

The Crystal Series for Software Developers
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Writing Effective Use Cases



Alistair Cockburn

The Writing Process

1. Name the system scope and boundaries.
Track changes to this initial context diagram with the in/out list.
2. Brainstorm and list the primary actors.
Find every human and non-human primary actor, over the life of the system.
3. Brainstorm and exhaustively list user goals for the system.
The initial Actor-Goal List is now available.
4. Capture the outermost summary use cases to see who really cares.
Check for an outermost use case for each primary actor.
5. Reconsider and revise the summary use cases. Add, subtract, or merge goals.
Double-check for time-based triggers and other events at the system boundary.
6. Select one use case to expand.
Consider writing a narrative to learn the material.
7. Capture stakeholders and interests, preconditions and guarantees.
The system will ensure the preconditions and guarantee the interests.
8. Write the main success scenario (MSS).
Use 3 to 9 steps to meet all interests and guarantees.
9. Brainstorm and exhaustively list the extension conditions.
Include all that the system can detect and must handle.
10. Write the extension-handling steps.
Each will end back in the MSS, at a separate success exit, or in failure.
11. Extract complex flows to sub use cases; merge trivial sub use cases.
Extracting a sub use case is easy, but it adds cost to the project.
12. Readjust the set: add, subtract, merge, as needed.
Check for readability, completeness, and meeting stakeholders' interests.

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