User stories

## What are they?

A single user story captures the outcome of an interaction from an end-user’s perspective.

They focus on what we are going to achieve, not how we are going to do it.

They typically take this format:

**As a <type of user>  
I need to <task>  
So I can <goal>**

They are created and prioritised at the beginning of a project before work starts.

They are a trigger for a conversation so that everyone understands the purpose of what they are delivering.

## Why are they useful?

Working with clients to generate user stories facilitates a conversation around **who, what** and **why**.

Team members are able to use their professional expertise to best solve each story.

Everyone involved in the project can see the benefit of completing a particular piece of work.

They provide a clear set of tasks that can be assessed in user testing scenarios.

## How do we make them?

#### Create a Project Charter

Come up with a one paragraph statement that summarises the ultimate goal of this piece of work. All user stories should fit within that Charter and contribute to it.

#### Consider your users first

Who are they? What do they want from your site? What brought them here? It may help to create personas and do some user-research first.

#### Create them collaboratively

User stories should not be created solely by the development team. They need to be created either by or in conjunction with the Product Owner – the person who knows this area of work and will ultimately see the benefit of its completion, and possibly key stakeholders. This might take the format of everybody coming together for a half day meeting to create these in detail.

#### Keep them simple

Create short sentences that are easily understandable and unambiguous to all target audiences.

Express what should be done, not how: no pre-conceived solutions. Focus on the result for the business not the technology.

#### Start with ‘Epics’ and then refine

Epics are big sketchy top-level stories that need to be broken down in to smaller stories. For example

**As a prospective student  
I want to find out about Exeter University  
So I can decide if I want to study there**

This can then be broken to down into many smaller user stories around course details, entry requirements, international placements, employability of graduates, modules etc.

#### Use paper cards

All user stories should be recorded on paper cards because these are cheap and easy to use. They facilitate collaboration: everyone can take a card and jot down an idea. Cards can be easily grouped on the table or wall to check for consistency and completeness and to visualise dependencies.