

## How to Write a Creative Brief

Many creative projects get underway without a clear sense of expectations between the people requesting the project and the creative people delivering it, resulting frequently in lost time and expensive rework. A creative brief is the best way to clearly lay out a framework for the project.

A creative brief is like a road map. A good brief leads to imaginative and persuasive design projects. And gets you there quickly.

A bad brief starts you off in the wrong direction. So you have to stop, figure out where the heck you're going, and start again.

Most briefs are simply answers to a list of questions. The people writing the brief answer the questions based on information about the project given by the client.

What you want is the flexibility to select questions appropriate to any type of project. Therefore, it's wise to avoid written-in-stone printed briefs precisely because they limit your flexibility. Better to place the brief template – the list of questions – on your computer. Then, for each new project, select the appropriate questions to have answered.

I recommend you have access to three types of briefs: A Quick Brief for simple, fast turn-around projects. A Basic Brief for the bulk of projects you produce. And an Advanced Brief for new product launches or new business pitches.

And if you're thinking, "I don't have time to write a brief." Remember that working from verbal input, without a written brief, is how non-professionals waste time and money.

## What's (Answered) In A Typical Creative Brief?

Dig and probe to achieve an understanding of the client's culture, products, services and market. See if you can summarize the Basic or Advanced Brief in two sentences, "Who are we talking to, and what do we want to say?" As you prepare the brief, look for insights that explain why consumers buy and why they don't buy.

During the creative presentation refer back to the brief. Explain how the wild and crazy stuff you're asking the client to buy meets the agreed upon objective.

The preparation of the brief should be a collaborative process. Whether initiated by the client or the account service team, it can include input from creative, strategic planning, research or media department. The first draft should be presented as, "here's where we're headed with this brief ... what do you think?"

Before work begins, the client and the agency should "sign-off" on the brief, signifying agreement on the objective and other details.

Clients who work with small design shops, or use freelance writers and art directors, should prepare the creative brief themselves.

Sometimes the Creative Director will write the brief. As a creative person, the CD will know what information the writers, designers, and art directors will need to do the job.

For example a Quick Brief might be presented as 5 "top-line" statements:

1. *Here's an overview of the client and project:*
2. *Here's what we need:*
3. *Here are some approaches to consider:*
4. *Here are all the facts and sources of information you'll need, including the key copy points:*
5. *Here's the schedule:*

While an advanced brief might describe the following:

1. **General Information**

*Date:*

*Project:*

*Client:*

2. **Project Background:**  
*Summarize the project and what it's supposed to achieve:  
How will you measure the success of this program?*
3. **The Audience:**  
*Who is the Primary Audience?  
What should be avoided in talking to this audience?  
What do they believe before we tell them anything?  
Who is the secondary audience?*
4. **Objectives:**  
*What objectives are you trying to achieve?  
What are the priorities of those objectives?  
Can you suggest strategy or positioning to achieve the objective?*
5. **The Message:**  
*If you could get one sentence through all the clutter, what would that be?  
If they asked you to prove it, how would you do that?  
What other major points do you want to communicate?*
6. **The Medium:**  
*What is the best way to reach this audience?  
Is there another way?  
Are there existing pieces that this piece must work with?  
How will this piece be delivered to the audience?*
7. **Anything Else:**  
*Any other design objectives or special circumstances?  
Are there any other mandatory elements that must be in the piece?*
8. **The Deadline:**  
*When must the message get to the audience for maximum effect? (i.e. trade shows, events, product intro dates)  
When must we deliver the finished work?*
9. **Budget:**  
*How much money do you have to spend on this project?  
Has this budget been approved? By whom?  
What quantities do you need to produce? (for printed pieces)*
10. **The Responsible Parties:**  
*Who needs to sign off on final execution?*

Remember that it's a creative brief. Keep it short. Very rarely does a good brief need to be lengthy. I've seen great one-page creative briefs that give all the information needed to do killer creative work. If you're writing a five-page brief, it probably means you don't have a clue what's going on. If you can't say it briefly, go back to the client for clarification.

Finally, there is both an art and science to writing creative briefs. A typical problem is that many are ambiguous, lacking specific details. Or incomplete.

So keep in mind that you are writing the brief for the creative team. The brief must tell them everything they will need to work on the project. And the brief should be so thorough, so well documented that the creative team could complete the project without ever asking you, the brief writer, for clarification.