

Backlog Refinement

Quick View:

- Scrum Teams develop future requirements just-in-time
- Refinement meetings ensure stories are correctly sized and well understood so work can be done
- 1-2 hours for a 2-week sprint

Tips:

- Have a consistent time and location
- Start with highest priority items first — they're what will be pulled in the next sprint
- Ensure the right domain knowledge is present for any given story

What Is Backlog Refinement?

The Product Backlog is a prioritized list of the work for a team. Items (usually in the form of User Stories) are created in a just-in-time fashion in Scrum. The highest priority items in a backlog are those which are the most refined — these are the items that have been broken down into small chunks and have the most detail. Further down the list, less work has been done and the less precise the information. This just-in-time refinement ensure that the items most likely to change are those that have had the least amount of effort invested.

Every sprint, the delivery team takes items from the Product Backlog as their work. To ensure the team doesn't run out, the Product Owner must constantly be refining the backlog for future sprints. Typically, they look 2-4 sprints ahead. This process is called Backlog Refinement or Backlog Grooming. In order for a team to be able to take items into a Sprint, they must be familiar with the work. The Sprint Planning meeting is insufficient and too late in the process for this activity, so teams need to spend 5-10% of their time preparing the backlog for future sprints.

What Is A Backlog Refinement Meeting?

The Scrum Guide does not specify a meeting for the purpose of refinement, it merely says the team should spend time doing it. It is very common practice to set aside 1-2 meetings in a 2-week sprint for the purpose of backlog refinement, rather than doing it ad hoc. The meeting typically includes one or more of the following activities:

- Adding or removing User Stories
- Reprioritizing User Stories
- Breaking larger stories into smaller pieces
- Estimation

Be careful not to let the meeting become about solutions. If there is technical uncertainty, add a Spike to the backlog and have the delivery team get more information before proceeding. A spike should deliver tangible value and is demoed like any other story.

Backlogs should be:

- D**etailed appropriately
- E**stimated
- E**mergent
- P**rioritized

Stories should be:

- I**ndependent
- N**egotiable
- V**aluable
- E**stimated
- S**mall
- T**estable