**What is a User Story?**

User Story is a tool in which requirements are captured in an easy to understand plain language, and is written from the perspective of an end user.

“In software development and product management, a user story is an informal, natural language description of one or more features of a software system. User stories are often written from the perspective of an end user or user of a system”

In Agile software development, user stories are used to express the requirements from an end user perspective.  The format of the user story is:

As a < user >

I want to < perform an action >

So that < I expect…. >

* <User> - is the end-user or the role of the user in the application software – “As a net banking customer”
* <perform an action> - the action the user is performing on the application software – “I want to add beneficiary in my account”
* <I expect..> - outcome, desired value, the user expects out of the action performed – “so that I can transfer money to the added beneficiary”
* The larger-sized stories are called “Epics” which are then decomposed to “Features” and then further decomposed to a “User Story”.
* Epic example: As a Bank, I want to provide net banking to customers, so that they can perform various transactions.
* The above Epic can then be decomposed into multiple features: few examples:
* As a Bank, I want to provide a funds transfer feature to customers, so that they can transfer funds from one account to another account
* As a Bank, I want to provide an account summary for all the customer’s types of accounts.
* As a Bank, I want to provide credit card details to customers.
* Now each feature can be decomposed further into multiple user stories.

## Who Writes User Stories?

So, whose responsibility is to write user stories in an agile team?

Generally, the notion is that only the Product Owners should write user stories as they are the ones who elicit requirements from the stakeholders. However, in practice, any member of an Agile team may write user stories, though the overall responsibility is that of a Product Owner. The product owner should go through the stories and prioritize them in the product backlog. Over the course of an agile project, every team member is encouraged and expected to write user stories.

**When are User Stories Written?**

Are user stories written at the beginning of the project in a traditional way?

User stories are written throughout the lifecycle of the project. At the start of the project, user stories are written in Sprint '0', also called as pre-sprint. Initially, the product owner elicits the requirements from the stakeholder and they are stored as EPICS, Features and User Stories in the product backlog. The requirements in agile software development are progressively elaborated and hence the need for writing user stories will arise throughout the project. These are written mainly during the backlog grooming session where the product owner decomposes epics/features into granular stories. The Dev team writes stories along with the product owner during this session and also gets involved in the 3 C’s (the next section describes this).



confirmation in the 3C’s of user stories

“Card”, “Conversation” and “Confirmation” is a model that captures the components of a user story.  This is popularly known as the 3Cs model which helps in planning and estimating the user stories by the Agile team.

* **"Card"**– denotes a Post-It note or physical card, typically 3”x5” in size, where the important information of a user story is captured. The card should contain enough information (not too less or too much) that the team is able to understand in order to plan & estimate the story.
* “**Conversation**” – this is the conversation that happens between the product owner and the dev team to discuss the story and get into the details. This may also be a conversation with the users of the system. This conversation also brings out the creativity of the dev team and uncovers any unstated needs of the users.
* “**Confirmation**” – this brings out the acceptance criteria for a story based on the above conversation.  This criterion will be used to evaluate the story by the stakeholders when the user story is implemented by the dev team.

The 3 C’s of the user story generally unfold during the backlog grooming session when the dev team and the product owner discuss the stories that need to be groomed. The user stories are written during this time as well on the card by the dev team and product owner. Just enough information is captured in the story that enables the team to discuss and get into the details, uncovering any hidden or explicit information in the process. The team then negotiates with the product owner and arrives at the acceptance criteria for the user story.

Next, the dev team estimates the user story with the available information. The conversation continues between the dev team and product owner until a consensus is reached with respect to the details and acceptance criteria and until the team can size the same. This round of conversation may happen again during the iteration/sprint planning session. The dev team then implements the story in an iteration which is reviewed by the product owner or stakeholders at the end of the iteration. They will then accept the story based on the acceptance criteria defined for the story.

**Why Create User Stories?**

What are the benefits that a team will get by documenting the need of the stakeholders in the form of user stories?

* It enables the team to understand the requirements from a user perspective.
* The focus is on the user to provide value to them; the user story clearly describes the expected outcome of every action performed.
* This manner of capturing requirements provides opportunities for the team to collaborate more with the product owner and business users.
* By having conversations (in 3 Cs), the team is able to uncover the hidden requirements and also come up with creative solutions.
* Provides a shared understanding of the requirements to the team so that everyone is aware of the outcome/goal of the story and is on the same page.
* User stories help the team to achieve smaller product increments.
* User stories are more understandable by all stakeholders (technical/non-technical/business/operations).
* User stories help the team to implement features in smaller iterations ranging from one week to one-month durations.
* User stories enable the team for progressive elaboration, where they can defer the story until more clarity is obtained.
* User stories help create transparency of the priorities defined by the product owner and the customer.
* User stories help the developers, product owner and business owners to reach a mutual consensus as they discuss the details and agree on the acceptance criteria. With the help of the user stories tool and CSM or [**PMP course**](https://www.knowledgehut.com/project-management/pmp-certification-training), professionals can enhance their career skills in agile project management.
* This helps prioritize the product features by the stakeholders and also helps to take the right decisions at the right time.

**Types of User Stories**

We can classify user stories into functional and technical types:

**Functional:** Normally, a user story is written based on the functional aspects of the application software, while focusing on the user and the value of the functionality provided to the user. Functional stories concentrate on the product features which the customer will be testing at the end of an iteration based on the acceptance criteria defined for the story.

**Technical:** Technical stories are written to be able to support the functional stories. Technical stories can be classified as

* **Infrastructure stories:** any infrastructure addition/modification that may be required to support the functional story
* **Refactoring:** this type of story is written to maintain the code and address technical debts. This can be used for designing and automation needs as well
* **Spikes:** stories that require research on architecture and design which may in turn help achieve the functional need of the customer.

Simple User Story Template

**Title:**

**Priority:**

**Estimate:**

**User story**

**As a** [*type of user],*

**I want to** [*perform some task]*

**so that I can** [*achieve some goal].*

**Acceptance criteria**

**Given that** [*some context],*

**when** [*some action is carried out]*

**then** [*a set of observable outcomes should occur].*