User Stories to Define and Refine Critical Product Features

User stories describe how, why, and when your intended audience uses your innovation. These stories typically illustrate the real or idealized sequence of steps an end user takes to engage with your product. Product developers can co-create user stories alongside actual or potential users of a product – those who are currently using an innovation or those who you would like to use an innovation.

This resource presents three types of user stories that a product developer may use to better engage with and understand the needs of end users and refine and improve products.

A day in the life

A common type of user story is a description of a "day in the life" of an end user before your product comes along, and a "day in the life" after they start using your product. This type of story helps your team understand exactly how your innovation fits with existing workflows and how it solves (or has yet to solve) an existing problem of practice or need.

For example, before users started working with an educational app, how would they have gone about teaching a literacy lesson to differentiated groups of students? Then, how would the app change their workflow?

A "day in the life" user story might be helpful in the Invent stage, when you are dreaming up features that innovate the user workflow and meet a user need. You can also revisit this user story later in the Apply stage when working closely with users to refine the product and ensuring it meets market requirements.

Product development

A user story can also describe the sequence of steps an end user might take to achieve a goal with your product. In this way, it can serve as a roadmap for feature development and help you engage users around which features to prioritize. For example, a user story for an educational

app might describe how, when, and why a teacher logs into the app, selects a lesson, and records student data. Start by asking your user to fill in the blanks regarding your product:

As a _____,

I want to _____,

so that _____.

For example, think of a digital math program. Using the fill-in-the-blanks template above, you might get a variety of responses from a user of this app:

As a math teacher,

- I want to *see a roster of my students' progress* so that *I can plan whole-class instruction and schedule individualized coaching sessions*.
- I want to *have multiple content options for each lesson* so that *I can choose the content that is most relevant or interesting to my individual students*.
- I want to *be able to automatically track my students' math progress from lesson to lesson* so that *I can use this data to inform progress reports and IEP reviews*.
- I want to *be able to leave a lesson midway through, save my place, and come back to the same lesson* so that *we can easily resume the session when an interruption happens*.

You can repeat this process for any type of user who might engage with your product, like interventionists, school leaders, students, or parents.

Once you have created several of these statements, you can arrange them by theme and priority in a storyboard (below).

User: *Math teacher*

Theme:	APP METADATA	FUNCTIONALITY	LESSON CONTENT
Must-have features (Prioritize for minimum viable product release)	Review student rosters	Automatically pull up the next lesson based on student progress	Lessons align with state standards
	Track student progress and performance	Pause/save progress, resume lesson	Lessons pre-loaded into app
Would-be-nice features (Prioritize for future release or update)		Choose different subject content within lessons to match student interests	

In this way, your user story can help you develop the minimum viable product, or MVP, during the Invent stage. The MVP is like a test drive for your product — it's a prototype that has just enough features to solve the problem and provide value while being simple and easy to use. Developing an MVP can help you save cost and effort.

When developing your MVP, think about what matters most for your target customer segment and your scaling plan. Be specific about who your customers and end users are, and what they need to accomplish. Focus on outcomes —what users need to do and see when your product comes out—instead of features. What's "minimum" to them?

Then, you can use the user story to help you build out your product from the MVP during the Apply stage by adding "would-be-nice" features that users continue to request or prioritize.

Identify product pain points

User stories provide a way for end users to give feedback on the most useful features of your innovation and identify whether your product has unforeseen pain points that need further development. Consider a creating a user story map (see example below) that provides a step-by-step playbook of the end user experience to solicit input on how a user is using your product, what features they are using most, how their needs are being met (or not), and what the pain points or issues are with their use of the product.

Discussing such a user story with end users allows you to discover and incorporate user insights, preferences, and feedback into your product or intervention, improve its quality and relevance, and increase user acceptance and adoption.

Activities

Prepare Lesson			Teach Lesson			Review data		

Tasks

Log in to system	Select lesson	Assign lesson	Log in students	Initiate activity	Collect data	Log in to system	Select lesson	Select student

Sub-tasks

Input username and password	Select topical area	Review student pretest data	Input username and password	Select activity	Complete exit ticket	Input username and password	Select topical area	Select student
	Select lesson objective	Assign student activities		Highlight text	Submit feedback		Select lesson objective	Select topical area
				Hover-over glossary			Review total completion	Select lesson objective
				View completion process			Review average/ range time on activity	Review completion status
				Monitor time			Review average/ range exit ticket	Review time on activity
								Review exit ticket and feedback