**[Apple (1984)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2zfqw8nhUwA)**

One of the most persuasive ads in contemporary history is the Apple 1984 ad. There is much to learn from it.

**The Ad**

The ad is set in a dystopia. People march in unison. They sit to listen to a presentation on a large screen.

A woman runs towards the screen with a sledgehammer. She is dressed in bright colors (red shorts, white t-shirt). She is pursued by riot police as she races towards the large screen where an Orwellian-style dictator is speaking.

The woman keeps run and throws the sledgehammer towards the screen, destroying it.

The screen shows a message, read out by a voice over: “On January 24th, Apple Computer will introduce Macintosh. And you’ll see why 1984 won’t be like *1984*.”

The Apple logo appears. The commercial ends.

**The History Behind It**

The ad was created by a team which [included](https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=1627800) Ridley Scott as director, Steve Hayden as copywriter, Brent Thomas as art director and Lee Clow as creative director. It aired in the Super Bowl in 1984.

**Analysis**

The intent of the ad may perhaps be best explained by Steve Jobs himself. Introducing the ad in the 1983 Apple Keynote Address, he [explained](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lSiQA6KKyJo):

“It is now 1984. It appears IBM wants it all. Apple is perceived to be the only hope to offer IBM a run for its money. Dealers initially welcoming IBM with open arms now fear an IBM dominated and controlled future. They are increasingly turning back to Apple as the only force that can ensure their future freedom. IBM wants it all and is aiming its guns on its last obstacle to industry control: Apple. Will *Big Blue* dominate the entire computer industry? The entire information age? Was George Orwell right about 1984?”

This Apple commercial exemplifies a key characteristic of persuasive ads, namely a full story. Such storytelling must be complete with a narrative, certainly, but also with a premise, a theme.



**Premise is Key**

The great dramatist Lajos Egri [explains](https://www.writerswrite.com/fiction/egri/): “Everything has a purpose, or premise. Every second of our life has its own premise, whether or not we are conscious of it at the time. That premise may be as simple as breathing or as complex as a vital emotional decision, but it is always there.”

What he means is that human action is motivated by an underlying conviction and thus good drama must also have this key component. He continues to write: “Every good play must have a well-formulated premise. There may be more than one way to phrase the premise, but, however it is phrased, the thought must be the same.”

In the case of the Apple ad, the premise is very clear. It could be articulated as something like: *‘Conformity leads to tyranny’*. Perhaps we could articulate it more precisely as *‘Conformity in technology leads to tyranny whilst creativity in technology leads to freedom’.*The inevitable corollary to this is that *‘IBM leads to tyranny whilst Apple leads to freedom’.*

Juxtaposing tyranny and freedom is an effective and powerful premise. It helps explain the ad’s great success. In creating persuasive ads it is important to focus on the writing. No dramatic writing is complete without a hard-hitting premise, like the 1984 Apple ad shows. This is true in advertising and in audio ads as well.