



# ScrumMaster Thoughtlists

## An Evolving List of Reminders for Your Team

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# Overview

Checklists can be a useful tool in keeping organized but are often so narrowly focused on the minutiae of a task that users miss the bigger picture. That's where "Thoughtlists" come in. Thoughtlists are lists of questions every ScrumMaster should be asking about his or her team. Instead of checking off boxes on a list, ScrumMasters use these questions to help guide their improvement efforts. It's then up to the ScrumMaster to decide what steps to take to help the team improve.

The ScrumMaster is the shepherd of the processes chosen and used by the team in the Scrum framework. This means the ScrumMaster doesn't necessarily do the work but finds ways to help the work of the Scrum team go smoothly. For example, if something needs to be improved in the product backlog, the ScrumMaster should coordinate with the Product Owner to get the improvement implemented. In other words, ScrumMasters should work with their Scrum teams!

The focus on how the work is done also means the ScrumMaster is concerned about the entire framework. Yep, all of it.

**Before I introduce the thoughtlists, let me clarify a couple of key terms first:**

The Scrum team refers to the team members, the Product Owner, and the ScrumMaster. The team members are the individuals doing the development work, so basically the Scrum team with the exclusion of the Product Owner and ScrumMaster.

# Thinking About Roles

## TEAM MEMBERS

### Learning

- » Are the team members taking time to learn from each other?
- » Do the team members strive to have the skills necessary to fill in for each other when needed?

### Speaking

- » Are the team members communicating (face-to-face, phone, instant messaging) every day and often?

### Trust

- » Do the team members trust each other to support and improve each other in the work?
- » Do the team members trust the Product Owner to guide the work priority, including choices about technical debt and bugs vs. new features?
- » Are the team members focusing on good answers to how the product can be created and letting the Product Owner answer what the product should do?

### Ownership

- » Is the code owned by the whole team as opposed to only allowing specific team members to touch certain parts of the code?
- » Do the team members care as much about creating a great product as the Product Owner and the customer?

## PRODUCT OWNER

### Technical Debt

- » Does the Product Owner understand the concept of technical debt and watch the quality of the input to the product?
- » Can the Product Owner trust the team to inform appropriately when a technical issue is worth correcting, even at the cost of new feature development?

### Customer Focus

- » Is the Product Owner concentrating a significant amount of his or her time on understanding the customer's needs?
- » Does the Product Owner work hard to answer what the product should do and leave the answer of how to the team members?

### Trust

- » Does the Product Owner trust the team members to be honest in their estimates and the quality of their work?
- » Do the organization's stakeholders and management trust the Product Owner with choices about product direction?

## Attending

- » Does the Product Owner attend the daily Scrum meeting and regularly have things to talk about in the meeting?
- » Is the Product Owner invited to the planning meetings and any other discussions that come up during the Sprint?
- » Does the organization include the Product Owner in feature priority and other product discussions?

## Backlog

- » Is the Product Owner accepting new items into the backlog, regularly grooming it, and prioritizing the items with appropriate help?
- » Does the Product Owner bring items to the Sprint planning meeting ready for inclusion in the Sprint?

# Thoughts About Ceremonies

## SPRINT PLANNING

### Time Boxed

- » Does the Sprint planning meeting start and end on time?
- » Is the Sprint planning meeting length proportionate to the length of the Sprint? (A good rule of thumb is that the meeting lasts one hour for every week of Sprint length.)

### Effective

- » Is the entire time of the Sprint planning meeting effectively used?
- » Does the resulting Sprint backlog have all items prioritized and with acceptance criteria?

### Prepared

- » Does the Scrum team have all the materials and infrastructure needed to start the Sprint planning meeting on time?
- » Are the product backlog items brought into the Sprint planning meeting appropriately sized and with acceptance criteria?

### Interactive

- » Is the entire Scrum team regularly attending the Sprint planning meeting?
- » Are techniques that encourage all attendees to participate in the information exchange, estimation, and discussions used during the Sprint planning meeting?

### Estimates

- » Does the whole team do product backlog item estimates together?

## DAILY SCRUM:

### Time Boxed

- » Does the daily Scrum start on time and last 15 minutes or less?

### Members Speak

- » Do each of the Scrum team members speak at the meeting?
- » Does each person restrict his/her conversation to the standard questions of, “what I completed,” “what I will do,” and “what are my impediments,” or something similar?

### Stable

- » Is the daily Scrum held in the same place and time every day?

### Visitors

- » Are customers, stakeholders, and others who may be interested invited to observe the daily Scrum?
- » Are the visitors not on the Scrum team welcome to the daily Scrum but know they are not to speak during the meeting?

### Peer Reporting

- » Is the daily Scrum a report of each Scrum team member to their team peers and not a status report to any one person?

## SPRINT REVIEW (DEMO)

### Team Led

- » Do the Product Owner and team members lead the Sprint review as a way to showcase their work?

### Customers

- » Are customers, stakeholders, and even other teams invited to the Sprint review?
- » Are invited customers, stakeholders, and others often in attendance at the Sprint review to see the newly created features?

### Minimal Prep

- » Does the team spend only a minimal amount of time, about two hours maximum, preparing for the Sprint review because the new features are working product?

### Working Product

- » Is the Sprint review usually all demonstration of product?

### Feedback

- » Does the Scrum team ask for and act on feedback provided by attendees during the Sprint review?

## SPRINT RETROSPECTIVE

### Attendance

- » Is the Sprint retrospective regularly attended by the entire Scrum team, including the Product Owner?
- » Is the Sprint retrospective attended only rarely by people not on the Scrum team, and only then by special need?

### Regular

- » Is the Sprint retrospective held at the end of every Sprint, maybe even at the same place and time every Sprint?

### Safe

- » Do the Scrum team members feel safe speaking their mind at the Sprint retrospective?

### **Interesting**

- » Are different and interesting techniques of collecting information and communicating used at the Sprint retrospective to keep it from being boring?

### **Meaningful**

- » Are the conversations in the Sprint retrospective usually deep, heartfelt, insightful, or otherwise meaningful?

### **Improvements**

- » Does the Sprint retrospective result in one or two improvements selected to work on in the next Sprints?
- » Do the improvements selected in the Sprint retrospective regularly result in actions and changes that are carried out in the next Sprint?



# Thoughts About Artifacts

## PRODUCT BACKLOG

### Sized Appropriately

- » Are the items in the product backlog detailed appropriately, with items close to entering a Sprint split smaller with other items left larger?

### Prioritized

- » Are the product backlog items listed in order of priority by the Product Owner?
- » Are the items in the product backlog checked for re-ordering regularly, at least every Sprint?

### Groomed

- » Do the team members regularly help the Product Owner do the work of sizing, prioritizing and creating acceptance criteria for the items in the product backlog?
- » Does the Product Owner regularly seek input from customers and stakeholders about the contents of the product backlog?

### Visible

- » Is the current version (today's version) of the product backlog easily available for the Scrum team, customers, and stakeholders to review and comment about?

## SPRINT BACKLOG

### In Motion

- » Are at least some tasks and items in the Sprint backlog under active development, making obvious progress to completion every day?

### Owned

- » Does the Scrum team consider the Sprint backlog something they control, use, update, and discuss many times a day?

### Estimated

- » Are the development items ("stories") and tasks in the Sprint backlog estimated in points or hours?
- » If you use hours in your estimates, are the hours remaining for Sprint backlog items updated at least once per day by the Scrum team?

### Tasks

- » Are tasks that need to be explicitly documented in the Sprint backlog defined just enough to track as the Scrum team desires?

**Visible**

- » Is the current version (today's version) of the Sprint backlog easily available for the Scrum team to update and reference and for the rest of the organization to reference?

**SPRINT BURNDOWN:****Safe**

- » Is the Sprint burndown used appropriately by the Scrum team as an indicator of the need for a conversation?
- » Do people outside the Scrum team use the Sprint burndown as a general indicator of progress without using it for coercion, knowing it is a tool for the Scrum team, not them?

**Visible**

- » Is the current version (today's version) of the Sprint burndown easily available for the Scrum team to update and reference and for the rest of the organization to reference?

**Current**

- » Does the Scrum team update the Sprint burndown at least once a day, perhaps during the daily scrum meeting?

**Discussed**

- » Does the Scrum team freely talk about the Sprint burndown when it seems to be indicating something unexpected?

# Summary Picture

