FACILITATOR GUIDE

Timebox planning guide

Planning is the session where a team agrees what it will work on next and how it will start. Scrum calls it sprint planning. This short guide covers preparing for planning and keeping good habits during the timebox (the fixed stretch of time we plan and work in; Scrum calls it a sprint).

Version 2.0
For the whole team
One shared plan

WHY WE PLAN

Purpose

- To align on a timebox goal and on what we expect to deliver.
- To prioritise and plan the work to be done in the timebox.
- To create the plan together as a team: the product owner or manager, the project manager or scrum master, and the developers (the other team members).
- To inspect team capacity and adapt as necessary.

WHAT WE BRING

Inputs

- Our list of things to do (the backlog).
- It is good practice to refine prioritised items (figure out the “how”) ahead of planning as needed, so that dependencies and risks are known and uncertainty is reduced.

WHAT WE LEAVE WITH

Outcome

- Timebox goals, and how the team will start working towards them.
- The list of backlog items that will enable the goals to be achieved.
- Visibility of the risks to meeting the goal.

BEFORE YOU BRING IT IN

Discuss the pros and cons of planning your timebox with your team, and get their thoughts, concerns and ideas on board.

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WANT THE WORDS TO SAY?

The planning script and the graphic novel that go with this guide are on the site.

kubairshirazee.com/agile-sprint-planning-guide

PREPARATION

What happens before planning day

7 checks
In the days before

Good planning requires good preparation. In the days leading up to planning, follow these steps.

- [ ] **Review roadmap and vision.** Adapt based on timebox feedback or market shifts.
- [ ] **Prepare a pipeline.** Have enough “ready” items to cover the next two timeboxes, ideally.
- [ ] **Refine backlog items.** Get items “ready” with clear, manageable tasks that can be completed in a few days. Aim for simplicity.
- [ ] **Refine continuous improvements.** Make retrospective actions SMART: specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, time-bound.
- [ ] **Document just enough.** Ensure each task has minimal but sufficient detail to start.
- [ ] **Keep work boards updated.** Focus on moving items to “done” with a clear, shared understanding.
- [ ] **Create a safe space for estimates.** Encourage the team to forecast confidently. It is just a prediction!

ON THE DAY

What happens at planning itself

9 checks
Whole team present

- [ ] Ensure the entire team is present.
- [ ] Account for scheduled time off for team members. It will affect team capacity!
- [ ] Be aware of known blockers and third-party dependencies: the things we discovered during refinement.
- [ ] Dial in or video call remote team members. Cameras on!
- [ ] Define the timebox goals. Keep them simple and realistic.
- [ ] The product owner or manager sets the stage by elaborating the timebox goals. Remember, it is what needs to be achieved in the timebox that builds, step by step, towards the overall goals. Think of the goal for the upcoming match that builds towards the team's tournament goal!
- [ ] If needed, discuss work carried over from the last timebox (spill-over): is it to be continued or dropped? Prioritise by value against effort.
- [ ] Discuss the proposed backlog. Encourage the team to pull in items and tasks that align with the timebox goals. Resist the urge to push work; instead, invite the team to assess whether each item can realistically be completed within the timebox. Focus on de-risking by breaking large tasks down into smaller, manageable pieces.
- [ ] Revisit estimates and what done means (the definition of done), and capture new work that comes to light.

AN EXAMPLE

A timebox goal, and a plan to back it

A timebox goal is like setting a target for a short, focused burst of work, a bit like deciding to clean out your garage over the weekend.

You have a clear aim (the clean garage) and a set amount of time (the weekend) to get it done.

In a work setting, especially in high-performing teams, a timebox goal is the specific outcome or achievement the team aims to reach by the end of a short period, no more than four weeks.

This goal helps everyone on the team know what they are working towards, and stay focused on what needs to be done to get there together.

TIMEBOX GOAL

By the end of the weekend, have a fully organised and clutter-free garage, with all tools sorted and stored, unnecessary items discarded or donated, and the floor space cleared and cleaned.

THINGS TO DO (THE TIMEBOX BACKLOG)

01 **Sort items.** Separate tools from holiday decorations and sports equipment.

02 **Organise tools.** Label drawers and shelves for small tools and hardware.

03 **Clear floor space.** Move rarely used items to overhead storage.

04 **Dispose of unwanted items.** Take discarded items to a recycling centre or landfill.

05 **Deep clean.** Sweep and mop the garage floor.

06 **Safety check.** Ensure all chemicals and hazardous materials are stored safely.