

THE PROJECT BRIEF

BRIEF.md

The project brief for your semester project, kept in the root of your art418 repo. Dan Brown calls this the shared document where the problem statement, the objectives and the key insights about context live (Practical Design Discovery, chapter 4). It is never finished. Every hand-in this month is a section of this file, revised, and the previous version stays in the git history.

Copy everything below the line into a new file called `BRIEF.md`, commit it empty, then fill it in.

1. Assertions

Dated. Expected to be wrong. When you revise, add the new version above the old one with a new date; do not overwrite.

Problem statement

v0, YYYY-MM-DD. One or two sentences. Who is stuck, what they are trying to do, what is in the way, what it costs them. Write it like a reporter: the project and the core conflict as fast as you can. If your solution fits in the sentence, it is the wrong sentence.

Project objective

v0, YYYY-MM-DD. What you will deliver, not what problem you will solve. Brown's five things to be specific about: scope, outputs, fidelity, time, priority. This becomes the one-page proposal behind your pitch on Sep 21.

2. Context

A few lines under each. Put a `?` at the end of every line you have not checked against a person or a document. The question marks are the point.

Business

Domain, mission, objectives, markets, brand, culture, operating processes. For a product with no market this box is mostly empty. Say so.

Technology

What the product is, what it does, what it depends on, what it cannot do. You are not the expert. Write down what the people who made it told you.

Users

Expectations, what they cannot see or do not have on hand, everything they do around the activity (not just the part your product touches), what they believe about the industry. This section becomes your audience hand-in on Sep 9: three audiences, a paragraph each, which one you lean to.

Content

What exists to read about this product: papers, patents, documentation, reviews, forum threads, job postings that describe the pain. Style, structure, how much of it there is and how good it is.

3. Hunches

Impressions as they come, one per line, dated, with the evidence beside it. Review them when you add to section 2. Delete the ones the evidence stops supporting. Brown: learn to let go.

- YYYY-MM-DD. Hunch. Evidence: who said it, or where you read it.
-

4. Questions

The three questions you must answer to set a direction, picked from the question marks in section 2. For each one: the gathering activity that answers it (stakeholder interview, domain research, existing assets, user research, competitors, the current product), who you will ask or what you will read, and the date. Anything not answerable by Sep 12 is not in the problem statement.

1. Question. Activity. Who or what. By when.
 2. Question. Activity. Who or what. By when.
 3. Question. Activity. Who or what. By when.
-

5. What the machine did

One line per session. What you asked the model, what it gave you, what you kept, where you overruled it. This is the note every hand-in asks for, kept in one place.

- YYYY-MM-DD. What you asked. What you kept.

HAND-IN 1 · WED SEP 9

The audience, due Wed Sep 9

Copy the blank form into section 2 of your BRIEF.md and fill it in three times, once per audience. Then write the lean. Every line that is a guess gets a ? at the end. A guess is allowed on Sep 9. An unmarked guess is not.

What it is graded on: three real groups, each specific enough to name three people in; what each uses today instead of your product; what that costs them; and a lean with a reason.

The blank form

Audience 1: (name the group in five words or fewer)

- **Who they are.** Role, setting, and what makes them a group. _____
- **How I know they exist.** A source: a count, a job board, a forum, a person.

- **The problem it would solve for them.** In their words, not the product's.

- **What they use today instead.** The workaround. Name it. _____
- **What that costs them.** Time, money, risk, a lost argument. A number if you have one.

- **How I would reach five of them this month.** _____

">Audience 2: _____

(same six lines)

">Audience 3: _____

(same six lines)

The lean

- I lean to audience _____ because _____.
- The one thing that would change my mind: _____

Where to see one filled in

Not here. A filled-in form teaches the sentence that was already written in it, and the form is not the hard part; the evidence is. The demonstration is the deck shown in class, </lecture/art418-pitch-example.html>, which runs an invented company all the way through the same forms in the same order and marks every invented figure with a dagger. Read it for the shape, and read slide 15 twice: it is the one that says which parts a demo is allowed to make up and your hand-in is not.

HAND-IN 2 · MON SEP 14

The problem statement, due Mon Sep 14

One page. Export it as a PDF into your repo. The sentence goes in bold at the top, the four boxes under it, the sources at the bottom. Every claim in the boxes has a number in brackets that points to a source in the list. A claim with no number is a guess, and on Sep 14 a guess is a fault.

What it is graded on: one audience, four boxes filled with things you can point to, one sentence that carries all four, and a source list that resolves.

The blank form

_____ (who) need to _____ (do what) because
_____ (this is true about them).

Who has this problem, and how do we know? _____ []	What is the problem, and what signs show it? _____ []
Why is it worth solving, and what does it cost unsolved? _____ []	Where does it show up, and where does it not? _____ []

Traps checked. Anchoring _____ Wishlisting _____ Frankensteining _____ Boiling the ocean _____
 Amplifying feedback _____ Presumptuous _____ (mark each one you checked against, and say which you are still guilty of)

Sources.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

What the machine did. _____

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STUDIO · WED SEP 16

The boards, made Mon Sep 14 in studio

Two or three boards, one per page, in the repo before you leave. A board is a mood board or a style tile. Each one tests two or three descriptors: the words you would use for the brand, shown as pictures so the room can say whether the words mean the same thing to everyone. Two or three options, and no favorite among them.

What it is graded on: each board is labeled with the descriptors it tests, the options are genuinely different readings of the same words, and none of them is the throwaway.

The blank form, one per board

Board _____ of _____

- **Descriptors tested.** Two or three words. _____
- **Reading.** One sentence on how this board reads those words. "Authoritative as _____, not as _____."

- **Type.** One display face, one text face, shown as a line each. _____
- **Color.** Three to five swatches with names. _____
- **Images.** Four to eight, each with a one-line credit. _____
- **One object or screen from the audience's world.** _____
- **What I want feedback on.** _____

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HAND-IN 3 · MON SEP 21

The pitch, recorded, due Mon Sep 21

Two files on the Blackboard assignment by 1:30 on Mon Sep 21: the deck as a PDF and the recording as an MP4. If the video will not upload, a link to it goes in the submission text. Ten minutes, your slides on screen, you in a corner with the camera on, your voice over them, and ten is a ceiling rather than a target. The deck is about ten slides, one per part of Brown's discovery document, in his order. Fill the outline below slide by slide; every slide already has a home in something you turned in.

Recording it. Loom, PowerPoint's recorder, or Keynote and Google Slides with QuickTime or Zoom for the camera bubble. All of them are free. Camera on, lens at eye level, light in front of you, a plain wall behind. Export MP4, 1080p. The full setup is at meaninglayer.com/practice/recording-yourself. Name the product and the problem in the first thirty seconds: a room will sit through a slow build because it is in a room, and nobody watching a file will. About a minute a slide, with the direction slides running longer than the setup slides. Say the headline out loud before you explain it, and do not read the slide. One take you are willing to keep, and two run-throughs before you record will save you more time than editing. Record in a quiet room with the earbuds from your phone rather than the laptop microphone, because bad audio is what gets a pitch turned off.

What it is graded on: the five sections present and in order; the problem statement and audience carried forward from Sep 9 and 14 with the question marks resolved; a concept, principles tied to findings, and two or three boards; a next-steps slide a client could sign; and an audience that could follow it.

The deck, the blank outline

Slide	Section	What goes on it	Comes from
1	Objectives and outcomes	Product in one line: _____ Problem statement, verbatim: _____ Outcome: _____	Sep 14
2	The problem, elaborated	Business context: _____ Technology context: _____	BRIEF.md section 2
3	The problem, elaborated	The three audiences and the lean, with numbers: _____ Content context: _____	Sep 9
4	The design direction	The concept, one line: _____	Sep 14 studio
5	The design direction	Principle 1: We learned _____ . The implication is _____ . Principle 2: _____ Principle 3 (optional): _____	Sep 14 studio
6	The design direction	Board 1, descriptors: _____	Sep 14
7	The design direction	Board 2, descriptors: _____ (Board 3 if made)	Sep 14
8	Supporting details	Question 1 and its answer: _____ Question 2: _____ Question 3: _____ One competitor screen, one trace: _____	BRIEF.md section 4. Hall ch. 6 (the audit) and ch. 9 (the number with its context)

Slide	Section	What goes on it	Comes from
9	Next steps	Scope: _____ Outputs: _____ Fidelity: _____ Time: _____ Priority: _____ What the work would cost: _____	BRIEF.md section 15, and the worksheet below
10	Close	The problem statement once more. The ask: _____	

Next steps, worked out

Answer these nine and slide 9 writes itself. What you have answered is what a client would sign, so it is worth more room than the slide gives it.

- **Client.** _____ (the product's maker, real or as if)
- **The problem.** One sentence, verbatim from the statement. _____
- **Scope.** Which aspects of the product this work focuses on. _____
- **Outputs.** The deliverables, named. _____
- **Fidelity.** How close each output comes to a finished thing. _____
- **Time.** A timeline against Oct 14, Nov 4, Dec 2. _____
- **Priority.** What comes first, and why. _____
- **What the work would cost.** A number, with the hours or the rate behind it.

- **Assumptions.** What has to be true for this to hold. _____

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