A FREE GUIDE FROM STUDIO JUNCTURE

How to Write a Good Creative Brief

13 elements that give your creative team what they need to do their best work.

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INTRODUCTION

Why a brief matters

A creative brief is the handoff between a business problem and a creative solution. A good one gives your team context, focus, and guardrails, so they spend their time making great work instead of guessing.

How to use this booklet

Each page covers one element of the brief, with what to avoid (Instead of), what to write (Say), and the reason it works (Why).

The examples all follow one fictional product: a widget with bigger buttons and a voice-enabled command center.

AT A GLANCE

The 13 elements

THE WHY

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THE WHY

01

Assignment

Not a description of the deliverable. Answer two questions: Why are we advertising? What business problem are we helping solve?

INSTEAD OF

We need to create a digital banner and TV ad that shows off the new features of our widget.

SAY

We’re rolling out new features on our widget: larger buttons and a voice-enabled command center. Customer feedback tells us many older customers struggle to see, and easily reach, their apps and the features that make our widgets so great.

WHY

It gives the creative team the background, the high-level issue, the solution on offer, and why it matters.

THE WHY

02

Goals

List your business goals in ascending order of importance, KPIs included.

INSTEAD OF

The goal is to show customers how easily they can now access everything our widgets have to offer.

SAY

- Convert 10,000 existing customers to the new features
- Gain 50,000 new widget customers
- $3.5M in new customer sales in 6 months

WHY

Advertising has a purpose, and it ties directly to your goals. The team can only help you hit goals they understand.

THE WHO

03

Target audience

Who are we talking to? It can’t be everyone, so be specific.

INSTEAD OF

Existing customers and prospects who are 55+ and/or hearing or sight impaired.

SAY

- Existing customers
- 55 years of age or older
- Predominantly male
- 55% Caucasian / 40% African American / 5% Asian
- Have difficulty navigating small icons on their widgets
- Did not grow up with this technology

WHY

Trust the halo effect: a clear position for one audience spills over to the others. Speak to everyone and you speak to no one.

THE WHO

04

Accepted consumer belief

How your audience thinks and feels right now, in their own voice. Give them a persona so they're memorable.

INSTEAD OF

This customer believes they only need their widget to communicate and take pictures. Using all the features is hard, so they don't.

SAY

"Hi, I'm Joe. I just turned 63 years young, and I'm a little embarrassed to say I can't see the dang buttons on my widget anymore. I've given up scheduling fishing trips with my buddy George, and I wait at the bait shop instead of pre-ordering. It's frustrating (and did I mention embarrassing?). I meant to message George and my wife got a note about 'reeling in the big one.' I give up. Why do I need all this fanciness now?"

WHY

It helps the team understand who they're speaking to and why the product matters to them: an emotional connection stats can't give.

THE WHAT

05

Single-minded proposition

The ONE main idea to communicate: a single benefit or message. Pick the biggest driver from your customer insights and emotional benefits, and write it as one punchy sentence.

INSTEAD OF

This campaign should show and speak about the bigger buttons and voice-activated command center and highlight how that makes the widget work better for customers.

SAY

Show how much easier and more convenient it is to access every benefit, and get more bang for the buck, with the voice-activated command center.

WHY

It’s a springboard for concepts, so the team doesn’t have to guess. It isn’t a tagline or final headline, and it isn’t the USP, though the USP is often woven in.

THE WHAT

06

Brand promise

What is the brand promising about this product or service? Why should customers believe you?

INSTEAD OF

At company XYZ, we developed bigger buttons and a voice-activated control system to help our customers and entice new ones.

SAY

- Our customers are number one
- We believe technology should be useful and convenient for everyone

WHY

It narrows down the key facts, so the team can stress them in writing and design without being overt.

THE WHAT

07

Support for the proposition

Why should your customer believe the brand promises?

INSTEAD OF

We obviously listened to our customers. They complained they couldn’t use the widget, so we made it better.

SAY

- We heard you. We listen to our customers, understand their pain points, and work to solve them.
- Bigger buttons open up more features without squinting or fumbling.
- Don’t want to type? Ask the voice-activated command center, and consider it done.
- The buttons are bigger, but the widget is still pocket-size.

WHY

The team can see how each feature or element relates back to the brand promises.

THE WHAT

08

Desired consumer response

What should customers take away from the campaign? How does it make them feel, and what are they thinking?

INSTEAD OF

Our customers should be running to the store to get the updated widget.

SAY

“Joe here again. I just saw there’s a new widget with a voice command center and bigger buttons. This company really listened to me and found a solution. I must be a very important customer! I’m excited to go get it. George, fishing is on again!”

WHY

Personas help the creator picture the end user, and how you want that person to feel after seeing the work.

THE HOW

09

Tone

Every brand has a voice, but what should the tone of this project be? Consider your audience and their emotional state right now. Skip the buzzwords and describe it as a person.

INSTEAD OF

I want the ads to be upbeat and friendly with a focus on the new technology.

SAY

A best friend of 20+ years: warm, direct, honest, and somewhat cheeky.

WHY

It gives writers a guide to how the message should sound, and it informs design too. Neon green light streaks wouldn’t suit this persona, but a forest green check might.

THE HOW

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Executional considerations

Not mandatory requirements, but a curated list that shows the team how their work lives in the real world. Meant to inspire, not restrict.

INSTEAD OF

Do show diversity, but not any Asian males. Must use Helvetica and a blue filter. The background should use our brand purple.

SAY

Warm and empathetic, with a touch of sass and nostalgia, like The Sandlot. Most customers will see this during their weekly sitcoms or while reading the daily news at home. Others will see it scrolling Facebook as they catch up with family and friends.

WHY

Inspire the team to give you their best work in the vibe you want, rather than tying their hands with strict rules about how it should look and sound.

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Mandatories

Elements that must be included. These are strict, non-negotiable rules for legal and compliance reasons.

INSTEAD OF

Show the larger buttons. Include the brand logo. Make the background purple. Include the standard disclaimer.

SAY

- Brand logo
- Service mark on the new widget offering name
- Standard disclaimer
- Sonic logo (where applicable)
- Demographic diversity that mirrors our target audience

WHY

Leave any of these out and the work could be rejected for legal or brand non-compliance, or you could end up with a broken product, offer, or service.

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Specs

To you it might just be a digital ad. To the creative team, knowing exactly which one, and its production limits, is key.

INSTEAD OF

5 digital ads: 4 banners and 1 carousel. 1 thirty-second commercial and 2 fifteen-second commercials.

SAY

Digital ads (5)

- 4 banners: 2 @ 300 × 250 px, 1 @ 728 × 90 px, 1 @ 160 × 600 px, all with a 1 px white border
- 1 carousel: 3 cards, 15 seconds each (45 total), 1:1, 1080 × 1080 px, PNG (30 MB max per image), MP4 or .MOV
- Copy: headline 40 characters, body 125, link description 25

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Specs, continued

The same level of detail applies to broadcast.

SAY

Broadcast TV

- .MOV file format
- One :30 hero spot and two :15 cutdowns
- Standard disclaimer super at the bottom of the screen
- Brand sonic at the beginning and end
- Voiceover and screen text show the logo, CTA, and local shop location in the final end card
- All typography stays within 16:9 title safe boundaries

WHY

Be specific so the team builds the right ads for your media buys. Not sure of the specs? Work with your media buyer and/or creative project manager.

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Timeline

A due date alone isn't enough. Include delivery dates and airing dates, note different deadlines per element, and list in delivery-date order.

INSTEAD OF

Delivery of all elements by June 1.

SAY

Broadcast commercial

- :30 hero spot due June 1; airs June 15–August 1
- :15 cutdowns due June 15; airs June 30–August 5

Digital ads

- All due June 25; run June 15–August 10

WHY

It helps the creative team prioritize the ask and manage their resources.

QUICK CHECK

Before you hit send

☐	**Assignment**	What business problem are we solving?
☐	**Goals**	What are the measurable targets?
☐	**Target audience**	Who, exactly, are we speaking to?
☐	**Consumer belief**	How do they think and feel today?
☐	**Proposition**	What is the ONE idea?
☐	**Brand promise**	What are we promising?
☐	**Support**	Why should they believe it?
☐	**Desired response**	How should they feel afterward?
☐	**Tone**	If this were a person, who would it be?
☐	**Executional**	Where will this live? Inspire, don’t restrict.
☐	**Mandatories**	What must be included, no exceptions?
☐	**Specs**	Exactly what are we delivering?
☐	**Timeline**	What’s due when, and when does it run?

Great creative starts with a great brief.

Want a brief process your creative team actually uses, even through a merger, rebrand, or new tool rollout? Let’s talk.

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