

Need a little **inspiration** for your portfolio? Want to **practice** your instructional design skills, but don't have a business case to pull from?

In The Book of Briefs, you'll find 20 Big Picture Briefs and 30 Bite-Sized Briefs to help you craft content that makes hiring managers (or clients) say, "Yes! This person gets what we're looking for." Stretch your skills by building solutions for fictitious businesses with real problems. Whether you're new to the industry or an experienced pro looking for practice, The Book of Briefs is for you.



The Book of Briefs | Your Instructional Designer



The Book of Briefs

50 Prompts to Inspire Your Next Portfolio Piece



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Introduction

*By Nicole Papaioannou Lugara, PhD
Founder, Your Instructional Designer*

When I started to freelance, my first priority was to create a portfolio. From my experience as a hiring manager, I knew employers with competitive roles would want to see evidence of my talents. I would need a portfolio whether I stuck it out on the freelance path or returned to traditional employment.

But I quickly realized, “Ah crud! All of my stuff is protected by NDAs / confidentiality agreements/paywalls. I have nothing I can legally share with potential clients!” I felt stuck.

I didn't want to create “how to make a peanut butter sandwich” style eLearning. I wanted to make it easy for them to see how I could improve their businesses with relevant examples.

From conversations with colleagues in the learning and development field, I've found that this is a common experience. When it comes to developing creative portfolios, we want to share our skills, but sometimes, the fear of creating “irrelevant” content holds us up. We don't want to just create stuff to create stuff. We want to spend time developing meaningful work that attracts the right kind of attention. We get lost down rabbit holes of information and attempts at inspiring ourselves past writer's block.

This book is intended to keep you moving.

With 50 briefs to inspire you, you'll never have to stop to think “what can I make?” You can get right to building something that will wow your next client or next boss.

This book is also intended to be more than just a portfolio-builder. At its core is the idea that **practice makes progress**-- that if you keep working on your skills in different contexts, you'll become a stronger learning designer.

You can use and reuse the briefs to power your professional development.

How to Use This Book

The Book of Briefs has a little something for everyone—the new designer, the transitioning teacher, the person who wants to go from academia to corporate, the experienced designer who wants a skill refresh, the enthusiastic designer who just wants to play around.

The book is broken into three sections:

- **Portfolio Best Practices** – Tips for designing impactful portfolio content from a hiring manager's perspective.
- **Big Picture Briefs** – 20 long-form scenarios where you'll learn about a business, its operations, and its learners and respond to your contact's learning design request.
- **Bite-Sized Briefs** – 30 prompts for portfolio pieces you can complete in 2 hours or less

You can complete all the briefs, or you can pick and choose. You can complete a brief once or design a whole package of different learning experiences related to the brief.

And you don't have to follow the briefs perfectly. They are meant to give you perspective and offer inspiration. Build what feels right to you.

Portfolio

Best Practices

What makes a winning portfolio? It's two things:

a great user experience and well-designed content.

The User Experience

A portfolio is a **learning experience**. It teaches your potential client or employer about you and what you're capable of.

Regardless of whether your portfolio is a website or digital at all, your user should be able to **navigate the space** without getting lost or distracted.

Well-Designed Content

You want someone to look at your portfolio and say, "Wow!" or "Yes, this is exactly the kind of person we're looking for."

Dazzle your audience with your portfolio content. Go above and beyond in each piece. Try the thing you couldn't try for a real project that you know would have been awesome. These are your work samples. Your only job is to impress your potential clients / boss.

Additionally, **provide context** for each piece. What was the training request, or what problem were you solving for the client? Did you design every aspect of the portfolio piece? For example, if you show a Storyline file that someone else developed but you designed, you might highlight your work on the storyboard and explain how you worked with the developer.

PORTFOLIO CHECKLIST

As you brainstorm what you'll create in response to each brief, consider whether your portfolio piece meets these criteria.

Does your solution **address** the following?

☐ **organizational goals?**

For example, is this organization trying increase revenue? Are they trying to rewrite their brand narrative in the marketplace?

☐ **performance needs?**

What do their people need to be doing that they aren't doing right now or could be doing better? Does the environment support that or disrupt it?

☐ **learner needs?**

Who needs to learn this stuff? What's the role? What motivates them? What makes them disconnect? How do they feel about what they need to learn?

☐ **project constraints?**

What limitations may affect your solution? This might include budget, time to develop, accessibility, and/or available tech.

Does your solution **offer** the following?

☐ **great user experience?**

☐ **appealing graphics, storytelling, and/or activities?**

☐ **practical applications of learning theory that you could explain to a client?**

RUBRIC

Use this rubric to help you evaluate your portfolio piece for effectiveness once it's completed.

	NEEDS-FOCUSED	AUDIENCE-APPROPRIATE	CONSTRAINTS CONSIDERED
BEST	Meets organization, performance, and learner goals through an innovative approach to behavior change.	Offers a user experience that wows the audience and feels relevant to their immediate needs/wants.	Project can be done within scope, but cheaper, faster, or of better quality than expected given the existing constraints.
GOOD	Addresses performance, organizational, and learner goals with a more traditional solution.	Offers a solution that answers the "what's in it for me" question. Nobody rolls their eyes at the content of the training.	Project will remain in scope, on budget, and on time if no unforeseeable major events occur.
SUBPAR	Does not address the learning context, including the organizational and learner needs and/or performance goals.	User experience is unappealing to the audience, feels overly complex and/ or is culturally inappropriate based on end user data.	Project would be far out of scope, off budget, and/or be impossible to complete by the given deadline.

FAQs

How many samples do you need in a portfolio?

Your portfolio should represent the best of your work and the tasks you want to be hired to do.

If you have nothing in your portfolio right now, start with one awesome piece. Then, aim for three. At that point, you can assess if there are other skills you want to show off.

Remember, one amazing piece is better than five mediocre ones.

How long should portfolio pieces be?

Short, but impactful. A focused, 30-second sample of your work can tell me a lot about how you think and design.

Remember, hiring managers are busy-- that's why they're hiring. Most are not going to review a full 5+ minute learning experience, let alone a 2-hour one.

What are hiring managers looking for?

They are looking for evidence that you can do what you say you can do, and that you can fulfill their needs-- strategy, program design, multimedia development, writing, etc. This looks different for every organization.

That's why, if all of your work is K12, and you want to apply for a corporate job, I recommend creating samples that address corporate learning needs rather than using what you have. You can also create different "landing pages." Maybe you have one page where you have content that would serve a K12 audience and another with corporate-focused content.

The easier it is for them to see how you fit, the easier it will be for them to move your name to the top of their list.

BIG PICTURE BRIEFS

PRACTICE PLANNING AND EXECUTING
SOLUTIONS TO ADDRESS COMPLEX
BUSINESS NEEDS

BIG PICTURE BRIEF #4

Leadership Skills

THE COMPANY

Peaks, Inc.



What do they do?

Peaks is an international outdoors sporting goods company.

Who do they work with?

They are a retail company, working directly with consumers.

Where are they located?

With over 750 locations across the US and Canada

How many people work for them?

Peaks employs over 28,000 people between their corporate offices and store locations.

What's their #1 goal for this year?

They just created an all access pass for the three regions with high grossing winter sports equipment sales: Vail, CO; Park City, UT, and Whiteface Mountain, NY. With any ski/pole/ski boot or snowboard/boot package, members can get a one day all access mountain pass to their local slopes for free. They're hoping to do \$2 million in sales.

POINT OF CONTACT



Ali
Head of Leadership & Development

5th Year in the Role

Ali loves the outdoors, and the minute he graduated from college, he knew he wanted to work for a company that embraced that. He stepped into his first position at Peaks 9 years ago as a Sales Enablement Trainer and worked his way up to his current role.

As head of Leadership & Development, he has a small team of direct reports that includes 2 trainers, 2 instructional designers, an LMS administrator, and a data analyst.

Ali interfaces with many of the other teams at Peaks. He works very closely with the company's Chief Learning Officer and Director of Human Resources.

At the moment, Ali's team is swamped. Because of the recent pandemic, Ali's been tasked with helping to move the company's predominantly face to face training online. Being a national chain, Peaks has had challenges with keeping up with changing local regulations for workplace safety and customer service, so the L&D team has been in constant production mode since March 2020.

As if that wasn't enough responsibility, his team fears layoffs. There has been no word of this happening, and actually, numbers are up because people are trying to get outside, but the uncertain climate is definitely taking its toll on the team. Ali needs the outside support, but fears that his team may be unnerved that a consultant has been called (that's you).

SUBJECT MATTER EXPERT



Mila
Director of Digital & Marketing

3rd Year in the Role

Mila started with Peaks 18 years ago as a Marketing Associate. She was excited to be working with a brand that embraced her love of the outdoors and sent her traveling across the country.

As marketing took a turn into digital, Mila kept her skills sharp and figured out how to make the most of the emerging space.

Her campaigns grown Peaks' reach immeasurably over the years.

Her latest challenge is getting the word about the All Access Pass program.

Mila was chosen as the subject matter expert for this project because she understands Peaks deeply, she enjoys working with the L&D team, and she sees a real need to for leadership development in this digital space.

As someone of a digital tools expert, Ali thought she'd be most helpful in collaborating on a digital learning solution since his team had no availability.

She is excited to be the SME. She has a lot of ideas about what this training could look like.

THE REQUEST

An Email from Ali

The Ask

- Leadership skills training
- Uses Workday LMS
- Complete in 4 months
- \$50,000 budget

The Goal

- Improve productivity by increasing manager effectiveness in remote working situations

The Email

Hello,

I'm Ali, the Head of Leadership & Development at Peaks. We're looking for a consultant to help us development a leadership skills program for managers that can be delivered digitally.

We're noticing that, as our culture shifts online, folks are having trouble communicating effectively with their teams and maintaining cross-team collaboration that happens when every one is on-site. We'd really like to help them develop basic leadership skills, but in a way that translates in this new remote working space, as we don't see most of our corporate employees returning to our office spaces any time soon.

We use Workday LMS, Microsoft Teams, and Zoom for most of our training deployment right now. We're open to creative solutions, but they have to be accessible to all employees who are working from home.

We would like to see at least a curriculum outline completed within 2 weeks and ideally some content before the end of next month. We want to have a full program to roll out in 4 months.

Can you help us?

THE LEARNER

Corporate

Love the outdoors, work from an office.

Key Needs

- 1) Develop strategies for communicating with their team and across teams remotely
- 2) Build confidence in their ability to use work from home tools and to manage a remote team
- 3) Find effective workflows to increase productivity

Middle Management

A company with 28,000 has a lot of layers. There are over 400 middle management level staff within Peaks corporate offices.

In general, they range in age from 28 - 42, though there are outliers, of course. Peaks like to promote internally, and most have been with the company 4+ years.

The vast majority (about 75%) has limited experience working fully remotely and almost no experience managing remote teams. The transition to off-site has been a big adjustment for them.

The biggest complaint is that they feel siloed from other teams and colleagues.

They also have a hard time figuring out the communication balance. They don't want to overdo it on emails, Teams, or Zoom calls, but what other options are there when everyone is remote?

THINGS TO CONSIDER

Some additional needs you'll need to address as you build your solutions.

Overall, Peaks management team has been high performing, until now.

It seems that managers already know what they're doing when it comes to people management. They just struggle with translating that into a virtual environment.

They are not willing to change their LMS.

Workday Learning was a big investment, and they aren't willing to change it, although they didn't say that you have to use the LMS in your solution.

Everyone is short on time.

Even though Mila is your SME, she has limited time, as does Ali and his team. You'll have to move fast with limited support.

They are willing to spend on the right solution.

Peaks really believes in developing their leaders, and they have money to spare. Don't be afraid to push for innovative solutions that might be out of range for smaller companies. If it's really the best solutions, Peaks may be willing to extend their budget.

BRAINSTORM

Instructions:

Take a moment to brainstorm before you start building your solution.

What is the measurement you would use to define project success?

What do you think is the best solution?

Next Step:

Build a design document, prototype, or a few pieces of your solution that you can share in your portfolio. Make sure to include a write up that explains the scenario and why you designed your solution the way you did.

BIG PICTURE BRIEF #5

Sales Enablement

BITE-SIZED BRIEFS:

COMPLETE A PORTFOLIO PROJECT
IN 2 HOURS OR LESS

Bite-Sized Brief:

CORPORATE #14

Write a Branching Scenario for Sales Enablement

Brief

MagicLMS offers a learning management system (LMS) for organizations with 250 or more employees. Using AI, it adapts to the user's areas of interest and ability to ensure they are served appropriate content. Administrators can use the dashboard and reporting features to track acquired skills and skill gaps across the organization, as well as course completion, assessment scores, and over 40 other data points about learning performance.

As the sales team rapidly expands to keep up with growth, MagicLMS finds itself hiring early-career sales professionals, who are nervous about negotiating. They often default to offering huge discounts to close the sale. To help the sales representatives practice their negotiation skills, MagicLMS will be offering an in-person sales negotiation workshop. But they know that's not enough, so they are looking to build a series of short branching scenarios to simulate a conversation with a customer as a follow-up.

Audience

Early career sales representatives at an edtech company

Task

Write a draft of the dialogue for a 2-minute branching scenario of a negotiation training for sales enablement.

Revise a PowerPoint Slide

Brief

The required safety training for new hires is being offered as a mandatory refresher course for employees who have been with the company for over a year. The slides need to be updated.

Audience

Construction and administrative team members at a large construction company

Task

Revise this slide from a key part of their PowerPoint presentation:

(You'll find the text on the next page.)

Workplace safety tips!

- * * Lock the doors after your shift * *

- Keep your construction site access pass in a safe place
- Have site visitors sign in at the front kiosk and ensure all their contact info is provided
- If you see something suspicious report to your supervisor immediately
- Wear safety equipment on the construction site at all times
- Provide evidence of covid-19 vaccination
- We have had incidents where it was obvious people did not read the safety manual. Click THIS LINK

LINKLINKLINKLINK%BLAHBLAHLINKLINKLINKLINK%BLAHBLAHLINKLINKLINKLINK%BLAHBLAHLINKLINKLINKLINK%.PDF and be sure to review all parts of the document as it reviews many key points that we discussed today and goes into further detail about who, what, where, when, and why you need to follow the safety protocols whether you are working in the office or on construction sites—remember that safety is our number one priority and we cannot afford to have any errors in this very important area of safety. Remember wearing those seat belts.



Workplace safety tips!

****Lock the doors after your shift****

- Keep your construction site access pass in a safe place
- Have site visitors sign in at the front kiosk and ensure all their contact info is provided
- If you see something suspicious, report to your supervisor immediately
- Wear safety equipment on the construction site at all times
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ABOUT



YOUR
INSTRUCTIONAL
DESIGNER

Make **learning** that **matters**.™

Your Instructional Designer is a learning and people development agency, specializing in digital strategy and solutions for social learning. We leverage social learning networks, digital cohorts, and storytelling to build learning ecosystems that encourage collaboration and innovation while improving performance.

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