Design briefs and specifications

Design briefs

A design brief is a short statement which describes some or all of the following:
▲ the sort of product to be made and its purpose;
▲ who will use it;
▲ where it will be used;
▲ where it might be sold.

An open brief provides general guidelines and offers the opportunity for a wide range of possible outcomes. A closed brief is more specific and detailed in its requirements. Here are examples of open and closed briefs for two lines of interest.

Interiors

Open design brief: Design a mural for a new café called Good Vibrations to be opened in a seaside town. It will seat up to 80 people at 20 tables. Overall, the interior has the 60s as a theme with an accent on ‘surfin’ sound’ and it aims to attract young couples during the day.

Closed design brief: Design a mural for a new restaurant called Bloomsbury that aims to attract couples and small parties for ‘special occasion’ evening meals. It will seat up to 30 people at 10 tables. Overall, the interior should feature memorabilia of the Bloomsbury Group including paintings, prints, decorations and writing. It should include pictures of members of the Group with newspaper-type headlines indicating the controversy associated with their lives.

Paper engineering

Open design brief: Design a range of pop-up cards suitable for children of primary school age to be sold in a wide range of outlets, such as specialist card shops, department stores and W.H. Smith.

Closed design brief: Design a series of press-out scenes based on stories from traditional nursery rhymes for children at infant school to be sold at craft shops that specialize in handicraft kits.

For the open brief different styles of cards are possible. They could be traditional or modern in appearance, linked to toys and games popular with young children, and even use special effects, as in ‘exploding’ cards and cards that play tunes on opening. Different complexities of card are possible, from simple stand-up figures to mechanisms with moving parts. In the closed brief the product and its style are specified and the end user is more clearly identified. This provides a more detailed picture of what is required.
Specifying the product

You will need to develop the design brief into a performance specification. This will provide a list of criteria against which you can assess your design as it develops.

The performance specification will always:
▲ describe what the product has to do;
▲ describe what the product should look like;
▲ state any other requirements that need to be met.

For example:
▲ how it should work;
▲ how much it should cost to manufacture;
▲ possible production levels – one-off or batch production;
▲ what materials it should be made from;
▲ what energy source should be used if it needs to be powered;
▲ ergonomic requirements related to end user;
▲ legal requirements to be met in its development and use;
▲ environmental considerations and requirements.

Here are two examples of performance specifications and products that meet their requirements.

Local music scene guide specification

What it has to do:
▲ provide information about local bands, gigs and playing venues (clubs) on a monthly basis.

What it should look like:
▲ be attractive to young people in the 15-30 age group;
▲ indicate the wide range of music styles available.

Other requirements:
▲ have a recognizable house style, as it will be produced monthly;
▲ use one colour ink only;
▲ include a summary of information in the form of charts as well as more in depth information;
▲ be made from easily recyclable materials as it will be used and thrown away;
▲ be suitable for inclusion in a free community newspaper;
▲ contain adverts for playing venues, to cover the cost of design and production.
Packaging specification

What it has to do:
▲ protect and promote an expensive special occasion/anniversary celebration sparkling wine from Italy.

What it should look like:
▲ the surface decoration be based on fresco-style art depicting wine drinking in ancient Rome;
▲ reflect the special occasion nature of the wine in a way that appeals to a wide age range from 25-55 years.

Other requirements:
▲ be easy to manufacture for batch production;
▲ use low cost materials, recycled if possible;
▲ be seen as part of a range of packaging that can be used to promote wines from different parts of the world.