



**Boston University** Global Programs  
Study Abroad | London

# FUNDAMENTALS OF CREATIVE DEVELOPMENT. COM CM 417

## SPRING '25.

### **Instructor information:**

Name: George Bell  
Day and Time: 1.45PM to 17.45PM  
Mondays (March 3<sup>rd</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup>, 24<sup>th</sup>, 31<sup>st</sup> & April 7<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup>)  
Tuesdays (April 8<sup>th</sup>, 15<sup>th</sup>, 22<sup>nd</sup>)  
Location: Kensington Room, 43 Harrington Gardens  
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Office Hours: by appointment

### **Course Description**

**This course focuses on the strategic creative process in advertising** - from finding insights and developing concepts right through to the craft skills of copywriting, art direction and design. Through your assignments, you'll be finding creative solutions to marketing challenges across a range of media. You will learn the foundations of effective advertising: problem definition, strategic development, idea generation and creative execution.

### **Course Objective.**

Every student will create an online portfolio with a minimum 2 ad campaigns by the time they finish this course.  
This is your passport and the first big step to getting a creative job - this is the focus for this course.

**CONGRATULATIONS. YOU'RE IN TRAINING FOR THE BEST JOB IN THE WORLD.**

Your imagination is your passport to an exciting career.

One day you're an expert in breakfast cereal, the next you're selling an electric car.

One day you'll be coming up with ideas in the coffee shop, a few months later that sketch on the back of an envelope could be a fully-fledged photo shoot.

As a writer or an art director, you'll spend your career coming up with insights that are so fresh, so interesting, and so impactful they're capable of disrupting the lives of millions of people you've never even met.

Maybe your idea challenges their perspectives. Maybe it changes their opinions. Maybe it influences their behaviour — and compels them to do something they wouldn't have otherwise.

It's no exaggeration to say what you dream up might just alter the neural pathways to someone's mind—and become a permanent part of who they are.

**Here's a taste of what you can look forward to...**

### **BRING ON THE BRIEF.**

The most important document in an agency is a creative brief. It's the spark of great ideas. We'll be looking at how research leads to insights, which in turn leads to a strategy - and ultimately becomes a brief which inspires your creative work. Other classes in the COM curriculum offer a deeper dive into creative briefs, but we will spend some time talking about the importance of a proposition — and try writing our own. This will help you begin thinking about insights, business problems, your target audience and the commercial objectives of creative work.

### **TELLING A STORY WITH WORDS AND VISUALS.**

You'll notice some ads are nothing more than a headline. Others are just an image and a logo. Some need both a picture and copy to convey a message. Art and copy are primary tools, and we'll get acquainted with each. That includes covering some basic advertising vocabulary and understanding the anatomy of an ad.

### **THE JUICY BIT: COMING UP WITH IDEAS, GREAT IDEAS AND EVEN MORE GREAT IDEAS.**

You got a creative brief. You've got a blank page. You've got a deadline. Now what? How do you conjure up an idea that's authentic to the brand, aligns brilliantly with the creative brief, and will look great in your portfolio? We'll be discovering brilliant techniques to get your ideas flowing. Building on what you've learned about art and copy, you will arrive at solutions that are visual, copy-led and a combination of the two. To train your conceptual muscle, you'll be practising these techniques in our sessions and your

assignments to be in your knowledge.

### **HEADLINE CRAFT AND COPYWRITING.**

"There are no boring products," advertising legend David Ogilvy famously observed, "just boring writers." So let's see how to keep things interesting. The best way is to create messaging that makes people feel something. Joy. Anger. Fear. Jealousy. When we build an emotional connection to the reader the relationship will follow. I'll be sharing examples of great copy and digging into why the writing works. We'll also look at the nuts and bolts of headlines, body copy and calls to action, as well as turning your hand to a brand tone of voice. I plan to invite an industry guest speaker to run a workshop on copy with you.

### **ART DIRECTION & DESIGN\***

Copy is only half the story. We will next consider the principles of art direction and I'll be sharing some best-in-class campaigns that demonstrate the power of visuals. We'll explore the many tools at our disposal - from photography to film, illustration to graphic design. We'll also look at some visually-led concepts and how images can land a message effectively.

We'll also go deeper on design hierarchy. We'll learn how to control the reader's eye as it travels across the page. We'll look at which elements we should prioritize, which elements should take a back seat—and which can be removed altogether. We'll also touch on which typefaces and colour palettes might make the most sense to visually reinforce the message we're trying to communicate. We'll talk about the importance of using all the design elements we choose consistently from one execution to the next, and one medium to the next.

*\*Please note: This class does not cover how to use any software. (If you would like to learn the fundamentals of Adobe, I strongly recommend you take CM501 - Design Strategies and Software.)*

### **EXPLORE CREATING ADVERTISING IN VARIOUS CHANNELS.**

The average consumer is bombarded with 6,000-10,000 messages a day. It could be as simple as a tag on a sweater or a logo on a coffee mug. Or it could be something more elaborate like a billboard, a poster on the Greenline, a TV spot, a video in your social feed, or an interactive experience, you name it. The best practices for engaging your audience change based on the media tactic. After all, some are static. Some are dynamic. Some are interactive. Some have video. Some have only audio. Some are contextually relevant based on placement or time of day. We'll explore a variety of channels and you'll see what it's like to create messaging in a number of them.

### **HOW BRANDS COMMUNICATE IN SOCIAL MEDIA.**

These days a lot of clients are asking for social ideas. Social media can be a smart way to spark conversations and create an authentic connection

between the consumer and the brand. It feels more personal, more immediate than a lot of other tactics. After all, a post can be created and live in minutes instead of months. No wonder it's so popular. We'll focus on how to create social content that turns heads and stops thumbs. I aim to invite an expert guest speaker to give you some pro tips on this channel.

### **FROM INSIGHT TO INTEGRATED CAMPAIGN.**

Once you've worked out what a good strategy is, you've had some practice coming up with ideas, you have a basic understanding of design fundamentals, and you're familiar with a variety of channels, it's time to put everything together and create a polished, integrated campaign. If you develop a serious passion for this assignment, consider honing your creative skills in Portfolio Development. It's a steady diet of portfolio-building exercises for aspiring art directors and copywriters—and its primary goal is to give you a website that helps you land an entry-level gig in an ad agency.

### **OUR SESSIONS... HERE'S THE GIST**

Your lessons essentially break down into theory and practice. I'll be sharing some best-in-class case studies to fire up your creativity and talking to you about the principles of effective advertising. I'll be giving presentations packed with inspiration and valuable knowledge. Beyond that, I will be helping you bed in this knowledge by setting tailored practical tasks and exercises. You'll do some of these exercises in the classroom with me - where I can act like an agency Creative Director and be at hand to oversee your work and give you helpful pointers. This might sound pressured, but it's really designed to accelerate your learning because it gives you the opportunity to ask me questions, get in-person feedback and allows us to collaborate to find creative solutions. I know you're learning so rest assured, I'm not looking for perfection. At other times, you'll have assignments to take away and complete independently, or in creative teams.

Visits from industry guest speakers and trips to London ad agencies are also in the pipeline.

### **LEARNING TO BE INDUSTRY-READY.**

In the classroom, I want to prime you for the working world by creating the agency creative department. We'll adopt industry acronyms and ways of working.

Our classroom will be a supportive, collaborative atmosphere where you are encouraged to experiment with ideas, share freely and take creative risks. The more receptive we are to each other's thinking, the more we can push for great ideas and tease out some real gems.

To help you generate ideas, bounce things around and push your thinking, you'll often work in creative teams of two. This is an industry norm -

traditionally, one team member is the writer and one is the art director, but at this stage you can be role-curious. Learning to be a good creative partner is key skill you will hone across the course - and will contribute to your grade.

To create an immersive creative space, I encourage you to cover the classroom walls with great work, ad inspiration and scamps (rough drawings) of your ideas.

To help you develop essential presentation skills, we will have a group-sharing element in every session - try not to worry about this, I'm not looking for perfection. This is about improving your skills and getting comfortable with a routine part of the industry process.

Sharing will also help you gauge what good creative work is. You'll learn to critique other team's ideas, and how to receive feedback on your work in an open and productive way.

### **HOW YOU CAN—AND SHOULD—USE AI IN THIS CLASS.**

AI has changed the creative world and will be a tool of the trade going forward. The trick is to use it as an assistant, not to let it do your work for you. Chat GPT, Mid-Journey, and Dall-E can be useful as a more nuanced search engines, a thesaurus or to help you visualise ideas but be careful - **there is no substitute for your own thinking.**

Chat GPT doesn't write great headlines or world-class copy. Your goal should be to be better than a robot, or why hire you? **And please note all language you submit must be your own, or it is deemed a form of plagiarism** – an academic conduct violation that may lead to grading penalties and/or review by the Academic Affairs Committee.

My advice? Get familiar with AI and use it as a tool - not a crutch. It can spark ideas, just like TV shows, video games, podcasts and other stimulus around you. Our aim on this course is to train your mind to think creatively, so turning to AI too soon or too often may compromise the important work you are doing to deepen your creative powers. I want you to be confident in your abilities when you only have yourself to rely on.

### **HOW TO ACE THIS CLASS.**

Let's start by defining success. Success, to me, is ending the semester with a much deeper understanding of how to solve creative problems (while staying on strategy) and having created some work that is unique, compelling, clear, and effective.

Truth is, in all the job interviews I ever had, not a single Creative Director asked me what my college GPA was. In advertising, grades simply don't matter. It's all about the quality of your creative portfolio. But, since this is a

class and I have to give you a grade, here's what I value:

**DO GREAT WORK.**

That's the obvious one. Sound easy? It's not. But in the end, if you come up with unique, compelling, strategically sound creative ideas, that's success. Will that happen every time? Unlikely, because you're just learning the basics.

**PUT IN THE EFFORT.**

You will need to put in lots of work and produce a volume of ideas. That will be especially critical in the rough (initial) stage of our projects, when we will see how far you have pushed your thinking. Volume of ideas matters. More is better. Varied is better. It allows us to edit and still have things to push forward. The best ideas generally do not come out of a small batch of work. When we get into team projects, you will need to meet (virtually or otherwise) with your partner more than once a week.

**BE A GREAT PARTNER.**

This is a very collaborative course - and so is the advertising industry. Being a good working partner is critical. In fact, it's almost as important as the work itself. Why? Because if you're brilliant at concept development—but a nightmare to work with—you're going to be a liability to your creative director.

So be open to your partner's ideas, make yourself available, show up on time for your meetings, pull your weight.

You will have partners you like, and some with whom the chemistry isn't as immediate or easy. It happens at BU - it happens professionally. You are expected to work through it unless you really have issues (e.g. someone is not making themselves available or not pulling their weight.) If this happens, let me know while there is enough time for me to intervene and help.

**DO NOT LEAVE HOMEWORK UNTIL THE LAST MINUTE.**

We will discuss this further, but the creative process is an iterative one. If you do the work in one sitting close to class, you will not be getting the best results. Plan to break up your homework time and be flexible in coordinating with your teammate(s).

**PARTICIPATE IN CLASS.**

Volunteer comments, ideas, information, answer questions, ask relevant questions, and contribute to the constructive criticism or well-deserved praise of the work of others.

Hold up your share of the presentations— these things will be a significant part of your grade. Also included in participation is doing any set reading and handing in all assignments on time. On time means the day and time they are due. No exceptions unless it's a genuine emergency, or you have

arranged an extension with me in advance. Late submissions will lower your project grade by one letter grade for each 24-hour period it is late.

### **STAY OFF YOUR DEVICES.**

There's almost no reason for you to be on your phone or laptop during this class. We will take 10-minute breaks so you can catch up on texts and emails. Otherwise, please put your phones and tablets away and laptop lids down and give your classmates your undivided attention.

### **SHOW UP ON TIME.**

Please be in your seat and have everything you need for the class right on time. Please get your printouts, visit the bathroom, and fill up your water bottles before class starts.

## **GRADING**

### **Here's what I look for when grading your assignments:**

- Quality of the creative work
- Originality of the work
- Thinking/problem solving
- Clarity of your ideas
- Range of ideas
- Successful execution of the ideas
- Ability to stay on strategy
- Ability to incorporate feedback

### **GRADING RUBRIC.**

When it comes to grading your creative assignments, I use the same criteria to evaluate your work that other professors use with their students, so you can expect a consistent experience from class to class across the department.

Overall, the grade you earn in this class will be a clear indication of your effort—and an honest reflection of how good your work is.

Grade	Honour Points	Usual %
A	4.0	93-100
A-	3.7	89-92
B+	3.3	85-88
B	3.0	81-84
B-	2.7	77-80
C+	2.3	73-76
C	2.0	69-72
C-	1.7	65-68
D	1.0	60-64
F	0.0	Unmarked

**'Incomplete'** or **I** grades are not permitted because of the obvious difficulty in making up missed work once the student has left the country. All work must

be completed on time. We also do not allow '**Audits**' (AU), '**Withdrawals**' (W), or '**Pass/Fail**' (P) grades.

The grades reflect the quality of the work. Lecturers and students should use the following criteria for an understanding of what each grade means.

**HERE'S WHAT YOUR GRADE MEANS:**

**A:** your work is agency-level and its presentation is flawless. The work you created would be usable as is by an agency to go present to a client with no changes.

**A-:** your work is agency-level and would be usable to present to a client with a few alterations. Typos, missing body copy here or there, etc.

**B+:** Your work is still very good. Not quite as thorough, clear or creative as it could be. It COULD be presented to a client but with further exploration/polishing.

**B:** your work has a strong core idea but has weaker executions that need to be imagined before going to the client.

**B-:** your idea has creative potential. Work isn't thought out enough.

**C+:** your idea lacks creative interest. Idea and or execution is on the weak side.

**C:** shows lack of effort. A lot of time and effort would be needed to improve it.

**C-** Not enough thought or effort.

**D (or worse):** the work has no merit as presented—and re-concepting would be necessary.

Please refer to the Academic Handbook for detailed grading criteria and policies on plagiarism. This can be accessed via Blackboard Learn:  
<http://learn.bu.edu>

\* Final Grades are subject to deductions by the Academic Affairs Office due to unauthorised absences.

**ASSIGNMENTS FOR SPRING 2025**



*There will be a short weekly show and tell session that I will talk through in the first session. This will simply be talking through creative advertising we have seen in London each week.*

*There will be lots of little activities and tasks throughout the course.*

*There will be 5 assignments in total for this course with variable weighting.*

*I will though always be on hand to help.*

### **Assignment 1: Write a Creative Brief – Solo assignment.**

If you get bad brief, you get bad work. Here you will research and write a strong and focused creative brief and learn why strategy matters. **This is a 1-week assignment.**

**Assignment starts: 3<sup>rd</sup> March.**

**Deadline: Monday 9<sup>th</sup> March.**

### **Assignment 2: 30 Headlines – Solo assignment.**

We'll try to find interesting creative territories around a product and do a headline exercise to bring our point to life.

**This is a 1-week assignment.**

**Assignment starts: 10<sup>th</sup> March.**

**Deadline: Monday 16<sup>th</sup> March.**

### **Assignment 3: Team Assignment (Out-of-Home Focus)**

The client is still to be determined, but working in creative teams of two, you will develop campaign ideas (**1xBillboard, 2x6sheet posters, 1xBus or Taxi side**) to solve the business problem defined in the brief. This is typically a 3-week process, divided into 2 stages: rough ideas and presentation. (This will be a portfolio project).

**This is a 3-week assignment.**

**Assignment starts: 17<sup>th</sup> March.**

**Deadline: Monday 6<sup>th</sup> April.**

### **Assignment 4: Quick Social Assignment – Solo assignment.**

Working in an industry-ready environment you will learn to adapt to client demands. There are times where you have to work at pace, we will recreate a scenario where this might happen and a social post needs to be created.

**This is a 2-hour assignment.**

**Assignment starts: 14<sup>th</sup> April.**

**Deadline: Monday 14<sup>th</sup> April.**

### **Assignment 5: Team assignment (Integrated Campaign).**

The client is still to be determined, but working in creative teams of two, you will develop campaign ideas (**2xOOH posters, 1xSocial post, 1xOLV**) to solve the business problem defined in the brief. This is typically a 3-week process, divided into 3 stages: rough ideas, computer layouts, and final presentation. (This will be a portfolio project).

**This is a 3-week assignment.**

**Assignment starts: 8<sup>th</sup> April.**

**Deadline: Monday 21<sup>st</sup> April.**

## **HERE'S WHERE SHOWING UP ON TIME AND STAYING OFF YOUR DEVICES PAYS OFF.**

Let's say your grade is teetering between a B+ and an A- at the end of the semester. Let's also say you were great about following the expectations listed in this document. I would enthusiastically and wholeheartedly bump up your grade to an A-. On the other hand, if you make a habit of leaving class in the middle of a lecture or another team's presentation, and spend time multitasking on your phone or laptop, you're not going to get the grade you want. I will not embarrass you by calling you out in class. But I will remember.

### **Recommended Reading**

*Hey Whipple, Squeeze This. (The Classic Guide To Creating Great Ads) SIXTH Edition, Luke Sullivan: (New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc.).*

*Creative Advertising – Ideas and Techniques from the World's Best Campaigns – Mario Pricken (Thames & Hudson).*

### **CLASS MATERIALS.**

We will supply you with A3 pads, Sharpie Pens and Pencils.

As the course evolves, please bring cut out ads, prints of stimulus etc. to stick on the walls of the office.

- **Inexpensive multipurpose white paper** (generic copy paper or similar) – it's perfect for rough sketches. You'll likely burn through a lot of it during your initial brainstorms. No need to bring to class.
- All final work will be digitally presented within an online portfolio, so you will need to have a computer with the basic Adobe software, like InDesign, Photoshop, and Illustrator. As a BU student, you can download Adobe Creative Cloud for free by filling out the form at [bu.edu/tech/adobe](https://bu.edu/tech/adobe) and you'll also be able to use Adobe Portfolio to host your work.

### **THE WRITING CENTER.**

The Writing Centre Service at BU London offers you a supportive environment to develop and polish your written communication skills. During a Writing Assistance appointment, you will receive holistic guidance to support your growth as a writer. Your Writing Fellows will provide valuable guidance at all stages of the writing process: from initial planning and outlining, to drafting, formatting citations, revising, and more.

From this guide you can book in-person one-to-one appointments or choose to do these via Zoom. The guide also provides reliable and authoritative web-based resources to help you with all aspects of your written work.

### **Artificial Intelligence Guidance**

Boston University London faculty may incorporate the use of artificial intelligence (AI) tools in teaching where deemed appropriate for student learning.

However, students should not use generative AI and automated content tools to develop or create any piece of assessed work unless explicitly instructed and permitted by the presiding faculty.

AI tools can provide inaccurate and superficial responses and their inappropriate use undermines the integrity of the academic process.

As use of AI tools in assessed work is prohibited in BU London programmes, unless explicitly permitted by the faculty, any suspected unauthorised use will be investigated and may be considered academic misconduct, in line with the University's [Academic Conduct Code](#).

### **Attendance Policies**

To receive course credit, all students on Boston University London programmes are expected to attend every class session and field trip, and day of internship work for Placement courses. Students that have been absent from multiple sessions will need to meet with a Director to discuss their continued participation on the programme.

#### **Authorised Absence:**

For each day of absence, students must complete an Authorised Absence Approval Request Form, which is available through the Academic Affairs section of the BU London Personal Page: <https://fm.bu-london.co.uk/fmi/webd/>

#### **Please note: Submitting an Authorised Absence Approval Request Form does not guarantee an authorised absence**

Students may apply for an authorised absence only under the following circumstances:

- **Illness (first day of sickness):** If a student is too ill to attend class, the student must notify Academic Affairs as soon as possible by submitting an Authorised Absence Approval Request Form in advance of the class. If it is the student's first absence of the semester (from any class) a doctor's note is not required.
- **Illness (multiple days):** If a student is missing more than one class day due to illness, the student must complete an Authorised Absence Approval

Request Form and upload a doctor's note. Once recovered, the student will need to meet with Academic Affairs to ensure they do not fall behind.

- Important placement event that clashes with a class (verified by internship supervisor).
- Special circumstances which have been approved by the Directors (see note below).

Students who expect in advance to be absent from any element of the programme should notify a member of Academic Affairs and complete an Authorised Absence Approval Request Form ten working days in advance of the class date.

**The Directors will only allow students to leave the programme early or for a significant break in the most extreme cases.**

### **Unauthorised Absence:**

An absence will be marked unauthorised if a student does not submit an Authorised Absence Approval Request Form or if the reason for the absence is rejected. An authorised absence can result in **a 4% grade penalty**, which will be applied to the final grade for the relevant course.

### **Religious Holidays**

Boston University's Office of the University Registrar states:

'The University, in scheduling classes on religious holidays and observances, intends that students observing those traditions be given ample opportunity to make up work. Faculty members who wish to observe religious holidays will arrange for another faculty member to meet their classes or for cancelled classes to be rescheduled.'

### **Special Accommodations**

Students needing to request accommodations for the semester they are abroad must contact the Disability & Access Services in Boston. BU London can only uphold special accommodations if we have received the appropriate documentation from the BU-DAS. Students will not automatically receive the same accommodations as they do in a regular semester, and we cannot accept letters from other universities/centres.

### **Lateness**

Students arriving more than 15 minutes after the posted class start time will be marked as late. Any student with irregular class attendance (more than two late arrivals to class, or leaving class early without approval) will be required to meet with Academic Affairs and may have their final grade penalised.