



Presentation Skills

# Disarm Your Audience When You Present

Get ready for a fight, though you might not have one. **by Nancy Duarte**

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**When you walk into a room as** a presenter, it's easy to feel as if you're the central figure: You're up front, and people came to hear *you*. In reality, though, you're not the star of the show. The audience is. It's in their power to embrace — or reject — your ideas. You're presenting because you need them to change their beliefs or behavior in some way, and people find it [hard to change](#). So expect them to resist.

Resistance doesn't have to be a bad thing. In fact, if you prepare for it, you'll sharpen your presentation and stand a much better chance of winning your audience over. By considering different points of view and addressing doubts and fears before they become roadblocks, you'll demonstrate an open mind — and invite your audience to respond in kind.

Here are the most common types of resistance and some tips on getting ready for them:

**Logical resistance:** As you plan your presentation, try to come up with arguments against your perspective. Familiarize yourself with alternate lines of reasoning by digging up articles, blog posts, and reports that challenge your stance. This kind of research will prepare you for skeptical questions and comments — and it'll help you develop a deeper understanding of the topic and a more nuanced point of view.

**Emotional resistance:** Does your audience hold fast to a bias, dogma, or moral code — and do your ideas violate that in some way? Hitting raw nerves will set people off. So look at things from their perspective, and proceed carefully. If, for example, you're at a medical conference launching a new HPV vaccination for kids, emphasize the importance of abstinence in youth.

**Practical resistance:** Is it physically or geographically difficult for the audience to do what you're asking? Acknowledge any sacrifices they're making, and show that you're shouldering some of the burden yourself. Suppose you're asking your team to work nights and weekends to meet a tight deadline. Explain that you'll be in 24/7 mode, too, until the big project is wrapped up — and that everyone will get comp time afterward.

Anticipating resistance forces you to really think about the people you're presenting to, and that makes it easier to influence them. If you've made a sincere effort to look at the world through their eyes, it will show when you speak. You'll feel more warmly toward them, so you'll take on a conversational tone. You'll sound — and be — authentic when you address their concerns. As a result, you'll disarm them, and they'll be more likely to accept your message.

If you're struggling to figure out what kinds of resistance you'll face, share your ideas with others before you present and ask them to pressure-test the content. You may be so deeply connected to your own perspective that you're having a hard time anticipating other points of view. Use your boss as a sounding board as you prepare to speak to the executive committee, for example. Or ask a colleague for a reality check before you present to other managers in her group.

Always remember that the people in your audience get to determine whether your idea spreads or dies. You need them more than they need you. So be humble in your approach. Their desires and goals — and their frustrations and anxieties — should shape everything you present.

*This is the fifth 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](#).*

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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](#).