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A Good User Story

PART 3: ELIMINATE MISINTERPRETATION

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The final aspect of writing a good user story (see [Part 1](#) and [Part 2](#)) is making sure that clear language is used to reduce or eliminate the opportunity for misinterpretation. While this may sound easy, it's actually very difficult.

At Clientek, we recently conducted an experiment in which each team member had to write down a set of instructions for how to make a peanut butter and jelly sandwich. Those instructions were distributed to the leadership team, and they followed the instructions step by step without interpretation. Needless to say, the results (none of which even closely resembled a classic PB&J) were interesting. The point of this exercise was to explicitly demonstrate that the English language is full of complexities and that words can have several meanings.

The acceptance criteria of a story should be very specific. Vague verify statements will be interpreted differently by different people. Ideally, the verify statements that are included in the acceptance criteria of a user story should

form the basis of the test cases that will be executed to validate the story.

One question that I like to ask our teams is, if you give your user story to a stranger that has no background information on your project, would they have a decent understanding of what you are trying to accomplish? If the answer is no, then there is probably some additional refinement required to make it clear.

User story refinement is an activity that takes practice to perfect. No matter how many times you review a user story, there is probably a way to make it better. Don't let perfection get in the way of improvement. As long as your product owner and development teams have a consistent understanding of what will be delivered, you can consider the user story "grooming complete".

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