

Ghostwriting Briefing Guide

How to brief a writer so the first draft already sounds like you — and the back-and-forth ends at one round.

BEFORE THE FIRST DRAFT

1. Send source material, not instructions

Writers imitate what they read. Send three things you did not write for publication: a long client email, a recorded voice note, a Slack explanation. Unpolished material carries voice better than polished material does.

2. Name the argument, not the topic

"Write about retention" produces filler. "Argue that most churn is a sales problem disguised as a product problem" produces a piece only you could have signed.

3. Give the writer one story

Every strong piece has one concrete scene: a client call, a decision you regret, a number that surprised you. Without it the draft will be generic, and no amount of editing will fix that.

THE BRIEF TEMPLATE

WORKING TITLE / THE ARGUMENT IN ONE LINE

WHO THIS IS FOR AND WHAT THEY SHOULD DO AFTER READING

THE ONE STORY OR NUMBER THIS PIECE IS BUILT AROUND

WHAT I DO NOT WANT SAID (POSITIONS, CLIENTS, CLAIMS)

LENGTH, CHANNEL, DEADLINE

EDITING THE DRAFT

- ☐ Read it aloud. Mark every sentence you would not say out loud — those are the only real edits.
- ☐ Do not rewrite for style. Tell the writer what felt wrong; let them fix the sentence.
- ☐ Cut hedges: "I think", "arguably", "in many ways". Authority is unhedged.
- ☐ Check the first two lines. If they could open anyone's post, they are not yours.
- ☐ Approve or kill in one pass. Third rounds cost voice, not quality.

WARNING SIGNS YOUR BRIEF WAS TOO THIN

The draft opens with a definition. It cites studies instead of experience. It could be published under a competitor's name with a find-and-replace. Every one of those is a briefing failure, not a writing failure.