

## Summary

A sprint retrospective is a type of meeting within the Agile framework, when teams reflect on what went well and what could be improved for their next sprint. Retrospectives are essential to continuously improve your sprint process and ensure key learnings are incorporated for next time. Read on to learn how to run a sprint retrospective, plus solutions to common pitfalls.

### What is a sprint retrospective?

A sprint retrospective is a type of meeting within the [Agile framework](#) that happens at the end of a sprint. During a sprint retrospective, teams reflect on what went well and what could be improved for their next sprint.

In [Scrum](#), a sprint is usually a two-week long working session with specific deliverables at the end. Organizing work this way gives teams the focus they need to work quickly, plus the opportunity to improve and [iterate their process](#) during each subsequent sprint. That's why a sprint retrospective is an essential part of the Scrum process—it gives teams a chance to reflect and [continuously improve](#) their sprint process.

### Sprint retrospective vs. sprint review meeting

A sprint review meeting also happens at the end of the sprint—but instead of focusing on improving processes, it's an opportunity for the Agile or Scrum team to showcase the work they accomplished. During a sprint review meeting, the team typically presents their accomplishments using product demos, which help cross-functional stakeholders visualize and understand each deliverable.

Alternatively, the purpose of the sprint retrospective is to identify processes that worked and didn't work during the sprint. This meeting is less focused on specific deliverables, and more focused on process improvements to optimize your team's sprint workflow.

### Who needs a sprint retrospective?

If your team uses Scrum, you should conduct a retrospective at the end of each sprint. Scrum is a type of [Agile methodology](#) most commonly used by product, engineering, or software development teams. However, any team that wants to build and iterate quickly can benefit from using Scrum and conducting regular sprint retrospectives.

And even if your team doesn't work in sprints, you can still conduct retrospectives whenever you finish a project or achieve a goal. That way, you can learn from your experiences and incorporate those learnings into your next project.

### Who attends a sprint retrospective?

Only immediate team members who worked on tasks during the past sprint should attend a sprint retrospective. This includes the [Scrum master](#) (aka the Scrum team leader) who facilitates the meeting, individual team members, and sometimes the product owner. Typically, everyone who attends daily Scrum (aka [standups](#)) should be included in the sprint retrospective.

Stakeholders and managers who aren't directly part of the team don't usually attend a sprint retrospective. That's because a retrospective is really about the product team—it's a place for each team member to give feedback and brainstorm ways to improve their sprint process. Restricting attendance at sprint retrospective meetings helps the product team stay focused and feel comfortable expressing things that went wrong.

While cross-functional stakeholders and managers don't attend sprint retrospectives, they do attend sprint review meetings.

### **Benefits of a sprint retrospective meeting**

[Continuous improvement over time](#) is a core principle of the Scrum framework. That's why a retrospective is built into each sprint—so the Scrum team always has an opportunity to record and incorporate their learnings into the next sprint cycle. That way, each individual sprint functions as a learning cycle for teams to refine their [sprint planning](#) process.

A sprint retrospective helps your team accomplish the following:

- Celebrate (and continue doing) things that are going well. For example, you could use a sprint retrospective to acknowledge and support your team's proactive communication when tasks took longer than expected. Positive feedback not only provides clarity on what the team should keep doing—it also keeps your team engaged, promotes teamwork, and [reduces the negative effects](#) of stress.
- Identify areas for improvement. For example, your team could suggest changing the way they estimate how long each task will take to complete. Or, you might want to improve your [backlog refinement](#) process to ensure similar tasks are batched together. Identifying ways to optimize your sprint process is essential—because without constructive feedback, you and your team can't improve.
- Create a plan to implement improvements to the sprint planning process. Suggesting improvements is one thing, and implementing them is another. During a sprint retrospective, your team decides on concrete action items to carry over into the upcoming sprint. For example, you could decide to implement a pointing system to estimate time requirements for each task. Creating action items ensures that you and your team are accountable for implementing improvements to the sprint process.

### **Sprint retrospective meeting agenda**

There isn't one way to run a sprint retrospective meeting. Over time you'll learn what works best for your team, and you can tailor and refine your sprint retrospective agenda accordingly. Creating a standard agenda template makes it easy to share with your team and collect feedback in advance. That way, you can make sure your discussion is as informed as possible.

But to start with, make sure your agenda covers these basic steps:

#### **1. Set the goal of the meeting**

Establishing the goal of your sprint retrospective up front helps your team focus on the task at hand. When you set a goal, you ensure everyone is working towards the same thing. To do this, spend

some time brainstorming what a sprint retrospective means to your team. That way, you can use that goal to guide every meeting going forward. For example, your team's goal may focus on providing candid and constructive feedback in order to improve the sprint planning process—rather than placing blame for things that went wrong.

## 2. Collect team feedback

Your team is the best source of information you have to improve your sprint process. They're the ones doing the day-to-day work, so their input is key to make sure your sprint runs smoothly. Plus, gathering feedback directly from your team helps ensure the sprint process works for everyone's individual work styles and needs.

Send each team member these questions 1-2 days before your sprint retrospective meeting, so they can brainstorm and provide feedback before the meeting.

- What went well during the last sprint?
- What didn't go well?
- What did we learn?
- What should we do differently next time?

To make things simple, share these questions alongside your [meeting agenda](#) (since you're also sending that in advance). And if you opt to use a project management tool like [Asana](#), you can streamline things even further—for example, you can share your agenda and gather feedback all in one place with a [sprint retrospective template](#).

Some Scrum teams use an even simpler approach to gather feedback called the start-stop-continue method. With this approach, each team member identifies things the team should start doing, stop doing, and continue doing.

## 3. Draw insights

Now that you've gathered data from your team [asynchronously](#), you can identify patterns and common threads during the retrospective meeting itself. These can be pain points that multiple team members share, key learnings to carry over into future sprints, or practices from the previous sprint that are working for the team. Identifying patterns helps you prioritize which action items your team should set for the next sprint. For example, if multiple team members flag that they didn't have sufficient information to complete tasks, that's something you should address with an action item.

If you can, find a way to share your screen or collaborate on a shared document or whiteboard with your entire team during the retrospective. That way, people can see you're taking notes, jotting down action items, and seriously considering each person's feedback. This is a good way to jump start engagement and turn conversations into actionable steps—especially if it's your first time running a retrospective meeting.

## 4. Set action items

Now it's time to create [action items](#) to address common pain points. Action items are concrete next steps with clear owners and deadlines—so you and your team are accountable for ensuring next steps are completed. Setting action items during your sprint retrospective provides clarity on who's doing what, when. Plus, it helps your team understand why each action item is important for the group's success.

To continue the example above, if multiple team members share that they didn't have sufficient information to complete tasks, you could create an action item to collect more context from stakeholders during sprint backlog refinement.

## 5. Close the meeting

Set aside a few minutes at the end of your sprint retrospective to close out your meeting. During your closing, briefly summarize the meeting, thank everyone for their participation, and identify how you'll share action items with the group. Formally closing your retrospective demonstrates that you value your team's time and contributions. Plus, it ensures that everyone is on the same page going forward.

## Common pitfalls of sprint retrospectives, plus solutions

Sprint retrospective meetings can be difficult to navigate, especially if it's your first time planning one. Here are some common pitfalls to watch out for—plus solutions to stop them in their tracks.

### Running out of time

There's a lot to cover during agile retrospectives, so it's common for these meetings to run well over their allotted time. Luckily, you can keep your retrospective on track with a couple simple solutions:

- Create and share an agenda in advance. Creating a clear meeting agenda is one of the best ways to run an efficient meeting. Your agenda should include a list of topics to discuss, plus allotted time for each. This helps you stay focused, move on to the next topic when needed, and ensure you get to everything on the agenda. Sharing your agenda in advance also saves time, because it helps team members arrive prepared and ready to contribute.
- Consider how long your meeting should last. Make sure you set aside enough time to complete everything on your sprint retrospective agenda. The length of your meeting may vary depending on your particular circumstances—like how many team members you have, the length of your sprint, and if there are any new team members that need to be brought up to speed on the retrospective process. As a general rule, you should set aside 45 minutes for a week-long sprint, 1.5 hours for a two-week sprint, 2.25 hours for a three-week sprint, and three hours for a month-long sprint. Be sure to build in short breaks every 30 minutes for longer sessions, especially if you're meeting virtually. [Research suggests](#) that it's hard to focus past 30 minutes during a video call.

### Lack of engagement

Sharing feedback is hard—especially if team members don't feel comfortable sharing pain points or feel like their input isn't valued. But in order for you to improve your sprint process, you need

constructive feedback from your team. Here are some ways to boost engagement and ensure everyone is set up to contribute successfully:

- Share prompts in advance so team members can come prepared with their thoughts. It can be hard for people to think on their feet, especially when they feel like they're on the spot. Instead of posing difficult questions for the first time during your retrospective meeting, send out a list of prompts at least a few days in advance. These can include questions like what went well, what didn't go well, and what the team should do differently next time.
- Break the ice. Start with an [icebreaker question](#) to set a fun and collaborative tone for your meeting. Fan favorites include "Is a hot dog a sandwich," "If you were a potato, how would you like to be cooked," and "If you had to email the CEO an emoji right now, what would it be?"
- Show gratitude. If you want your team to share feedback, you need to create a safe space and demonstrate that their experiences and input matter. That means when team members do speak up, you should [listen actively](#) and write down their input to show it's valued. And remember to sincerely thank your team members for their contributions—especially if their feedback is constructive. Giving constructive feedback is hard, but it's also a critical component to improve your sprint process.

[Read: How to give and take constructive criticism](#)

Unclear next steps

Picture this: You spend hours giving and collecting constructive feedback, close out your retrospective meeting, and then... nothing happens. No follow-up, no action items, nothing is changed. Ouch.

To prevent that painful scenario from happening, make sure to document and follow through on the insights gathered during your sprint retrospective. Here's how:

- Take notes and share your screen if possible. The Scrum master or [product manager](#) is the meeting facilitator and should take notes during a sprint retrospective meeting. That way, team members can concentrate on giving feedback. [Meeting notes](#) are essential to help you remember important points and action items to follow up on. And while note-taking methods vary, the most important things to include are topics discussed, key decisions, and action items.
- Follow up with action items. Setting concrete action items is the best way to follow through on feedback and fulfill the purpose of a sprint retrospective—to continuously improve your sprint process. Great action items have a clear owner, a deadline, and a description that starts with a verb so there's no ambiguity about what needs to be done. For example, "[Gather task context](#) from stakeholders before backlog refinement" is much clearer than just "More task context."
- Make information accessible. Notes and action items are great, but they're not much help if you can't easily share them with your team. Instead of passing along documents and emails that can easily get lost, consider organizing your sprint retrospective with a project

management tool like [Asana](#). That way, you can circulate your meeting agenda, take notes in real-time, and assign action items all in the same place. And if you also use Asana to coordinate your sprint, your team doesn't have to switch back and forth between different tools to get the information they need.