# Brief development

A brief is a concise document that explains what is wanted and why (the conceptual statement) and lists the characteristics that an outcome must demonstrate to be acceptable (the specifications).

Brief development is a dynamic process in which an initial brief is progressively refined to describe and justify the outcome that has been developed.

## Key ideas

### Need or opportunity

Every brief is a response to a need or opportunity.

Identifying an authentic need or opportunity may take some research and careful analysis of the context. If exploration throws up a number of possible needs or opportunities, the technologist needs to select one that offers scope for technological development and then justify their choice.

The brief should clearly describe an outcome that will meet the need or realise the opportunity, taking into account the physical and social environment in which it will be situated/used.

### Parts of a brief

#### Conceptual statement

The first part of a brief is the conceptual statement. This communicates, via any appropriate means (for example, oral, written, drawing, or digital), the focus and purpose of the proposed technological outcome. The conceptual statement should be firmly based on a careful analysis of the context and issue.

#### Specifications

The second part of a brief consists of the specifications, which lay down various requirements that must be met if the outcome is to be judged as “fit for purpose”. These requirements relate to the outcome’s physical and functional natures (what is wanted in terms of appearance, performance, and so on).

Specifications provide a “yardstick” for ongoing evaluation throughout the development process, and against which the final outcome can be judged as fit for purpose (or not).

When specifications include requirements relating to how the technologist goes about developing an outcome, the outcome’s fitness for purpose can be evaluated “in its broadest sense”.

#### Attributes

Attributes are often developed as a first step to developing specifications. Unlike specifications, attributes are broad descriptors – relative, not measurable. They can mean different things to different people.

### A developing brief

Sometimes a brief will describe an intermediate outcome of technological practice, for example, a scale model. In this case, the brief will outline the purpose of the model (to communicate and/or test the potential of a concept for development into a technological outcome). The specifications will relate to the model itself.

### An iterative process

Brief development is not a one-off exercise, completed at the beginning of a project. A brief continues to be developed and refined throughout the life of a project in response to ongoing research, consultation with stakeholders, technological modelling, changing constraints or circumstances, reflection and evaluation, and the technologist’s own developing practice.

As they engage in practice, particularly functional modelling, technologists grow their own knowledge, skills, and understanding. They bring this heightened knowledge to their reflections on the purpose, specifications, and feasibility of outcomes they work on.

Refining initial attributes into final specifications requires extensive research and trialling and testing of design ideas.

While a brief is iteratively refined throughout the life of a project, it should be finalised before the outcome is completed so that it can be used as an evaluative tool.

### Physical and social environments

A brief should take into account the physical and social environments in which the outcome will be developed and situated.

* The physical environment refers to the spaces where the outcome will be developed and finally located. Factors to be considered include area, topography, temperature, lighting, wind, weather, noise, nearby objects/features, and hazards.
* The social environment refers to the complex of human factors – for example, ethical, cultural, political, economic – that will influence the acceptability and viability of the outcome when placed in its destined location.

An understanding of physical and social environments can only be r­eached through a careful exploration of how historical events have shaped relationships between the various factors, and how future events may continue to shape them.

Technologists must prioritise (assess in terms of relative im­­­portance) physical and social environmental impacts and influences, as well as other factors that come up in consultation with key stakeholders and the wider community.

Stakeholder feedback

Stakeholder feedback is an integral part of brief development. When seeking feedback, technologists choose a medium to communicate the brief (for example, oral, written, or visual). The medium should be chosen to make the process is as straightforward as possible for stakeholders while eliciting the required feedback.