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# The Core to Creative System

The 10 psychological principles that decide whether your creative wins or dies. Quick-reference audit cards, the wins-vs-kills patterns, the application matrix, and the publish-ready checklist. Built to apply in your next campaign, not your next quarter.

**10**

CORE PRINCIPLES

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WIN PATTERNS

**20**

KILL PATTERNS

**10**

PRE-PUBLISH CHECKS

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Quick-reference checklist. Print this. Pin it.

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## **02** How a Brain Decides to Care

The cognitive funnel every creative travels through.

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One card per principle. Mechanism, signal, action.

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A personalized teardown of your live creative.

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# 01 The 10 Principles at a Glance

Every creative that converts hits these ten triggers. Every creative that flops misses at least one. Read each. Tick what your last campaign actually delivered. Circle the gaps. That is your edit list.

## **CAPTURE — first 3 seconds**

- #01 Attention through pattern interrupt**  
Different from surrounding content in frame one. Not louder. Different.
- #02 Relevance through self-recognition**  
Specific enough that the right brain instantly tags it as "for me."

## **SUSTAIN — hold the attention you earned**

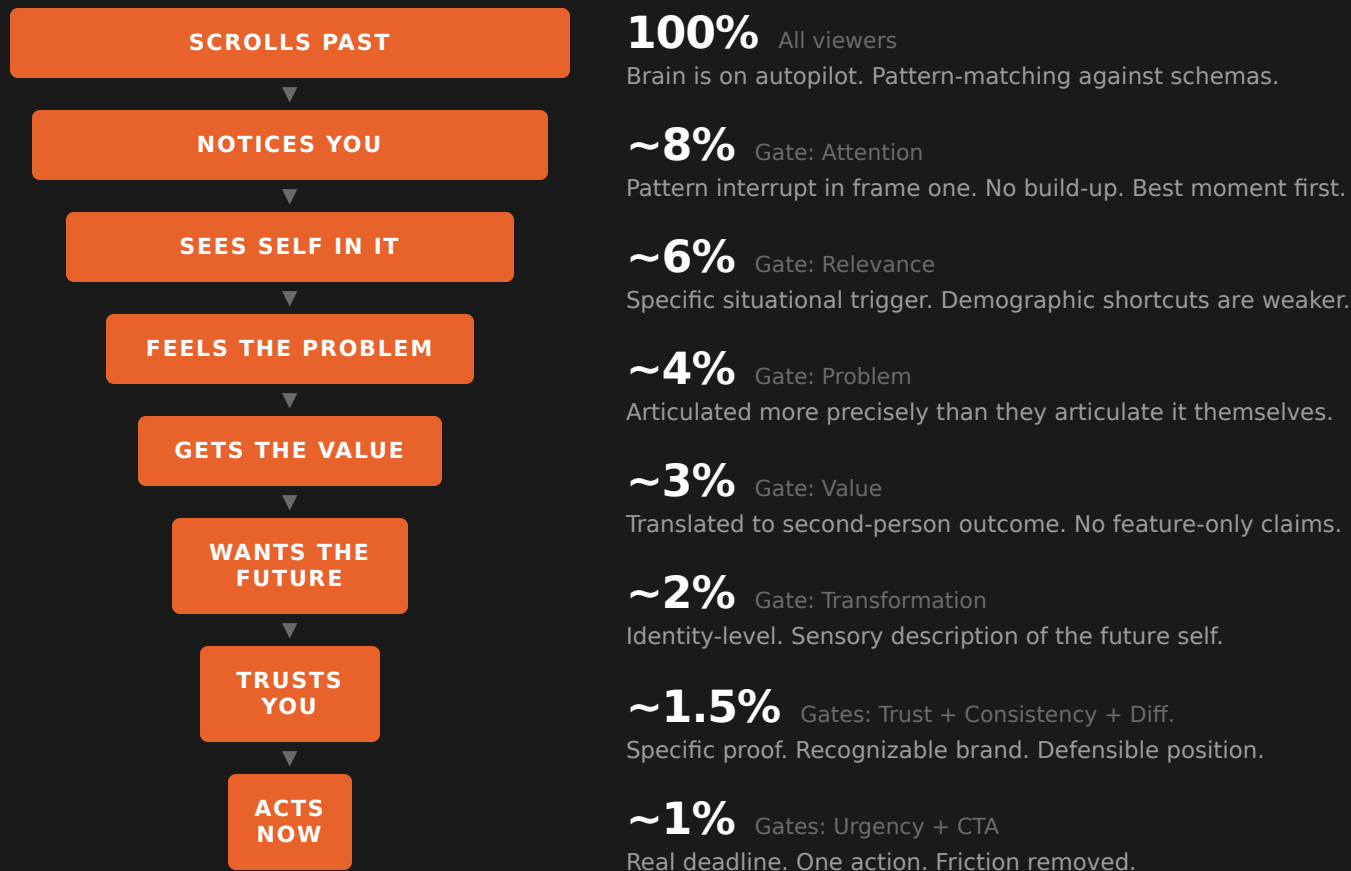
- #03 Problem named better than they can name it**  
Concrete details. Physical sensations. Their internal monologue, externalized.
- #04 Value translated, never listed**  
Every feature followed by "which means." Specific numbers beat vague claims.
- #05 Transformation, not transaction**  
Who they become, not what they get. Sensory. Identity-level. Believable.

## **CLOSE — earn the action**

- #06 Trust through specific, real proof**  
Real names. Real numbers. Multiple proof types. Objections addressed before raised.
- #07 Brand consistency across every touchpoint**  
Recognizable without the logo. Voice and visual aligned. No platform drift.
- #08 Differentiation that the buyer cares about**  
A meaningful tradeoff, not "best at everything." Owned territory, not borrowed.
- #09 Legitimate urgency, in sequence**  
Real deadline, real scarcity, real cost of waiting. Value first. Pressure second.
- #10 One singular CTA + memory hook**  
A single verb. Friction removed. A phrase or visual that sticks for later buyers.

# 02 How a Brain Decides to Care

Every viewer travels the same six-stage funnel between scrolling and acting. Each stage is gated by a specific principle. Miss the gate and they drop. The 10 principles are not a checklist — they are the locks on this door, in order.



## THE INSIGHT

Most creative dies at gates 1 and 2. Most strategy obsesses over gates 6-8. Fixing earlier gates compounds the impact of every later one. Audit top-down. Always.

# 03 The 10 Audit Cards

One card per principle. The mechanism in one line. The signal you missed it. The single action that fixes it. Treat each like a diagnostic.

● CAPTURE STAGE   ● SUSTAIN STAGE   ● CLOSE STAGE

CAPTURE

#01

## Attention

**Mechanism:** The brain ignores anything that matches its predictions. **Signal you missed it:** Hook lands at second 4, not second 0. **Action:** Move best frame to first frame. Make it different from surrounding feed, not louder.

CAPTURE

#02

## Relevance

**Mechanism:** Self-relevance filter fires before conscious thought. **Signal:** Could describe "anyone who wants X." **Action:** Rewrite with one specific situation, one specific moment. Narrower = stronger.

SUSTAIN

#03

## Problem Identification

**Mechanism:** Loss aversion is twice the force of equivalent gain. **Signal:** Problem stated abstractly — "stressed at work." **Action:** Replace with concrete physical or behavioral detail. Match agitation to awareness level.

SUSTAIN

#04

## Clear Value

**Mechanism:** Brains avoid translation work. Features without benefits get ignored. **Signal:** Lists technical specs as selling points. **Action:** Chain every feature with "which means → which means → which means" until you reach an outcome they already want.

SUSTAIN

#05

## Emotional Transformation

**Mechanism:** Decisions are made emotionally, justified rationally. **Signal:** Sells "have X" instead of "become someone who Y." **Action:** Describe the transformed state in sensory detail. Anchor it to identity, not circumstance.

# 03 The 10 Audit Cards / continued

CLOSE

#06

## Trust + Credibility

**Mechanism:** Trust compounds slowly, breaks instantly. Social proof and expertise run on different psychological circuits. **Signal:** "Thousands of happy customers" with no names. **Action:** Use real names, real numbers, varied proof types. Address the top objection before it gets raised.

CLOSE

#07

## Brand Consistency

**Mechanism:** Consistent expression reduces cognitive load → builds preference. **Signal:** Cover the logo — would anyone know it is yours? **Action:** Define brand at three levels: visual, voice, conceptual. Audit every channel for drift. Evolve intentionally, never reactively.

CLOSE

#08

## Differentiation

**Mechanism:** When you can't articulate difference, the brain defaults to price. **Signal:** Claims superior across every dimension. **Action:** Position against the actual alternative the buyer considers (often not a competitor). Pick one tradeoff some buyers will reject. That's real differentiation.

CLOSE

#09

## Urgency

**Mechanism:** Present bias defers decisions. Loss-of-opportunity flips the frame. **Signal:** "Limited time" with no specific deadline. **Action:** Use a real date, a tracked quantity, or a defined cost-of-waiting. Establish value first. Add pressure last.

CLOSE

#10

## CTA + Memorability

**Mechanism:** Decision paralysis kills more conversions than weak offers. **Signal:** Multiple "learn more" buttons competing. **Action:** One verb, one action, one path. Map the journey and remove every step that does not absolutely earn its keep. Add a repeatable memory hook for the buyers not ready today.

# 04 Wins vs Kills, Side by Side

The patterns that consistently win, set against the patterns that quietly destroy each principle. Use this as a pre-flight checklist on any creative draft.

<b>#01</b> <b>Attention</b>	<b>WHAT WINS</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Best moment in frame one</li><li>● Visual or cognitive contrast with feed</li></ul>	<b>WHAT KILLS IT</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Slow build before the hook</li><li>● Stock imagery brains have seen 10,000 times</li></ul>
<b>#02</b> <b>Relevance</b>	<b>WHAT WINS</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● One specific situation, named</li><li>● Aligned with brand identity</li></ul>	<b>WHAT KILLS IT</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● "Everyone who..." framing</li><li>● Trend-chasing that breaks brand voice</li></ul>
<b>#03</b> <b>Problem</b>	<b>WHAT WINS</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Concrete physical or behavioral detail</li><li>● Future consequence made real</li></ul>	<b>WHAT KILLS IT</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Polite, abstract pain</li><li>● Agitation past the point of hopelessness</li></ul>
<b>#04</b> <b>Value</b>	<b>WHAT WINS</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● "Which means" chained to outcome</li><li>● Second-person, specific numbers</li></ul>	<b>WHAT KILLS IT</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Feature lists without translation</li><li>● "Improve your life" vagueness</li></ul>
<b>#05</b> <b>Transformation</b>	<b>WHAT WINS</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Identity-level shift, sensory description</li><li>● Aspirational but believable</li></ul>	<b>WHAT KILLS IT</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Overnight-result promises</li><li>● Generic "live your best life"</li></ul>
<b>#06</b> <b>Trust</b>	<b>WHAT WINS</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Real names, real numbers, varied proof</li><li>● Top objections addressed up front</li></ul>	<b>WHAT KILLS IT</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Stock-photo testimonials</li><li>● Generic "this changed my life" lines</li></ul>
<b>#07</b> <b>Consistency</b>	<b>WHAT WINS</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Voice + visual + framework aligned</li><li>● Intentional evolution, everywhere at once</li></ul>	<b>WHAT KILLS IT</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Different personality per platform</li><li>● Visual consistency without voice match</li></ul>
<b>#08</b> <b>Differentiation</b>	<b>WHAT WINS</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● One owned attribute the buyer cares about</li><li>● A real tradeoff some buyers reject</li></ul>	<b>WHAT KILLS IT</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● "Best at everything" claims</li><li>● Differences invisible in use</li></ul>
<b>#09</b> <b>Urgency</b>	<b>WHAT WINS</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Real deadline + visible scarcity</li><li>● Cost of inaction made tangible</li></ul>	<b>WHAT KILLS IT</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Timers that reset, "final day" repeats</li><li>● Pressure before value is established</li></ul>
<b>#10</b> <b>CTA + Memory</b>	<b>WHAT WINS</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● One verb, one path, friction removed</li><li>● A repeated phrase or visual that sticks</li></ul>	<b>WHAT KILLS IT</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Multiple CTAs competing for attention</li><li>● Clever copy that hides the action</li></ul>

# 05 The Pre-Publish 10-Point Audit

Run every creative through these ten questions before launch. If you cannot answer yes to a question, that principle is your weak link — fix it before you spend a dollar promoting it.

**01 Does it stop the scroll in 3 seconds?**

Best frame first. Different, not louder.

**02 Will the target think "this is for me"?**

Specific situation, not broad demographic.

**03 Did I name the pain better than they can?**

Concrete detail, not abstract description.

**04 Is the benefit clear with zero translation?**

Outcome-level, second-person, specific.

**05 Am I selling who they become, not what they get?**

Identity shift, sensory detail, believable.

**06 Is the proof specific and authentic?**

Real names. Real numbers. Varied formats.

**07 Recognizable as our brand without the logo?**

Voice, visual, and framework all aligned.

**08 Clear why us vs. the alternative they'd pick?**

One owned attribute that matters to them.

**09 Is there a legitimate reason to act now?**

Real deadline, scarcity, or cost of waiting.

**10 Is the next step obvious — and will they remember us?**

One action, no friction, memory hook present.

**RULE OF THUMB**

Eight or more "yes" answers — ship it. Five to seven — fix the gaps first. Below five — start over. You will save more in wasted ad spend than the rewrite costs.

# 06 When to Emphasize What

All ten principles always matter. But weighting shifts based on the goal of the specific creative. Use this matrix to decide where to invest your strongest energy on any given asset.

CAMPAIGN GOAL	LEAD WITH (primary)	BACK WITH (secondary)	STILL CHECK (tertiary)
<b>Brand Awareness</b>	<b>Attention, Memorability, Consistency</b>	Transformation, Differentiation	Trust, CTA, Urgency
<b>Lead Generation</b>	<b>Relevance, Problem, Value</b>	Trust, CTA	Transformation, Urgency
<b>Direct Response Sales</b>	<b>Value, Trust, Urgency, CTA</b>	Problem, Differentiation	Attention (assumed warm)
<b>Premium Launch</b>	<b>Differentiation, Transformation, Consistency</b>	Trust, Memorability	Urgency (only if real)
<b>Retargeting</b>	<b>Trust, Urgency, CTA</b>	Value, Differentiation	Attention (already noticed)
<b>Educational Content</b>	<b>Relevance, Problem, Value</b>	Memorability, Consistency	Urgency, CTA (light touch)
<b>Founder Story</b>	<b>Trust, Differentiation, Consistency</b>	Transformation, Relevance	Urgency, CTA
<b>Seasonal Push</b>	<b>Urgency, Relevance, CTA</b>	Value, Trust	Attention, Memorability
<b>Cold Outreach</b>	<b>Attention, Relevance, Problem</b>	Value, Trust	Urgency, CTA
<b>Loyalty / Repeat</b>	<b>Consistency, Transformation, CTA</b>	Memorability, Value	Attention (already in audience)

## HOW TO READ THIS

Lead with the primary trio — they carry 70 percent of the result. Back them with the secondary set. Sanity-check the tertiary. If a tertiary principle is broken, fix it. If a primary is weak, the whole creative collapses.

# 07 Why Creative Fails

When a creative underperforms, the cause is almost always one of these five breakdowns. Each one maps to a specific principle. Diagnose first. Then fix one thing.

## 95%

scroll past in under a second

### Broken Hook

Principle #01 → Attention is the leak

Symptom: low impressions-to-clicks. Cause: predictable opening, slow build, or matching the feed too closely. Fix: move the strongest moment to frame one. Make it cognitively or visually distinct from surrounding content.

## 3x

drop-off when relevance misses

### No Self-Recognition

Principles #02 + #03 → They watch but don't lean in

Symptom: views climb, clicks don't. Cause: generic positioning, abstract pain, "everyone who..." framing. Fix: pick a single moment in your buyer's life. Describe it with details only that buyer would know.

## 60%

bounce within 8 seconds

### Untranslated Value

Principles #04 + #05 → Click, but no desire

Symptom: clicks happen, conversions don't. Cause: features listed without benefit translation, value spoken in our language not theirs. Fix: rewrite using "which means," in second person, with concrete numbers and sensory transformation.

## 70%

cart abandonment when trust is thin

### Trust Vacuum

Principles #06 + #07 + #08 → Interest without conviction

Symptom: high intent, low purchase. Cause: generic proof, inconsistent brand voice across pages, no clear positioning vs alternatives. Fix: real testimonials, address the top objection on the page, align all touchpoints.

## 90%

defer indefinitely without a real reason to act

### Soft Close

Principles #09 + #10 → Sold but not converted

Symptom: positive engagement, no action. Cause: vague CTA, multiple options, no legitimate reason for now, no memory hook for later. Fix: one verb, one path, one real deadline, one phrase or visual they will remember next month.

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# Get Your Brand's Creative Audit For Free.

You have the framework. Now see how your live creative scores against it. We will audit your last five ads, your landing page, and your funnel against all ten principles — and tell you exactly which gates are leaking.

[BOOK YOUR FREE CREATIVE AUDIT](#)

[audit.connectlabz.com](https://audit.connectlabz.com)

## What is included:

- Hook and attention diagnostic on your last 5 creatives
- Relevance and problem-articulation review
- Value, transformation, and trust scoring
- Brand consistency check across all touchpoints
- Urgency and CTA friction audit
- A prioritized fix list, ranked by leverage

*No commitment. No pressure. Just clarity on which gates are leaking and what to fix first.*