

What are they?

A user story is one or more sentences in the everyday or business language of the user or customer that captures what the user or customer wants to achieve through software. They tell a short story about how the user, customer or other persona will use the system, and what benefit they derive from the functionality.

The goal is to provide context, which helps the Product Owner effectively manage and rank the backlog, and help the team understand how to implement functionality with the goals of customers in mind.

Who?

The who in a user story is the ‘who’ who wants the functionality and who benefits from it. Typically, we use a role or persona, so that everyone has a rich understanding of the needs and motivations of the ‘who’. Avoid roles that are too general (e.g., As a user...); instead, use roles that help the team imagine for whom they are building software. Some stories have a system as the ‘who’. Even very technical stories should describe what customer or user benefits.

What?

The what in a user story specifies the need, feature, or functionality that is desired by the who. This is what the team will build into the software or service. The what should be clear so the team knows what to design and build.

Why?

The why in a user story specifies the value to the ‘who’. This is the primary purpose for delivery. The inclusion of ‘why’ gives user stories their richness. The ‘why’ is important context that helps the team design solutions that meet the real needs of users and customers. The ‘why’ is also critical in Agile, which is a value-driven approach to software development. The ‘why’ keeps the value front and center, helping the Product Owner with ranking. If you cannot find the ‘why’ for a story, you might have a story with no value.

Template

The user story template is designed to help Product Owners and others tell stories with a clear who, what, and why. The template is simply a guide. The key is to include the elements.

- *As a registered user, I want to reset my password, so that I can get back in to the site if I forget my password.*
- *As an unregistered user, I can sign up for the site, so that I’m able to have a personalized experience.*
- *As Tom, I want to only see updates from close friends, so that I can view relevant updates during my time online.*

Another Template

Some stories benefit more than one ‘who’. In that case, it can help to include multiple who-why pairs.

what: Track history of what products registered shoppers have viewed.

who: Registered Shoppers

why: So I can go back and find again (and buy) what I've researched previously

who: Marketing

why: So we can serve ads that are relevant to the interests of individual registered shoppers.

Getting Started

A simple statement in a user story format gets us started, but doesn't tell the whole story. The team needs more. The Three C's indicate the three elements of a user story – Card, Conversation and Confirmation.

Card

The card is an overview of who, what, and why of a user story. The index card metaphor (and sometimes literal format) represents a small space for telling a succinct story, and the fact that stories should be easy to move around as we rank the backlog. The card captures the general idea and is a promise for a conversation.

“As a registered user, I want to reset my password so that I can get back into the site if I forget my password.”

Conversation

The card provides the basis for a conversation between the Product Owner or customer and the Delivery Team. Through conversation, the Product Owner and Delivery Team develop a shared

understanding of the goals for functionality as well as the constraints. Often the team asks questions.

For our password reset example, questions might include:

- *What type of authentication do we need?*
- *What information do we need to collect about the user?*
- *Are there different types of users that we have to worry about?*

The whole team can participate in these discussions. Different roles and different viewpoints will surface different questions and concerns.

The Confirmation

The results of the conversation should be captured as Acceptance Criteria. A well-defined user story is testable. How will the Product Owner confirm that the story was implemented properly?

Acceptance criteria are the conditions of satisfaction and acceptance for the story. Product Owners and the Delivery Team work together to provide acceptance criteria and remove any ambiguity from the user story. High-level statements are usually fine and they should be turned into acceptance tests as implementation of the story begins.

Acceptance Criteria for our Reset Password story might include:

- *Username, password, and email address are all required. Display name can be provided, but is optional.*
- *Passwords can be 6 – 200 characters in length.*
- *Passwords should be stored encrypted and cannot be decrypted.*