The Designer's Guide to *Better* *Questions*

RESULTING IN FEWER REVISIONS AND BETTER CLIENT RELASHIONSHIPS

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As a designer, your creative vision is only as strong as the clarity of your client's brief. But let's be honest—**clients don't always know how to articulate what they want**, and vague feedback like *"Make it pop"* or *"I'll know it when I see it"* can send us straight into revision chaos. That's where the power of better questions comes in.

This guide is your cheat sheet to smoother projects, fewer revisions, and stronger client relationships. It's not just a list of questions—it's a roadmap to help you ask the right things at the right time so that every project starts with clarity and confidence.

Why This Guide Matters

Too often, designers dive into projects with incomplete briefs, unclear direction, or assumptions about what the client might want. The result? Frustration, miscommunication, and endless back-and-forth. Instead of waiting for the client to tell you everything, lead the conversation with smart, strategic questions that uncover what they truly need.

These questions will help you:
✔️ Understand your client's vision and goals upfront
✔️ Set clear expectations from the start
✔️ Minimise revisions and scope creep
✔️ Position yourself as a trusted expert, not just an order-taker

Inside, you'll find tailored questions for branding projects, packaging design, social media campaigns, annual reports, and more—so no matter what kind of design work you're doing, you'll always have the right questions at your fingertips.

Use this as a guide in your client calls, emails, or briefing sessions—or even share sections with your clients to help them provide better answers. Over time, you'll develop your own signature way of gathering information, but until then? This guide has your back.

Now, let's dive in and get those better questions rolling! 🚀

Remember always start with:
Hello, how are you?

If the client starts talking, let them —*when the conversation flows naturally, follow it.* These questions are your guide, **but your instincts** are just as powerful.

Clients often have a clear picture of **what they don't want**—*it's our job to help them realise what they do want.*

Basic Branding

- **What do you need help with?** *(Logo, rebrand, brand strategy, full identity system?)*
- **What is your business about?**
- **Where will your logo primarily be used?** *(Print, digital, social media, packaging, merchandise?)*
- **Do you have any existing brand colours, or do you want to explore new ones?**
- **Are there any colours you want to avoid? Why?**
- **Do you have a look in mind?** *(Playful, professional, minimalist, bold?)*
- **What emotions do you want your audience to feel when they see your brand?**
- **Do you have any reference brands whose look and feel you admire?** (What do you like about them?)
- *It can be helpful to suggest a shared PINTEREST board to gather inspiration and create a mood board. This will give you an idea about the visuals that catch your client's attention. This is not for you to copy other designs but to be inspired. This process also helps the client to get clear on what they like.*
- **Are there any existing design elements that need to stay? (***Typography, symbols, imagery?)*
- **What specific branding assets do you need?** *(Style guide, packaging, stationery, templates, website?)*
- **Who is your ideal customer? (***Age, interests, problems they need solved?)*
- **What sets your brand apart from competitors?** *(Your unique value, story, or approach?)*

General Design Project

- *What do you need help with?*
- *Do you have an existing style guide (look of your artwork)? If so, can you share it?*
- *Can you supply your Logo in vector?*
- *Any other open files? This way I can design according to your brand.*
- *Is the project used digitally or printed?*
- *What information needs to go into the design? (Text, legal disclaimers, images?)*
- *Or do you have a specific look in mind?*
- *Please supply the copy/text/information that needs to go onto the design as close to the final as possible.*
- *Do you have images that need to go on / should I supply or source?*
- *Any other information that is needed to complete this design project to the best of our ability.*

Take note of:

- **Car branding** -ask for photos of the car from all sides.
- **Wall/Window Branding** asks for photos of the area so that you can see what obstacles
- **Event Collateral design** - ask for the Final event name(for you to design the event look) and all details that need to be used.

Annual Report/Publication Layout Project

- *What is the project about?*
- *What is the main goal of this publication? (Inform, inspire, showcase, sell?)*
- *Will I be handling design only, or do you need me to facilitate other services?*
  - *Copywriting (Who is writing the content?)*
  - *Photography (Do you need new images? What kind?)*
  - *Printing (Do you have a print supplier, or should I source one?)*
- *Will the copy be supplied? If you need me to facilitate copywriting – must it be written from scratch?*
- *If Photography is needed, what exactly do you need?*
- *Will photos be supplied?*
- *Must I quote for stock images?*
- *What photographs do you need to be taken? People, product, manufacturing process, premises, interior?*
- *Board members – how many?*
- *Once the quote has been approved – we will schedule a date that fits you and the photographer. We will also supply a dress code to match the design theme/ layout and props if needed.*
- *Do you have an example of previous publications done?*

Things to remember if you Facilitate the whole project:
- Once you quote – let the client know that you will work on a payment schedule. This helps you to be able to pay all suppliers on time without having to use your own money/cash flow.
- Remember to discuss timelines, themes, locations, dress codes and (or) props for the shoot with the photographer.
- In the case of an Annual Report - ask for FINAL Financials, signed off by Auditors (working with draft figures means you will have to do the whole layout again.)
- Remember to quote for props.
- Ask the client about the copy. Who will supply it? Must the copywriter write from scratch? What is the tone of the report?
- Ask the printer for a quote and printing timeline. Remember to mention all relevant points of printing: pages, what type of cover, what kind of binding, and any extras such as foiling, embossing or varnishes.
- Write out a Timeline – mark all relevant schedules and send them to the client.

Packaging Design

- *Tell me more about the product.* (What makes it unique? Who is it for?)
- *Where will it be sold? (*Retail, e-commerce, both?)
- *Are there any additional branding needs?* (Shelf displays, in-store signage?)
- *Do you already have a look in mind, or do you need help defining the design style?*
- *It can be helpful to suggest a shared PINTEREST board to gather inspiration and create a mood board. This will give you an idea about the visuals that catch your client's attention. This is not for you to copy other designs but to be inspired. This process also helps the client to get clear on what they like.*
- *Do you have a logo?*
- *What must go onto the packaging:*
  - *Barcode?*
  - *Ingredients?*
  - *Extra logos?*
  - *Product size?*
  - *Correct contact details that should be on?*
- *What containers are you using? Do you have samples?* (You need to have the sample container to get the size and shape of the label/branding to be done.)
- *Are there any limitations on what can be done creatively?* (You can usually get this information from the manufacturers of the packaging. Ask if the client can find out from them OR if they need you to work directly with the printers/manufacturers.)
- *What are the technical specs you need to design on, or do you have a template/DIE-line/framework?* (This is also something you can get from the Manufacturers/Printers.)

Social Media Project

- *Can you elaborate on your social media project idea?*
- *What are your objectives for this campaign?*
- *Who is your target audience?*
- *What motivated you to initiate this campaign?*
- *Which social media platforms do you plan to utilize?*
- *How many posts are you considering for this campaign?*
- *Do you have a timeline in mind for the campaign's duration?*
- *Will you provide a copywriter, or should I arrange for one to craft the post copy?*
- *Will you grant me access to your social media platforms, or will you handle postings yourself?*
- *Would editable Canva templates help you manage future content?*
- *Who will be handling posting and scheduling?* (Do you need assistance with this?)
- *Do you have existing branding elements like a logo, look and feel, etc., that should be adhered to? Please supply those if available.*
- *How will we measure success?* (Likes, shares, conversions, brand mentions?)
- *Do you need help tracking and reporting analytics?*

Checklist of Tasks:
- Brainstorm campaign ideas
- Develop a social media calendar
- Outline a content creation timeline
- Engage a copywriter for text creation
- Source a photographer and, if necessary, a stylist
- Design campaign visuals and elements
- Schedule posts
- Generate an analytical report
- Schedule a post-campaign review

Project Timelines & Workflow – Managing Expectations

- What is the absolute deadline for this project?
- Are there any key dates or milestones we need to meet?
- Who are the decision-makers involved in the approval process?
- What is your preferred method of communication? (Email, Zoom, WhatsApp?)
- How quickly do you expect responses during the design phase?
- Do you have any flexibility with the deadline if more time is needed for revisions?

After the Conversation: Set Expectations & Define Your Process

Now that we've covered everything about your project, it's time for me to explain how I work, my process, and what happens next. This ensures we're both on the same page and sets us up for a smooth collaboration.

First, take a moment to reflect. If you feel this project is the right fit, walk them through your next steps. If you believe another designer might be a better fit for their needs, refer them to someone else and share their contact details.

If we're a great fit, here's how I work:

1. Thank you for all the information! It helps me understand your vision and how we can bring it to life.
2. I will now send you a proper brief (if I feel we need more details) to ensure I have all the necessary insights before quoting.
3. Once the brief is complete, I will prepare a quote. Once you approve it, we move forward.
4. I'll add you to my Client Hub (Playbook Client Desk). This is where all our admin lives—your invoices, quotes, working agreements, timelines, and final artwork. It keeps everything organised in one place, so you always know where to find what you need.
5. I work with the One-Concept Method. I only present one strong design option, not multiple versions. Why? Because my process is built on clarity, strategy, and trust. Instead of overwhelming you with choices, I focus on crafting a single, well-thought-out solution that aligns perfectly with your goals.
6. The design phase begins! Once we're set up, I'll share timelines and milestones to keep things moving smoothly.

If you have any questions, concerns, or ideas, this is the perfect time to discuss them! Let's make sure we're both aligned before we move forward.

The Start of a Stronger Design Process

Asking the right questions isn't just about filling out a form or ticking boxes—it's about starting a real conversation. These questions are your gateway to understanding your client, their needs, and the heart of their project. They're designed to get the dialogue flowing, to help you dig deeper, and most importantly, to give you the clarity you need to design with confidence. But remember—this is just the starting point. Once you've gathered enough insight and truly feel aligned with the project, you can take things further with an official briefing if needed.

However, if you intuitively know you've got the essence of what the client needs, you can dive into your process with clarity and purpose.

How to Use These Questions in Your Workflow

There's no single right way to use these questions—adapt them to fit your workflow and client interactions. Here's how you can apply them effectively:

- **In an Email:** Copy and paste the relevant questions into an email when a new client inquires about your services. This sets a professional tone and helps you filter out vague requests.
- **During a Discovery Call or Meeting:** Use these questions when you first meet a client, whether that's in person, over Zoom, or on a phone call. This allows you to get a feel for their personality, project scope, and expectations.
- **Before Saying Yes to a Project:** Before committing to a project, run through these questions to ensure it's a good fit for you—both creatively and in terms of workload, budget, and timeline.
- **To Set Expectations:** These questions help establish boundaries and clear expectations early on, so you don't end up in the dreaded revision loop.
- **To Gain Deeper Clarity**: Even mid-project, returning to some of these questions can help refocus direction and bring clarity when things feel messy or uncertain.

Final Reminders: *Step into Your Power as a Designer*

Before you dive into the project, take a deep breath and remember:

- **Smile** – This is a new person, a new story, a new connection. Treat it as a conversation, not just a transaction.
- **Make them feel heard** – The more questions you ask, the more clarity both of you will have. You're not just collecting answers—you're helping them understand their vision better.
- **Stay professional** – You are not 'just a designer'; you are a business helping another business succeed. Show up with confidence, clarity, and expertise.
- **There's no such thing as a dumb question** – The best projects come from clear communication. Never assume—ask!
- **You have power** – Without your skills, their project, product, or business would not be communicated properly. You are not just 'doing a design'; you are creating a bridge between their idea and their audience. You are making them money. You are an asset.
- **You are on the same level** – This is a collaboration, not a hierarchy. Approach the relationship with mutual respect. You bring strategy, skill, and creative problem-solving—they need you just as much as you need them.
- **Do great work, not just fast work** – Speed is never more important than quality. Take your time to create something intentional and impactful.
- **Listen beyond the words** – Sometimes, what a client doesn't say is just as important as what they do. Pay attention to their tone, their hesitations, their excitement. Try to capture the feeling they want from this project—not just the technical details.

You are not 'just' a designer.
You are a creative partner, a problem solver,
and a business ally. Own it. 🚀

Start the Conversation.

For many designers, the hardest part isn't designing—it's asking the right questions and setting the tone for a smooth collaboration. It can feel intimidating at first, but the more you do it, the more confident you'll become. When you take control of the conversation, you position yourself as the expert, build stronger client relationships, and ultimately, design better work with fewer frustrations.

So, go ahead—start asking better questions, build deeper connections, and create work that truly resonates.

Stay creative, Your friend in design,

Nelett

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