

pichler

(/)

10 Tips for Writing Good User Stories

Posted on Thursday 7th October 2010

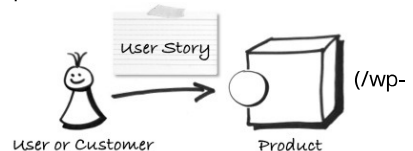
Summary

User stories are probably the most popular agile technique to capture product functionality: Working with user stories is easy. But writing good stories can be hard. The following ten tips help you create good stories.

1. Focus on the user ([../..../agile-product-innovation/focus-on-the-user-not-the-product/](#))

As its name suggests, a user story tells a story about a customer or user employing the product. Write therefore stories from the

user's perspective and show how a user or customer uses some product functionality.



[content/uploads/2010/10/UserStoryOverview.jpg](#)

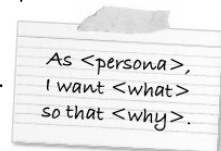
2. Write stories collaboratively

A user story is not a specification, but an communication and collaboration tool. Stories should not be handed off to the development team but be complemented by a conversation: Product owner ([../..../roles/one-page-product-owner/](#)) and team should talk about stories, or even better, write them together: Invite the team to create and detail the stories together. This leverages the creativity and the knowledge of the team and usually results in better user stories.

3. Keep your stories simple and concise

Write your stories so that they are easy to understand. Keep them simple and concise. Avoid confusing and ambiguous terms, and use active voice. Focus on what's important, and leave out non-essential information. The following template puts the user or customer into the story and makes its benefit explicit. But use the template only if it is helpful. Try out different ways to write your

stories to understand what works best for you.



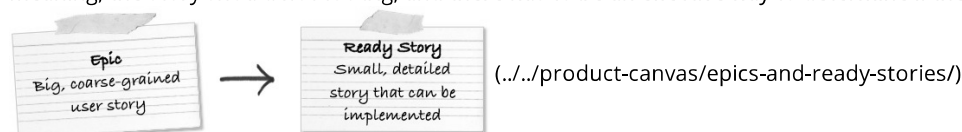
[\(/wp-content/uploads/2010/10/StoryTemplate.jpg\)](#)

4. Start with epics

Epics are big, coarse-grained user stories. Starting with epics allows you to sketch the product functionality without committing to the details. This is particularly helpful for new products and new features, as it buys you time to learn more about the users and how to best meet their needs. It also reduces the time and effort required to integrate new insights: If you have lots of detailed stories, then it's often tricky to relate the feedback you receive to the right stories. I like to use the personas ([/tools/persona-template/](#)) with their goals to discover the right epics.

5. Decompose your stories until they are ready

Break your epics into smaller, detailed stories ([../..../product-canvas/epics-and-ready-stories/](#)) until they are ready ([../..../product-backlog/the-definition-of-ready/](#)): clear, feasible, and testable. Everyone should have a shared understanding of the story's meaning; the story should not too big, and there has to be an effective way to determine if the story is done.



6. Add acceptance criteria

As you decompose epics into smaller stories, remember to add acceptance criteria. Acceptance criteria complement the story's narrative: They allow you to describe the conditions that have to be fulfilled so that the story is done. The criteria enrich the story and make it more precise and testable, and they ensures that the story can be demoed or released to the users and the other stakeholders.

7. Group user stories into themes

Using themes helps you organise your stories. Each theme is a group of related stories. Sample themes for a mobile phone are

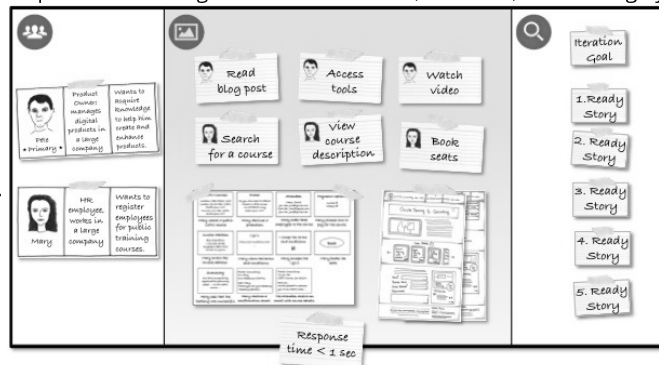
email, calendar, voice communication, and organizer, for instance. Themes make it easier to check for completeness and consistency, they structure your product canvas (/tools/product-canvas/) or product backlog, and they facilitate prioritisation.

8. Use paper cards

Paper cards are not only cheap and easy to use. They facilitate collaboration, as everyone can take a card and jot down an idea. Cards can also be easily grouped on the table or wall to check for consistency and completeness. Even if your stories are stored electronically, it is worthwhile to use paper cards when you write new stories.

9. Keep your stories visible and accessible

Stories want to communication information. Don't hide them on a network drive, the corporate intranet jungle, or a licensed tool. Make them visible instead, for instance, by putting them up on the wall. A great tool to discover, visualise, and manage your



stories is my Product Canvas (/tools/product-canvas/).

(/tools/product-canvas/)

10. Don't solely rely on user stories

Creating a great user experience (UX) requires more than writing user stories (.../agile-product-innovation/user-stories-enough-for-a-great-user-experience/). Also consider the user journeys and interactions (.../agile-product-management-tools/agile-scenarios-and-storyboards/), the visual design (.../agile-product-innovation/agile-user-interface-design/), and the nonfunctional properties (.../product-canvas/agile-nonfunctional-requirements/) of your product. This results in a holistic description that makes it easier to identify risks and assumptions, and it increases the chances of creating a product with the right user experience.

More on User Stories

You can find out more about user stories by reading the following posts:



- Epics and Ready Stories (.../epics-and-ready-stories/) to write stories at the right level of detail.
- Constraint stories (.../agile-nonfunctional-requirements/) to capture nonfunctional requirements such as performance.
- Personas (.../agile-product-innovation/persona-template-for-agile-product-management/) to discover the right stories.
- User Story Modelling (.../user-story-modelling/) to describe the relationships between different stories.
- Agile Scenarios and Storyboards (.../agile-product-management-tools/agile-scenarios-and-storyboards/) to discover and explore user stories.
- Product Canvas (.../agile-product-innovation/the-product-canvas/) to derive, manage, and visualise stories and other UX artefacts.
- 5 Common User Story Mistakes (.../5-common-user-story-mistakes/) you should avoid.

User Story Training

Learn how to effectively work with user stories by attending my Certified Scrum Product Owner training course (/training/category/certified-scrum-product-owner-course/) and my Product Canvas training course (/training/category/product-canvas-course/). Please contact us (/contact/) for user story writing workshops and onsite courses. [This post was last updated on 12 Dec 2013.]

Home (/) » User Stories (...) » 10 Tips for Writing Good User Stories

26 comments on “10 Tips for Writing Good User Stories”

1.  Robert Wilson says:
October 18, 2010 at 10:22 am
thanks for the post
[Reply \(?replytocom=2779#respond\)](#)
2.  Agile Scout (/agilescout.com/) says:
December 20, 2010 at 4:30 pm
Thanks a lot for this. We featured this on our article today 😊
[Reply \(?replytocom=2780#respond\)](#)
3. Die besten Ressourcen zu User Stories « Produktmanagement und Vermarktung von Internet-Anwendungen (/produktmanager-internet.de/2011/03/22/user-stories-ressourcen-buecher-linktipps/) says:
March 23, 2011 at 9:24 am
↑ 1 Roman Pichler: Writing good user stories ↑ 1

[...] Roman Pichler: Writing good user stories [...]

Reply (?replytocom=2781#respond)

4. Roman's Top Ten Product Backlog Tips » - Roman Pichler's Thoughts on Agile Product Management (.../product-backlog/top-ten-product-backlog-tips/) says:

April 1, 2011 at 8:46 am

[...] user stories to capture functional requirements. Start with large, coarse-grained stories and progressively [...]

Reply (?replytocom=2782#respond)

5. The Best Resources About User Stories « Product Owner for web applications (/productowner.net/2012/01/01/best-resources-user-stories/) says:

January 1, 2012 at 4:01 pm

[...] Roman Pichler: Writing Good User Stories [...]

Reply (?replytocom=2783#respond)

6. Tips to Grooming the Product Backlog Effectively (.../product-backlog/grooming-the-product-backlog/) says:

April 18, 2012 at 2:52 pm

[...] I employ user stories, constraint cards, design sketches, and workflow diagrams [...]

Reply (?replytocom=2784#respond)

7. The Product Owner Role at a Glance (.../roles/one-page-product-owner/) says:

May 16, 2012 at 7:06 pm

[...] User stories to capture how target users and customer may interact with the product. [...]

Reply (?replytocom=2785#respond)

8. Role of Business Analysts in Scrum (.../roles/business-analysts-in-scrum/) says:

June 15, 2012 at 9:16 am

[...] the individual usually has to learn new skills including [...] writing user stories. [...]

Reply (?replytocom=2786#respond)

9. User Story Acceptance « Tales from a Trading Desk (/mdavey.wordpress.com/2012/08/21/user-story-acceptance/) says:

August 21, 2012 at 12:47 am

[...] should be in a better place to capture the Product Owners requirements, and ensure stories can be tests, and thus marked "done". Share this:PrintEmailFacebookTwitterLinkedInLike this:LikeBe [...]


Reply (?replytocom=2787#respond)

10. SCRUM: beyond better software « Geospecialling (/www.geospecialling.com/index.php/2012/10/scrum-beyond-better-software/) says:

November 17, 2012 at 2:00 am

[...] that their feedback is incorporated in stories and sprint planning. Your user stories are focused on the user and easily understood by end users, making it easy for them to provide feedback and decide on [...]


Reply (?replytocom=2788#respond)

11.  Prashant Khare says:

February 14, 2013 at 9:20 am

Should the technical parts at the start of the project like setting up the environments, continuous integration, etc. be included as stories and also be estimated?

Reply (?replytocom=2789#respond)


- o  Roman Pichler (/) says:

February 14, 2013 at 10:11 am

Hi Prashant, Great question. I don't capture work results that are necessary to create a successful product but are not meaningful to a customer or user as user stories. I simply add a card that says, for instance, "Install and configure CruiseControl so that software can be continuously integrated and tested". The example is written similar to an epic. It uses a goal/benefit clause but has no user role or persona. I would suggest, however, to estimate the item, as the team will have to spend time and effort to get it done.

Does this help?

Reply (?replytocom=2790#respond)

12.  Prashant Khare says:


February 14, 2013 at 1:25 pm

Thank you for very fast response! It is very helpful.

Just one query though; when you say estimate the item – do you mean the relative estimation (Poker / T-shirt) or the time estimation as done for the tasks / sub-tasks for the user stories?

Thanks once again!


Reply (?replytocom=2791#respond)

- o  Roman Pichler (/) says:

February 14, 2013 at 2:44 pm

Hi Prashant, I was referring to the former. I typically estimate user stories in a product backlog/canvas workshop: <http://www.romanpichler.com/blog/product-backlog/the-product-backlog-grooming-steps/> (.../product-backlog/the-product-backlog-grooming-steps/) The task break-down happens in the sprint planning meeting.

Reply (?replytocom=2792#respond)

13.  Prashant Khare says:

February 15, 2013 at 5:27 am

Thank you Roman! Very helpful thoughts...

Reply (?replytocom=2793#respond)

14. The Product Backlog's Strengths and Limitations (.../product-backlog/the-product-backlogs-strengths-and-limitations/) says:

March 6, 2013 at 10:05 am

[...] Items can be described as user stories or as use cases [...]

Reply (?replytocom=2794#respond)

15. 10 Tips for Writing Good User Stories – Pichler Consulting | J.C. Loewe ([//jcloewe.com/?p=559](http://jcloewe.com/?p=559)) says:

March 28, 2013 at 6:58 pm

[...] 10 Tips for Writing Good User Stories. « Top 10 Information Architecture (IA) Mistakes – Jakob Nielson Posted in [...]

Reply (?replytocom=2795#respond)

16. Writing good user stories | Musings of a Solution Architect ([//solnarchitect.wordpress.com/2013/04/05/writing-good-user-stories/](http://solnarchitect.wordpress.com/2013/04/05/writing-good-user-stories/)) says:

April 6, 2013 at 12:36 am

[...] Writing good user stories Share this:TwitterFacebookLike this:Like Loading... [...]

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17. Five Blogs – 24 April 2013 | 5blogs ([//5blogs.wordpress.com/2013/04/24/five-blogs-24-april-2013/](http://5blogs.wordpress.com/2013/04/24/five-blogs-24-april-2013/)) says:

April 24, 2013 at 6:32 am

[...] 10 Tips For Writing Good User Stories Written by: Roman Pichler [...]

Reply (?replytocom=2797#respond)

18. Agile Scenarios and Storyboards (../agile-product-management-tools/agile-scenarios-and-storyboards/) says:

April 29, 2013 at 1:56 pm

[...] I like to think of an epic is as a scenario rolled up into a brief narrative [...]

Reply (?replytocom=2798#respond)

19. 5 Common User Story Mistakes by Roman Pichler (../5-common-user-story-mistakes/) says:

June 12, 2013 at 9:46 am

[...] check out my “10 Tips for Writing Good User Stories” [...]

Reply (?replytocom=2799#respond)

20. Agile | Pearltrees ([//www.pearltrees.com/benou101/agile/id8198606#pearl80827221&show=reveal,6](http://www.pearltrees.com/benou101/agile/id8198606#pearl80827221&show=reveal,6)) says:

June 12, 2013 at 4:45 pm

[...] < Cours Cegep < benou101 10 Tips for Writing Good User Stories The role of design still puzzles many Scrum and Kanban teams I work with. When should the design [...]

Reply (?replytocom=2800#respond)

21. The Product Owner Responsibilities (../roles/the-product-owner-responsibilities/) says:

July 26, 2013 at 10:01 am

[...] personas, user stories, scenarios, design sketches [...]


Reply (?replytocom=2801#respond)

22.  AnAn says:

December 17, 2013 at 11:34 am

Thank you Roman! Useful post! We’ve recently summarised our “recipe” for writing a user/feature story the right way – looks like there’s a lot of similarities <https://netguru.co/blog/posts/doing-features-and-user-stories-the-right-way> (<https://netguru.co/blog/posts/doing-features-and-user-stories-the-right-way>)


Reply (?replytocom=4215#respond)

23.  Lohic Beneyzet says:

January 18, 2014 at 10:13 am

Thank you Roman for your posts. I’ve read this one and the linked one. Very useful! Especially the collaboration tip in writing user stories. I was struggling with how to deal with my role of Deputy Product Owner and now I think I’ve found the clue. Keep up the good job.

Reply (?replytocom=4820#respond)

- o  Roman Pichler (/) says:

January 20, 2014 at 9:25 am

Thanks for the feedback. Glad you’ve found my user story tips helpful!

Reply (?replytocom=4844#respond)

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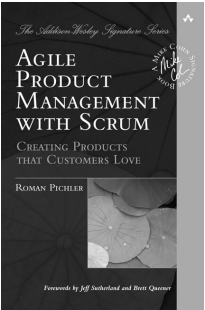
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