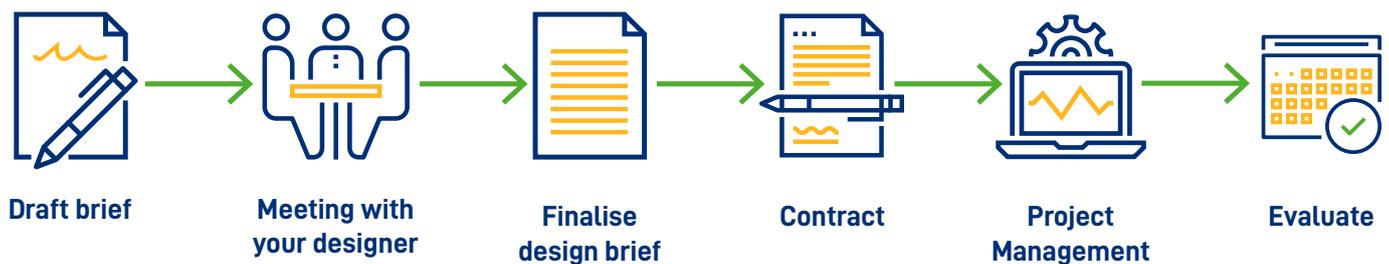


Starting Out

Starting out on your design project can be exciting. It can also be daunting, especially if it is the first time you have embarked on a creative project. This guide will help you get the most out of your project.

Being prepared with a draft design brief from the outset can help you select the right designer, get the project under way more quickly, and keep it on track as it progresses.



Why draft a brief?

The best briefs are evolved through discussion between the client and designer. During your initial meeting, the designer will often use their own briefing template or questions to guide this process. Giving thought to what information should be in the brief in advance can clarify what you need from a designer and can help inform your selection when recruiting.

The brief includes details about the challenge or opportunity at hand. It states the purpose of the project and outlines to the designer the intended business or organisational outputs and impacts you want to achieve. The purpose of the brief is not to direct the solution or the aesthetic that the designer should apply, but to inform their understanding and approach. It is the starting point for a design project, providing a common point of reference for the client and the designer throughout the design process. Once agreed, it can form the core of the contract between you. When the project is up and running it can be used to manage the project delivery and resolve differences of opinion.

Preparing a brief

The brief is a written document. Verbal briefs should be avoided as they can be open to misunderstanding. There are many ways to write a brief: a single page of bullet points with key information; a series of slides; a detailed 20-page document.

The content will differ according to the type and scale of design project you are undertaking but will include information about your business generally and the project specifically, and can draw from existing research, strategic plans and competitor analysis. Narratives and images, such as a mood board giving a visual representation, can stimulate a deeper understanding of what you are inspired by or are looking to achieve. Key to the success of any project is understanding the needs and desires of your customers and, where they are different, the users of your product or service. Involve them in the process where you can.

Different information is required for specific types of design projects. A brand development brief might contain information on the values, vision and personality of your organisation, key messages to communicate, and print and digital media applications. A brief for a service could include touchpoints (instances where the user interacts with the service whether physical, digital or in person), key stakeholders, and personas. A product brief could reference materials to use, functionality, and sustainability requirements.

The brief is a living document that can change and evolve over the duration of a project. Think of your draft brief as the start of a conversation with the designer rather than a final specification.

Use the 5 Ps below to help you draft a brief in preparation for a design project.

Purpose

- Background – share information about your organisation's values, purpose, vision and mission, and strategic priorities
- Describe the challenge – clearly state the challenge to be solved or the opportunity to be embraced
- Deliverables – state what you expect to be delivered at the end of the project eg website, new packaging, etc
- What success looks like – describe the intended impact of your project. Connect this with the specific project objectives
- Competition – highlight what is unique about your product/ service and the benefits. How do you differ from competitors?

People

- Customers – share information you have or lack about your target audience or customer segments
- User testing – state if and how your project will involve user or customer testing
- Stakeholders – identify the internal and external influencers who can affect the success of the project. Ensure you have the necessary information involvement and support from key individuals. For smaller businesses this could be a business partner or an investor. Larger businesses might involve marketing, production, and finance departments. Ensure your team are on board, informed and engaged at the relevant points in the process

Parameters

- Brand guidelines – share your brand guidelines (if you have them) to ensure consistency
- Non-negotiables – what are the fixed requirements that must be adhered to in the output?
- Constraints – what limitations or restrictions need to be adhered to? Considerations could relate to financial, legislative and technical requirements, or capacity and capability within the organisation

Project Management

- Timings – highlight important events, activities and deadlines. Agree the milestones at the outset of the project
- Budget – avoid potential frustrations on both sides by stating the project budget. If you cannot be exact, give a rough figure
- Project team – state who will be involved, their role and responsibilities in the project
- Communication – agree regular communication with the designer. Consider how you will keep your team and other stakeholders involved throughout the project

Passion

- Design inspiration – share any approaches or inspirational material that helps express what you are trying to achieve such as images and visual representations. It can be helpful to show examples of what does not work for you, who you would not want to be like. Remember, you are not directing the design outputs but are looking to inform and inspire your designer

How to use your Design Brief

The design brief is a useful tool throughout the life of a design project. It guides the working relationship and provides a point of reference, ensuring that both you and the designer have a shared understanding of the drivers, parameters and intended outcomes of the project.

It can help keep activities on track, guide decision-making, and diffuse tensions where there is a difference of opinion or understanding, bringing client and designer back to a shared understanding. It can be used throughout the process to test ideas and ensure they are on target and in line with the intended impact for the project. When the project has been completed, the brief can be useful for guiding the evaluation of the outputs in meeting your goals.

Top Tips

- > **Prepare, don't prescribe** – gather information that will aid the designer to achieve your ambition without directing the output
- > **Co-create the brief** – with the designer to clarify and agree what is needed – consider the 5Ps: Purpose, People, Passion, Parameters, Project Management
- > **Write the brief** – whether a short list of requirements or a detailed document. Reduce the possibility of misinterpretation by avoiding verbal briefing
- > **Use visuals** – to communicate, inspire, and bring to life your aspirations, but not to constrain the creative process
- > **State your budget** – avoid frustrations by confirming the budget even if it is an estimate
- > **Customer focus** – understand customer needs and expectations and engage them where you can
- > **Living document** – use the brief to guide activities throughout the design process and evolve it to meet changing requirements as they occur.

Customer Focus

Scottish Enterprise Market Research service can help if you need to research your customers or client group.

If you cannot access customers directly, you could use personas. These are constructed 'typical' characters, based on research, who represent each of your main customer or user groups and allow you to consider their needs, motivations and expectations.