

Design Thinking: Insights to Inspiration

Design Brief Creation Guide

Jeanne Liedtka

Directions

- Review and consider the following questions as you create your design brief. These will help to guide your work as you tailor this activity toward your chosen project.

Project Description What is the business problem or opportunity? Describe the project in a few sentences, as you would in an "elevator pitch."	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Is this the high level "elevator speech" version that describes the project in a few sentences and explains what you are doing and why? Is it clear what you are proposing? Is the language clear?• Does the framing make sense? Have you set your project up as a "problem" to be solved, or as an "opportunity" or "challenge" to be explored? Sometimes these are different sides of the same coin, and experimenting with different approaches can lead to better definition.• Is it clear what question your project solution will be the answer to? Does it give someone a sense of the purpose behind the project, and the reason why this project is critical now?
Scope What is within the scope of the project and what is outside it? What boundaries or constraints must your solution accommodate?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Is the scope for your design work clear? Does it seem appropriate? Is it clear what is in bounds and what is not? A good scope is ambitious, but not unrealistic for the time, effort, and skills available.• Have you considered some broader as well as some narrower questions? What are the obvious higher- or lower-order questions that you might consider?• Does the scope take into consideration the context of the problem or opportunity?• Does the brief layer on constraints that might be constructively addressed or perhaps even eliminated creatively? Push yourself to explain why those particular constraints must be worked within, rather than challenged. Constraints can be useful for triggering greater creativity—but they can also drive out innovative solutions. The goal here is to minimize the number of constraints at the outset, while not ignoring those that are non-negotiable.• Since we do not yet know what constraints or requirements the solution must meet in order to create value for stakeholders, is the emphasis on the organizational constraints (budget, time, and boundaries of corporate capabilities)?
Users and Stakeholders Who are you designing for? (Try to be as specific as possible.) Who else is important to consider? Why are they important to the project?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Design projects should be undertaken with a specific group of target users in mind, either internal or external. Is it clear who you are designing for? Does the brief name and describe the audience as specifically as possible?• Sometimes we see design briefs in which the author seems to have only a vague notion of who the customer is and lists large target groups like the "mass market" or "Gen Y." Push yourself to be more specific! If you have too generalized a view of the audience, you may overlook critical elements of the problem or opportunity space. Remember that all groups are made up of actual people.• Another common pitfall is focusing on only the primary set of users, while ignoring peripheral or indirect users. For example, while you may be designing a system to streamline workflow for front line staff, you still need to understand how that system will affect customers. Demonstrating that you understand and have taken into consideration the larger system of players is important here.

Design Brief Creation Guide

Exploration Questions What are you curious to learn about your users and how they think, feel, and behave? What key questions will you need to answer through your research? These may include things like changes in the environment, emerging technical possibilities, or new business models.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Is the focus on what you want to learn more about? Are broader areas of inquiry laid out? (Details on who you will interview and why will be developed in step 4 as part of a more detailed plan.)• What are your assumptions? Try not to bring too many into your exploration.• As they set out to create new knowledge through observation of and interaction with target customers, what are they curious about? Exploration should be a divergent activity. They shouldn't be looking for or talking about solutions yet. Instead, they should be identifying different lines of inquiry that will broaden their understanding and stimulate their thinking.
Expected Outcomes and Success Metrics How does the world look different after your project succeeds? What specific metrics might help you assess whether this is happening?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Do the anticipated outcomes give us some guidelines to work by? While we do not know exactly what the solution will look like, we can nonetheless frame our expectations for the outcomes of our project, which are not the same as stating the solution.• Are you clear about what you expect to get out of this work? How will the project results be utilized? What physical components will you deliver? What kind of value will the project generate?• Design is challenging (and exciting) because we do not know at the start of a project precisely what our alternative solution will look like. Still, the more clearly and specifically defined the "if anything were possible" types of outcomes, the better. How do you hope to change the lives of your target users for the better?• Are you clear about how you will know if your project added value? How do you define success? Remember that metrics do not necessarily have to come in the form of numerical data. What other kinds of measures are you looking at?• What measures of both organizational and user success are included? Keep in mind that the success of a design project is ultimately in how well it serves or creates value for the end customer or user—and that pleasing one's organization is not necessarily the same thing as designing a successful solution for their users.