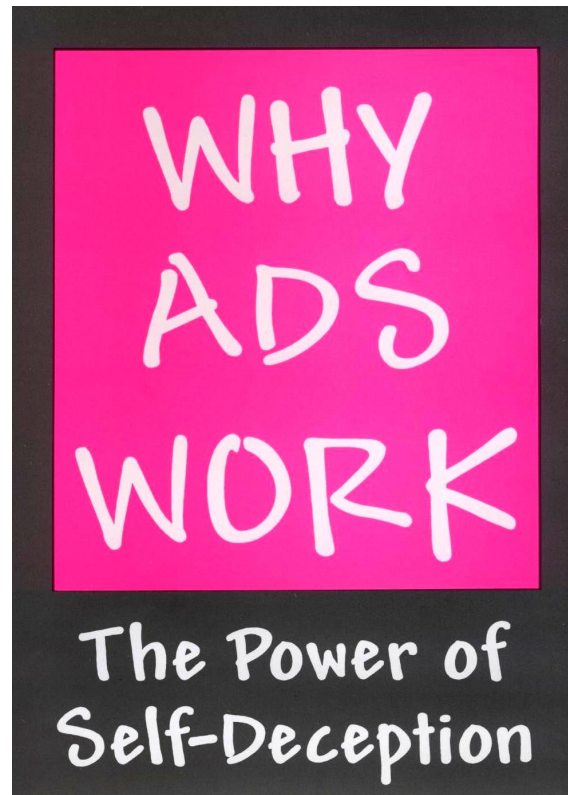


# Why Ads Work



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# Why Ads Work

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## **Our Guarantee**

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# The Program

## Summary

The most important words in advertising are the ones you don't see or hear. *Why Ads Work* proposes that ads rarely lie, they merely allow plenty of room for self-deception. Ads use humor, drama, and entertainment because people being humored and entertained are not critical - they "suspend their disbelief." In short, they become the perfect consumer.

*Why Ads Work* will help your students reclaim their critical powers. Think of this video as a retraining of listening and reading skills. The technique is to focus on claims made by ads - the actual selling part that "claims" some benefits or value for the product.

### Learn:

- How claims are devalued by small words or phrases such as up to, as much as, from, can, or fights. These phrases can completely change the meaning of a claim, yet most listeners fail to hear them. They see "works to fight wrinkles," but *hear* "prevents wrinkles."
- When "best" means "better" and "better" means "best". Why so many products can claim to be the best, the strongest, the most powerful, etc.
- The meaning of puffery and the difference between facts and opinions.
- The "magic" of *Water is Wet* claims. These are claims true for all brands but phrased in such a way as to make it sound unique and exciting.

# Why Ads Work

## Questions & Answers

### **What's so special about small words and phrases like "from," "up to" or "as much as"**

These little words are sometimes called "weasel words." The dictionary defines a weasel word as "words used to avoid making a direct statement." They don't lie, but they don't reveal much truth either. They are named after the weasel, a cunning animal that can slip into the farmer's chicken house and supposedly suck out the inside of an egg without completely breaking the shell. The drained egg looks whole. Only upon close inspection does the farmer discover it is empty. Weasel words drain meaning from ad claims turning forthright statements into hollow shells.

### **Why are these small words so effective?**

Consumers tend to "tune out" these little words. So "save up to 40%" is often heard as "save 40%." Or "Helps prevent cavities" becomes "prevents cavities." These little words are so effective because they have become nearly invisible. As the video observes, "when spoken you don't hear them. When printed you don't read them. You ignore them because they seem so unimportant. But that's precisely why they're so powerful."

### **Why do we "tune out" weasel words?**

Perhaps listening carefully to the meaning of so many thousands of ads is simply mind numbing. We don't know for sure, but the video proposes that we tune out these words because we don't want to hear them. We hear what we hope to hear. In other words, if an ad claims "save up to 40%" we hear "save 40%" because we want to save money. The "save 40%" gives us a justification, a reason for going to the store. We justify the shopping trip because it is a chance to "save" money rather than spend it.

We hear "prevents cavities" instead of "helps prevent..." because we like to believe that using the toothpaste will indeed save some painful dental drilling. We do not want to hear a more honest "This toothpaste is just like a dozen other brands. Brushing and not the toothpaste does most of the cavity prevention."

The video explains "Advertising language is a bit like a magic trick. Magic works because audiences want to be amazed - they want to see things disappear, or be cut up and magically restored. That's why advertising works - consumers want to believe a product has power. They want the pieces to be made whole again - whether that thing is a kitchen floor or their own bodies. Advertising usually tells the truth, but consumers lie to themselves."

### **Are these small "stealth words" the most persuasive aspect of today's advertising?**

No, image is primary today. Much advertising (especially national) works beneath the verbal level by appealing directly to emotions. Ads often work without words, they depend entirely on pictures and music or sounds. Images work to create general "good feelings" about a product or brand. But words work best to steer the final purchase, especially for more expensive items.

### **How can so many competing products all claim to be "best" or "fastest" or "strongest?"**

Many court decisions, helped define the concept of parity that enables ads to use superlatives without proof of superiority. If a category of products are all about the same (at parity), each brand may legally claim to be "best."

In other words, the courts assume that superlatives such as "best" or "superior," will be disbelieved by the public. But a parity product cannot claim in a specific way to be better than a competitor without proof. Legal precedent protects "puffery" in advertising. Claims such as the following claims need no special proof for advertisers to use:

The perfect gift. The strongest pain relief you can buy without a prescription. The best (insert brand name) you can buy. The (insert brand name of sport drink) that helps you perform at peak levels. No other brand beats the taste of (insert brand name). The best tasting (insert brand name) cheesecake. The biggest (insert product category) sale event ever.

Ironically, the law defends puffery because it assumes educated people can see through it. In other words, the law allows it because it doesn't work. But advertisers use puffery precisely because it does work.

### **What's the difference between fact and opinion?**

The law offers consumers some protection against false facts, but not against false or exaggerated opinions. If a seller gains a sales with false information, that is misrepresentation. A consumer can gain a refund or even file a lawsuit alleging misrepresentation. But if a seller gains a sale with false opinions, that is "caveat emptor." The law assumes people can tell the difference between a fact and puffery (an opinion).

# Why Ads Work

## Ad Claims To Evaluate

Evaluate these ad claims. Look for "invisible" words, opinions disguised as facts, and claims for superiority where none exists.

- 1) Mellow Roast has even more of that rich aroma and smooth taste coffee drinkers seek.
- 2) ...helps prevent static build-up in the dryer - before it starts.
- 3) Primo Salsa - the most zest in a sauce this side of Italy.
- 4) The plumpest, juiciest hot dog anywhere.
- 5) ...the conditioning creme that will make your hair feel just as soft and natural as it looks.
- 6) The vitamin supplement that makes you feel young again.
- 7) The vitamin supplement scientifically formulated to help prevent some kinds of cancer
- 8) Two germ killing ingredient give twice the cleansing power of other leading mouthwashes.
- 9) With a new fluoride formula for unbeatable cavity protection.
- 10) Assembles in minutes. Easy directions enclosed.
- 11) Maximum strength PainEx - the strongest pain reliever available without prescription.
- 12) Savings up to 50% on select furnishings.
- 13) New Cheerio Granola Bars - now with even more cherry taste.
- 14) .... with our exclusive gold plated Securelok® safety system.
- 15) Guaranteed savings of as much as 50% on the finest linens.
- 16) GasLok users save up to \$200 yearly on their gas bills.
- 17) ...fights age spots to make your complexion look years longer.

# Why Ads Work

## Ad Claims Analysis

- 1) Product has a claim built into its name. Even more - how much more? More than what? Rich aroma and smooth taste - No standards exist to compare aroma and taste. Rich and smooth are opinions. There is no one taste for all.
- 2) Helps prevent — how much does it help?
- 3) "Zest" is a subjective quality that cannot be measured.
- 4) plumpest, juiciest - subjective and immeasurable. For hot dogs this might mean a product with added water.
- 5) feel soft and natural is subjective. Feel natural defies definition. Your hair "feels natural" when there is no creme on it.
- 6) makes you feel young - an opinion. Pure puffery.
- 7) scientifically formulated - the word "science" gives the claim added authority. help prevent - how much does it help?
- 8) Two germ killing ingredients - are two better than one? germ-killing ingredients - a healthy mouth **REQUIRES** germs. The whole idea of "killing germs" is a scare tactic that appeals only to those who do not understand that "germs" are both natural and vital to human survival.
- 9) New formula - but does "new" mean better? unbeatable cavity protection - unbeatable could mean just as good as all the other toothpastes with the same ingredients.
- 10) Assembles in minutes - two minutes? 120 minutes? Easy directions enclosed - "easy" is an opinion.
- 11) Maximum strength - is "maximum" better than the "correct" amount or strength? PainEx - note the claim built into the product name. strongest pain reliever - could mean just as strong as all the others  
(1) a parity product.
- 12) up to 50% - perhaps a handful of hard to sell furnishings are 50% off with the rest priced less attractively. A claim without weasels would read "Everything in the store 50% off regular prices." select furnishing - does "select" mean "the best" or those we selected to mark down for this sale?
- 13) even more cherry taste - more than before? cherry taste - perhaps more artificial flavoring added?
- 14) Securelok® - note registered trademark symbol. gold plated - does gold make the system work better? Note the claim built into the product name.
- 15) as much as 50% - "as much as" means "at most." finest linens - finest is an opinion.
- 16) up to \$200 - Perhaps only a few people in very unusual circumstances save this much. Perhaps most people using GasLok save little or nothing.
- 17) fights age spots - Does it win the "fight"? age spots - a natural companion of aging skin. look years younger - an opinion. Not measurable.

# Why Ads Work

## Ad Claims Scavenger Hunt

Find examples of each of the following types of ad claims. Write the claim on a separate page or attach the actual ad.

- 1) A claim built into the name of the product. Examples: Sta-soft, Sheer Energy, Amoco Ultimate, Toddler's Best. *Find two examples.*
- 2) A claim of superiority (claim to be best, fastest, strongest, etc.) for a product that is probably not "better." *Find three examples.*
- 3) An ad using the phrase "the taste of," "the feel of" or "the look of" for an item or quality the product does not have. For example, "the look of leather" for a vinyl seat cover. *Find two examples.*
- 4) Use of the words "up to", "from" or "as much as" in an ad promising savings. *Find two examples.*
- 5) Use of the words "fights," "helps," or "acts on (or against)" for a product in the health or beauty category. *Find two examples.*
- 6) An ad for a brand of pain killer (for example, aspirin or acetaminophen) that uses carefully chosen words to make its product appear superior to other brands of the same pain killer. *Find one example.*
- 7) An ad which promises to reveal a "secret". *Find one example.*
- 8) A product that really does claim to be better than a competing brand and that gives a reason why it is better. *Find one example.*
- 9) Find a product using an "invented" word to sell. An example would be the word "Polyglas" for a brand of fiber glass. *Find one example.*



# Why Ads Work

## Sample Ads

The video concludes with three sample ads to view and analyze for "the power of self-deception." We suggest you run each ad and follow the viewing with discussion. View the ad again during the discussion. Many of the "fine points" of persuasion go by so fast they might take a few viewings to catch. All ads are fictional and any similarities to actual ads are purely coincidental.

Here is the verbal content of each ad and a brief analysis:

### SAMPLE AD #1: Fullerman's Furniture Liquidators

**HYPER NARRATOR (carnival barker style):** Our buyers did a final check of the warehouse. And there's still TOO! MUCH! FURNITURE! Final reductions have been taken for Fullerman's colossal Spring Inventory Clearout. **(in small print at bottom of screen: Savings off similar style merchandise. See store for sale price policies.)**

Some prices cut by over a half. **LARGE TYPE "SAVE 20-60%** Get this leather sofa - a \$1999 value -now clearance priced at \$889. **\$1999 VALUE. CLEARANCE PRICE \$889.**

Hurry in today. Spring clearance ends this week. **FULLERMAN'S FURNITURE LIQUIDATORS**  
Guaranteed low prices!

### SAMPLE AD #2: Farm Morning Spread

Close-up of bread. On screen: **"NO CHOLESTEROL"**

**SMOOTH NARRATOR (Mr. Butter Voice):** Home made bread, a weekend morning, and FarmMorning Spread -the perfect combination. All that flavorful buttery taste. Just taste the country in this rich, creamy spread. Fewer calories and no cholesterol  
**(On screen: Compared to butter)**

The fresh taste of a farm morning.

### SAMPLE AD #3: Dermaclean Cleanser

One problem with TV ads is that images and words come so fast you come away with only one simple idea. And often that idea is NOT what the ad really says upon close examination. This skin cleanser ad illustrates:

Teen: "My complexion was embarrassing. I just wanted to go hide in my room. I felt everyone was staring at me. I tried regular cleansers. Even some not-so-regular ones."

**Narrator:** "The first step to clearer skin is DermaClean daily face wash. DermaClean helps eliminate bacteria that can cause skin blemishes. It gets rid of more dirt." **(in small white letters at bottom of screen: "leading regular cleansers excluding non-rinse + scrub products.")**

**Teen:** "it worked great. I don't feel I have to hide in my room anymore - except when I want to get away from my little brother."

**Product with words: "The Cleaner Cleanser"**

**Narrator:** The Cleaner Cleanser.

# Why Ads Work

## Sample Ads Analysis

### **SAMPLE AD #1: Fullerman's Furniture Liquidators**

This store's name itself is a claim. It's not a furniture store - it's a liquidator. That implies giveaway prices. And it doesn't use a showroom or store, but a warehouse - another implied claim for low prices. And this is not a sale, but an inventory clearance - a phrase that suggests desperation and giveaway prices. The basic idea of the ad is that they have too much furniture and need to unload it quickly. But what if the sale is a success and they clean out all that furniture. Aren't they out of business then? Who wants to shop where there's no "inventory." Stores are in business to move or sell inventory, but never to clear it out.

"Some prices cut by over a half." SOME is an invisible word — how many prices are cut this much? Two or three? Most?

How much do you save on this sofa? Over a thousand dollars? Not really. The ad says the sofa is a \$1999 **value** -- that's an opinion. A "value" is not the same as a 9(regular price." It DOES NOT claim the sofa ever sold for \$1999. \$899 might be the standard price.

The phrase "guaranteed low prices" is another puff phrase. Low is an opinion and does not guarantee the same furniture isn't sold elsewhere for less. Ultimately this ad creates a sense of excitement, incredibly low prices, and \$1000 savings on leather sofas without making a clear promise.

### **SAMPLE AD #2: Farm Morning Spread**

What is being sold? Butter? Margarine? Really, neither - it's a spread. We don't know what it's made of. The narrator says it has a "buttery taste." But "buttery taste" is merely an opinion.

"The fresh taste of a farm morning" is a puff. Just how does "a farm morning" taste? The words "rich" and "creamy" are also puffs. The spread does not contain cream.

Fewer calories is a dangling comparison. Fewer than what? The small print at the bottom (Compared to butter) completes the comparison, but many viewers will miss this. The comparison is with butter, not with margarine or other "spreads."

### **SAMPLE AD #3: Dermaclean Cleanser**

What does the ad claim? First that it "helps" eliminate bacteria. Helps is an invisible word, but an honest one since nothing on the market completely eliminates bacteria. But any cleansing agent helps eliminate bacteria, that's what cleaning is all about. Washing with soap and water "helps" eliminate bacteria.

The second part of the claim is "gets rid of more dirt." More than what? The answer is found in the tiny print at the bottom of the screen that few viewers can or will read. The printed explanation reads "versus leading regular cleansers excluding non-rinse and scrub products." So our fictional cleanser admits that another type of cleanser might work as well or better.

The ending tag "the cleaner cleanser' again refers to cleaning more than some but not all products. Few viewers will come away understanding all these complexities. They will instead, remember seeing a young girl who used the product to improve her life. Users who are desperate will hear an ad that promises magic.

So what are the real claims? That it helps eliminate some bacteria and that it cleans more than some other popular products but probably not as much as non-rinse and scrub products." Is that what you heard?