INTRODUCING MEDIA PRACTICE
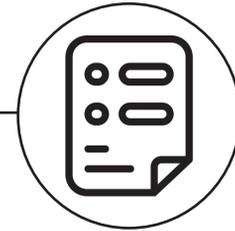
THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE

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MEDIA PROJECT BRIEFS
From Media Student to Media Professional

After reading this chapter you will be able to:

- establish the brief for your practical media project;
- consider media project work as part of ongoing work experience, and developing employability skills;
- develop project-management skills;
- communicate with brief providers or clients and manage your projects in a professional way.

Introduction

So far you have been engaged in building the project team and considering what skills are required for successful media group-project work. This chapter will help you consider how you might develop a professional approach to your practical work whilst at university. We will consider the different aspects of developing and working to project briefs with external organisations, thus working on projects in a professional client-based context.

Where to Find Project Briefs for a Media-Practice Project

Briefs for practical media projects can come from a variety of sources. This will depend on the course you are following, but broadly there are two types of project, the 'live brief' and the 'simulated brief'.

A simulated brief might be set by your tutor based on a theme such as examining particular issues or stories. These could perhaps be focused on such issues as citizenship, sustainability, university life and 'a day in the life of …' for example. The brief provider then sets the theme, audience and market, media form and length.

A real or 'live' project brief, on the other hand, has great potential for genuine and deep experience in communication and project-management skills. This treats the student-based media project as a work-experience opportunity and has employability skills embedded. A real brief or live project will often be developed by your tutor, but you may also be involved in working up the project brief. This offers up many possibilities, as it is reflective of the corporate video industry, which you may end up working in on graduation. This sector is vast, especially when you take into account communications work for corporate clients, charities and the voluntary sector.

A project brief can be developed in many ways. You could look out for competitions and showcases which will provide a ready-made brief for a project. Charities often run competitions to produce media products for them based on a theme, so it is worth looking out for these. You could also look out for competitions and festivals online that you could use as the brief for your project work. Many of these festivals usually run on an annual basis and you can find more information in Chapter 10.

You could work with a department from your university and ask them to set you a brief for a media text that might be of use to them. This approach can be successful with the university marketing department, the alumni department, the sustainability department, the university outreach team, or perhaps your student union. Sometimes, the same brief provider might provide a number of briefs based on the same theme but each with a different focus (for example, audience/market/subject, and so on).

The other source of project briefs is to look to external organisations in a variety of areas. The third sector is a rich resource for student media project briefs, as Harding points out:

> There are many community groups and campaign organisations with access to video equipment, but few that use them effectively … The main reason is lack of purpose. Without purpose there is no strategy. Without strategy there is no social change. Without social change there is no video activism. (Harding, 2001: 15)

You could look in the not-for-profit, third sector, community and voluntary sectors. Most universities have a volunteering unit or department which will have a number of local organisations on its books for student volunteering. You could also look at volunteering websites.

You may also find contacts for a potential brief from within your project team. This may be a club or society that your fellow group members belong to, a hobby or interest they follow, or an organisation for which one of your team volunteers. It is best to avoid commercial projects for this type of brief to prevent undercutting those who work in the sector for their livelihood. It is also the case that once money and a profit motive is included, the educational basis of the project could get lost, so this type of project is best avoided.

Working Up a Project Brief

Whether your project brief is tutor or student generated will depend on many factors, such as the appropriateness to the curriculum and assessment criteria. It is important your tutor has some involvement in this process to help ensure the brief provider or client understands the commitment. However, negotiating your own brief can be a valuable part of the experience, with clear benefits for developing your employability.

Whatever the basis of your brief, it is important to work up a written form to ensure both client and project group have shared expectations about the project.

EXERCISE
Working Up Your Project Brief

Working in your media project team, create a briefing form using Figure 3.1. You should use the project briefing form as the basis of your first meeting. This should be re-visited on a regular basis throughout the project to ensure you are on-task with what is agreed.

Media Project Briefing Form		
Project Details		
Production team name		
Team leader name		
Production team contact details	Address	
	Email	
	Phone no.	
	Website	
	Social media sites	
Tutor's contact details	Address	
	Email	
	Phone no.	
	Website	
	Social media sites	

(Continued)

Brief provider/client details	Name of organisation	
	Name of main contact	
	Position in organisation	
	Address/postcode/directions for travel	
	Email	
	Phone no.	
	Website	
	Other forms of contact (social media sites, professional online profiles, cloud file-sharing sites, for example)	
Project briefing		
Preferred media form (video, photo exhibition, audio piece, website, etc.) Subject/theme of the media text		
Proposed content		
Proposed treatment/form (such as for video – documentary, infomercial, drama)		
Length/size of the media text		
Main aims for the production of the media text		
Deadline for completion of the project		
Schedule for the project (dates for pre-production, production, and post-production)		
Audience (primary audience, secondary audience)		

Market (where the media text will be shown, in what situations, to whom and why)		
Any other issues		
State any other issues related to this specific project that you feel are important before the project starts; for example: the need for safeguarding checks, the distance to travel for shooting and the nature of the organisation's service users		
Research sources		
Provide any sources that will help with the initial project research	Websites	
	Project reports and policy documents from the organisation	
	Archives	
	Face-to-face interviews	
	Action research such as job-shadowing, or work experience for the organisation	

FIGURE 3.1
Media project briefing form

Issues for the Brief Provider to Consider in Setting a Brief

If you are working with an external client, it is important you make them aware of the *educational context* of the project before you start. Setting and managing expectations around issues such as time commitment, available resources, levels of commitment and other constraints are very important in the early stages of the project. You should discuss the following considerations with your brief provider, whilst you are working up the project brief together:

- Establish that it is an educational project and as such the resulting quality may vary. The project could be treated in the same way as a work-experience placement might be. Give the brief provider the assessment criteria that will be used to assess the project (if available) and discuss these with them at the start.

- Discuss and agree the optimum size or length of the resulting project. Make sure it is manageable and realistic and relates to the requirements of the curriculum and resources (such

as time) available to you. You should agree to keep the brief tightly focused and avoid the temptation to cover everything for too wide an audience. Don't offer what you can't deliver!

- Make the brief provider aware that they as the client should offer their ideas for the project but that these ideas should not be too set in stone. Flexibility and creative freedom for the group will often result in a better project.

- Arrange regular meetings with the brief provider to discuss progress throughout. These meetings should be scheduled at the start of the project. Set up a clear system of communication. Agree on the method of communication (such as *just* through email, through texting, or through social media), and establish a main contact in the production team. Ask your brief provider to identify one main contact within their organisation. Agree that they will have the final say about the project to avoid 'too many cooks'.

- Give your brief provider a rough schedule for the project including dates of meetings, dates when the pre-production and research, production and post-production will be happening. Also make the brief provider aware of any times you are not available to work on the project (due to other modules' demands, exam and holiday dates, for example).

- Allow the brief provider to see a rough draft of the project for approval in good time for the deadline so that suggestions for changes can be made. Set a date for this in advance. Be clear about when the brief provider will receive the signed-off copy of the project, and in what format.

- Make the brief provider aware that it is the production team's responsibility to plan for, research and produce the project and to keep them updated on progress at regular intervals. Approval of the client should be sought through a script and storyboard meeting before production starts so a date for this should be set early on.

- Discuss the fact that it is the brief provider's responsibility to arrange the dates, times and places for shoots. They should organise safeguarding checks for the team if needed, and accompany the production team where necessary (especially where health and safety might be compromised). Your brief provider should usually arrange permissions for filming. For example, if any of their staff or service users appear in the video they will have to sign a consent form.

- You may need to negotiate with your brief provider to cover basic expenses such as transport costs. If so, do this at the start of the project and find out the process for claiming expenses back. Let your brief provider know that you are required to use copyright-free material in the project and that if they wish to use anything else, the copyright clearance will be their responsibility.

Dreams and Nightmares for Successful Media Project Work

Now that you have set up your project brief it is a good idea to take a little time to think about what you want to achieve from the project. Thinking ahead like this is a useful way of

approaching projects and a useful employability skill. It will also help you when it comes to reflecting on the project at the end.

EXERCISE
Dreams and Nightmares for Practical Media Project Work

Now that you have established your production team, and have analysed the necessary skills and experience required to make a good team, identify your hopes and fears for the practical media project you are about to embark on. Create a table like the one in Figure 3.2. Discuss the results of this exercise with your production team and remind yourselves about the strategies in column 3 throughout the project.

	Hopes/dreams for the project	Fears/nightmares for the project	Strategy for realising dreams and avoiding the nightmares
1.	**Example**: *Complete an impressive film that our client is happy with and uses in future*	**Example**: *Disappointing our brief provider by not fulfilling the brief and the video not being signed off*	**Example**: *Communicate with our brief provider, keeping them up to date with our progress at all times. Show rough drafts throughout and ask for regular feedback*
2.			
3.			
4.			
5.			

FIGURE 3.2
Dreams and nightmares for practical media project work

Thinking about Stakeholders for the Project

Thinking about what you want to gain from the experience of doing a media-practice project is important as part of your preparation work. You should think about and identify what each of the stakeholders for the project stand to gain from it, and what risks may be inherent in it. Being aware of this before you start work will help you to realise that it is not just *you* and *your group* who have vested interests in the project. It is important to recognise that the motivations of each stakeholder will be different, and will have a different impact upon the success of the project. The following exercise will help you to recognise the risks and rewards for each of the stakeholders involved in your project.

EXERCISE
Thinking about Stakeholders

Using the form in Figure 3.3, identify what each of the stakeholders for your project stands to gain from its success. In each of the relevant columns, make a list of possible gains and risks for each of the stakeholders. In the final column develop a strategy to ensure that each stakeholder has maximum gains from the project.

Stakeholder	Gains	Risks	Strategies
Your production team	Example: Work experience and social and cultural awareness.	Example: Not understanding the needs of the client's organisation.	Example: Treat the project like a real 'live' brief, rather than a simulation.
The project brief provider/client			
The project brief provider's service users			
Your university/degree course			
Your tutor			

FIGURE 3.3
Thinking about stakeholders

Revisit the results of this exercise throughout the project to stay focused and keep in mind the requirements of each of the stakeholders. You can use this to inform your detailed setting up of the project.

Project Management for a Successful Media Project

Now that you have set up your project brief and determined who your brief provider/client will be, you are ready to get started with the project. Using some basic management techniques for your media-practice project will be useful for the project itself, but will also provide some valuable employability skills for your future career. In relation to your media-practice project, you should begin with the research and development phase by initiating the project. This could involve the development of a project requirement analysis as below.

Media-Project Requirement Analysis

Any project produced for a client should start by clearly agreeing what you will actually deliver. You have already worked up or been given a detailed project brief. Now you should have a go at analysing and agreeing exactly what it is you will deliver as a result of the project. A media-project requirement analysis can help you to avoid problems of mis-matching expectations between you and your brief provider. This can help avoid common problems such as the brief provider complaining it's not what they asked for; having a change of mind halfway through the project; conflicting needs from several different stakeholders; failing to deliver the whole project; and so on.

EXERCISE
Preparing a Media-Project Requirement Analysis

Complete the project analysis in Figure 3.4 with your media-project group. This should be completed after the project brief has been agreed, with all the project stakeholders present.

Identify the stakeholders for the project
Who is the project's brief provider?
Identify the stakeholders' requirements for the project
What does the project brief provider want and expect from the project?
What does the project's audience want and expect from the project?
Definition: describe the basic idea and the background to the project.

(Continued)

Purpose: describe why you are doing the project.
Objectives: list some specific objectives for the project and describe how success will be measured.
Scope: describe the scope of the project, for example, type of work, type of client, type of issue.
Deliverables: describe what will be delivered as a result of the project.
Constraints: list and describe any constraints that could affect the success of the project.
Benefits: describe the benefits of the project and how these will be measured.
Resources: give a breakdown of the project resources such as equipment, time and transport.
Schedule: give a detailed schedule for the project. Identify a timetable for the pre-production, production and post-production phases, and list deadline dates.
Risks: identify and describe any potential risks within the project.
Plan B: describe how you will avoid the risks identified above.
Project jobs: list the major jobs that need to be completed during the project.

Human resources: list the team to work on the project, identify the roles of each team member, estimate the amount of time each team member will need to give to the project.

FIGURE 3.4
Media-project requirement analysis

Discuss and agree the contents of this form with your project brief provider. You should revisit the results of your analysis throughout the project to ensure you are on target.

Working with External Clients/Brief Providers

So far you have initiated your project and agreed with your brief provider the scope and nature of it. You are now ready to build a professional relationship with your client. Here is some advice about working with external brief providers on university-based media projects:

- Have a team leader who is the sole communicator with the brief provider. This is an efficient way for the client to share information with the team and be involved.
- Exchange email address and phone numbers. Create an email address under the production team's name purely for the purpose of contacting the brief provider.
- Listen to the client's ideas and keep them up to date with the project. If you listen to their ideas they are more likely to appreciate the final product.
- Get to know your brief provider's organisation. Visit several times before embarking on the production, and perhaps volunteer for the organisation.
- Always take notes during meetings in order to ensure you achieve what the brief provider wants the project to accomplish.
- Ensure deadlines are known. Allow your brief provider to know all deadlines and vice versa so everyone understands the time constraints of the project.
- Use social media as a tool for showing the brief provider drafts of your work.
- Be professional when contacting and meeting your brief provider. You want them to take you seriously and it is important to show that you are committed to the project.

Professionalism

The advice given above has established how best to work with an external client on a university-based media project. Such a project based on a real issue/topic and briefed by a real

client, external to the university, is an excellent opportunity to develop your professionalism. Professionalism is an important skill to learn and practise, and a university media project is the perfect safe space to develop these skills that will be important for your future career.

Client-led media projects can be seen as an ongoing work experience opportunity, and contribute directly to your CV. Professionalism is important whilst working within your project team and whilst working with your client/brief provider. Emotional intelligence in the (work-experience) workplace is the basis of professionalism.

According to Daniel Goleman (2004) there are five basic features of emotional intelligence:

- **Self-awareness**: the ability to understand your own strengths and weaknesses.
- **Self-regulation**: the ability to think before acting, having openness to change and having the ability to say 'no'.
- **Internal motivation**: a genuine reason or passion for acting or behaving in a particular way. Having the ability to defer immediate results for the benefit of receiving long-term gains.
- **Social skills**: the personal skills needed for successful communication and interaction. Being good at building and maintaining relationships.
- **Empathy**: the ability to understand the feelings of others.

Emotional intelligence is important because it enables you to see how others might see you, and helps you to behave appropriately in professional situations.

Imagine, for example, how you might react if one of your teammates (or a work colleague) were to behave in the following ways:

- Refuses to do jobs that are not directly linked to their media production or area of technical skill.
- Words their emails in sloppy or inappropriate ways.
- Uses their mobile phone at inappropriate times.
- Complains of being too tired due to previous late nights.
- Does not turn up or is late, with no apology or explanation to production meetings.
- Spends lots of work time on social media and makes no attempt to hide it.
- Makes no attempt to disguise a full open-mouthed yawn during team meetings.
- Only turns up when it suits them.
- Chats, giggles and smirks whilst others are talking in meetings.
- Complains about a brief that they have been set as being beneath them or boring.

You can appreciate that all of the above would seem highly inappropriate in a professional work situation, but you have probably witnessed this type of behaviour on some occasions – maybe in a lecture, or during group work – from one of your peers! Now is the perfect opportunity to develop a sense of self-awareness. You could practise treating the *university workplace* like a *professional workplace*, especially in the context of your media project work. This is the basis of having emotional intelligence.

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As part of their research into employability and graduate identity, Geoffrey Hinchliffe and Adrienne Jolley (2010) list the many expectations that employers have of graduates. The words in bold below highlight the skills where emotional intelligence (defined above) is important and these are areas you might like to prioritise for future development. Think about how close you are to displaying these attributes, and think of examples of times your peers (or you!) might have contradicted them:

- demonstrates **honesty** and **integrity**;
- is **trustworthy**;
- is able to **listen** to others;
- is able to **integrate** quickly into a **team** or department;
- is able to **present ideas** clearly, both verbally and in writing;
- demonstrates good **time-management**;
- can demonstrate attention to **detail** and **thoroughness**;
- has a **mature** attitude;
- is willing to take **responsibility** for their own work;
- can **share** ideas with others;
- can demonstrate **tact**;
- demonstrates **social/cultural awareness**;
- is able to take the **initiative**;
- can be **relied upon** by other members of the team/department;
- is willing to take on new **challenges** and **responsibilities**;
- thinks **critically** about their work.

You can see how the keywords highlighted in bold above are personal skills linked to emotional intelligence and professional behaviour, and not to technical prowess! If you refer back to the 'Group-Project Dynamics and Individual Characteristics' section in Chapter 2, you will notice that the 'Very Good' and 'First-Class Teamworker' categories possess many of the positive traits of emotional intelligence given above. These personal skills are transferable and can be developed during your media-practice projects, and subsequently applied to your future career. The next exercise will enable you to focus on what constitutes professional and unprofessional behaviour.

EXERCISE
Professional and Unprofessional Behaviour

In order to maintain professional behaviour, it helps to predict a series of 'worst-case scenarios' so that you can plan to avoid unprofessional behaviour taking place during your own media-practice projects.

Look at the list of potentially unprofessional situations outlined below. These are all scenarios that are commonplace in student-based media projects. Reflect on one occasion from your previous work experience

or team-project work, where similar incidents have occurred. Draw up a strategy to make sure you avoid these incidents happening in your project work.

Scenario	Strategy to avoid this scenario happening to you
Rumour and gossip One of your teammates gossips about a colleague or client and it comes back to haunt them! The person they bitched to assumes this is how they speak about them too, behind their back. Consequently, your teammate loses all respect.	
Social media You create a group chat to support your project, but a colleague ends up posting inappropriate updates about their social life instead!	
Over-sensitivity A teammate takes criticism about their work and contribution to the project too personally. They do not understand that someone is trying to give them constructive advice in order to improve their work.	
Punctuality Someone in your group is often late to production meetings. They get the reputation for being unreliable which they then find hard to shake off, even when they put the effort into improving their timekeeping.	
Mobile phone over-dependence A team member spends much of their project work time paying more attention to their phone. As a result, their teammates think that they lack commitment.	
Email etiquette Someone in your group lacks email etiquette; for example, they send emails to the client in the middle of the night and badger them for an immediate response. They use casual language and ignore accepted email protocol. This reflects badly on the project group.	

Emotional excess A team member's self-obsession with their emotional state interferes with the progress of the project. For example, the teammate lets people know that they are bored/hungover/hungry/grumpy/heartbroken/anxious/stressed. This slows the project down.	
Unrealistic goals Your team promises your client too much from the project, and subsequently can't deliver by the agreed deadline. This tarnishes the professional reputation of the group.	

FIGURE 3.5
Avoiding unprofessional behaviour

Summary

In this chapter we have discussed how to find and set up briefs for your projects. You have developed a range of project-management skills. As well as being useful for your work at university, these will be transferable to a variety of employment contexts. You have also considered ways of working constructively and professionally with your team on client-led briefs. In the next chapter we will be looking at the important areas of audiences and audience research.

Further Reading

To deepen your understanding about emotional intelligence in the workplace, have a look at Daniel Goleman's book:

> Goleman, Daniel, 2004, *Emotional Intelligence and Working with Emotional Intelligence*, London: Bloomsbury Publishing.

To find out more about what employers are looking for from graduates search online for the following:

> Hinchliffe, Geoffrey, and Jolley, Adrienne, Hecsu.ac.uk – graduate market trends, spring 2010.