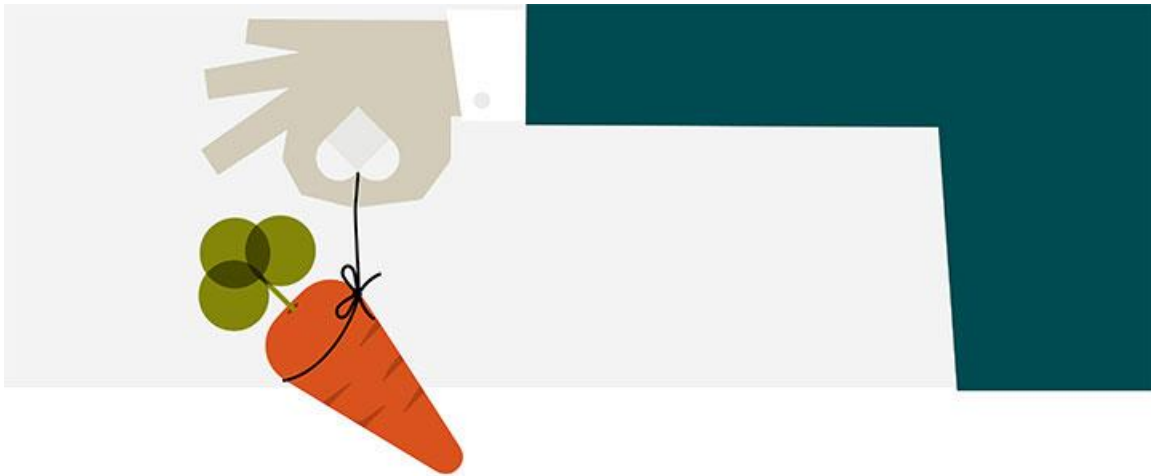


# How to Master Audience Engagement When You Present

By Catrinel Bartolomeu



Don't panic, but if you want to engage your audience in a presentation, you have about 30 seconds to make it happen. Recent [studies show](#) that the first lapse of attention happens about halfway through that first minute. If you haven't caught their attention yet, there's a good chance you'll lose their focus to their phone, laptop, reading materials, daydreams, etc.

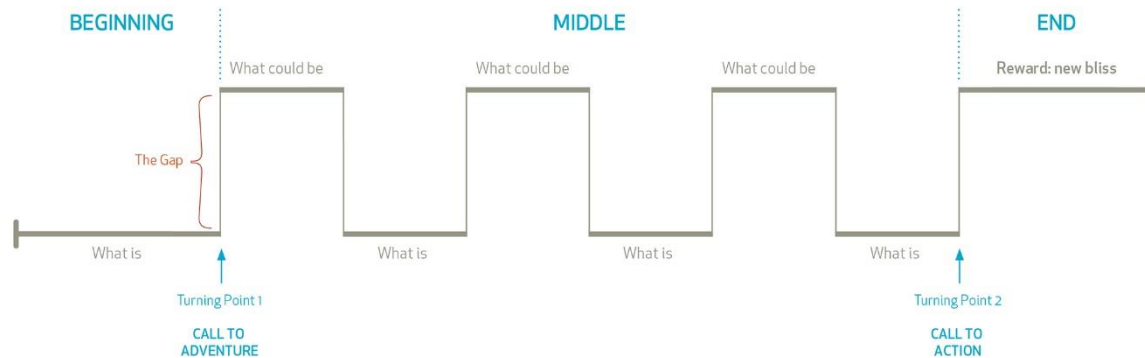
However, there are a few techniques that can help you hijack a person's flighty focus and reset audience engagement. Then you can direct it towards hanging on your every word.

Over the years, Duarte's studied thousands of effective presentations. These presentations kept audiences engaged, engrossed, and even on the edge of their seats. What we've learned is that your success in engaging the audience is largely determined by three key elements: how you structure your presentation, how well you understand your audience, and how you deliver the information.

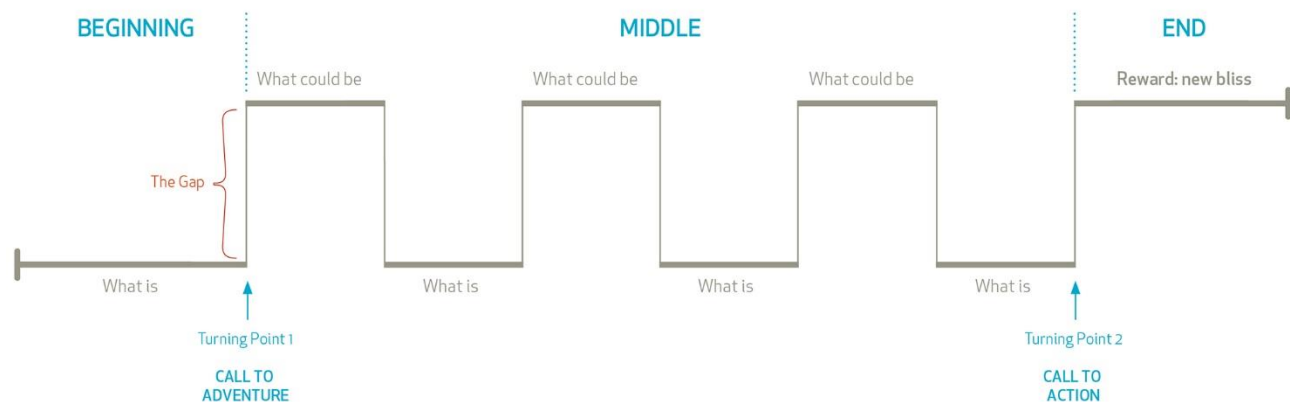
## Structure your Presentation to Keep the Audience Engaged

The most crucial step in engaging your audience is taken before your presentation begins, as you're planning it.

## The Presentation Form



## The Presentation Form



## Define the Beginning, Middle, and End

In [\*Resonate\*](#), Duarte's CEO, Nancy Duarte, explains how most great presentations use the same structure as our favorite myths, movies, and books. Setting up your presentation as a story can help engross an audience, and building the information you deliver into a narrative with drama will keep them riveted – no matter how technical or dense your data might be. Duarte says,

*Creating desire in the audience and then showing how your ideas fill that desire moves people to adopt your perspective. This is the heart of story.*

**The Beginning:** The beginning of your story serves as a *call to adventure*. Set up for the audience a baseline reality and the problems they grapple with today—think of this as *what is*. The beginning should include concise information about what *everyone* agrees is true.

**The Middle:** The middle of the presentation, is generally longer than the beginning and shows a series of contrasts. It reveals to audience members *what could be* in the future

vs. *what is* now. Building contrasting elements into your presentation helps hold an audience's attention. They enjoy experiencing a small dilemma then learning its resolution.

**The End:** The end of the presentation should leave the audience with a concrete, ultimate sense of *what could be*. They just need to be willing to be transformed. It should describe potential future outcomes with wonder and awe, leaving audiences inspired. You should also use the ending to repeat the most important points from the previous parts of the story.

## Use Distinct Turning Points to Guide your Audience

Even if you succeed in engaging your audience, listeners need guidance to stay on track. For this purpose, use two turning points to move them through the presentation and maintain audience engagement.

**The Call to Adventure:** The *call to adventure* should come just after the beginning of your story. It should move listeners to the middle. The *call to adventure* puts forth a big idea of *what could be*, which stands in stark contrast to *what is*—it quite suddenly destabilizes the status quo.

Your audience can't help but want to resolve the gap. They'll pay attention as you build towards a conclusion.

**The Call to Action:** To move the audience from the middle to the end of your presentation the *call to action* must clearly articulate what the audience can do to move from *what is* to *what could be*. Include discrete tasks that will help bring the ideas you've presented to fruition. After your call to action, your ending will inspire audience members and remind them of the rewards they will reap if they're moved to act.

## Connect with the Audience Before You Present

Even if you craft a spellbinding, dramatic narrative, there's still a chance that you can lose audience members as you talk – especially if those listeners can't relate to you.

To ensure maximum audience engagement, make sure you find common ground with the people to whom you're presenting. Common ground helps create empathy; if an audience can relate to the story you are telling them, they'll empathize with you and may begin to care.

There are a couple of techniques you can use to get to know your audience before you present, so you can be sure you're relevant.

## Segment the Audience

One of the best audience engagement strategies is to divide the audience into many subsegments. Choose the subsegment which is most likely to adopt your perspective and appeal to them. There are countless ways to segment an audience, including by demographics, job title, geographies and more.

### Meet Your Hero



Get really specific and think of the individuals in your audience. Think about what kind of event you're speaking at, and why most people are there. Then, ask yourself the following questions:

1. How do they spend a day?
2. What keeps them up at night?
3. How do they spend their paychecks?
4. What are their likable qualities?
5. Name things they prioritize.
6. Do they already know a lot about what you are going to tell them, and what do they need to learn more about?
7. How do they give and receive respect?
8. How do they make decisions?
9. What biases do they have?

Once you answer these questions, you can better determine what experiences they will relate to. When crafting your presentation, you can rely on those shared experiences to relay information in a way that resonates. Ask yourself:

- What memories, historical events, or interests do you have in common?
- What types of outcomes are mutually desired?
- Why are you uniquely qualified to be their guide?
- What similar journey have you gone on with a positive outcome?

Ultimately, you should communicate from the common ground – you’ll build credibility, and keep the ear of the people that you need to hear you.

## Deliver Your Presentation to Maximize Audience Engagement

Even the most well-thought-out, well-crafted, audience-centric presentations can lose people if they’re not delivered well. Remember [Charlie Brown’s teacher](#) in the Peanuts cartoons? If you’re not focused on your presentation’s delivery, you may end up sounding just like him to listeners.

If there’s one person you can rely on for effective delivery tips, it’s Doug Neff, Duarte’s content director, speaker coach, and all-around presentation guru. He gave us the following tips:

### Interact with the Audience from the Get-go

Remember that your presentation isn’t a speech. There’s no need to simply stand and read information off of a slide or a piece of paper. Instead, use your presentation to engage and interact with the audience. Neff explained that directly interacting within the first two minutes of your presentation “allows you to build a connection with them right up front.” Not sure how to interact with the people listening to you? Neff suggests the following possibilities:

- Tell a joke (try to get them to laugh)
- Ask them to “raise your hand if...”
- Tell a quick story, then “has that ever happened to you? Yeah, I see some heads nodding...”
- Ask them to give a round of applause for something...

### Match Your Tone of Voice to the Setting

There’s no need to drone on in a monotone, even if you are delivering serious information. However, for optimal audience engagement, you should be sure to match your tone of voice to the setting. In order to choose the right tone of voice for the event, Neff recommends using the dress code as a measure. He explains,

*Dress code is one way to gauge your tone of voice: we try to aim for one notch above our audience. For instance, if they’re business casual, we might dress just one more step above that... and we’d match our tone of voice to that same level.*

## Don't Stand Still, and Don't Pace Like a Caged Panther

The amount of movement you do on stage during your presentation can have a huge effect on how well people can pay attention to you. If you stand behind the podium the entire time, you'll probably be too boring to engage the audience; if you pace like you're a hungry panther in a zoo cage, you're going to be distracting. Neff explains that the goal of any good presenter should be to be "purposeful in your movements." However, you choose to move onstage should help to both engage your audience's attention and get your message across. The worst mistake to make in terms of movement, according to Neff? "To let your unconscious movements be in control." So, work on taming those distracting nervous tics before you take the podium.

## Don't Pause to Let Your Audience Members Read Slides

Slides are an important part of your presentation because they help communicate your ideas visually. However, there's no need to pause and let audience members read them—that will interrupt the flow of your presentation, and distract people from keeping their attention on you. Instead, refer to your slides as you speak—but don't let them take over. Neff explains, "Slides are background, like set decoration in a play. They should help enhance the message, but not ever be noticed so much that they get in the way. Referring to them is the same thing. Refer to them if that helps your audience better understand them, but not more."

Let's face it—going into a presentation can be nerve-wracking. However, if you structure your presentation like a story while keeping your audience's needs front of mind and you present calmly and confidently, you can eliminate one worry—that you'll bore the people silly. You can also reap the ultimate grand prize that all presenters seek: that your engaged audience leaves believing in your ideas and ready to act to make them a reality.

Source: <https://www.duarte.com/presentation-skills-resources/audience-engagement-strategies-presentations/>

---

## Check Your Understanding Questions

1. What is the attention span of typical audience members?
2. What is the structure of a captivating story?
3. What are some questions you can ask during the audience analysis?
4. What are some examples of common ground you can use to engage an audience?
5. Give an example of "matching the tone to the setting"
6. Why is it bad to pause and let the audience read the slide?