

How to brief a designer

1. Start by answering two questions: who is going to see the design and what do you want them to do as a result of seeing it?
2. Even if you brief in person it's always a good idea to confirm the main points in writing. That way, you both have something to refer back to.
3. Apart from tackling creative content, your document should include a simple description of the approval process, time frames, and confirmation of prices agreed.
4. Try showing your written brief to a colleague and then asking them to relay back to you what they think you want. If they can't tell, a stranger certainly won't be able to.
5. If you want something specific, say so, and describe it as best you can. Show the designer examples of the kinds of things you like, but then ask them for their honest opinion on what you've asked for.
6. Still on specifics, don't forget to cover the basics: size, whether you favour landscape or portrait, the inclusion of logos, or existence of corporate guidelines etc.
7. Keep the length of your brief in proportion to the size of the job: a £100,000 campaign deserves a ten-page brief, a £100 flyer doesn't.
8. If you're not sure what you want, it's acceptable (and indeed preferable) to ask the creative to produce a rough draft – a sketch or a mock-up – before progressing...
9. ...But pay them for it. Good design may look easy. It isn't. It takes time and deserves reward.
10. Experienced designers are practised at interpreting briefs, but they can't read minds. Encourage questions and think carefully about your responses, because...
11. By definition creative people think laterally. If they're any good they'll produce a fresh twist to your idea that will absolutely delight you. The best briefs pin down the necessities while encouraging creative freedom.
12. Finally, try not to base your opinion of a design on your own tastes alone. It works if the target audience is just like you, but not if they're at a different life-stage, or are a different sex. How your *target market* reacts to it is far more important.