

# User Story Examples: The Good, the Bad and the Ugly

User stories are short descriptions of something your customer will do on your website or application. Here are 10 examples of Good, Bad and Ugly user stories to help you develop stories that deliver value early and often.

## What makes a good user story

Good user stories highlight the value you'll deliver your users. They're written in the language of the person using your product. They rely on the 3Cs: Card, Conversation and Confirmation. They are short enough to fit on an index card. They prompt a conversation that builds a shared understanding of the work involved. And they make it easy to confirm when the work is done.

To do this, they need to meet the INVEST criteria. They should be:

- Independent
- Negotiable
- Valuable
- Estimable
- Small
- Testable

## Example project: movie theatre website

Imagine you're creating a website for the Cinerama movie theatre. You're building the site with two personas in mind, Fiona Film-Fan and Max Manager. These represent your highest priority user groups.

We'll start with examples of Bad user stories.

# The Bad

## User story 1

As Fiona Film-Fan, I want to be able to see what Cinerama is offering, so I can decide if I'll go there.

### Acceptance criteria:

- homepage is created showing our name, tagline, address, email address and phone number (see attachment to the story for these details)
- homepage lists the movies that are 'now playing'
- the list includes the title, rating, genres, description, cast and crew, and session times for each movie (see attachment)
- the list can be filtered by title and rating
- Max Manager can update the 'now playing' movies as they change

## Scorecard

Independent	✓
Negotiable	✓
Valuable	✓
Estimable	✓
Small	✗
Testable	✓

## Notes on the scorecard

The story is not as **small** as it could be.

**Improving the story:** You could split the story and do only the first acceptance criterion initially. A website with your name, slogan (summing up your point of difference), address and contact details will let Fiona Film-Fan decide if the theatre is right for her and then get in touch to find out what's playing. By keeping the story as small as possible, you make it easier to deliver value in a single Sprint.

## User story 2

As Fiona Film-Fan, I want to see which movies are now playing, so I can decide if I'll come and see any of them.

### Acceptance criteria:

- a Slick jQuery carousel of 'now playing' movies is added to the top of the homepage
- each movie displays for 10 seconds in the carousel
- each panel in the carousel includes the movies' name, rating, length, genres, description, cast and crew, and sessions times
- carousel displays under a "Check out the great movies that are playing now" H1 heading

## Scorecard

Independent	✓
Negotiable	✗
Valuable	✓
Estimable	✓
Small	✓
Testable	✓

## Notes on the scorecard

This story is not **negotiable** because the acceptance criteria specify the solution the development team will implement, not the outcome they'll achieve. Your developers might have a better solution than a carousel. You get better results by empowering your technical team to make the technical decisions. And the moment you start adding technical detail, you're not writing the story from the customers' point of view.

**Improving the story:** The first acceptance criteria could just be *Movies that are now playing are shown on the homepage*. Rather than specifying what information about each movie that needs to display, why not have a conversation about that with your development team? As Product Owner, you know what makes people choose a movie. As developers, your team know how much information users can take in.

## User story 3

As Fiona Film-Fan, I want to be able to filter movies, so I can choose the one that I want to see.

### Acceptance criteria:

- Filters are added to movie listings

## Scorecard

Independent	✓
Negotiable	✓
Valuable	✓
Estimable	✗
Small	✓
Testable	✓

## Notes on the scorecard

This story is not **estimable**. There's not enough information here for the development team to estimate how much work the story would involve. What filters would be useful for Fiona Film-Fan? For a story to be estimable, it needs to be clear and unambiguous.

**Improving the story:** Specify the filters (e.g. Customers can filter movies by rating and by date of screening).

## User story 4

As Fiona Film-Fan, I want to be able to sort as well as filter movie listings, so I can choose the movie that I want to see based on the factors that matter most to me.

### Acceptance criteria:

- the filters also include sort options
- movie listings can be sorted by session times, newest first, rating and title

## Scorecard

Independent	✘
Negotiable	✔
Valuable	✔
Estimable	✔
Small	✔
Testable	✔

## Notes on the scorecard

This story can't be started until you've completed the story to create the filters, so isn't **Independent**. If both stories are in the same Sprint, the 'sort' story can only be started once the 'filter' story is finished, making it less likely the 'sort' story will be done by the end of the Sprint.

**Improving the story:** Bring this story into a later Sprint once the 'filter' story is done.

## User story 5

As Fiona Film-Fan I want to be able to easily watch trailers of movies so I can decide if I want to see them.

### Acceptance criteria:

- trailer videos are embedded on each movie's listing page
- videos are high-quality
- embedded video is well-integrated into the page design
- video is big enough to be clear
- the video controls are user-friendly

## Scorecard

Independent	✓
Negotiable	✓
Valuable	✓
Estimable	✓
Small	✓
Testable	✗

## Notes on the scorecard

This story is not **Testable**. To be testable, you need a black and white answer to the question "Has this acceptance criterion been met?". Deciding if you've met criteria that use terms like "easily", "high-quality", "well-integrated", "big enough" and "user-friendly" requires a value judgement; there's not a yes or no answer.

**Improving the story:** Instead you could specify that the videos: are at least 1440p; use Cinerama branding; display at full column-width; use video embed functionality that has been user-tested.

## User story 6

As Max Manager, I want a database so we can store our customers' details.

### Acceptance criteria:

- database is built
- database stores name, email, phone number, favourite film genre, date of birth, previous film bookings

## Scorecard

Independent	✓
Negotiable	✓
Valuable	✗
Estimable	✓
Small	✓
Testable	✓

## Notes on the scorecard

This story is not **valuable** because just building a database delivers no value to the customer.

**Improving the story:** Perhaps you want the database so you can create a loyalty programme. In this case, rather than building this functionality in layers (database, logic, user interface), you could immediately deliver value by building a vertical slice across each layer. For example, you could create an email newsletter signup. The newsletter gives value to your customers by offering them news and deals, and value to the business by giving you the foundation for a loyalty programme.

# The Good

## User story 7

As Fiona Film-Fan, I want to be able to find Cinerama’s details online so I can decide if I want to go there.

### Acceptance criteria:

- single page website is created showing:
  - our name
  - our slogan
  - our address
  - our email address
  - our phone number

Notes: See the attachment to the story for these details

## Scorecard

Independent	✓
Negotiable	✓
Valuable	✓
Estimable	✓
Small	✓
Testable	✓

## Notes on the scorecard

The story meets all the INVEST criteria and gives enough detail for the conversation with the development team. It won't deliver the perfect movie theatre website, but it will deliver value to potential customers in a single Sprint.

**Improving the story:** Can you think of ways this story could be improved? Email [info@boost.co.nz](mailto:info@boost.co.nz) with your suggestions if you can.



## User story 8

As Fiona Film-Fan, I want to be able to see which movies are 'now playing', so I can decide if I'll come and see any of them.

### Acceptance criteria:

- list of 'now playing' movies is added to the website
- list includes the title, sessions, rating, genres, description, cast and crew, and session times for each movie (see attachment)
- Max Manager can update the 'now playing' movies and their details as they change
- Max Manager only has access to edit the 'now playing' section, not other parts of the site
- Max Manager is the only person with access to edit this section

## Scorecard

Independent	✓
Negotiable	✓
Valuable	✓
Estimable	✓
Small	✓
Testable	✓

## Notes on the scorecard

The story meets all the INVEST criteria.

**Improving the story:** Does Max Manager need to be able to update the movies, or will it be OK for the development team to do this in the short term? If you've built the site on an off-the-shelf Content Management System, then this acceptance criteria will be easy. If not, consider enabling Max's updates as a separate story.

## User story 9

As Fiona Film-Fan, I want to be able to reserve seats so I can turn up safe in the knowledge the movie I want to see hasn't sold out when I get there.

### Acceptance criteria:

- customers can select a movie
- customers can select the session
- customers can select the number of seats they want to reserve for that movie
- customers get email confirmation of their reservation
- customers CANNOT choose specific seats
- customers CANNOT pay for seats

## Scorecard

Independent	✓
Negotiable	✓
Valuable	✓
Estimable	✓
Small	✓
Testable	✓

## Notes on the scorecard

The story meets all the INVEST criteria. It is also constrained; it makes clear what's not in scope. This keeps the developers focused on delivering must-haves not nice-to-haves.

**Improving the story:** Would the story be improved by spelling out what customers need to know about what they can and can't do? Ideally, the user interface will make this clear.

# The Ugly

<p><b>User story 10</b></p> <p>As Max Manager, I want a website so we've got an online presence.</p> <p><b>Acceptance criteria:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Website is built</li></ul>	<p><b>Scorecard</b></p> <table border="1"><tr><td>Independent</td><td>✘</td></tr><tr><td>Negotiable</td><td>✘</td></tr><tr><td>Valuable</td><td>✘</td></tr><tr><td>Estimable</td><td>✘</td></tr><tr><td>Small</td><td>✘</td></tr><tr><td>Testable</td><td>✘</td></tr></table>	Independent	✘	Negotiable	✘	Valuable	✘	Estimable	✘	Small	✘	Testable	✘
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<p><b>Notes on the scorecard</b></p> <p>This doesn't meet any of the INVEST criteria. Don't laugh, we've seen stories like this.</p>													