



# Interview Questions for Agile Business Analyst

## Intro

### Why this list?

When looking for a new IT Business Analyst to join the team, sometimes interviews pop up in the calendar very unexpectedly and at the last minute. I like to be prepared for cases like these.

That's why I created a list of questions which I keep handy and can use as a basis when meeting a candidate. Every interview is unique, but having such template helps me structure the conversation and remember good questions that suit to the context of a particular interview.

This list is not in any way a "plan for the interview". It is just a collection of questions to help me remember good and useful ones when I need them.

### What I expect?

Even though I come to the interview with some expected answers in mind, I also assume that candidates with different work experiences will have different opinions and approaches.

So in most cases what I really look for is:

- **confidence** and **dynamics of the conversation** that comes from simply doing Business Analysis work before and knowing what one talks about,
- **clearly formulated opinions** based on knowledge and practice,

- **positivity** and **enthusiasm** when we speak about approaches which candidates consider “working” and “effective”,
- **empathy** and **communication skills** when the candidates listen to the questions and structure their answers.

## Agile context

In Agile settings work of IT Business Analyst changed, often there is less emphasis on formal analysis and some BA tasks could overlap with what Product Owners/Managers are doing (so these domains of knowledge become very important to master).

Understanding the role of BA in Agile context, being able to adapt, learn and find ways to bring value are the key aspects to look for in the candidate during the interviews and other types of assessment.

# Questions

## Business Analyst in Agile environment

- **How would you describe your typical project approach? Describe the general phases or types of artifacts you might create as well as the way to customise this process depending on the project.**

Here I am looking for a clear and systematic approach, ability to look at the project lifecycle as a whole as well as diving down into specific details and coming back to previous high level without losing the context of the explanation.

I appreciate if the candidate wants to visualise the process, identifies the phases, the cycles, mentions specific deliverables and relationships/dependencies between the objects, etc.

- **What is the day to day activity of Business Analyst in a Scrum team during one Agile Iteration (e.g. one Sprint in Scrum)?**

*Alternative version of this question:* **As an Agile Business Analyst in a Scrum team how would you describe your cooperation with a) Product Owner/Manager and b) Development team?**

Here I expect tasks like these to be mentioned:

- Help the Team with understanding/clarifying requirements for the current Iteration;
- Work with QAs on creating/validating test cases/scenarios/suites;
- Pick up review/documentations tasks;
- Take part in UX/UI activities/discussions;
- Participate in data-modelling activities;
- Participate in architecture/design sessions;
- Work with Product Owner on clarifying requirements for next couple of Iterations;
- Help organise Grooming sessions and update Product backlog afterwards; etc.

If Business Analyst is a part of Scrum Development team (and not e.g. a Product Management team), I also expect an answer like “if all my tasks are done or blocked (and this is properly communicated and escalated) I will act like a cross-functional team member and pick up any other task on a board which fits my skills”.

- **From your own experience, what do you consider well written User Story? What criteria do you use in your own work?**

Here I would love to hear READY criteria mentioned as well as candidates’ preferred way of validating Stories written by them or other people.

- **What is your preferred tools to maintain Product Backlog? What were the limitations of the tools you tried?**

Excel? Stack of index cards? Jira and Atlassian suite? Something more Product Management specific? When the candidate explains the limitations, it will quickly show the extend of their experience with a particular tool and Product Backlog activities in general.

- **How do you handle non-functional requirements in Product Backlog?  
Could you give me several examples from your practice?**

Again, for the person who solved this issue for their Project it would not be a hard question. There can be several ways of dealing with non-functionals in a Backlog, the challenge is rather:

- a. not to forget about them,
- b. find the format of capturing them that is acceptable for everyone involved (PO, BA, Dev team, etc.) and
- c. keep documenting them consistently in the chosen format so they can be implemented and tested.

- **When the Backlog Grooming takes place and in what form? What are the best practices you prefer?**

If the candidate prepared and participated in Backlog Grooming process before, they would have a clear vision on this topic. Even bad previous experiences will give them ideas about the ways they would want to run Groomings and things to avoid in the future (which is still very valuable).

- **What other techniques of capturing requirements you use and/or find useful in Agile settings?**

Many techniques can be spoken about here, I am always happy when the following are mentioned:

- User Story mapping
- User Journeys / User Scenarios / Storyboards
- Visual requirements capturing (including e.g. UI mock-ups)
- Product Board
- Lean Startup Hypothesis
- Flowcharting and more formal methods like UML / BPMN for complex Products
- etc.

As well as techniques of requirements elicitation like *5 whys*, *interviews*, *users shadowing*, *prototyping*, etc.

- **What are your preferred Prototyping techniques?**

High fidelity prototypes in Invision? Mockups in Balsamiq? Basic sketches in Gliffy? Drawings on the napkins? All is good if it does the job and brings the necessary results.

- **How do you handle Technical Debt and Defects? Do you include them into Product Backlog?**

Again, what is needed here is a description of a clear and consistent approach of managing both Technical Debt and Defects as well as reasons for it based on practice and experience.

- **What is your favourite way of creating "Personas" for your Product?**

Here my assumption is that the term "Personas" would not be a surprise for Agile BA. I expect to hear how they approached this task in the past, how and on what basis they would create initial versions, how and why they would update their "Personas" documents, and how they would use them in everyday practice.

If the candidate does not have an experience, this question can be used as an interview task: we can take a well known product like Twitter or Skype and identify Personas (or at least "types/groups of users and their characteristics") together. This will show candidate's analytical skills, systematic approach, creativity, etc.

- **What metrics do you consider important for "product related activities" in Agile project?**

Metrics is a broad subject and depend on the Product type, chosen methodology and Project phase. But experienced candidate would be able either to clarify the phase and context and then tailor their answer accordingly or at least identify some universal/popular metrics that may seem suitable for the Product/company, e.g.:

- AARRR,
- selected KPIs,
- Release burndown,
- Sprint Goals achieved vs. planned,
- Tech Debt and # of Defects and all derivatives from both,
- even simple Scrum velocity or
- Kanban WIP/cycle time/lead time/throughput.

- **How important the relationship with the Development Team are for you? And how you go about creating and maintaining them?**
- **If you realise in the middle of the iteration that you forgot important part of the User Story? What are your next steps? What if the absence of this important requirement influenced a big architectural decision in a way that it negative to the project's future and expensive to fix?**

### Practical questions / tasks

- **Could you give me an example of the User Story which is ready to go into the Backlog Grooming?**

Here we can choose well known product like Twitter or Skype or a software for a fancy coffee machine and write User Story together identifying the parts which need to be checked and ready before the Grooming process.

- **Take a well known product like Twitter or Skype or LinkedIn and: 1) identify 7-10 most important Epics and 2) take two major Epics and break them down into User Stories using your preferred technique. Take 10-15 minutes for the preparation if you want/need.**

This task very effectively reveals how the candidate works, how they structure the answer, whether they look at the functionality from user scenarios/journey point of view, how they formulate and group Epics and Stories and what techniques they use (Mind map? Flowchart? Diagram? User Story map? Other?)

### New Project / Product

There is a difference between joining an established team in the middle of Product development and joining a brand new team tasked with creating brand new Product. For the latter cases it is useful to ask some targeted questions:

- **In a new Product how do you go from zero requirements to established Product Backlog?**
- **In your opinion what is the role of BA in Product Discovery phase? What specific activities and deliverables could you identify?**

- **How do you learn about stakeholders on the new project? What methods of inquiry do you use and how do you manage information you learn?**

## Other BA Skills

Skills that are not that specific to Agile environment, but very useful in everyday project work and in accessing candidates' experiences:

- **What is your experience with UI mockups creation? What tools have you used / liked and why?**
- **What is your experience in Data modelling?**
- **What is your experience in UX?**
- **Do you have experience working with UML or BPN? Could you explain why you needed them?**
- **Did you have an experience of Business Processes documenting? What were the challenges you encountered during this activity?**

## Stakeholders' management


Working with Stakeholders is one of the key aspects of the Project, and assessing candidates' experience in this area is essential:

- **How do you identify challenging stakeholders? How do you manage relationship with them?**
- **How do you handle changes to requirements coming from or affecting your stakeholders? Could you give several examples from your previous projects?**

## General

Working in IT and in Agile Teams requires not just specific BA skills, but also constant learning, keeping up with industry trends, knowledge management, and many others.

- **What professional blogs do you read?**
- **What books on IT Business Analysis /Product Management /UX / Agile have you read recently?**

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- **How in general you manage keeping up with new trends in Software Development?**
  - **How do you organise your own knowledge management? How do you make sure you don't forget things you learned recently?**
  - **Do you use any methods of time management or self-organization?**
  - **How do you make your work fun?**