

Brand Positioning — Workbook

This workbook turns the course into a finished, validated positioning you can build a brand on. Each section mirrors one course module with hands-on exercises, fill-in worksheets, and checklists you run against a real brand. Pick one real subject, a company, a product, or a service, and carry it through every section. You will finish with a ranked list of competitive alternatives, a table of unique attributes and differentiated value, a chosen market category, two or three perceptual maps, a points-of-difference table, and a pressure-tested positioning statement with a messaging hierarchy and a one-page positioning canvas.

What Positioning Really Is

Separate positioning from branding and taglines, and internalize why the mind sorts brands into categories before deciding which is the right frame to claim.

Worksheet: Pull Apart the Four Layers for a Brand You Admire

Take one brand you admire and reconstruct its four layers from the outside in. Working backward from the public tagline to the underlying strategy trains you to see positioning as the load-bearing layer. Brand and its public tagline or campaign line

Messaging: the value proposition and key claims it makes in market

Brand identity: the personality, look, and tone (in a few words)

Positioning: in one sentence, who it is for, what category it competes in, and why it is the better choice

Test: if they changed the tagline tomorrow, would the positioning survive? Why does that show which layer is load-bearing?

Exercise: Name the Drawer: Categorize Three Products in Seconds

For three products (including your own), write the first category your mind files them under, then notice how that single choice sets price, competitors, and expectations. This makes the frame-of-reference effect concrete.

- Product 1: what category does your mind file it under first, and what price range and competitors does that imply?
- Product 2: same question, then name one expectation the category creates that has nothing to do with the product itself.
- Your own subject: what category do customers currently file you under, and is that the most flattering drawer for your strengths?
- For any product, imagine a different category for it (like Dunford's database becoming a data warehouse):

how would price, rivals, and judgment change with no change to the product?

Exercise: Decide Who You Are Willing to Repel

A position that excludes no one differentiates from no one. Force the trade-off the way Liquid Death and Patagonia do: name the customer you are deliberately not for, so the customer you are for can adore you.

- Who is your best-fit customer, in one specific sentence?

 - Which customer are you willing to deliberately not serve or even repel to be sharper for the best-fit one?

 - What would you have to stop doing or saying to fully commit to the best-fit customer?

 - What is the cost of trying to keep everyone, in wasted marketing, price pressure, or forgettability?
-

Checklist: Positioning Mindset Gut Check

- I treat positioning as a strategic decision that sits above brand, messaging, and tagline.
- I accept that customers file me under a category before they judge whether I am good.
- I understand that the wrong category can sink a good product and the right one can rescue it.
- I am aiming to be number one or two for a specific segment, not unranked in a giant category.
- I accept that to be strongly chosen by some, I must be willingly ignored by others.
- I will judge every choice by whether it makes me the obvious choice for my best-fit customer.

Mapping the Competitive Landscape

Gather the raw material: the real alternatives customers weigh, the attributes only you can own, and the differentiated value those attributes create for a best-fit segment.

Worksheet: Inventory Your True Competitive Alternatives

List what customers would really do if you did not exist, the way they see it, not the way your industry classifies it. Always include the status-quo and do-nothing option. Rank by how often each actually comes up in real decisions.

The job the customer is hiring you to do, in their words (jobs-to-be-done framing)

Direct alternatives: competing products customers name

Indirect substitutes: different-looking options that solve the same job (spreadsheet, manual process, in-house build, hiring someone)

The status quo / do-nothing option, named explicitly

Alternatives ranked by how often they actually come up in real deals

Source of this list: customer interviews, win/loss reviews, or sales (not guesswork)

Worksheet: Separate Table Stakes From True Differentiators

List your candidate strengths and honestly classify each. Mark whether every alternative has it (table stakes), you do it meaningfully better (parity-with-a-twist), or the alternatives genuinely lack it (true differentiator).

Only the last column is real positioning fuel.

Candidate attribute or capability

Type: table stakes / parity-with-a-twist / true differentiator

Do the alternatives on my list genuinely lack this? (yes/no)

Proof a skeptical buyer would accept (demo, data, guarantee, reference)

Is it defensible? What moat protects it (network effects, data, brand, switching costs, exclusivity)?

Exercise: Run the So-What Ladder to Differentiated Value

Take each true differentiator and ask so what until you reach a concrete customer outcome, then name the segment that wants that outcome most. Use the feature-advantage-benefit chain and quantify wherever you can.

- For each differentiator, write the feature, the advantage (what it does), and the benefit (what the customer gets), quantified in real numbers where possible (time saved, money earned or avoided, risk reduced).
 - Phrase the value in the customer's language and metrics, not your internal terms.
 - Name the segment that craves this value most, and the traits (size, role, mindset) that make them care.
 - Fit check: would this segment switch from their current alternative to get this value? If not, refine the value or the segment.
-

Checklist: Landscape Quality Check

- My alternatives list includes the do-nothing / status-quo option, named explicitly.
 - I built the alternatives list from real customers, not from my internal competitor list.
 - Every differentiator I kept is something the alternatives genuinely lack, not table stakes.
 - Each differentiator has provable evidence behind it, not just an assertion.
 - I carried each attribute all the way to a human benefit, not a feature restatement.
 - Each value statement is specific and quantified, and tied to a clearly named best-fit segment.
-

Choosing Your Category and Whitespace

Decide the frame of reference where your value is obvious, then use perceptual maps and a points-of-difference table to find defensible, wanted whitespace.

Worksheet: Choose Your Market Category and Frame Move

Decide how you will frame yourself and write the category you intend to claim in a single phrase. Pick the move that fits your resources; for most beginners, subdividing or leading a narrow existing category beats inventing one.

Frame move: compete in an existing category / position against a category / create a new category / subdivide a category

The category I intend to claim, in one short phrase (becomes my frame of reference)

Why my differentiators are the headline (not a footnote) in this category

If creating or subdividing a category: what must I teach the market, and can I sustain that multi-year?

What this category implies for my price range, expected features, and budget the customer spends from

Exercise: Draw Two or Three Perceptual Maps

Plot the competitive landscape on the attributes customers actually use to decide. Try several axis pairs, because different dimensions reveal different gaps. Place competitors and yourself by customer perception, not by your own opinion.

- List the attributes customers care about most when choosing in your category (from interviews or reviews), then pick two important, independent ones as the axes for Map 1, define each end, and plot every alternative plus yourself.

- Map 2: choose a different axis pair (ideally one unusual axis, the way Liquid Death used edgy-vs-calm) and plot again.

- Mark the crowded clusters and the candidate whitespace on each map.

- For each gap: is it empty because customers do not want it, or is it genuine wanted whitespace my strengths can fill?

Worksheet: Build the Points-of-Difference and Points-of-Parity Table

Separate the few attributes you win on from the basics you must cover to be considered. Keep your points of difference to two or three, each with proof. Note where matching a rival (parity) neutralizes their advantage and throws the decision back to your difference.

Points of difference: 2-3 attributes you own and can prove (from your true differentiators and value)

Category points of parity: the must-have basics that make you a legitimate option in this category

Competitive points of parity: where you simply match a rival to remove their edge

Proof for each point of difference (demo, data, story, guarantee)

Frame of reference: the category these comparisons live inside

Checklist: Category and Whitespace Check

- I chose a category in which my differentiators are obviously valuable, not irrelevant.
- My frame move matches my resources (I did not commit to inventing a category I cannot fund).
- I drew at least two perceptual maps on different, customer-relevant axes.
- I confirmed any whitespace I am targeting is wanted by a real segment, not just vacant.
- I have 2-3 provable points of difference, not a long list that reads as noise.
- I covered the category and competitive points of parity that get me into the game.

Writing and Activating Your Position

Assemble the building blocks into a positioning statement, pressure-test it, translate it into a messaging hierarchy, and capture it in a canvas so the position actually ships.

Worksheet: Fill In Geoffrey Moore's Positioning Statement

Complete the template using the specific outputs from earlier sections, with no placeholders. Force singularity: one target, one category, one key benefit, one primary alternative, one differentiation. Then sharpen until a stranger gets it in one read.

For [target customer] — your best-fit segment

who [statement of need or opportunity] — the job they are trying to do

the [brand] is a [product category] — your chosen frame of reference

that [key benefit / reason to buy] — your differentiated, provable value

Unlike [primary competitive alternative] — the top option from your alternatives list

our brand [statement of primary differentiation] — your single strongest point of difference

Exercise: Pressure-Test the Statement

Stress-test the draft against honesty, distinctiveness, and the market before building on it. Run the swap test first; it catches the most common beginner failure. Then take it to people who actually talk to customers.

- Swap test: replace your brand name with a competitor's in the statement. Does it still sound true? If yes, it is not differentiated yet.

- Honesty check: is every claim true and provable, or aspirational fiction? Mark any believability gap and decide to prove it or soften it.

- Breadth check: is it so broad it could describe ten thousand companies, or so narrow it is trivially true but commercially pointless?

- Reality and desirability check: do the people closest to customers believe this is really why customers buy, and do enough customers want this position to build a business on it?

Worksheet: Build the Messaging Hierarchy

Translate the validated position into language the market hears. One core value proposition at the top, two or three message pillars (your points of difference) beneath it, and proof points under each. Everything must ladder up to the positioning statement.

Core value proposition: one short public expression of the position (this is not the internal statement)

Message pillar 1 (a point of difference) and its proof points (features, data, stories, testimonials)

Message pillar 2 and its proof points

Message pillar 3 (optional) and its proof points

Per-audience translation: how a technical buyer, an executive, and an ad each hear the pillars, worded for them but on-strategy

Checklist: Activation and Alignment Readiness

- My positioning statement commits to one target, one category, one key benefit, one alternative, one differentiation.
- It survives the swap test: a competitor's name does not fit in it.
- I validated it with target customers and a sales/support reality check, not just internal opinion.
- I wrote a messaging hierarchy where every public message ladders up to the position.
- I briefed all customer-facing teams so they describe the brand the same way.
- I aligned the roadmap to invest in the differentiators that justify the position and stop diluting it.
- I captured everything in a one-page positioning canvas as the single source of truth.

Your Action Plan

1. Choose one real subject (company, product, or service) to carry through the whole plan.
2. Interview recent customers and inventory five to ten true competitive alternatives, ranked by frequency, including the do-nothing option.
3. List your candidate attributes and classify each as table stakes, parity-with-a-twist, or true differentiator, keeping only the provable differentiators.
4. Run the so-what ladder to turn each differentiator into quantified, customer-worded value, and name the best-fit segment for each.
5. Decide your frame move and write the market category you will claim in one phrase.
6. Draw two or three perceptual maps on customer-relevant axes and mark the wanted whitespace your strengths can fill.
7. Build a points-of-difference and points-of-parity table with proof for each difference.
8. Write the positioning statement using Moore's template, forcing one target, one category, one benefit, one alternative, one differentiation.
9. Pressure-test it with the swap test, an honesty check, and a market check with customers and sales; refine until it is distinct and wanted.
10. Translate it into a messaging hierarchy, brief every customer-facing team, align the roadmap, and capture it all in a one-page positioning canvas.

