

Effective User Stories



User Story Narrative

As a <Consumer of the value>
I want to <Functionality (What)>
so that <Value/benefit (Why)>

Tips

- Write stories from the end user perspective (user can be a system)
- Understand **what** the user wants and **why** (not *how*)
- Don't assume just one kind of user of the system
- Don't confuse user stories with tasks. **Stories** describe what the user wants and why. **Tasks** are how we will achieve the goal/benefit of the story.

Acceptance Criteria

Scenario 1: <summary of test>
Given <precondition or assumption>
And <additional precondition>
When <perform an action>
And <perform additional action>
Then <this outcome will result>
And <an additional outcome>

Acceptance Criteria are essentially a measure of whether a User Story has been correctly completed. A story may have multiple scenarios to define the acceptance criteria. They also help define the scope and create a shared understanding of the story.

INVEST for Better Stories

Independent: Story can be valued, developed, and delivered on its own

Negotiable: It's a placeholder for requirements to be discussed, developed, and accepted

Valuable: Provides value to the user

Estimable: Small enough so effort to implement can be rapidly determined

Small: Small enough to fit into a single sprint but large enough to be valuable

Testable: Acceptance criteria is testable by Testers or Business Users

User Story Example and Common Problems

Example

As a customer service agent, I want to know the customer's benefits payment amount so that I can see that information and relay it to the customer.

Acceptance Criteria

Scenario 1: Calculate benefits payment - Active

Given that a customer has a benefits plan on file associated with their account

And the benefits plan is active

When the system receives a request to calculate a benefits payment

Then the benefits payment amount is correctly calculated and displayed to the customer service agent

Scenario 2: Calculate benefits payment - Closed

Given that a customer has a benefits plan on file associated with their account

And the benefits plan is closed/not active

When the system receives a request to calculate a benefits payment

Then the system will return a message stating that the customer does not have an active benefits plan

And the system will return a benefit of \$0.00

Scenario 3: . . .

Common Problems to Avoid

- **Not having a conversation**
 - A rich conversation with the team is needed to ensure a common understanding. Use whiteboards or other medium to communicate and ideate on the story.
- **Using User Stories for everything - even tasks**
 - Don't confuse stories (the 'Who', 'What', and 'Why') with tasks (the 'How')
 - Stating the 'how' in a story leads to limiting the solution. The team may come up with a better solution if they are aligned to the goal and have autonomy to find a good solution.
- **Undefined or wrong user (As a "user", As a "Developer", As a 'Product Owner', etc.)**
 - Example: "As a developer, I want to replaced the application widget, so that I have maintained the app widget." The Developer role is sometimes used to address issues of technical debt or spikes.
 - Identifying the correct user leads to a solution that better meets the needs of that user
- **No Acceptance Criteria**
 - Can cause the wrong definition of development tasks or the wrong estimation.
 - Story can fail tests or test cases will cover different criteria due to lack of understanding.
 - A good way of discovering Acceptance Criteria is asking questions such as 'What if ...?', 'Where ...?', 'When ...?', 'How will we know we're done?'.