Building a Better Content Brief with Tech

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In 2022, content marketing isn't a maybe, it's a must. It's no longer a matter of if, but how and how often. If your goal is organic traffic, it's not uncommon for websites to publish new content several times per week to keep a steady flow of visitors and maintain their authority and rank in SERPs.

Top publishers like CNN and the New York Times can publish hundreds of pieces each day. Even more industry-specific sites like Healthline and Business Insider, who both made it to Statista's report of the top 100 most visited websites in 2021, rack up a quite impressive daily publishing cadence.

Maintaining such a cadence and competing in a content-first website landscape is a tall order for any size organization. No matter how much cumulative knowledge your team has about your industry, putting it all down in words is a job itself. In fact, it may be many jobs depending on the size of your company.

So, the question becomes, how can content marketers, editorial teams and SEOs create content at scale while also maintaining quality? The answer is content briefs or outlines, but the one-page template you're already using probably won't cut it.

The key is building a better brief that's based on existing data from top-ranking content – i.e., its word count, content depth and breadth, and the topics discussed – and supplemented with insights from SEO experts.

In this guide, we'll discuss what content briefs usually include, and how to amplify your briefs to ensure that each time you give an assignment, the result is predictable, high-quality, and optimized for search engines. Then, we'll dive into how to use tech – and specifically, AI – to create briefs at scale while maintaining quality.

First, let's talk basics.

What is a Content Brief?

A content brief is a document you give to a writer that outlines the scope and specs of a project. Ideally, you'll want to have a new brief for every piece of content you assign. Commonly, agencies will have editorial briefs for each client and companies will have in-house blog guidelines, but these don't provide as much detail into how individual pieces should be crafted. Client briefs and editorial guidelines will often include:

- Keyword list
- Audience
- Goals and Objectives
- Tone and Style

- Word count range
- Linking strategy
- Resources
- Delivery instructions

This is all very useful and necessary information for your writers to know, but providing them with an overview of a content strategy instead of a specific content brief leaves a lot of room for creative freedom.

When companies do provide content briefs for individual posts, they typically specify:

- Title
- Summary
- Word count
- Sources

- Internal and external links
- Keywords
- CTA
- Deadline

Again, great information, but does it tell the whole story? Could a writer refer to that document to determine exactly how to craft a piece to your expectations? Not quite.

The problem with content briefs as we know them is they often lack the key questions and insights that differentiate page-one results from page-two results; shallow content from deep content; content with a purpose from content that meanders. You get it, but how do you get it?

You can achieve high-performing content with a brief that goes above and beyond, answering your readers' every question, as well as the ones they didn't even know they had. Each post should aim to address a set of questions, both obvious and obscure.

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How to Write a Better Content Brief

Building a better brief entails a thorough analysis of the content that's already ranking for your focus topic, and supplementing that with information that will differentiate your piece from the rest. It's essentially the idea behind skyscraper content, where you look at what's already at the top of SERPs and create a more robust piece of content.

The problem with the skyscraper technique is that it requires a lot of manual action and analysis, which is both time-consuming and unreliable because you're using your subjective judgment to determine what "better" means.

This is where automated solutions can both save you time and ensure that your final result is based on data, not opinions.

Below, we'll walk through what a MarketMuse Content Brief looks like and how each section contributes to a more reliable outcome. **We're going to get meta here and show you the brief that was used to make this article, How To Write A Content Brief.**

The "How To Write A Content Brief" Brief

See The Full Brief

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MarketMuse Content Brief Basics

A MarketMuse Brief consists of two components – the executive summary and the outline view. As its name implies, the executive summary provides an overview of the strategy outlined in the brief in order to create a comprehensive piece of content on the chosen topic. The outline view is the blueprint the writer will use to craft their piece of expert-level content.

Executive Summary

This summary provides your writer the path to creating the best content by following six critical steps:

1. Determine the ideal user intent and audience.
2. Discover the question to answer within the content.
3. Choose an article title appropriate for search placement.
4. Find the most relevant subheadings.
5. Discuss the most important related topics organized according to those subheadings.
6. Link to relevant external and internal pages.

User Intent and Questions

When a user performs a search in a search engine, they expect to get something out of the experience. There is intent behind every search, and it can be explicit or implied. Truly understanding the question(s) the audience is asking and the problem they need to solve helps writers craft more useful content, ultimately leading to better on-page performance.

With a MarketMuse brief, we provide the top questions your audience is asking around your target topic, ordered by relevance.

Ranking Titles

Writing an engaging title is one of the most important aspects of creating content that does well in search engines. Titles with clear, concise and engaging language are often best, bringing more visitors to your site and into your marketing funnel.
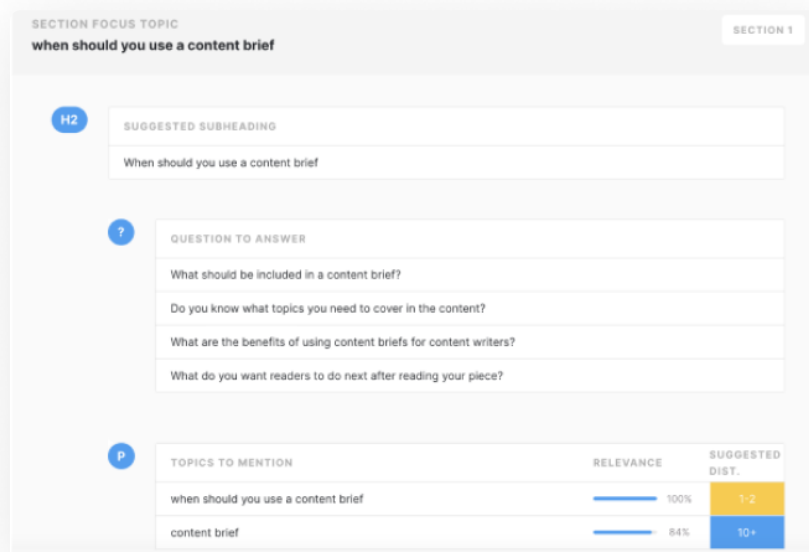
MarketMuse briefs provide the top ranking titles of competitors in the space, as well as recommended terms you can use to set your article apart.

Relevant Subheadings

Subheadings guide writers to create content that better reflects the topical authority standards search engines use to rank web pages. By focusing on subtopics that anticipate your audience's questions and needs, you can craft a piece of writing that is easy to read and quick to rank.

This section is the meat of your content brief because it allows your writer to quickly draw up an outline of what the final piece should look like, without having to start from scratch.

MarketMuse Content Briefs typically contain multiple subheadings, depending on the complexity of your topic. Subheadings are based on the topics discussed in top-ranking content, and we include suggestions to help your content stand out.

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Related Topics

Establishing topical authority for a chosen search term requires mentioning the topic and using a network of relevant subtopics and keywords. These subtopics are linked to your primary focus topic through search indexes, so it's vital that they are included.

MarketMuse briefs include a compiled list of the most relevant related topics for your focus topic. The MarketMuse suite also includes a heatmap of the top ranking SERP pages, where you can easily see which pages cover which topics and identify opportunities to provide additional value to your readers that competitors may be missing out on.

Providing subtopics for a writer keys them into important contextual information about the topic and your audience. Excluding subtopics can also help ensure a writer stays on track and doesn't try to cover too much in one article, or cannibalize existing content on your site.

Linking

You'll need both internal and external links to create an informative piece of content. Inbound links should point toward pillar or supporting pages that are relevant to your focus topic. Outbound links should point toward authoritative, non-competing pieces of content that complement your focus topic.

Setting standards about which sites to link to, and which don't make the cut can save your SEOs and editors in editing time.

MarketMuse briefs use AI technology to identify relevant internal links by scanning your existing content inventory, suggesting which pages are best to link where, as well as recommended anchor text. MarketMuse also identifies appropriate external links, weeding out competitor content.

» See the full executive summary and outline brief «

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Effectively Conveying your Content Strategy

An amplified content brief can make a good writer better, but it doesn't totally remove the human element of managing a content team.

To truly communicate what you want to achieve, you should be able to speak specifically about your strategy. Aim to provide examples to clarify what you're looking for, and give statistics, facts, and resources to bolster your writers' expertise and fuel their creativity.

Your writers should be aware of the goals and objectives you want to achieve with your content, as this will give them context for the posts and resources they create. Both existing and new writers should have access to a user-friendly document that outlines all the items mentioned earlier when we talked about client briefs – your goals, audience, tone/style, keywords, linking, resources, delivery instructions, desired length.

Ultimately, the more your team knows about what you're trying to achieve and the mission of your company, the better prepared they are to create content that's on point.

If you're working with freelancers, there may be some information you'll want to protect, particularly if you're in a highly competitive market. Consider having your contractors sign a non-disclosure agreement, or only give them the information that you'd be comfortable making public.


how to write a content brief

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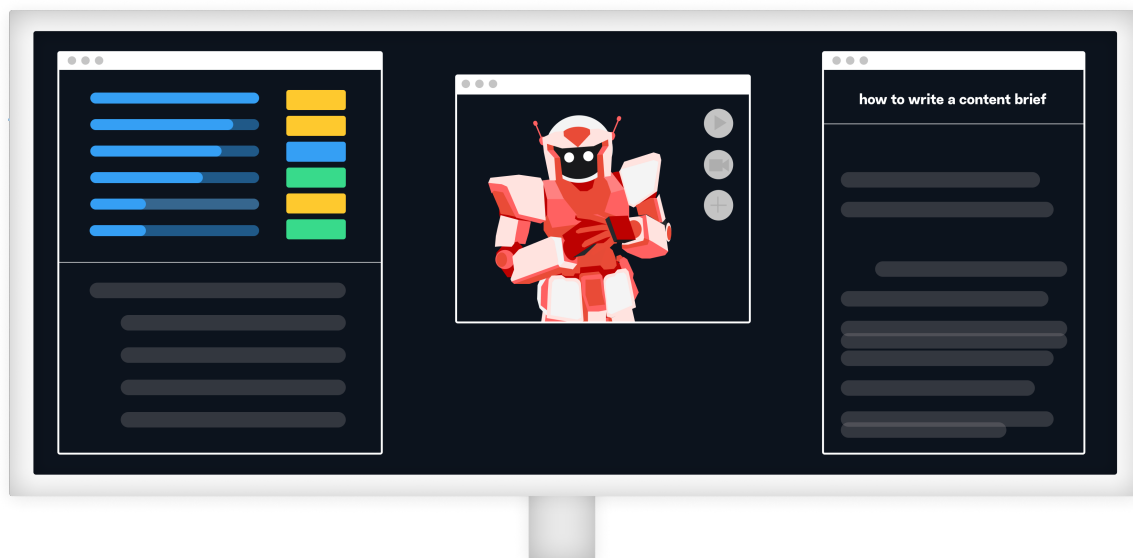
Tips on Providing Writer Feedback

If you're busy or don't like confrontation, it's all too easy to just fix errors and rework sentences yourself rather than talking to your writers about the issues. But if you nip it in the bud and give them feedback, you're giving your content writers the chance to truly excel and meet your expectations every time.

Here are some tips to keep in mind when giving your writers critiques:

1 **Be understanding.** Writing is subjective work and your writer has feelings, so consider their perspective and admit fault if you failed to make something clear.
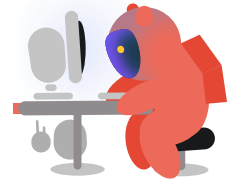
2 **Be specific.** Instead of saying, always use active voice, give them an example of where they used passive voice. Seeing an example usually helps the message stick.

3 **Be consistent.** Learning sometimes requires having to repeat yourself, but don't assume your writer just doesn't get it and give up. (Not right away, anyway.)

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Manual vs. AI: The Case for Automated Solutions

All of the content brief best practices outlined above can be executed through manual processes, they just take time. If you maintain a lower publishing cadence, or have ample writing and editing resources this method may not be a concern for you. If you're trying to get a lot accomplished each week with limited resources, an AI solution may help.

There are ample keyword research tools on the market that can speed up topic selection, there are content optimization tools that can help you better write for SEO or user experience.

MarketMuse does both. And more.

What We Do

MarketMuse is an AI-powered content research, intelligence, and writing tool. We help online publishers and businesses increase their publication tempo, build content-driven customer journeys, and get discovered by the people who need them most.

- **Inventory:** The MarketMuse Inventory automates your inventory and content audit processes. It collects and organizes your pages for you, analyzes them, and makes them easily accessible. Less manual work for you, more content research, planning, and execution.
- **Research:** Search any topic or URL, find related topics, variants and suggested distribution on your site
- **Compete:** A heatmap of the top 20 ranking URLs in SERP for your target topic outlining topic coverage, distribution and a MarketMuse content score. Easily identify opportunities to create content that goes deeper than your competitors.
- **Optimize:** Hold your own content up to the microscope to see suggested content score, suggested word count, recommended topic distribution and competitor insights.

- **Questions:** Better understand your audience, user intent and content needs with a list of the top questions being asked related to your target topic.
- **Connect:** We provide suggestions for internal and external links most effective for the topic and your domain, helping you build authority and craft effective content clusters on your site.
- **Brief:** Give your writers the structure, related topics, questions to answer and linking suggestions they need to write great content with minimal guidance.

How We Do It

1. Our proprietary AI analyzes your inventory, assessing the breadth and depth of topical coverage on each page.
2. We assign all of your pages and their related topics an Authority Score and a Personalized Difficulty score.
3. Start your research and planning. Easily slice and dice your inventory using stackable filters or build dashboards that surface opportunities for you.
4. Use the MarketMuse Applications to do deeper research into a specific topic.
5. Sort your best opportunities into Content Plans.
6. Order Content Briefs, and even AI-generated drafts of content.

Key Takeaways

- Content briefs create predictable, high-performing content
- Leverage technology to help you build a 10X content brief
- Be clear and consistent with writers to produce great work
- MarketMuse Content Briefs + highly trained writers = your content dream team

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Publish better every time.

Let us show you how MarketMuse helps thousands of content teams turn content into a growth channel.

Schedule a Demo

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