Ten Tips for Writing Great User Stories

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Story Time

• A user story describes functionality that is valuable to a user or a customer.
• It tells a story about how someone uses the product.
A Sample User Story

As a conference visitor, I want to attend a talk to acquire new knowledge.

Acceptance Criteria
- I won’t fall asleep or play with my iPhone.
- By the end of the talk, I can correctly answer three question about the subject.
- The talk should be no longer than 45 min.
Focus on the User

- Describe the product from the perspective of your target users and customers
- Use user roles in your stories
- You may find it helpful to do some lightweight modeling
Engage in a Conversation

• Use stories to facilitate a dialogue between the team and the users, the customers and the other stakeholders
• A story is not a specification but captures the essence of a conversation about the features of a product
• This encourages creativity
Story Writing is Teamwork

• Collaborate to discover and describe your user stories
• Leverage the creativity and knowledge of the team and the stakeholders
• Have regular product backlog grooming workshop to jointly refine your user stories
Keep it Simple

• Use language that is easy to understand
  – Avoid confusing and ambiguous terms
  – Use active voice

• Focus on what’s important, and leave out non-essential information
  – Rewrite your stories to improve them
  – Writing is an inherently iterative process
Progressively Refine your Stories

Compose email
As an enterprise user, I want to compose an email

State Subject
As an enterprise user, I want to state a subject

State Recipient
As an enterprise user, I want to state one or more recipients

Set Importance
As an enterprise user, I want to set the importance

Select Recipient
As an enterprise user, I want to select one or more recipients from my contact list

Enter Recipient
As an enterprise user, I want to enter a recipient
Use Acceptance Criteria

• Add acceptance criteria to your user stories as you break epics into detailed stories
• Acceptance criteria complement the story’s narrative, state when the story is complete, and ensure that it is testable
• My rule of thumb: Detailed stories should have three to five acceptance criteria
Group Stories into Themes

• Each theme represents a product capability or a goal; it groups related stories

• Themes have several benefits
  – It is easier to check for completeness and consistency
  – We can first prioritise the themes, then the stories
  – Find the right stories is easier
Use Paper Cards

• Paper cards facilitate collaboration: Everyone can grab a card and write down an idea
• They can be easily grouped on the table or wall to check for consistency and completeness
• If you have to use an electronic tool, print out stories on cards for your story writing workshops; transfer the new information back into the tool
Visualise your Stories

• Stories want to communicate
  – Put them up on the wall so that everyone can see them
  – Don’t hide them on a network drive or in the corporate intranet jungle!

• If you are short of wall space
  – Ask yourself if all your stories are really necessary to create a successful product
  – Consider displaying only the high priority ones
Some Things aren’t Stories

• Use prototypes or sketches to capture user interface requirements

• Use constraint cards to describe operational qualities

Performance Constraint

The system must answer any request in less than one second

Acceptance Criteria

• 10 000 concurrent read and write transactions take place
• Each transaction has a data size of 500 KB
• The system configuration is “small enterprise”
Famous Last Words

“Storytelling reveals meaning without committing the error of defining it.”

Hannah Arendt
More Information


Pichler, Roman. 2010. *Agile Product Management with Scrum*. Addison-Wesley
