

User Story Mapping

Lay out the full user experience as a left-to-right narrative, then slice it into releases so the team can commit to the thinnest honest version of the journey first.

DURATION

2-3

hrs

GROUP SIZE

5-8

people

WHAT YOU BRING

One named persona card, an agreed end-point for the journey, a long wall, coloured notes, and tape for release lines.

WHAT YOU LEAVE WITH

- A backbone of 6-12 activities showing the user journey end to end
- A vertical stack of user tasks under each activity, ordered by importance
- A taped release-1 line defining the thinnest complete journey to ship
- Release-1 tasks transcribed into the backlog, tagged by journey stage

WHO TO INVITE

- **Product owner.** Mandatory narrator during walk-the-map and the final decision-maker on release slicing.
- **Developers (at least two).** Ground the map in what is buildable and surface tasks that hide weeks of infrastructure work.
- **Designers.** Think in journeys natively and reshape the backbone in ways others would not consider.
- **Support / sales / ops.** Bring the unhappy paths -- declined cards, failed pauses, damaged deliveries -- the golden-path team forgets.
- **Operations / SRE.** Essential when the user being mapped is an engineer or the product is an internal pipeline or tool.

USE WHEN

- Planning a new product or a major new feature area end to end
- The backlog has grown large and nobody can see the big picture
- MVP or first-release arguments keep going in circles
- Turning Impact Mapping or Event Storming output into a buildable plan

AVOID WHEN

- × Mapping a single well-understood story -- use Example Mapping instead
- × There is no clear user or persona to map the journey for
- × The work is purely technical with no user-facing narrative
- × Scope is so broad you are really deciding strategy -- run Impact Mapping first

How the session runs

- **Phase 1 -- Orient, persona, scope (15 minutes)**

Pin the persona card to the left of the wall, read it aloud, and agree the journey's end-point explicitly. Write that end-point on a card at the right end so scope has a visible boundary before any notes go up.

- **Phase 2 -- Backbone (20 minutes)**

The product owner narrates the user's journey at the highest level while the team places 6-12 blue activity notes left to right. The facilitator keeps granularity high and stops tasks or system steps leaking onto the backbone.

- **Phase 3 -- User tasks (30 minutes)**

For each backbone activity the team writes yellow task notes describing user intents, stacking them vertically with most essential on top. The facilitator circulates, prompts for unhappy paths, and reframes UI details as user tasks.

- **Phase 4 -- Walk the map (15 minutes)**

Everyone stops adding notes and the product owner narrates the whole journey left to right using only the wall. The facilitator listens for stumbles, pauses on each one, and asks the room to fill the gap before continuing.

- **Phase 5 -- Slice releases (30 minutes)**

Run tape across the wall to mark release 1 and hold the rule that the slice must still tell a complete story end to end. For each activity ask what the absolute minimum is, and protect the trade-off conversation as items move above or below.

- **Wrap-up (10 minutes)**

Confirm what is in release 1, photograph the wall in panorama and close-up, and agree who transcribes the release-1 tasks into the backlog with their activity as context.