

Ad Creative Design — Workbook

This workbook turns the course into reps. You will analyse real ads, write hooks in bulk, build a master concept, adapt it into a full size set, and package a launch-ready creative test. Work through one section per module and finish with a complete ad set and a media-buyer handoff you could ship today.

How Ad Creative Actually Works

Train your eye on real feeds and lock in the three jobs every ad must do before you design anything.

Exercise: Feed Teardown: Stop, Communicate, Act

Open Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn on your phone and screenshot the first five sponsored posts you scroll past in each. For each ad, judge it against the three jobs in order. Be honest: most ads fail at job one.

- Did it stop your scroll in roughly one second, and what specifically caught your eye (face, colour, motion, hook)?

- Within two seconds, could you state the single core benefit it was selling?

- Was the next step obvious, and what was the call to action?

- Score each ad 0 to 3 on how many jobs it actually did, and note the one change that would most improve the weakest one.

Worksheet: Platform Mindset Map

For the brand or product you will design for in this course, fill one row per platform. This forces you to decide the audience mindset and native look before you open a design tool.

Platform (Meta / Google Display / LinkedIn)

Audience mindset in that moment (leisure / browsing content / professional)

What native creative looks like here

One angle that fits this platform

One angle that would feel wrong here and why

Checklist: Pre-Design Readiness

- I can name the single product or offer this ad set promotes
- I have written the one core benefit in a single sentence
- I have collected at least 10 competitor or in-feed ad screenshots as reference
- I have the brand assets I need: logo files, brand colours (hex), and approved fonts
- I know the destination URL and have viewed the landing page the ad sends to

I have confirmed which placements are actually required for this campaign

Visual Hierarchy for Attention

Practise engineering a single focal point and a deliberate eye path, then prove it with the squint test.

Exercise: The Squint Test Drill

Take three of your competitor ad screenshots and three of your own draft layouts. Apply a 6-pixel Gaussian blur to each (or step ten feet back from the screen). Record what survives the blur as the dominant element.

- Which single element survived the blur as most prominent in each ad?

- Was the surviving element the hook or hero, or did the logo or background wrongly win?

- Where multiple elements tied, what would you shrink or mute to break the tie?

- Rank your three drafts from clearest to weakest hierarchy and write the fix for the weakest.

Worksheet: Eye-Path Plan (Z-Pattern)

Plan the eye path for one ad before laying it out. Map each of the three jobs to a position along the Z sweep and choose the leading device that carries the eye between them.

Top-left / top-right element (the hook)

Diagonal middle element (the supporting value or proof)

Bottom-right element (the call to action)

Leading device used (gaze direction / arrow / line / product angle)

Reserved accent colour for the CTA only (hex)

Where an untrained viewer's eye actually went when tested

Checklist: Hierarchy and Legibility Pass

- Exactly one element clearly wins the squint test
- The headline is readable on a phone at arm's length (roughly 60 to 90 px on a 1080 square)
- Text-to-background contrast is at least 4.5 to 1, with a scrim or shadow over any photo
- The accent colour appears almost only on the call to action
- I evaluated the ad inside a real feed screenshot, not on a blank canvas
- No thin or condensed typeface is used for the hook

Copy and Design Working Together

Write hooks in bulk, balance copy against the image under the 20-percent guideline, and clear the policy traps.

Exercise: Twenty Hooks, Five Angles

For your offer, write 20 headline hooks of 5 to 8 words each, spreading them across the five angles from the course: specific number, direct callout, problem-agitation, curiosity gap, and bold claim with proof. Then shortlist the strongest three to carry into testing.

- Write at least three hooks for each of the five angles (15 minimum, push to 20).

- Replace every vague benefit with a concrete number or specific detail.

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- Mark which three hooks you would test first and why each earned its place.
 - For your top hook, draft the matching primary-text caption that carries the proof the image cannot.
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Worksheet: Message Split: Image vs Caption vs Headline

Decide what each part of the ad unit carries so the image stays under the text threshold and nothing is crammed. Fill this for one ad.

On-image hook (the words baked into the visual)

On-image core benefit (short)

Primary text / caption (context, proof, link)

Headline field copy (short reinforcing line + offer)

Call-to-action label (verb-first)

Estimated text coverage on the image using the 5x5 grid (cells touched out of 25)

Checklist: Policy and Compliance Gate

- Text covers under roughly 20 percent of the image (5 or fewer of 25 grid cells)
- No fake or non-functional UI elements (play button, close X, cursor)
- No copy implying a sensitive personal attribute about the viewer
- No restricted before-and-after or unrealistic-outcome imagery
- Any superlative or strong claim is backed by stated proof
- Logo, colours, and type follow the brand guideline and match the landing page

Master Files, Multi-Size Adaptation, and Animation

Build one master, reflow it into the full size set, decide where motion helps, and package a launch-ready test.

Exercise: Master to Full Size Set

Build your master concept at 9:16 first, then reflow it into the full set. Do not resize blindly; rearrange the layout for each shape and re-run the squint test on every size.

- Produce the three social ratios (1:1 1080x1080, 4:5 1080x1350, 9:16 1080x1920) from one master.
 - Produce the high-performing five Google Display banners (300x250, 336x280, 728x90, 300x600, 160x600).
 - Produce the two LinkedIn sizes (1200x627 and 1080x1080).
 - For the most cramped banner (320x50 or 728x90), list what you dropped and confirm the hook still reads.
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Worksheet: Animation Brief (Per Concept)

Plan motion with intent before animating. Confirm the ad still works frozen on frame one and muted. What the motion is for (reveal hook / show product in use / lead to CTA)

Frame 1 hold: the static message if no one presses play

The reveal beat (what moves or appears)

The resolve frame (logo + CTA on the held final frame)

Target length in seconds (social 6 to 15; Display max 30s / 3 loops)

Export format and file-size ceiling (MP4 H.264 for social; HTML5 under 150 KB for Display)

Exercise: Creative Matrix for a Clean Test

Lay out a test that changes one variable at a time so results are readable. Map your three shortlisted hooks and visuals into a matrix and name every file so a media buyer can read the test from the file name.

- Round 1: fix the visual, vary the three hooks. Write the three file names (e.g. concept_hook-A_1x1_v1).
 - Round 2: fix the winning hook, vary two to three visuals. Write those file names.
 - Round 3: fix the winner, vary format (static vs animated, square vs vertical).
 - Confirm that only ONE element changes between any two variants in the same round.
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Checklist: Export and Handoff Gate

- [] Every required size exported at exact pixel dimensions and correct ratio
 - [] Correct formats used (PNG/JPG static, MP4 H.264 video, HTML5/optimised GIF Display)
 - [] Google Display files are under the 150 KB ceiling; social video within platform caps
 - [] Captions baked into video and safe zones clear of the platform interface
 - [] Files named with concept, variable, and size so the test is legible after launch
 - [] Copy document (primary text + headline) included, plus a note on which variants belong to which round
 - [] Editable, layered master file delivered so quick swaps take minutes
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Your Action Plan

1. Pick one real offer and write its single core benefit in one sentence.
2. Tear down 15 in-feed ads across Meta, Google Display, and LinkedIn and score each on the three jobs.
3. Write 20 hooks across the five angles and shortlist your strongest three.
4. Build the master concept at 9:16, designing from the hook outward and passing the squint test.
5. Reflow the master into the three social ratios, the high-performing five Display banners, and the two LinkedIn sizes.
6. Run the policy and compliance gate on every size before going further.
7. Decide where motion earns its place and produce one animated variant that survives a frozen first frame and muted playback.
8. Lay out a creative matrix that changes one variable per round and name every file accordingly.
9. Export each placement to its exact spec and file-size ceiling, baking in captions and clearing safe zones.
10. Package the launch-ready handoff: named exports, copy document, test notes, and the editable master file.

