



A well-crafted brief will attract the best creative response from your agency, save time, and ultimately give your campaign the best possible chance of delivering the results you need.

So, what makes a great film brief? HerioVisual writer and director, [Steve Bookbinder](#), outlines his seven essentials for the perfect creative brief.

7 RULES FOR BETTER FILM BRIEFS

If you want a house built, you don't spend day one buying bricks. The house needs an architect to produce a design for the builder to follow, but despite their years of professional experience, the architect needs to know exactly what you want before they start drawing.

No one who has bought or rented property walks into an estate agent's office and says only, 'I need an apartment'. We specify a location, the number of bedrooms, or whether we need parking provision or a garden. Without consciously labelling it, we give the agent a brief.

It's the same when commissioning a film. But it is not uncommon for the briefing process to be neglected. A scant and vague notion of what's required gives your filmmakers a headache; if they don't know what it will be about and exactly what purpose it needs to fulfil, there's little hope of the best film emerging.

So, if you're going to commission a film, here's what you need to tell the production team - and what you don't - to ensure that your final product delivers everything you've planned.

1. DEFINE YOUR FILM'S PURPOSE: WHAT DO YOU WANT TO ACHIEVE?

Why do you need a film?

What effect do you want it to have?

What are the key messages you need to convey?

What do you want your audience to think, feel, say, or do after watching it?



If you can't answer these questions in a sentence each, you haven't defined your film's purpose. Think this through; a clear purpose informs the backbone of any effective film.

2. UNDERSTAND YOUR AUDIENCE

Who are you aiming the film at?

If it's a broad demographic, is there a primary target audience?

How will they actually view the film?

A clear idea of who will be watching the film helps the filmmakers to pitch the content and tone. How it will be viewed is important too: a live event, a workshop, on mobile phones? Brief this in; it can affect production decisions.

3. DON'T BRIEF THE 'HOW'

Concentrate on the what, why and when and leave the how – the genre, structure, and style – to the filmmakers

Trust in the team's creative expertise will pay off. It can be hard to picture a finished film, but the team can show you examples of similar approaches that have worked well and write up a creative treatment to help you to envisage the film.

Do give details of any brand guidelines or visual standards you require (such as particular fonts, colour palettes or logos) and be clear about any 'no-go' areas.

Give the team time to work-up their ideas before you accept or reject them.

4. DON'T BRIEF THE SAME AS BEFORE

Audiences hate the predictable; be open to a different approach

Predictable is dull, it fosters boredom and fails to engage. Good production teams are communications experts; they will know what compels an audience. Consider pushing the boundaries - audiences love a surprise.



5. KNOW YOUR BUDGET

Try to be up-front about available budget; even a ballpark figure can save time and enable a better response

Giving your agency a rough idea of how much you have to spend really helps them to devise the right kind of film. Good filmmakers are creative and will always look for an imaginative way to deliver the best possible film for your budget.

If you need a 3D animation or a location drama but have money for 2 interviews in the office, be clear at the outset: we may still be able to devise a clever idea from the office shoot, without wasting time pitching the next Bond movie!

6. BRIEF EARLY AND STICK TO THE SCHEDULE

Always brief a delivery date

Time matters: a clear delivery date is crucial. The entire production schedule will ripple-back from this date. It allows your agency to guarantee you'll get your film on time.

Order early

Films can take longer than they look to make. Even a low budget film will be a far better film by avoiding a mad dash to churn it out.

Try to stick to approval deadlines

Remember that your approval decisions will be scheduled at critical points in the production process; there may be a dozen or more people poised to leap into action upon your say-so. You wouldn't want a taxi hanging around unnecessarily with its meter running!

Time is money

Remember that production schedules and budgets are carefully worked out, based on the availability of key players, time, and resources. Individual crew members are booked for specific dates at a given cost, each with different inter-dependent tasks.

Filmmakers are agile, but be mindful that delays can mean shifting delivery dates and increased cost.

Consider the trade-offs

The tried and tested 'project management triangle' is always a useful model to apply to film production: adjust one side of the triangle and you'll see a corresponding effect of the others:



- If you want your film *quickly* and at *low cost*, then the *quality* of the film will be lower
- If having the *highest quality* is your priority, but you also need it to be *low cost*, then it's going to *take longer* to produce
- If it must be *delivered quickly* and at *high quality*, your costs will increase

7. DON'T OVER-BRIEF

Preparing a brief can seem daunting if you're trying to write 5 pages. Provided that you're focussed, a simple bullet-point list can be enough to get your agency started.

I directed a film for a UK railway company some years back. Their brief was little



more than headlines, but it was all we needed to deliver a powerful and challenging film.

The commissioners said this:

- *Passengers are assaulting our staff and sometimes the staff are unwittingly provoking them*
- *Show what it is that winds passengers up*
- *Reveal staff attitudes that inflame rather than diffuse*
- *Audience is guards, station staff, ticket office, drivers: must feel real, honest. Don't patronise an audience that knows the reality of a Friday night*
- *They'll watch on phones, desktops, some group training*
- *Must hit home – any assaults are wrong, but staff approach can make all the difference*
- *We need it for September publication to hit the return to work for many*
- *This is a vital film for us: we have allocated a realistic budget'.*

The commissioners knew **what** they wanted, **why** they needed it and where the film would be viewed. They had **identified** their **audience** and how to appeal to them. They said **nothing about how** it should be done but **trusted** the creative team to deliver their brief. They gave a clear **delivery deadline** and a **budget** outline.

The resulting film was an award-winning drama which delivered everything the client wished, leading to a reduction in assaults on the company's staff.

Finally – don't feel you need to have nailed every detail to the mast before approaching an agency. Sometimes a chat over coffee between you and the production team can help to draw out the essence of your film. It can also be fun, especially with chocolate Hobnobs.

[Steve Bookbinder](#) is a senior writer and director at HerioVisual.

If you'd like to chat with Steve or with any of the HerioVisual team about brief development, film, animation, photography or visual media strategy, we'd love to hear from you!

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