



Better sprint reviews

Get useful feedback.
Decide what to do next.

A practical guide for Scrum Masters and agile coaches

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- 01 Involve real users
 - 02 Inspect the working product
 - 03 Make honest feedback possible
 - 04 Use it to decide what comes next
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Guide + worksheets + quick reference

What should your review achieve?

I have seen many sprint reviews in my career. Many of them were not sprint reviews at all.

The team works through a list of Jira issues. Someone explains to managers why fewer items were finished than expected. The Product Owner presents a slide deck of new features. Users hear a list of what the team completed. You may recognise your own meeting.

This is not an effective sprint review. It reports completed work, but misses the purpose: getting feedback that helps you improve the product and adapt the plan.

Get feedback to build a better product

A sprint review should help you find out whether the product is useful to the people who use it, what needs to improve, and what to do next. The work may match every requirement and still miss something important. Feedback from users helps you discover that while you can do something about it.

First, bring the users. Without them, you miss feedback from the people who should get value from your product. For those users to give meaningful feedback, they need a working product to respond to. A slide or a Jira ticket cannot show them how the product actually works.

For the team to ask openly for feedback, negative feedback has to be treated as useful learning. If discovering a problem leads to blame, people will hide it or avoid asking. Finally, you must be able to use what you learn to adapt the plan. Feedback cannot help you build a better product if the plan is never allowed to change.

These are four prominent problems I see in practice. The following pages explain how to recognise them and what you can do about them.

This is also the purpose described in the Scrum Guide: “inspect the outcome of the Sprint and determine future adaptations.”

Start with the problem most relevant to your team. Use the preparation advice and worksheets to improve your next review.

Find what you need

Understand the four problems	3-6
Prepare and facilitate	7-9
Examples, decisions, and follow-through	10-12
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3. Negative feedback feels like failure

People will protect themselves if discovering a problem leads to blame.

In many organisations, being successful means delivering the agreed plan without bad news. A team in that environment has good reasons to present its work carefully. It may explain away a problem, hurry past an awkward moment, or avoid asking questions it cannot control.

Users notice how criticism is received. If their first concern leads to a long defence of the design, a polite “looks good” may be the easiest way to end the next discussion.

Prepare the people who influence the response

Before the review, talk with the team and relevant leaders about the purpose of feedback. Agree to understand a concern before explaining or proposing a solution. If people have been blamed after previous reviews, address that history directly. A meeting rule cannot undo consequences that continue afterwards.

A conversation with a manager

“We want people to tell us when the product misses the mark. Last time, the discussion became about who had made a mistake. How can we respond this time so the team can investigate the problem openly?”

Respond to the first concern with curiosity

Thank the person, then ask them to show or describe what happened. Give the team time to understand it. If someone begins defending the design, redirect the discussion: “Let’s understand where this gets in your way first.” A technical explanation can come later if it helps the decision.

A team member can make uncertainty visible: “We are unsure whether this step works for people handling several cases at once.” Use a real uncertainty. Then invite people to explore it. You are making disagreement easier, without asking them to perform criticism.

When people only praise the work

Ask for a concrete example: “Where would this help in your work?” or “What would you still have to do outside the product?” Positive feedback may be accurate. Look for the circumstances behind it, and avoid treating either praise or criticism as something you need to obtain.

Prepare your sprint review

Complete this with the Product Owner and the team before you send the invitation.

Product / team	Review date
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What do we need to learn?

Sprint outcome, connection to the Product Goal, and the question to explore.

Who can help us understand it?

Relevant users and stakeholders. Missing perspectives and how we will reach them.

What will people see or try?

Working product, ordinary starting point, example data, and who will prepare it.

What could make honest feedback difficult?

Known concerns, risk of blame, and conversations to have beforehand.

What decisions are open?

Product Owner, other people needed, constraints, and time reserved for discussion.
