

What to Include in a Learning-Content Development Brief

A practical guide for academies, training providers and corporate trainers commissioning external content development

PROJECT BRIEF

- **AUDIENCE**
Who are the learners?
- **OUTCOMES**
What should they do?
- **DELIVERY**
How will it run?
- **DELIVERABLES**
What needs building?
- **HANDOVER**
What does done mean?

When you outsource learning-content development, a clear brief helps the project start faster, reduces unnecessary revisions and makes it easier to scope the right deliverables.

You do not need every detail decided in advance.

A useful brief simply gives a development partner enough information to understand who the content is for, what it should help them do, what needs to be created and what needs to be ready at handover.

WHO IS THIS FOR?

The learners, their professional context and their level.

WHAT SHOULD IT HELP THEM DO?

The learning, communication or performance outcome.

WHAT NEEDS TO BE CREATED?

The programme, module, lesson or supporting materials.

WHAT NEEDS TO BE READY?

The files, formats and resources trainers and learners will use.

Not everything needs to be decided before you start. Some projects arrive with a detailed syllabus and complete specification. Others begin with a client request, an existing programme, a content gap or materials that are no longer working well. Both are valid starting points.

START WITH THE LEARNING NEED

1. Explain the project context

Start with the reason the content is needed.

- who the learners are;
- the sector or business environment;
- an existing client or programme requirement;
- whether this is a new programme, an extension or a redesign.
- their roles, departments or professional context;
- why the content is being commissioned now;
- problems with current materials;

A short, specific explanation is usually more useful than a long background document.

Instead of: We need a Business English module.

Try: The client needs a short module for B1-B2 operations teams who regularly give updates, clarify delays and agree next steps across departments.

2. Clarify the learning requirements

Where possible, define what learners should be able to do by the end of the programme, module or session.

- CEFR level or approximate language level;
- workplace communication outcomes;
- programme or module length;
- expected progression;
- learning objectives;
- priority skills or language areas;
- number and duration of sessions;
- assessment requirements.

For workplace learning, outcomes are most useful when they describe what learners should be able to do.

Instead of: Practise language for meetings

Consider: Contribute clearly to a cross-functional meeting, clarify responsibilities and confirm next steps.

3. Describe the delivery environment

The same learning objective can require very different content depending on how it will be delivered.

- online, in-company, phone or blended delivery;
- typical class size and session length;
- individual, pair or group work expectations;
- trainer-led or self-study;
- programme frequency and delivery platform;
- practical constraints trainers regularly face.

A 60-minute online session for six learners should not be built in the same way as a four-hour workshop for twenty participants. Delivery conditions affect the design from the start.

DEFINE WHAT NEEDS TO BE BUILT

4. Share the inputs already available

External development does not always begin with a blank page.

- an existing syllabus or programme map;
- current course materials;
- workplace situations or processes;
- client or brand guidelines;
- existing assessments or evaluation criteria.
- approved learning objectives;
- terminology or vocabulary lists;
- reference documents and approved public sources;
- learner or trainer feedback;

These materials do not necessarily need to appear directly in the final content. They may simply help the developer understand the required context, terminology, level or degree of realism.

Check what can be shared

Only provide material that you are authorised to use for the project. If any source is confidential, proprietary or subject to licensing restrictions, agree how it can be handled before development begins.



A useful brief connects what already exists with what needs to be built and delivered.

5. Specify the deliverables

Be clear about what the project should actually produce. Depending on the brief, deliverables might include:

- learner presentation or lesson deck;
- participant materials;
- reading or listening materials;
- answer keys, assessments or rubrics;
- trainer guide or facilitator notes;
- scenarios or role cards;
- language-support resources;
- course or module overview, syllabus or programme architecture.

Useful test: What does the trainer need to deliver this confidently, and what does the learner need to participate effectively?

6. Add the production requirements

Include the practical constraints that affect production: branding or templates, required file formats, editable/source files, LMS or platform requirements, accessibility, multimedia specifications, and whether internal teams need to update the materials later.

AGREE HOW THE PROJECT WILL WORK

7. Set the working rules

A few project decisions made early can prevent substantial delays later.

Timeline

Clarify the delivery date, key milestones, review dates, pilot sessions and launch or delivery deadlines.

Review and approval

Agree who reviews the content, who consolidates feedback, how many review rounds are included and who gives final approval.

Ownership and use

Clarify who owns the final materials, whether editable files are included, how the content may be reused and whether third-party material has licensing restrictions.

Confidentiality

Identify information that requires restricted handling, anonymisation or approval. Share only what is genuinely necessary for development.

8. Define what “done” means

Before production begins, both sides should be able to describe the final handover.

Which files will be delivered?

Which formats are required?

Which files must be editable?

Who gives final approval?

What does the trainer need in order to deliver the content without additional development?

What does the learner receive?

Does anything need to be tested or piloted before final handover?

Your brief does not need to be perfect.

You may already have a detailed programme specification, a short client brief, an existing course that needs updating, disconnected materials that need structure, a new requirement with very little content yet, or a development backlog your internal team does not currently have capacity to handle.

The purpose of the brief is not to complete the learning design before external development begins. It is to provide enough context to scope the work properly and make good development decisions.

Already have a programme, client brief or content gap?

The English Side | Content Studio develops tailored, trainer-ready learning content for academies, training providers and corporate trainers.

If your requirements are already clear, development can begin from an agreed brief. If the project is still taking shape, the first step can simply be clarifying the scope, deliverables and production requirements.

Discuss a content project →