

Role-Play: Eliciting Requirements from a "Difficult Client"

Scenario: You are a Business Analyst (BA) for a software firm. The client is the founder of "QuickMeal," a startup aiming to build a new food delivery app. The client has strong opinions but is vague on details, frequently changes their mind, and has unrealistic expectations about timelines.

Participants:

- **Alex (Client):** The "difficult" client. Passionate, visionary, but impatient and inconsistent.
- **Jamie (BA):** The Business Analyst. Your role.

In this role-play scenario, the Business Analyst, Jamie, begins by setting a clear agenda for the requirements discovery session with the client, Alex, seeking agreement to explore core features from the user's perspective. Alex immediately demonstrates classic difficulties by jumping to a solution list of advanced features like AI recommendations and drone tracking, while insisting on an unrealistic three-month launch timeline. Jamie employs active listening and probing questions, acknowledging the vision but redirecting the conversation to uncover the underlying problems. By asking about the main issue QuickMeal will solve and the primary user focus, Jamie shifts the discussion from vague features to specific pain points.

Alex identifies busy professionals as the target user, citing frustrations with late orders, cold food, and poor recommendations. Jamie seizes this specific insight to introduce requirement prioritization, implicitly using a MoSCoW framework to distinguish between core needs and enhancements. By prompting Alex to choose the absolute core value proposition, Jamie guides the client to isolate reliable delivery and hot food as the foundational "Must Have," successfully deferring the AI features. This creates a crucial anchor for the project's scope.

To make the requirement concrete and avoid ambiguity, Jamie then introduces user personas and storyboarding, proposing to prototype the user journey together. Visualizing the steps of a typical user, Sam, helps ground the conversation. When Alex interjects with a desire for a complex live tracking map, Jamie manages scope by acknowledging the idea as a "Could Have" enhancement, but immediately links the discussion back to the core "Must Have" of reliability. By offering a simpler, clear ETA and status updates as a potential solution, Jamie balances client input with practical feasibility.

Finally, Jamie quantifies the requirement by defining what "on time" delivery means, establishing a measurable metric of 45 minutes. After confirming this, Jamie concludes with active summarization and clear next steps, recapping the core user, primary problem, key requirement, success metric, and deferred features. This ensures a shared understanding and formally documents the decisions, to which Alex agrees, appreciating the clearer, focused approach. The session demonstrates how structured techniques can align a passionate but inconsistent client, transforming vague ambitions into a prioritized, actionable project foundation.