering anything else. This time-pressed group of senior managers invited you to speak because they felt you could supply a missing piece of information. So answer that specific request directly and quickly.

**Rehearse:** Before presenting, run your talk and your slides by a colleague who will serve as an honest coach. Try to find someone who's had success getting ideas adopted at the executive level. Ask for pointed feedback: Is your message coming through clearly and quickly? Do your summary slides boil everything down into skimmable key insights? Are you missing anything your audience is likely to expect?

Sounds like a lot of work? It is, but presenting to an executive team is a great honor and can open tremendous doors. If you nail this, people with a lot of influence will become strong advocates for your ideas.

*This is the first post in Nancy Duarte's blog series on creating and delivering presentations, based on tips from her new book, the [HBR Guide to Persuasive Presentations](#).*

*Read the other posts here:*

Post #2: [Create a Presentation Your Audience Will Care About](#)

Post #3: [Do Your Slides Pass the Glance Test?](#)

Post #4: [Structure Your Presentation Like a Story](#)

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**Nancy Duarte** is a best-selling author with thirty years of CEO-ing under her belt. She's driven her firm, [Duarte, Inc.](#), to be the global leader behind some of the most influential messages and visuals in business and culture. Duarte, Inc., is the largest design firm in Silicon Valley, as well as one of the top woman-owned businesses in the area. Nancy has written six best-selling books, four have won awards, and her new book, [DataStory: Explain Data and Inspire Action Through Story](#), is available now. Follow Duarte on Twitter: [@nancyduarte](#) or [LinkedIn](#).

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