



Transforming Ambiguity into Clarity:

A Guide to Refining Project Requirements

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Ambiguous terms and what they may actually mean

Ambiguous Terms	What the Client Said	Ambiguity in Client's Statement	Question to ask for Clarity	Examples of Good Requirement Documentation
Real time	We need real-time data processing.	"Real-time" lacks specificity regarding the acceptable latency or the exact frequency of updates.	What does 'real-time' entail in the context of your system? What types of data or interactions require real-time processing?	Data should be processed and available within 2 seconds of receipt.
User-friendly / easy to use.	Ensure the system is user-friendly / easy to use.	"User-friendly" is subjective. Could refer to intuitive UI, fewer steps to complete tasks, accessibility for users with disabilities or the target user demographics that the software needs to accommodate.	Can you describe what user-friendly features or functionalities are essential for your users? Kindly describe a typical process and how you would like to see it simplified? Can you provide examples of interfaces that you find user-friendly?	The system should have a non-cluttered interface with tooltips, fewer steps to complete tasks such as purchase, registration etc, with clear instructions or hint labels displayed at each step. and a comprehensive help section accessible within two clicks.
Increasing users.	The app should handle increasing users.	"Handle increasing users" is vague without specific metrics.	What is the current user load, and what maximum capacity do you anticipate needing? Over what timeframe do you anticipate an increase in the numbers of users?	"The system must support up to 10,000 concurrent users with a plan to scale up to 50,000 within 12 months."
Secure	Make sure the application is secure.	Security is broad and can encompass many aspects. Access control, encryption standards, compliance requirements, or specific threat protections.	What specific security standards, regulations or controls should the application meet?	The system must comply security standards such as ISO 27001, PCI DSS or GDPR and implement latest encryption mechanism for all data transactions."

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Fast	The application must be fast.	"Fast" is relative and does not provide specific performance targets. Could mean quick response time or high throughput.	What are the performance benchmarks you are targeting? What specific response time do you expect for key operations?	The application should load within 3 seconds and handle database queries within 500 milliseconds.
High Availability	We want high availability.	"High availability" lacks quantification concerning uptime percentages or the acceptable downtime per year.	What desired uptime percentage are you aiming for the system? How do you envision the failover process to be managed in case of system downtime?	The system should guarantee 99.9% uptime, excluding planned maintenance windows.
Intuitive	Our software interfaces need to be intuitive.	This statement is subjective and varies with the user experience and background. It doesn't specify what makes the interface intuitive to the target audience.	"Who are the primary users, and what common tasks will they perform?"	The interface should allow users to complete all basic operations without prior training, with tasks not requiring more than three steps.
Compatibility	Our software should be compatible with all major systems and multiple devices.	This does not specify which systems or versions are considered "major," nor does it spell out which devices or operating systems it should be compatible with. And it does not address how extensive the compatibility should be.	What specific devices, platforms and operating systems must the application support? Are there legacy systems it needs to integrate with?	The application must be compatible with the latest versions of iOS, Android, Windows, and macOS.
Up-to-date	Ensure the system is always up-to-date	Could mean regular updates, latest software versions, or current data	How frequently should the system information or components be updated and what type of updates are you expecting (e.g., security, features)?	The system should receive automatic updates monthly to ensure all components are running the latest software versions and security patches.

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Scalable	We need a scalable storage solutions.	<p>The statement lacks specifics parameters or limits about the scalability expectations and rate of expansion.</p> <p>Is the client referring to about user load, data volume, or transaction capacity?</p>	<p>How quickly do you need to be able to scale up or down?</p> <p>What are the scalability expectations in terms of user growth, data volume, and transaction throughput over the next 6 months, 1 year or 5 years?</p>	The storage system must start with 10 TB capacity and expand up to 100 TB without major system overhauls.
White glove	We want white glove service for our clients.	<p>Could mean high-end, full, or premium service, personalized service often involving installation, setup, and support.</p>	<p>Can you specify the type of services do you expect as part of this 'white glove' experience?</p> <p>Can you describe a scenario where this level of service has been met or not met in the past?</p>	The service shall include full installation, personalized setup according to user specifications, training for all end-users, and a dedicated support/service representative for 30 days post-installation.
Optimized	Ensure the process is optimized for mobile use.	<p>There is no context associated with this requirement. What needs to be optimized (speed, cost, efficiency) and against which benchmarks or goals?</p>	<p>What are the critical features and functions that need optimisation?</p> <p>What are the current benchmarks, and what improvements are you targeting?</p>	System optimizations should reduce CPU usage by at least 20% during peak operation hours without sacrificing output accuracy or speed.
Cutting-edge / State-of-the-art Technology	We need our system to incorporate cutting-edge technology to stay ahead of competitors	<p>Could refer to the latest technology, innovative features, or industry-leading standards.</p>	<p>What technologies or practices do you consider state-of-the-art that should be included?</p>	The platform will incorporate real-time data analytics, AI capabilities, and new security features ensuring it employs the latest available technologies for performance enhancement recognized as advanced as of [year].

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Integrated	Our solution must be fully integrated with our existing tools.	Could mean compatibility with specific software, use of APIs, or modular design.	What third-party system, software, platforms, service or plugins do you need the system to integrate with?	The system shall provide RESTful API support for integration with Github, Salesforce and Oracle ERP systems.
Simple	The interface should be simple for anyone to use.	"Simple" can vary greatly in interpretation; what is simple for one user might be complex for another. It lacks detail on specific elements that make the interface user-friendly. Could refer to minimalistic design, ease of use, or intuitive layout.	Can you describe the level of simplicity you are aiming for, perhaps with examples? What are the most important functionalities that need to be easily accessible?	The user interface shall feature a minimalist design with no more than 5 buttons on the home screen and an intuitive navigation menu.
Exciting / Lively / Catchy / Fresh	The design should be exciting and catchy to attract people	These adjectives are subjective and don't provide concrete design elements or how these qualities are measured or achieved. Could mean a vibrant design, visual or animated components, interactive element or aesthetical aspects that make the product appealing to younger or wider demographics.	What visual elements or styles are essential for the desired aesthetic? Can you provide examples of apps that embody the 'exciting' qualities you are looking for?	The app shall include animated transitions, a vibrant color scheme, and interactive quizzes or a chatbot to engage users effectively.
	We expect the final product to be of high quality.	"high quality" is subjective and needs clarification on specific quality metrics or standards to be met. Generally, it means the product or service meets or exceeds customer expectations and is fit for its intended use.	What specific criteria or performance metrics do you use to define quality for this product/service? Might refer to the absence of defects, user satisfaction, or meeting specific standards.	The product shall meet specific customer requirements as defined in the design documentation, ensuring functionality, reliability, and user satisfaction are aligned with the intended purpose of the product.
Compliant	The software must be compliant with industry standards.	Which industry standards or regulations are relevant and how will compliance be demonstrated or met?	What legal or industry standards must the frontend comply with?	Product must comply with relevant standards such as POPIA, ADA, GDPR, or HIPAA.

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Agile	Ensure the development is agile to keep up with market changes.	<p>The statement does not specify which aspects of Agile are desired or how they should be implemented.</p> <p>While it references the desire to keep up with market changes, it lacks details on the specific agile methodologies to be implemented or how frequently market analysis and adjustments should occur.</p>	<p>Are you referring to Agile software development practices, or are you looking for general agility in how we manage the project?</p> <p>How do you envision the involvement of your team and our team in the Agile process and what roles do you see each party playing?</p> <p>Are you looking for continuous delivery, bi-weekly sprints, or other specific time frames?</p>	<p>The MVP should have 4 weeks sprints and follow the Scrum or Kanban framework as the primary method for managing development.</p> <p>All deliverables must pass predefined acceptance criteria before being considered complete.</p>
Customizable	We need customizable features on the system.	Customizable implies that users or admins have options to alter certain aspects of the system to their preference such as adaptable interfaces.	What aspects of the product should end-users be able to personalize or modify?	The product must allow users/admins to customize the layout, choose from a range of themes and colors, add, or remove widgets as per their preference.
Future-proof	The system should be future-proof to accommodate upcoming changes	<p>"Future-proof" is ambiguous as it does not specify the expected types of changes, or the time frame considered.</p> <p>Changes may refer to capability of adapting to future technological advancements or expanding business needs.</p> <p>Also, may refer to Maintainability, updates, and support to remain functional and competitive.</p>	<p>What future technologies or business expansions do you foresee that the system should accommodate?</p> <p>How do you envision managing updates and maintenance for the software?</p>	<p>The system design should have a modular architecture to easily integrate new technologies and scale up for up to 50% more users within the next five years without significant modifications.</p> <p>The software will be supported with regular updates for new features and security patches on a biannual basis for the next ten years, with a subscription plan for continued support thereafter.</p>