

it would be tedious and not particularly useful to document them all in detail. Instead, scenarios can be produced to illustrate what happens typically and interesting exceptions. A use case description is used to describe the use case in general terms and document the main variations from the norm.

Use case descriptions

The use case description is a narrative document that describes, in general terms, the required functionality of the use case. Typically it describes the use case goal and gives a general description of what usually happens, the normal course of events, adding a brief description of any minor variations. In other words the description is generic, it should be written in such a way that it encompasses every sequence of events, every scenario, relating to the use case.

The description is written in terms of what the system should do, not how it should do it. What happens behind the scenes in terms of coding, data storage structures and other implementation details is not relevant in a use case description, only what the user sees happening. In other words, the use case describes the system as the user sees it and does not aim to form the basis of a program specification or provide information about the internal processes of the system.

UML does not dictate any particular format for describing use cases. Different practitioners use different methods. The best advice is that we have a look at different techniques described by experts on the subject and choose something that works for us. The standard we will use in this book, which closely follows the style recommended by Larman (1998), is illustrated in Figures 3.5 and 3.6.

High-level description. It is useful to have two distinct types of use case description. In the early stages of software development, when no detailed decisions have been made about the design of the

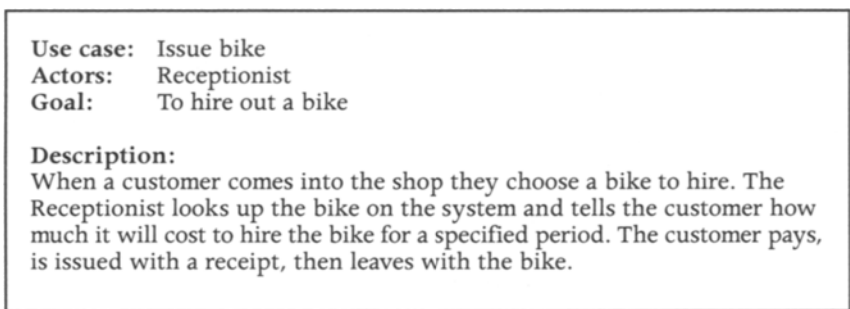


Figure 3.5 High-level description of the 'Issue bike' use case