

## Are There International Standards for Marketing Education? Comment

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The question was “Are there any agreed sets of core skills for the ‘profession’ of marketing.” The answer is “yes,” but only if you drop the word “agreed.” But even if we agree on skills, we are unlikely to teach them.

### Why We Do Not Teach Skills

Universities were originally designed to transmit content and that continues to be their primary orientation. Business schools do not teach such skills because:

- Few professors are interested in teaching skills

Skill training would alter the ways that faculty teach and students learn. For example, you could not learn how to ride a bicycle by attending lectures. And professors would not want to offer lectures on such practical topics. They would rather discuss “characteristics of successful bicyclists,” or “biking as a dynamic system,” with guest lectures by Lance Armstrong and other respected bikers. There is no incentive for professors to teach skills.

- Few students are interested in mastering skills

Learning of important skills involves practice and falling down. Setbacks lead to frustration and this does not lead to student satisfaction. Many students also resent receiving feedback about how to improve their use of techniques.

- The lecture and discussion method does not lead to skill development.

To learn skills, one must practice techniques. For example, telling students to listen better does not improve their listening skills; they must practice techniques to enhance their listening. To improve creativity, it does no good to lecture them to “think outside the box”; they must practice the use of creativity techniques.

### Is There Any Hope for the Future?

Fortunately, there is much knowledge available on techniques that can improve skills. Over the past 35 years. I have compiled a list of skills for marketing (see under Educational materials at <http://jscottarmstrong.com>). These include such things as “how to write a persuasive management report, manage an advertising campaign, conduct an interview, design a mail survey, and analyze data.”

I provide lists of techniques and principles for skill development in each of the courses that I teach. For example, one technique, brainstorming, is vastly superior to traditional group meetings when it comes to developing creative and effective solutions. (That said, it is difficult to remember the last time I met a business school student who could describe the brainstorming process, much less use it properly. Students and managers nowadays use the word “brainstorming” as a synonym for “talking.”) My advertising course asks students to master some of the 45 techniques and 290 principles described at <http://advertisingprinciples.com>.

Certification tests can provide an alternative to class-room instruction. These tests could be designed to assess the mastery of various techniques and principles. Students could then be given help to pass the certification test. While the American Marketing Association has recently begun a program for certification, their test makes no attempt to assess skills, nor does it assess knowledge of techniques or grounded principles. You can see a sample of their test

by searching for “pcm” at <http://ama.org> ). I believe that a certification program based on the demonstration of skills would be feasible and useful.

### **Proceed with Caution**

When I first started teaching advertising, I had little interest in the subject, did not know the literature, devoted little time to the course, and expected little from my students. As a result, I was quite popular as a teacher. Now, after almost 30 years of teaching advertising, studying the research on how people learn, gaining an extensive knowledge of advertising, working harder at helping students, using the latest technology, becoming more ambitious, putting what I know into a book, and developing extensive resources such as the <http://advertisingprinciples.com> website, I focus on skill development. As a result, my students are now much more successful at developing advertising campaigns – though they are not happy about this. They ask me to revert to a traditional style because that is how the other professors do things. Skill training seems too stressful to them.

In short, skill training is not welcome in schools that use teacher evaluations and student grading.