

# Dealing with a Hostile Audience

Hostility is a reasonable response to many presentations. You may well be uncomfortable with your audience's hostility but what will you sacrifice to avoid it?

If you have a hard time with the audience's provocation, give this presentation for history. Think about the record you will leave rather than the moment you are in.

## 1. The audience

Ask yourself what is in their heads. What do they think the problem is? Not the topic, but the *problem*? What do they think and feel now?

## 2. The information

Draft the information initially as though you were reporting an emerging news story—as simply and directly and neutrally as possible. Realizing your audience's hostility is justified or unjustified influences *what* you say, not *how* you say it.

## 3. The delivery

Treat difficult news with dignity and respect. Find neutral and stay there. Neutral delivery is an acquired skill. See Prime Minister David Cameron's 9/25/12 clip for delivery that is neutral and emphatic. [Cameron is not addressing a hostile audience; his delivery is the point of this clip] <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mavFTc21sCY>  
Imitation looks dismissive to the audience. Beware the snappy comeback.

## 4. The interaction

Go for the dignity vote not the sympathy vote, no matter how you feel.  
The way to give up the power of the presenter is to go for pity or self-pity.  
12/25/11 Italian Welfare Minister Elsa Fornero  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MVR118oHca8>

Compare delivery to 10/18/12 Tasmanian Premier Lara Giddings  
<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2012-10-18/tasmanian-premier-issues-apology-for-forced/4320600> [9:21-12:43] These are offered as examples of delivery.

## More

The dominant feeling in the room when you're being heckled or challenged is: What's going to happen? What's she going to do?

Sharing the power of the presentation is a judgment call.

What you see work in a movie isn't going to work when you do it.

Please don't be naïve

### Blueprint for speaking well in tough moments

Clear content  
Neutral tone  
Temperate phrasing

- **Clear content:** Let your words do your work for you. Say what you mean. Put the weight of your communication on your words.

- **Neutral tone:** 'Tone' here means the non-verbal part of your delivery: facial

expressions, hand gestures, and posture. Avoid anything that competes with the words.

- **Temperate phrasing:** This is the place to exercise your tact. Have you ever

heard someone say, "I'm not a doctor, but I have a few ideas about your problem?"

Temperate phrasing keeps your counterpart focused on the content of your message, rather than reacting to the way you've phrased it.