

Your book tour

You're finally in front of the CD for a book crit. Time to let the work speak for itself. Consumers don't have a narrator chirping away and, as a presidential nominee once foresaw, if you're explaining, you're losing.

Of course, feel free to explain your inspiration, your angle on the strategy etc. Just not your actual idea.

Once you've done a few of these reviews you'll understand just what a fickle bunch CDs can be. They contradict each other. They contradict themselves. But, beyond all that, they do care. Else you wouldn't be sitting opposite them.

And if one does care enough to give you proper constructive feedback, then take them up on their offer. Refine the work with their suggestion. Stroke their ego and use it as your way to get back in front of them. The squeaky wheel gets the oil.

Really bad feedback? Take it on the chin. Then take it right back to your tutor and ask her why she let the idea pass in the first place. It's your money.

When you're researching the agency and CD you're about to see, understand how your USP might complement them. Find a way of answering in the review why exactly you picked their agency. They'll probably ask you anyway. Again, stroke their ego.

Finally, have some gumption. Ask for the job or placement. How else will you really know how the review went?

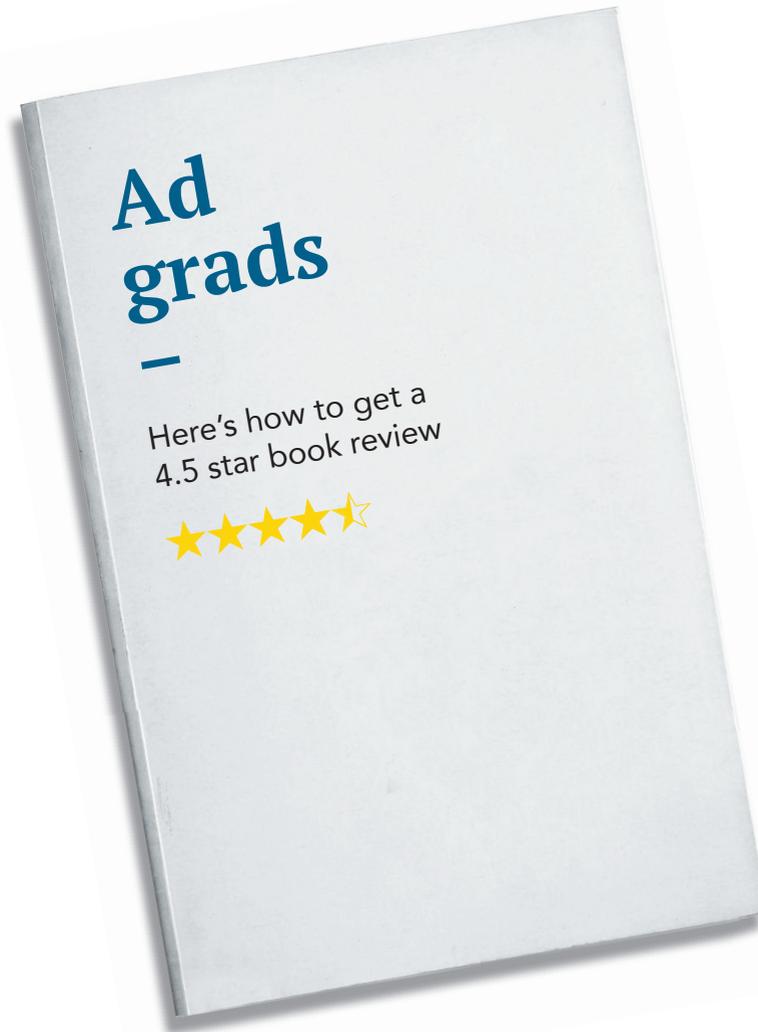
If they can't give you a placement, then ask for the next best thing – another name. Ask the CD for a personal contact at another agency that you can then use as your intro. They'll usually be happy to help, and it ends the review on a positive note. It also keeps your trail warm.

Good luck with it. If you've bothered to read this far, then that's a good sign you've got the drive to make a success of this game.

Oh, why only 4.5 stars? Because, as you already know, your book can always be better.

Rob Kavanagh

Executive Creative Director, OLIVER UK



While almost everything else in the world of advertising has changed over the years – there's still one immutable and reassuring constant for advertising graduates: you get a job on the strength of your book. Your portfolio.

After all, your book is simply your ad for yourself. And as such, if you can't prove that you can sell yourself, how are you going to sell something else on behalf of someone else?

So, as your degree show draws to a close and you start pulling together your portfolio, here are some things to think about.

What's your story?

In other words, why should we hire you over someone else? You're not the only one hawking their wares. At the end of your degree or course, your classmates become competitors. Competitors with a very similar corpus of work.

So, identify your competitive advantage. Your USP. Then build your book around it. That way, it goes from being a random gallery to a curation of carefully selected points supporting your single-minded proposition. From a picture book, to an autobiography.

And a CD is more likely to remember the person, than a couple of campaigns.

Are you, for example, an art director with specialist typography skills? Or one that can write? A copywriter that can craft out elegant long copy (rare enough these days that it is almost unique). Is social your strong suit? Have you a psychology degree that gives you an edge with behavioural economics? Do you help with charitable work that nurtures an insightful empathy with others?

Just what is so special about you?

Pick your works carefully

Once you've established your story, you reveal it through the work.

Obviously, your book needs to be about ideas. Good ones. Strategically framed, and properly thought through. You're after a job – and you want to show the CD sitting opposite you that you can just get on with things and not require constant direction.

Any one-off half-baked product ideas, punny business thoughts, or random unrelated stunts might stand out for all the wrong reasons. And, unfortunately, they're a common smudge on a book. With the graduate invariably explaining to a time-wasted CD *"I felt there was something in this"*. Finish the idea. Or, cull it.

Because it's all about your ideas, don't fuss with finessing your work. Think high concept, and low tech. One of AMV BBDO's first websites famously had all of their work presented on Post-it notes. The Volvo work, Alka Seltzer, The Economist – all of the classics, all stick figure sketches on a few pale-yellow squares.

Put it this way: better to spend an extra hour thinking of ideas, or tinkering with a layout?

Yep, that's why it's called work.

If you're a copywriter, make sure you actually have some great copy-led work. A well-crafted, incisive, on-brand headline is still the gold standard for distilling a strategic thought into a persuasive message. Amazingly, few portfolios have much to show for copy.

And even fewer have longer copy. An easy way to get one-up on the next copywriter queuing for a placement.

Speaking of the other people in line – the ones with campaigns from the same briefs as yours. Make sure you have your own fresh campaigns to trump them. And if you're after more challenging 'real world' briefs – to show you're ready for the real world – try the GRT Breakthrough Award.

Start your campaigns with a punchy strategic summary. The who, what, why. Or, think, feel, do. Rehearse this too, so you've got your patter down.

If it's a campaignable thought – a big idea – prove it. Carry it through a variety of media. Essential if you're after an integrated role. And, as above, it shows that you can just get on with a brief.

How many campaigns to include? Settle on just enough to show off what you can do across all main channels in about 30 minutes. If you have 6-8 great campaigns, you're doing well.

Kill your darlings. Got a campaign that you're really fond of but, you know, nobody else is? Do yourself a favour.

The best format for a book is probably a screen. A website. That way you can share it remotely – most CDs will want to vet your work before they take their time out to see you. And when you're presenting from the screen in person there's software like Offline Pages Pro that allows you to avoid the embarrassment of having wifi drop. Out. As you flick through your work.