



## Groom your backlog like a boss with Jira Software

PUBLISHED JANUARY 9, 2018 IN  
JIRA SOFTWARE

 CARLOS KHATCHIKIAN  
Jira Mobile Team Lead

“

Just create a ticket and we'll put it in the backlog.

How many times have you heard – or said – this?

It's so easy to let the projects, requests, and bugs pile up in your backlog until you can't even remember what these tickets were in the first place. And it can feel like an impossible task to even sort through them: prioritizing what to work on first and comparing which tickets are more important than others. In this article, I will cover three things you can do today make your backlog work for you, instead of against you.

### We'll cover:

- How to align your team to your backlog
- How to use Jira software to manage your backlog
- How to use relative sizing to make planning faster

### Match your team to your backlog

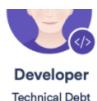
You're not going to be able to tackle your backlog all on your own. That is why making sure your team is pitching in to the issues in your backlog is so important.

“

“The goal is to shift away from long, drawn-out, low-context meetings and towards efficient assignments, priorities getting handled, and teams working together to understand the big picture.” – Grzegorz Majchrzak, Development Manager @Spartez

Think about the variety of roles on your team, the priorities your team members have, and the skillsets represented. Everyone will value your backlog tasks differently. For instance, an engineer will likely get excited about building a new feature, whereas a QA engineer will want you to tackle the growing pile of bugs.





**Developer**  
Technical Debt



**Product Manager**  
Feature



**Quality**  
Bug

As a team lead, it's your job to rally everyone to focus on what will be most important to your goals using the skills each team member has. Remember, no one type of task is more important than the other. That will depend upon your product.

Keep your own bias in mind, too – no doubt you have a particular bent on things that will influence how you want to prioritize issues.

In order to make everyone's voice heard, agree on the amount of time you are going to dedicate to each specific category: technical debt, new features, and bugs. When we started this on my team we had hundreds of items in the backlog, and this method of prioritization has worked well for us.

#### We dedicate our time like this:

- **70% of time:** new features
- **15% of time:** bug fixing
- **15% of time:** technical debt



**Pro tip:** We learned that the highest percentage items always tend to overcome the lower percentage items. So, we started off addressing the lower percentages early on in our sprint before getting to shipping features later in the sprint. It also doesn't hurt to get some quick wins early on in the sprint so everyone's feeling nice and productive.

## Bring in Jira Software for backlog grooming

Like you might do, we organize all our work in [Jira Software](#).

The workflow we have found to be most helpful takes a little bit of creative thinking, but we think it works great. Here's what we do:

- Organize tickets into categories like technical debt, bugs, feature requests, etc. We create fake sprints for each category, but never start them. We just use them as a visual guide.
- Then, we start moving issues from our huge backlog to a specific category. Leave the "backlog" for the product manager.
- When we create our sprints, we drag these issues into their corresponding sprint and see the story points they require.

The great thing about this system is you can see what issues you have in each category and you will notice if it's piling up. You also aren't forced into comparing the importance of feature requests to bugs and technical debt, you can compare each item in its category to others like it. If the items in each category are growing, this may tell you you should adjust your percentages.

## Relative sizing, relative mass valuation

Relative mass valuation is a quick way to estimate a large amount of stories as they relate to each other. This process has been faster for us than planning poker, more specific than t-shirt sizing, and we've made some of our own

When editing labels issue scrolls and it is annoying  
 Epic link colour incorrect  
 Json Parsing error viewing an issue

+ Create Issue

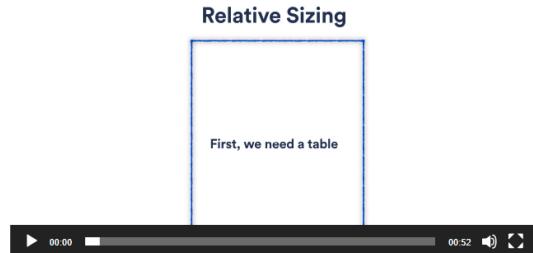
The great thing about this system is you can see what issues you have in each category and you will notice if it's piling up. You also aren't forced into comparing the importance of feature requests to bugs and technical debt, you can compare each item in its category to others like it. If the items in each category are growing, this may tell you you should adjust your percentages.

## Relative sizing, relative mass valuation

Relative mass valuation is a quick way to estimate a large amount of stories as they relate to each other. This process has been faster for us than planning poker, more specific than t-shirt sizing, and we've made some of our own adjustments. Here are our steps:

1. Get around a big table.
2. Print the cards from Jira. You can choose card size, and what to print (you can also get on [Atlassian marketplace app](#) for this).
3. Take a break from your screen and do some manual work to cut the cards.
4. Stand around the table with the papers and distribute them. It doesn't matter who gets what card.
5. Put a card on the table, use the table to measure. (For instance, the make the top of the table "the hardest thing" and the bottom of the table "the easiest thing.")
6. As the second card comes in ask, "Is it easier than, harder than, or equal to the previous task?" And so on with the following cards.
7. Draw lines when you see there is a specific distinction of effort.
8. Assign story points.

Here's a quick tutorial video I put together:



“

When just looking at a screen, it is easy for people to zone out and start thinking of the next thing they need to do. With cards in front of you, it becomes more focused and interactive than one would expect.”

-Stephen Costanzo, Agile Coach @ T-Mobile

**Pro tip:** Keep your cards from each sprint and evaluate which ones were correctly measured. Then, use them as a baseline for future planning.

## In sum

Having a healthy backlog means having a healthy team. Where expectations are clear, where you have a tool that helps you keep expectations high, and you have a process light enough to make everyone feel like a part of it.

Always remember: Empower your team. Process is just as important as finished product.



Use Relative sizing to make planning faster  
Get the best of your team's time

This talk was given at Atlassian Summit 2017. To hear Carlos' full presentation, check it out [here](#).

ABOUT THIS ARTICLE  
Published January 9, 2018

ABOUT THE AUTHOR  
CARLOS KHATCHIKIAN  
Jira Mobile Team Lead



### RELATED CONTENT

#### More in 'Jira Software'



JIRA SOFTWARE  
Introducing flexible terminology for Jira Software Data Center



JIRA SOFTWARE  
Advanced roadmaps is now part of Jira Software Data Center



JQL: the most flexible way  
to search Jira



Link Jira issues to  
Confluence pages  
automatically

MORE COLLECTIONS

COLLECTION

## Bring Your Full Self to Work

Teams are made up of individuals, and they function best when each member is happy, healthy, and productive. These stories will show you how to grow your skills, make your own path, and become the best version of yourself.

[VIEW COLLECTION](#)



COLLECTION

## Work Life Balance

Work life balance: everyone wants it, few know how to attain it. But once you do, you'll be amazed as the stress of work and life melt away, your productivity soars, and your personal life feels, well, like yours. Dive into all the different elements that make up a work life balance.

[VIEW COLLECTION](#)



COLLECTION

## The Future of Work

Whether you dread what the future holds for workers or embrace it with open arms, there's a lot to know and discover. We report on industry trends and broader economic forces to help you (and your career) stay ahead of the curve.

[VIEW COLLECTION](#)



SUBSCRIBE TO OUR NEWSLETTER

## WORK LIFE

By ATlassian

Culture, tech, teams, and tips, delivered twice a month

[Subscribe Now](#)

[Atlassian.com](#)   [Terms of Use](#)   [Privacy Policy](#)   Copyright © 2021 Atlassian