## **Interpreting the brief**

The client brief is a fundamental part of any design scheme. It is a document that includes every aspect of the client’s needs both aesthetically and functionally in order to provide the designer with all the information they will need to create an appropriate graphic design.

A client brief may be compiled during a meeting with the client or it may be issued as a document. The brief should determine a client's wish list, but should also take other information into consideration so that the proposed design can be developed and produced.



Fig 1. Pexels (n.d.) Client meeting

Sometimes a design brief is set beforehand and other times a brief may be compiled during a meeting with a client. In case of the latter, it is important to ask questions and make notes of the client’s needs and wishes as they are being communicated. This can include, but is not limited to the following:

* Details on the client (e.g. business) such as existing service or product line, years established, clientele, vision, mission, etc.
* The purpose of the design and its audience. This will affect the choices you make in terms of colour, imagery, layout and typography.
* The physical or digital location of the design.
* Wish list - make a list of the specific details the client has expressed they would like incorporated within the design (e.g. specific orientation, central focal point, specific brand colour palette, etc.)

## **Evaluating the design brief**

In order to best understand the needs of our client, begin by asking important questions which will help to get a better understanding of your client’s requirements. The goal is to understand your client (whether a person or business), their goal, vision, preferences and expectations. This can help to define the look the client is hoping to achieve.

It is a good idea to begin by making a wish list for your client. This should comprise of all the things they would like and things they need. Here are some questions to consider which may help to understand your client’s requirements:

* Does the client want this to be a multi-purpose design? If so, list the all its uses (e.g. online ad, poster, and physical)
* Is the client going to use the design digitally, in printed format, or both?
* Is the client planning to use the design for a short period or long term?
* Where will the design be used or showcased?
* What is the approximate size of the audience that will be viewing the design?
* What is the demographics of the intended audience?
* Does the client have a preference in terms of typography (e.g. sans or sans serif)?
* Does the client want to use existing branding colours or create a new colour scheme?
* If the design is for a business, are there different names for the business and which one does the client want to use in the design?
* Does the client/business have a slogan or tagline?
* Who is the client’s main competitor?
* What does the client like/dislike about their competitors’ branded designs?
* Does the client want a minimalist style or a more ornate and detailed design?
* What mood do they want to convey through the design? Should it be formal, casual, luxurious or purely functional?

In addition, designers need to fully understand the limitations and the technical aspects in order to create a design that is appropriate. Consider the following aspects:

* The cost - What is the budget for the project? Including any print costs, distribution costs, external factors, your time.
* The timeframe - When does the client need the design for distribution?
* Does the client require source files? This may involve an increase in your design fee as once the client has access to the original files they then have the ability to manipulate and/or reuse your files.
* Does the client have an existing style guide for you to follow? If not, it could increase the time required to deliver as you will need to implement a rough style guide of your own based on their wishes and on previous work.
* In what format does the client want the final deliverables in?

## **Design styles**

Your client's preferences and style will determine the design you create. Clients who let the designer make most of the decisions are extremely rare. Most of the time they will know what they want. In the case of a client not knowing what they want, it is the job of the graphic designer to help them find a visual solution to a particular design or marketing problem.

As graphic designers, it is therefore important to understand some general design styles to help you communicate your client’s needs.



Fig 2. Pexels (n.d) Advising on design styles

For example, your client may have a strong preference for Art Deco style design or perhaps they may prefer more of a Grunge style. It may even be a situation where your client has no idea of what their style preference is at all. Either way, as the designer, being able to identify and communicate design styles will help you to establish your client’s preferences even if they are initially unclear

Therefore, a valuable starting point for a design project is to learn a little more about each design style/movement and how they differ. It is important to note that for a design project you are not restricted by a given style and you can combine more than one style.

## **Budget and pricing considerations**

The costs involved in a graphic design project are either determined beforehand, like a client who has a set budget, or it may require the designer to calculate a price after the initial meeting. Herein lies two essential skills that every graphic designer must develop.



Fig 3. Pexels (n.d.) Invoicing a client

Firstly, the ability to work within a particular budget is integral to meeting the needs of the client and satisfying their expectations. Even though you may not be working to a specific figure, you may be tasked with working within a budget range.

The second important skill is to be able to price your own time and work as a freelance graphic designer. When you are starting out, it is essential to do research and see what the current rates are for projects similar to the one you are about to take on. Once you are familiar with the industry rates, you need to find a balance in your pricing, so that it is not too high but also not too low.

You also have to remember that different skill sets have different monetary values. It is vital for both designers and clients to understand the industry and how this works as it will help set a realistic budget for the work required. For example, a web designer may have a higher fee than a graphic designer or an illustrator may also cost more than a graphic designer, but less than an animator. The cost for a graphic designer therefore depends on the skills required as well as your experience. A novice designer, for instance, cannot expect to charge a client the same rates as a senior designer or creative director. A client’s budget will be key in determining the level of designer they can expect and the designer will then be able to invoice a client according to their role and seniority.

Another aspect to take into consideration for both a graphic designer and client is whether a designer is contacted through an agency or directly and the hourly vs daily cost.



Fig 4. Pexels (n.d.) Maintaining relationships with clients

During the early days of a graphic design career, invoicing a client can feel somewhat overwhelming and can generate anxiety and stress. The key things to always ask yourself to consider are:

* How long will the project take to complete?
* What is the going-rate for a similar project?
* On which platforms will the design(s) be used? (type and number of platforms)
* Will you be required to do a single print run or many?
* What is the client’s expected result?
* How much will you need as a ‘buffer’ for unforeseen situations, for example, factors that might extend the time it takes to finish the project?

At the end of the day, it can be difficult to put a value on yourself, as a designer and as a person. You have to generate new business while maintaining relationships with existing clients, and you also need to be able to withstand the increasing costs of living expenses, inflation, etc. It is a balancing act that is key to surviving in the industry but once you take time to value your work, to prepare for unforeseen events and to keep control of your finances, it will soon become second nature to you.