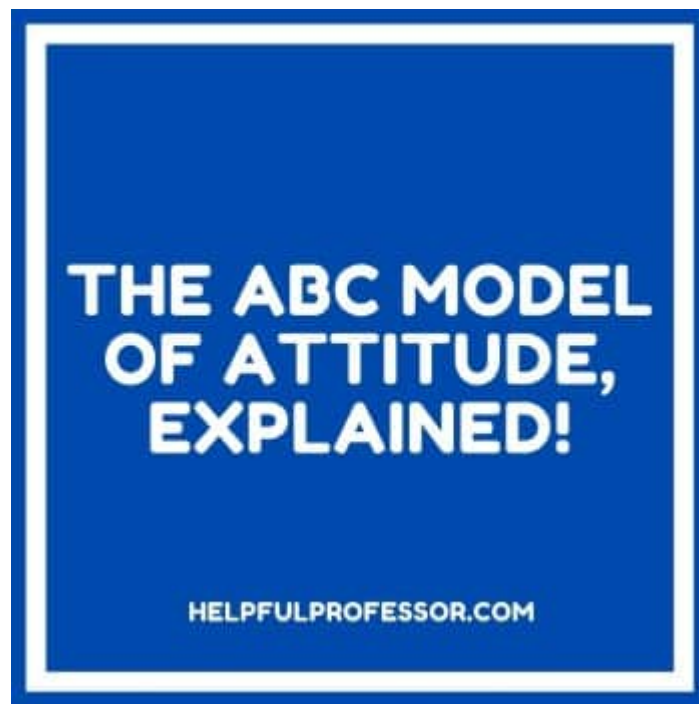




# The 3 Components Of Attitude (ABC / Tripartite Model)

By Chris Drew (PhD) / October 23, 2022

The tripartite model of attitude, also known as the ABC model, breaks attitudes down to their three components.



The three components of attitude are:

- **Affective Attitude** – how we feel about something.
- **Behavioral Attitude** – what we do about something.
- **Cognitive Attitude** – how we think about something.

This model helps us to define attitudes and deconstruct them to see what's going on under the surface.



Sometimes, affect is influencing behavior more than cognition (when we make impulse purchases, for example). Other times, cognition wins over (such as when we want something but decide not to get it right now because it's too expensive).

The ABC model of attitude can be used by **marketers** to find out why someone would want to buy a product (and better package it!) as well as **psychologists** to help people self-reflect on their own behaviors.

The model emerged from the Yale University Communication and Attitude Program in the 1950s and 60s<sup>[1]</sup>. However, note that this model has fallen out of favor in recent decades, as discussed in our 'criticisms' section later in this article.

**Contents** [ [show](#) ]

## The Structure Of Attitude

Attitude is structured into three components: affect, behavior, and cognition.

In this model, we consider there to be an “**attitude object**” that our attitudes and behaviors are directed at.

### Affective



The affective component of attitude refers to how we **feel** about something.

It's often our initial reaction and might be positive or negative, such as a fear-based reaction or an excitement-based reaction.

It's important to separate affect from cognition, where affect is what we feel and cognition is what we think.

Our affective responses might be driven by deep-seeded memories or experiences that shape our feelings about things. For example, our negative past experiences with certain animals may inform our current feelings toward them.

Some examples include:

- Being excited about a song because it reminds us of a loved one.
- Being repulsed by a smell because we have associated it with a bad memory.
- Being afraid of a lion because we've never seen one before.

## Behavioral

The behavioral component of attitude refers to our intentions, or what we would *do*.

It can be informed by our attitude or cognition. For example, if we're *afraid* of something (our affect), we might *run* (our behavior). Similarly, if we

However, the behavioral component is generally understood to be malleable. If



A marketer does a good job at marketing a product, they can influence the behavior so that it is favorable (i.e. that the person purchases the product).

The behavior is also often influenced by the 'cognitive' component, discussed next.

## Cognitive

Our cognitive component is what we *think* about something. It's what happens when we pause and really think hard about it.

Cognitive and affective components are interrelated, but don't always overlap.

For example, we might think it's a bad idea to take a holiday, even though we have positive feelings about it, because it's too expensive. That's because we're overriding our impulsive feelings in order to make decisions based on logic.

## Sequence Of Attitudes In The Tripartite Model

Affect, behavior or cognition could each win out in a decision. This changes depending on the situation. So, different ones come first, second and third at different times.

Here are some examples:

- **Affect-Behavior-Cognition:** A person needs to make a decision that is low-cost, such as buying an ice cream. Affect might be more important



than cognition here, as there is low risk in this action.

- **Cognition-Affect-Behavior:** A person needs to buy gas for their car. They know they need gas for the car to drive, but don't want to spend the money. The cognition here wins over because it's more important that the task be done than attending to your negative feelings about the task.
- **Behavior-Cognition-Affect:** A person buys a vacuum cleaner, which turns out to fail after a week. They re-assess how they think of the purchase (it wasn't worthwhile!) and now have a negative affect (dislike for) toward the object or brand.

## Which Wins Out?

We'll often try to reflect on which of the three components in the ABC model will "win" and force a behavior.

For example:

- Cognitive: "This is an expensive appliance"
- Affective: "This appliance gives me pleasure"
- Behavioral: "This appliance has served me well in the past"

Here, the conflict between cognitive and affective components of attitude may be resolved by the third – past experience – which might be enough to cause a consumer to make a purchase.

## Further Examples

Here are some more examples:



Attitude Object	Affect	Behavior	Cognition	Likely Sequence
Puppy dog	Adoration	Pet the dog	Dogs are friendly	Affect- Cognition- Behavior
McDonald's	Hunger	Don't buy the burger.	Junk Food is unhealthy.	Affect- Cognition- Behavior
Beer	Like a drink	Getting Drunk	You'll regret it!	Affect- Behavior- Cognition
Cleaning the house	It's Boring	Avoidance	It needs to be done.	Cognition- Affect- Behavior

## Conclusion

The ABC model has largely fallen out of favor in social psychology since the 1990s because it is widely understood that behavior should not be subsumed under attitude. They should, perhaps, instead be considered as separate things. As Sutton & Douglas (2020, p. 151) argue<sup>[2]</sup>:



*“We want to study how people’s behavior is related to how they think and feel about attitude objects. We do not want to simply define their behavior as an inherent part of their attitude.”*

Nonetheless, this model is useful for students to start thinking about how attitudes are formed and how we can influence behaviors by looking deeper at people’s cognitive and affective reactions to attitude objects.

Read Next: [A full list of 29 motivation theories](#)

## References

- [1] Augoustinos, M., Walker, I., & Donaghue, N. (2014). *Social cognition: An integrated introduction*. London: Sage.
- [2] Sutton, R. & Douglas, K. (2020). *Social Psychology*. London: Springer.
- [3] McCabe, S. (2010). *Marketing communications in tourism and hospitality*. Los Angeles: Routledge.

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Dr. Chris Drew is the founder of the Helpful Professor. He holds a PhD in education and has published over 20 articles in scholarly journals.



He is the former editor of the Journal of Learning Development in Higher Education.

2 Thoughts On “The 3 Components Of Attitude (ABC / Tripartite Model)”

**MARYELLEN ELIZABETH HART**

OCTOBER 29, 2022 AT 7:17 PM





This is the best summary of the information that I needed. Thank you. Thank you, too, for giving me a proper APA7 citation for your website. You are the best. Thank you for serving as a professor.

Cordially,

Maryellen Elizabeth Hart

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**CHRIS DREW (PHD)**

OCTOBER 31, 2022 AT 4:37 AM

Hi Maryellen,

You're more than welcome! If you're writing an essay for university, I'd recommend citing the sources listed in the reference list provided at the end of the article rather than my website because professors like to see you citing scholarly sources (I explain what scholarly sources are [in this blog post](#)).

Those three sources listed in the reference list have links to previews of the textbooks on Google books so you can even read them online so you don't even need to go to your university's library to get the scholarly info you need on the ABC Model of attitudes 😊

Best of luck in your studies!

Chris

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