

Briefing a writer

Choosing the right writer, and briefing them well is the key to a good report.

If possible, look at other reports written by the writer. Ask around for recommendations, colleagues may have previously worked with a writer. It is helpful if the writer already knows something about your organisation and/or market.

What to include

It is important to meet the writer and discuss exactly what you require.

A meeting agenda should include:

- **the purpose** of the report: why are you producing an Annual Report?
what do you want it to achieve?
- **the market**: who is the report aimed at? It is important to acknowledge how much the market will know about your organisation and where jargon and terminology may need to be explained. Remember the trend is toward plain english writing with little or no jargon.
- any **specific areas** you want the report to include that may seem outside the usual scope
- **the house style**: give the writer a copy of your style guide or other publications that you think best reflect your organisation
- identifying **key stakeholders**: confirm whether the CEO/Chair will be writing their own introductions or if they are to be interviewed / discuss how many interviews need to be done and where key information can be found
- **the compliance section**: identify how much will require writing and how much will be supplied ready to go
- **word count**: ask the designer to supply a page word count so that the writer can keep the copy to the number of pages set out in the initial brief.

Creative ideas

Ask the writer about their thoughts on how to approach the Annual Report or what to include. Their experience and fresh perspective may give insights that were previously not considered.

Deadlines

Discuss the schedule and deadline and ensure the writer is comfortable. This will depend on when you can get information to the writer and how much research and interview work is to be done.

The first draft

Circulate the first draft to all key stakeholders however if individuals have responsibility for certain sections only send them that section.

It is the project manager's role to collate all the comments for the writer. Cover all the positive things, as well as the things that you want to change. Make sure that the things you want to change do improve the report, and are not a rewrite based on a stakeholder's personal preferences.

Check that the style matches your style guide.

Source any additional information that is needed and supply it to the writer in a written response. It is often a good idea to meet with the writer to discuss the content changes.

The second draft

This should be a lot closer to the mark. According to your approval process collect feedback and collate it for the writer. This should allow the writer to prepare the final draft.

The final draft

This should be circulated to all for signoff before release to the designer for artwork.

