

# Evidence-based Principles of Advertising: Free Internet course

Developed by Professor J. Scott Armstrong,  
The Wharton School, University of Pennsylvania  
Homepage: <http://www.jscottarmstrong.com>

## Objectives

“Advertising is fundamentally persuasion.” [Bill Bernbach](#), 1960

The learning objectives are to gain skills in evidence-based principles for:

1. *Creating persuasive advertising campaigns.* A 15-year effort to summarize a century of research led to 195 persuasion principles. These principles do not appear in any course. They are based on the research described in [Armstrong \(2011\)](#).
2. *Improved decision-making in advertising.* There are about 40 useful techniques. Use the [Tools and Techniques Spreadsheet to guide your learning and track your progress](#). For example, one of these techniques, the [Persuasion Principles Audit](#), will allow you to make accurate pretests of which ad among a set of ads (for the same product and brand) will be most effective.

## Content

Persuasion principles apply not only to advertising, but also to many other aspects of life, such as preparing a résumé, convincing your friends about an issue, making a persuasive speech, or writing a management report. As a consumer, knowledge of such principles will enable you to defend against advertising “tricks,” thanks to a large body of useful experimental research that has been published over the last century. Interestingly, you will find that few advertisers are aware of these principles and techniques.

## Guarantee

If you follow the directions as specified, by the end of the course you should be better able to design and evaluate persuasive advertising campaigns than most practitioners with many years of experience. If you are skeptical, read [Armstrong, et al \(2015\)](#). Learning times vary substantially across individuals, but I estimate that it should take most people more than 200 hours to complete all of the activities described for this course. Self-directed learners should develop a learning plan to determine which aspects of the course to focus on, and thus plan a course suited to their aims and the amount of time they can devote to the course.

## Benefits of Online Learning

This Internet course allows you to (1) schedule your learning when convenient for you, (2) revise your schedule as needed, (3) go through materials at your own pace, and (4) allocate your time for techniques and principles that are most important to you.

A [small-scale test of an economics course at Stanford](#) found that those who used the Internet version did better on the final exam than did those who attended the classes. That course apparently focused on content (knowledge).

I ran a small test to assess the demand for this course if it were made available to Wharton students. That is, they were able to take this internet course for credit. This substantially increased the demand for the course. I also offered the regular classes for them along and provided advice on their work. Most of the students did not attend. Over 90% of the students completed the course, and their performance on the exams was comparable to that of the students in my traditional classes. Most of the students said they enjoyed the freedom to go at their own pace.

Similar results were obtained in economics, another area where what is taught often conflicts with “common sense”: Attiyeh and Lumsden (1972), in a study of 30,000 U.K. students in economics courses, found that class attendance was not related to learning as measured by "before" and "after" examinations. This is interesting in that one might expect the more interested students to be more likely to attend class sessions.

This internet course aims at content and skills. See “[Natural Learning in Higher Education](#)” for a brief review of the evidence for self-directed learning. Most importantly, it is more effective in terms of learning, and, of course, it is free.

Currently this course only offers self-certification. That might change in the future as we might arrange for independent assessment centers that would use the exams currently provided in this Wharton course.

## Learning Resources

**Text:** The text is [Persuasive Advertising](#) (Palgrave Macmillan 2010), a runner-up for AMA’s 2011 Best Book in Marketing (I refer to this book as *PA*). The aim of *PA* was to summarize all useful knowledge about persuasive advertising in such a way that advertisers, consumers, consumer groups, courts, and government regulators can use it. *It is the only advertising book that provides evidence-based principles*, and it is designed to help you understand how advertising campaigns *should be* conducted. (Most students today would already go to amazon to find the book without explicit direction – deleted to shorten content) There is no need to update the book because the new findings and changes are described at [adprin.com](#). Please note that the lectures and the checklists given in the course do not provide all of the conditions for each principle, nor do they provide all of the evidence; thus, you will also need to use the book.

**Website:** [AdPrin.com](#) won the Merlot Award as the best educational site in business and economics in 2004. It has been improved upon every year since then. It is currently rated as the best of the 267 advertising sites on [Merlot](#). It provides spreadsheets for applications and describes [Techniques and Concepts for Advertising](#). It provides [print and video ads](#) that illustrate good (and bad) applications of principles. To learn more about AdPrin.com, read the [FAQ](#) and take a tour of the site. If any of you see ways to make the site easier or more useful for students, please send me an email.

In addition, there are resources to help you run meetings, make presentations, gain acceptance for change, use research techniques such as conducting surveys, and more at Scott Armstrong’s [Educational Materials](#).

The self-directed testing provided on this website will enable you to learn much more efficiently. [Test taking](#) helps people learn content. Holding study time constant, you will learn much more by self-testing than by spending the same amount of time reviewing the material (there could be a reference here – I don’t remember what it was but there was an article for the Learning paper you had me read that said that students who did practice tests retained more information than those who just read the material or did concept-mapping). AdPrin.com provides “end-of-chapter self-testing” in which you can check the book and grade your answers. In addition, there are true-false, multiple choice, and open-ended tests for which you can grade your answers, along with an exam on advertising tools and techniques.

Pick what you believe to be the most useful topics and set a [timeline](#) that suits you. You are much more likely to be successful if you develop a proper timeline.

The following suggestions will enable you to more effectively retain your learning:

1. Take the tests near the beginning of the course. This will serve as a diagnostic for you, and you will find new information to be more meaningful when it fills in your missed or blank answers later on in the course.
2. Take the first test very soon after studying material to have high retention. The previously mentioned study on [test taking](#) also showed that learners lost about 30% of the content within five minutes.
3. Take the tests in short sessions. Avoid massed learning. Retest yourself after a week or so.
4. Repeat the tests after intervals of a week or more.

**Self-directed experiential lectures:** The “experiential lectures” first present a problem for you to solve and then allow you to see the evidence-based approach. Finally, they ask you to practice using the solution on other problems. These “self-directed lectures” guide you through this process.

If you are preparing for an advertising career, I suggest following the schedule that I present later in this syllabus. If you are currently working in advertising, you may want to select lectures that are relevant to your current issues. This would be a “just-in-time” approach to learning.

The idea behind this course is that you are responsible for learning. If you think that you would benefit from gaining ideas from others, feel free to do so. Although I individually cannot help people with their learning, the website manager invites your [suggestions](#) about how we can make this course more useful to learners. We also appreciate it if you would alert us to errors in this syllabus or on the website.

## Project

To demonstrate your ability to create an advertising campaign, you will need to undertake a project in which you develop a small campaign. It would seem sensible to do a campaign for an organization that you work for, or an organization that you are interested in. In addition to doing something useful, you would ask the organization (in advance) if they would be willing to write an endorsement for you should the campaign turn out well. This could be included in your certification report;

Project components:

1. Create at least two print ads, two video commercials, and one website mock-up. The project should lend itself to print, video and to a website (so that the website is used to advertise the product).
2. Demonstrate use of the [checklists for creating each of the print ads](#) as well as for the other ads you create.
3. Use the [persuasion principles audit](#) for each of the ads that you create.
4. Use copy-tests to compare the two print ads. See the [copy testing](#) recommendations from this lecture.
5. Recommend a media plan for your print advertisements using each of the procedures (except experimentation) described in Appendix E of *Persuasive Advertising* with the descriptions [provided on adprin.com](#)
6. Provide an appendix (for your Certification Report, not the client) describing your use of the creativity procedures that you used from the [Creativity chapter of Persuasive Advertising](#).
7. Provide a five-page report following the [outline on AdPrin.com](#). (Appendices up to 10 pages allowed)
8. Evaluate your report using the [checklist for ad proposals](#). Seek independent ratings.

## Suggested Syllabus for “Self-directed Lectures”

All of the “self-directed lectures” are available at the [Educational Materials](#) section of the course website. The following sequence follows *Persuasive Advertising*, with the exception of the Creativity and Evaluation techniques discussed at the beginning, as they are relevant to all of the applications. Tasks are listed under each topic heading, and some of the topics will take much longer (e.g., influence and resistance) than others (e.g., emotion).

### S1. \_\_\_\_ Introduction to Evidence-based Advertising

1. Obtain a notebook to use for planning and making applications.
2. Take the five-minute “[Test your advertising IQ](#)” evaluation. Record your score in your notebook.
3. Complete the Introduction lecture on the [Educational Materials](#) page.
4. Read the sections “Preface,” “Introduction,” and “Types of Evidence” in *Persuasive Advertising (PA)*.
5. Take the [end-of-chapter exam](#) for this section.

### S2. \_\_\_\_ Creativity and Evaluation Techniques

Find a project to work on, such as a project for your organization, a product/service you would like to sell, a worthy cause, a political candidate, or a company you would like to start. See the description on page 3 above. Your project should relate to a high-involvement, utilitarian product/service. Then do the following:

1. Work through the [Creativity and Evaluation](#) lecture.
2. Study the Creativity and Evaluation section on pages 278-292 of *PA*.
3. If you are advertising for a new organization or product, apply the creativity and evaluation procedures for selecting a name. Use the “[Names](#)” section on AdPrin.com.
4. List the creativity and evaluation techniques that you plan to use to create a one-page print ad.
5. Take the [end-of-chapter exam](#) for this section.

### S3. \_\_\_\_ Conditions: Objectives, Product, & Target Market

1. Work through the lecture on [Conditions](#).
2. Start your project (see above).
3. Apply the objective-setting process from *PA* to set objectives for your project.
4. Take the [end-of-chapter exam](#) for this section.
5. Read the [AdPrin FAQ](#).

### S4. \_\_\_\_ Target Market Research

1. Work through the [Target Market Research](#) lecture.
2. Describe what techniques you should use from the lecture to select the target markets for your project. Develop instruments to assess the target market for your project. Become familiar with Don Dillman’s [Internet, Phone, Mail, and Mixed-Mode Surveys: The Tailored Design Method](#).
3. Ask a few people to complete your target market survey. Then, seek inputs on how to improve your target market survey.
4. Take the [end-of-chapter exam](#) for this section.

**S5. \_\_\_\_ Information on the Product**

1. Work through the [Product](#) lecture.
2. Read the relevant chapter for this section in *PA*.
3. Take the [end-of-chapter exam](#) for this section.
4. Use the Product lecture and the [Checklist of Advertising Principles](#) to write two one-page print ads for your project that would go into a magazine. Use *PA* to guide you.

**S6. \_\_\_\_ Information on Pricing & Distribution**

1. Work through the lectures on [Pricing and Distribution](#).
2. Read the relevant chapter for this section in *PA*.
3. Take the [end-of-chapter exam](#) for this section.
4. How many principles were you able to apply to your project?

**S7. \_\_\_\_ Influence**

1. Assume that Waste Management has come to you for a proposal for a TV campaign. Go through the [Influence](#) lecture and find ideas for developing TV commercials. Do not look up any information about Waste Management. Focus on the influence principles, but also try to apply the principles to date by using the [Checklist of Advertising Principles](#) to create at least three storyboards.
2. When you have your storyboards, view the excellent [Waste Management](#) commercials by Ogilvy. How well did you do in comparison with Ogilvy?
3. Read the relevant chapter for this section in *PA*.
4. Take the [end-of-chapter exam](#) for this section.
5. Improve your project by using the Influence Principles.
6. How many principles were you able to apply to your project?

**S8. \_\_\_\_ Emotion**

1. Work through the lecture on when and how to use [Emotion](#) to persuade.
2. Read the relevant chapter in *PA*.
3. Take the [end-of-chapter exam](#) for this section.
4. Improve your project by using the Emotion Principles Checklist in the *PA* book and the creativity techniques in the *PA* book.
5. How many principles were you able to apply to your project?

**S9. \_\_\_\_ Mere Exposure**

1. Work through the lecture on when and how to use [Mere Exposure](#) to persuade.
2. Read the relevant chapter for this section in *PA*.
3. Take the [end-of-chapter exam](#) for this section.
4. Improve your project by using the Mere Exposure Principles Checklist along and the creativity techniques checklists in the *PA* book.
5. How many principles were you able to apply to your project?

### **S10. \_\_\_ Resistance**

Assume that you were asked to prepare an advertising campaign people who would be resistant to trying the product or service involved in your project. For example that might be using a substitute for your product.

1. Work through the [Resistance](#) lecture and apply the resistance principles to your project.
2. Read the relevant chapter for this section in *PA*.
3. Take the [end-of-chapter exam](#) for this section.
4. Improve your project by using the relevant [Checklist of Advertising Principles](#) to apply earlier principles.
5. Count how many principles were you able to apply to your project.

### **S11. \_\_\_ Acceptance**

Assume that Ansett New Zealand has come to you to develop a TV campaign. They believe they provide better airline service for their customers than Air New Zealand. They want you to present a campaign that customers will believe. Do not look at the actual ads until you get to the last step.

1. Work through the [Acceptance](#) lecture.
2. Read the relevant chapter in *PA*.
3. Take the [end-of-chapter exam](#) for this section.
4. Prepare storyboards for a possible campaign for Ansett or use a smartphone to provide a 30-second commercial. To do so, use the relevant section in the [Checklist of Advertising Principles](#).
5. Review the actual [Ansett New Zealand](#) commercials to see how closely they match with yours. I think these ads do a great job of implementing the influence principles.

### **S12. \_\_\_ Pretesting Ads by Copy-testing**

Write a questionnaire and all necessary material for pretesting the effectiveness of your print ads among a sample of subjects.

1. Work through the [Copy-testing](#) lecture.
2. Skim Don Dillman's [Internet, Mail, and Mixed-Mode Surveys](#) (the "bible" for survey research) to make further improvements to your questionnaire.
3. Write a technical report on your copy-testing procedure and findings. Use the evidence-based guidelines for [written management reports](#).

### **S13. \_\_\_ Message**

1. Work through the lecture on [Message](#).
2. Read the relevant chapter in *PA*.
3. Take the [end-of-chapter exam](#) for this lecture.
4. Use the [Checklist of Advertising Principles](#) section on message to improve your project.
5. How many principles were you able to apply to your project?

### **S14. \_\_\_ Attention**

1. Work through the lecture on [Attention](#).
2. Read the relevant chapter in *PA*.
3. Take the [end-of-chapter exam](#) for this lecture.

4. Use the [Checklist of Advertising Principles](#) to apply the attention principles to the various versions of your project. As you do this, use *PA* and relevant readings from the lecture.
5. How many principles were you able to apply to your project?

### **S15. \_\_\_ Still Media**

1. Work through the [Still Media](#) lecture.
2. Take the [end-of-chapter exam](#) for this section.
3. Use the Still Media Principles from the PA book to improve the print ad and website for your project.
4. How many principles were you able to apply to your project?

### **S16. \_\_\_ Design a Website for your Project**

Prepare a mock-up of a website to advertise your product (or agency). Examine books on how to design a website, such as [Lynch, Patrick J. & Sarah Horton \(2009\)](#).

1. Use the [PPI](#) to evaluate the website.
2. Revise your website based on your Persuasion Principles Audit.

### **S17. \_\_\_ Motion and Sound Media**

1. Work through the [Motion and Sound Media](#) lecture and discussion to help you develop a TV commercial for your ad agency (or other project).
2. Take the [end-of-chapter exam](#) for this section.
3. Create a storyboard for your project. Use the *PA* chapter to guide you.
4. Use a smartphone to create a video to advertise your project. The exercise takes about 2 hours; more time can, of course, lead to a better advertisement. As an alternative, consider an animated movie maker, such as [Plotagon](#), [GoAnimate](#), or [Movie Maker](#).
5. To edit and your commercial use, **Audacity**: A free audio editing program for voices available [here](#).
6. To fit your commercial into the allotted time slot, use [Truncate Silence](#)
7. Obtain feedback on your commercials. Then develop actions steps for improving your commercials. Count your success in terms of how many changes you are able to make.

### **S18. \_\_\_ Legal Aspects of Advertising**

1. Work through the [Legal Aspects](#) lecture.
2. Apply techniques from this session to your project.
3. How many principles were you able to apply to your project?

### **S19. \_\_\_ Media Allocation**

1. Analyze the [Gardenburgers Case](#).
2. Rate the effectiveness by using the [PPI](#).
3. Analyze how much to spend on the Gardenburgers' campaign in total and **on each media** (e.g., TV, print, or other). Use each of the techniques from the lecture on media allocation. Use the "[Media](#)" section on Adprin.com.
4. When you complete your report, go to the solution for [Gardenburgers](#).
5. Take the [end-of-chapter exam](#) for this section.



## **S20. \_\_\_ Evaluating an Advertising Campaign: *Seducing these Men***

Assume that you are in the advertising department of Subaru and that you were asked to review a number of advertising proposals to determine which advertising agency to hire.

1. Write in your diary how you would handle this problem.
2. Watch the video “[Sample of a Traditional Advertising Proposal](#)” related to Ogilvy’s pitch to Bell Communications. Do the recommended exercise. What techniques could you use from this exercise?
3. Analyze the proposal described in the report “[Seducing these Men.](#)” Use Appendix F from *PA*. Write your reasons for each rating. It is up to the writer of the proposal to make sure you have what you need in order to give a high rating.
4. Share your ratings with a learning partner and estimate the inter-rater reliability of each rating.

## **S21. \_\_\_ Prepare a Project Proposal**

1. Write an advertising proposal for your project. Show the proposed campaign (the advertisements and media expenditure, along with reasons why they should work). Then provide an estimate of the return on investment.
2. Rate your proposal by using the [Checklist for Rating Advertising Proposals](#).

## **S22. \_\_\_ Take the Final Exams**

This is useful not only for learning, but also for demonstrating learning in your certification report.

1. Take the [Multiple Choice, True/False, and Open-ended](#) exams. Time yourself to spend no more than three hours taking the exams, and sign an ethics statement that you took no more than 3 hours. To add credibility, ask someone else to grade your exam answers. The grading takes about an hour. Have the grader sign a statement that they used the grading sheet and graded the exam as objectively as they could. The testing session of 3 hours is more comprehensive than the 80-minute testing session used for this class at Wharton. It includes 44 open-ended questions vs. the 22 used in the Wharton class. Include your score and the testing procedures on your Certification Report.
2. Take the “Take-home” exam on the [Tools and techniques](#) page. Explain how you applied ten of the techniques. The entries will be graded based on the importance of the techniques and your ability to write a believable and persuasive report that would be impressive to someone who has little knowledge of these tools and techniques. This is what you would have to do when using the techniques so as to persuade clients in a real-world advertising proposal.

**End of course.** If you have done everything in this syllabus, you have done as more than as my very best students. If you have done most, you are still among the best students. You should be able to provide a convincing Self-Certification Report.



## Self-Certification for Evidence-based Advertising Principles and Techniques

This *evidence-based* advertising course has been under development by Wharton Professor J. Scott Armstrong since 1990. It is designed to help people apply the cumulative knowledge developed from experiments over the past century. [Research evidence](#) demonstrates that ads that follow evidence-based procedures have been shown to be more effective than those that do not. The research on the principles is summarized in [Persuasive Advertising](#).

I certify that I have completed the advertising course. I list the tasks that I completed in my efforts to learn advertising principles and techniques (inputs), as well as my tangible achievements (outputs). I provide links (or a brief appendix) with supporting information where needed.

### Inputs

I-1. I have studied the [Persuasive Advertising](#) book and have documented spending \_\_\_\_\_ hours doing so. The entries were recorded on the day that I spent the time.

I-2. I have documented spending \_\_\_\_\_ hours for all of my learning efforts in this course. I recorded hours on each day that I spent time.

I-3. I have completed all of the [experiential lectures](#) on AdPrin.com. YES \_\_\_ NO \_\_\_

I-4. I have used the evidence-based checklist for [oral presentations](#) \_\_\_\_\_ times.

I-5. I have used the evidence-based checklist for [written presentations](#) \_\_\_\_\_ times.

I-6. I have completed the [multiple-choice & T/F exams](#) on AdPrin.com \_\_\_\_\_ times, and the last time I took the test, my percentage score was \_\_\_\_\_ percent

I-7. I have completed the open-ended exam on AdPrin.com \_\_\_\_\_ times, and the last time I took the test, my percentage score was \_\_\_\_\_ percent when graded by myself, and \_\_\_\_\_ when graded by another.

I-8. I have done all of the [end-of-chapter questions](#). YES \_\_\_ NO \_\_\_

I-9. I can answer all of the questions on the [Tools and techniques exam](#). YES \_\_\_ NO \_\_\_

I-10. I have examined the [new evidence on the principles](#) that is on AdPrin.com. YES \_\_\_ NO \_\_\_

I-11. I have worked through all of the [experiential exercises](#) on AdPrin.com. YES \_\_\_ NO \_\_\_

I-12. I have used the [Tools and techniques](#) spreadsheet to guide my learning. YES \_\_\_ NO \_\_\_

I-13. I have guided my work by using the attached timeline. YES \_\_\_ NO \_\_\_

I-14. I have completed the self-training course for the [Persuasion Principles Audit](#). YES \_\_\_ NO \_\_\_

### Outputs

O-1 I have applied the [Checklist of Advertising Principles](#) to create \_\_\_\_\_ print ads.

O-2. I have applied the [Checklist of Advertising Principles](#) to create \_\_\_\_\_ video ads.

- O-3. I have applied the [Checklist of Advertising Principles](#) to create \_\_\_ radio ads.
- O-4. I have applied the [Checklist of Advertising Principles](#) to create \_\_\_ websites.
- O-5. I have applied the [Persuasion Principles Audit](#) to \_\_\_ print ads.
- O-6. I have applied the [Persuasion Principles Audit](#) to \_\_\_ video commercials.
- O-7. I have applied the [Persuasion Principles Audit](#) to \_\_\_ websites.
- O-8. I have applied the [Persuasion Principles Audit](#) to \_\_\_ radio commercials.
- O-9 I have applied the primary techniques for setting media [investments](#) for \_\_\_ campaign(s).
- O-10. I have written [an advertising proposal](#) and have checked it against [the recommended procedure](#).  
YES \_\_\_ NO \_\_\_

**Certification statement: I \_\_\_\_\_ certify that I have completed the above tasks to the best of my ability for the \_\_\_\_\_ hours that I was able to spend on this course.**  
**Date \_\_\_\_\_**

**I can provide sample of my work to demonstrate my skills in any of the above areas with asterisks.**

**Independent testing**

Q-1. I have taken an 80-minute test on my mastery of the content in this course on. by(date)\_\_\_\_\_. It was monitored by \_\_\_\_\_ (relationship to you) \_\_\_\_\_ and graded by that person and signed by here \_\_\_\_\_. They can be contacted at \_\_\_\_\_  
 My grade on the exam was \_\_\_\_\_

**Optional:**

I attach an endorsement by an advertising expert(s) who evaluated my ability to apply advertising principles and techniques.

Name of Independent Evaluator (PRINT) \_\_\_\_\_

Relationship to You (e.g., "Learning Partner") \_\_\_\_\_

Expertise of Evaluator \_\_\_\_\_

Evaluator's Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Your Name (PRINT) \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

This Certification Report form has been created by Professor J. Scott Armstrong at the Wharton School, University of Pennsylvania. He uses this form in his course at the Wharton School to allow students to demonstrate their mastery of the content.