

Commentary on assignment briefs

Introduction

The assignment assesses candidates' ability to apply the skills, knowledge and understanding acquired throughout the course in the production of media content. In the assignment candidates plan and develop media content in response to a negotiated brief. Candidates demonstrate their skills, knowledge and understanding of production techniques in an assignment which involves a degree of personalisation and choice. The brief set by the centre is an important part of this assessment task. It is crucial that the brief given to candidates lays out clear parameters within which candidates are expected to work, but without being too restrictive.

Here you will find examples of briefs along with a commentary on their suitability.

Example briefs with commentary

Brief 1

Create a short moving-image media text that will entertain and/or inform and/or educate a target audience of your choice.

Level of finish expected:

- ◆ A complete short film or trailer or PSA.
- ◆ Minimum of 45 seconds long / Maximum of 2 minutes long

Commentary

The brief is short and clear and allows candidates plenty of opportunity for personalisation and choice. They can negotiate the brief by making choices about genre, purpose, and target audience. The level of finish and length restrictions are clear and appropriate. Because the brief is so open, any decisions candidates make can be credited as part of their "Creative intentions in response to the brief" response in section 1 of their written work. Such an open brief may not give enough support to all candidates in coming up with their initial ideas, however, and some may benefit from the inclusion of more specific stimulus. It would therefore be good practice if using a very open brief like this to support students at the start of the assignment with plenty of classroom discussion of possible approaches in order to help them settle on an initial idea for their product.

Brief 2

Your brief is to plan and make a short (**2 minutes max**) moving image text inspired by one of the stimuli below. You will need to negotiate your Purpose and your Target Audience. Your finished film will be submitted to SQA and should be submitted to your teacher as either a .avi or .mov file.

Choose one of the following stimuli:

Stimulus 1

Create a short film in any genre you choose. This could be fiction or non-fiction.

Stimulus 2

Create a trailer for a feature film. Before you film your trailer, you should have a clear idea of what would happen in the full film. The trailer should show key moments from the film and clearly include content to persuade an audience to see the film.

Stimulus 3

Make a short documentary film about any topic which interests you. You could focus on a sport or hobby you enjoy, a local story that interests you or any other topic that you feel strongly about.

Stimulus 4

Create the opening or ending sequence for a feature-length film. If you choose the opening scene, you will need to think about how you introduce the character(s) and how you will hook the audience. If you choose to make the ending, you will need to have an awareness of what has happened in the rest of the film. Your scene should show the climax of the action and provide a satisfying end to the narrative for the audience.

Commentary

This brief is clear and sufficiently open to give candidates a range of options for their film. The opening paragraph indicates the level of finish (a completed film), with a clear time constraint of two minutes, which is in line with SQA recommendations. It also reminds candidates they will be required to negotiate purpose and audience. This will allow them to justify these choices in the first part of their written response - "Creative intentions in response to the brief".

The range of stimuli provided is beneficial to candidates. Stimulus 1 is completely open and gives complete creative freedom. This will suit candidates who already have a clear idea of what they would like to make. The other three stimuli give candidates a framework to work within, whilst also offering them the creative freedom to negotiate a wide range of ideas such as genre, narrative, representations etc. All of these stimuli allow candidates the creative freedom a good brief requires.

Brief 3

You have been asked to make a test reel for a short documentary film for Channel 4. Your film should comply with the commissioning guidelines for Channel 4 and should achieve the purposes of informing and educating the audience. You can make the documentary on any topic of your choosing, in negotiation with your teacher.

You should come up with two ideas in your planning phase and do research on both. You will then select one to make for your finished product.

Target audience

Your film should target an audience of British 16-25 year olds.

Level of finish

Your finished product should be a finished film of 5-10 minutes in length. You should also submit all research, planning materials such as mood boards, storyboards and scripts that you produce as part of your finished product.

Commentary

While this brief allows for some choice on the part of the candidates in terms of the subject of their documentary, overall it is too restrictive. Candidates should be given opportunities to negotiate genre, purpose and audience, and this will allow them more scope for justifying their choices in their write-up. The candidates are asked to come up with, and research, two ideas. This is not helpful and could make their research and planning stage confusing as they will only be credited for discussing plans for **one** piece of content. There are also issues with the section on level of finish as the length of the product is far too long. The SQA guidelines recommend no more than three minutes length for a moving image text. This is sufficient for candidates to evidence their understanding and abilities. A longer product may lead to them spending too much time on creating the content at the expense of their written response. The brief also states that they are required to submit planning documents such as mood boards, storyboards and scripts. This is not the case, and these materials **should not** be submitted along with the finished content and written response.

Brief 4

Your task is to create a moving image advert for a new product – an energy drink or a chocolate bar. You will have one week to design your product and shoot your advert.

Guidelines

- ◆ The product must be *NEW* and not an adaptation of an existing one;
- ◆ You must design the product including the packaging and detailed information about it;
- ◆ Your advert must be between 30 seconds and 2 minutes long;
- ◆ You can have other actors in your trailer but you are responsible for your own product and advert;
- ◆ You will be designing your product and shooting your advert within **ONE WEEK** of class time in December.

Elements to negotiate

- ◆ Type of product
- ◆ Details about your product
- ◆ Target audience
- ◆ Decisions about the content of your advert

Commentary

This brief instructs candidates to design a product before creating an advertisement for it. Whilst setting the task of creating a moving image advert is appropriate, the design of a new product is an unnecessary task and is not going to generate any relevant plans relating to a media text that can be credited in the planning stage. Students should not be asked to design products as part of their Assignment as the focus must be on the media text they are to create. It is acceptable to instruct students to create an advert for an existing product, and this would ensure that all plans made by the student will relate to the media content. The brief does provide an appropriate length for the finished text (30 seconds – 2 minutes); however, the time allowed for pupils to create the text (one week) is too restrictive. It is not advised to instruct pupils to produce their media text in such a limited time period as this will hinder their ability to achieve their creative intentions and respond to institutional constraints that arise. It is more appropriate to allow them to complete the production of their media content over several weeks, across both class time and their own time, to allow them to develop their production skills, implement their creative intentions and adapt them as necessary.

Brief 5

Make an opening sequence for the pilot episode of a new series for Netflix.

- ◆ Your sequence should be no longer than 2 minutes long.
- ◆ You need to decide on a target audience and genre for your series.
- ◆ For the purposes of this task, you can work on the assumption that you have a budget of between \$1 and \$2 million per episode.
- ◆ Although you are only going to make an opening sequence as your assignment project, your planning and research can refer to ideas for any part of the whole series.
- ◆ You can make casting decisions for the intended series but for your assignment film you may include stand-in performers to represent the actors who would feature in the show.

Commentary

The brief to make an opening sequence for a new series is clear, and the suggested length is appropriate. The candidates are given a choice of target audience and genre so in these respects the brief is suitably open and allows for negotiation. However, there are features of this brief that would disadvantage candidates. Firstly, the suggested budget is unhelpful. Candidates need to make finished media content for the Higher Media assignment, so their budget needs to be realistic – usually they will have no budget at all. It is important that their written work in section 1 relates to the actual product they plan to make, so they should be carrying out research and making planning decisions based on the actual institutional circumstances in which they will be working. Secondly, the suggestion to refer to the series as a whole is unhelpful: candidates' written research and planning should refer to the product they actually plan to make, so writing about plans for parts of a series that they are not actually going to make is not a valid response to the assessment task. Similarly, the advice to make casting decisions for the series is also unhelpful. Candidates should be making casting decisions for the film they are actually going to make and not for an imaginary series – this part of the brief could cause them to waste time thinking and writing about famous actors in a way that is irrelevant to their actual product.