

LETTER TO GRANDMA

Foster *Communication* and *Product Understanding*



PREREQUISITES

- A user story, epic user story, release plan or anything else you would like to communicate and describe
- Pen and paper

TIME

15-45min

WHAT

“Letter to Grandma” is a method to improve **sharing** and understanding of requirements and tasks. It allows a **knowledge transfer** that focuses on the **essential aspects** without omitting **key information** that seems to be obvious.

WHY

When sharing information the **knowledge provider** holds the required information and transfers this knowledge to one or various **knowledge recipients**. The task of **knowledge sharing** requires the knowledge provider to translate the knowledge in a format that allows to encode the information in a way that can be interpreted by the knowledge recipient. The most common format of knowledge transfer is to translate the knowledge into words. A big problem of knowledge transfer lies in this translation, as **tacit knowledge** has no exchange format that would fit all cases. Thus information is lost while encoding and also while decoding information by the recipient.

Writing a letter to grandma helps you to minimize these problems when dealing with requirements or tasks to be shared. The letter could also be addressed to somebody

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that has never dealt with your project - or to give an extreme example: an alien. All these recipients have in common, that they have no **prior knowledge** and thus need a description of the essentials enriched with further information that is only known to the team. This last part is actually a very important one: While the knowledge provider might think that some piece of information is already known to the team - or not worth to mention - the recipients may be missing that specific part to be able to complete the knowledge transfer. Concentrating on the essentials makes sure that one sticks to the important parts and does not overwhelm the recipient with unnecessary details, but gives a good overview of the requirements.

HOW TO

Write a letter that describes requirements or tasks in a way that you would write to your grandmother.

EMPATHISE No matter if you chose to write your grandmother or an alien, make sure that you fully empathise with your recipient. Imagine your recipient reading the letter, would they be able to fully understand it?

ESSENTIALS Your recipient has no prior knowledge about the things you want to describe, but as you are writing only a letter, you are also not able to explain everything very detailed. Try to concentrate on the essentials.

UNDERSTAND Before starting the letter, make sure that you indeed understand the topic that you are going to write about. If something is still unclear to yourself, solve that gap first.

PAPER As with a real letter you should use paper to write down your letter. It forces you to create a concept before starting to write, as you cannot just swap words around as you would on a computer.

EXAMPLE

Use this method to describe a product vision, bigger features or sprints. Feel free to use it in other situations, if you think that it will help you to communicate your ideas and product understanding.

Imagine that you are integrating a bitcoin payment system for an online shop.

Dear Grandma,

In my new workplace we are in charge of an online shop, you know those web pages where you can buy things. Until now you can pay in this shop by issuing a bank transfer or using a credit card. But there is now a new trend that is called bitcoin. Did you hear about that? It is like money, but everything is virtual. So you don't have real coins and no real wallet. All your money is only in the computer and you can access it with your wallet

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number, this is like a bank account number, and a long password. So now the shop that I am working with, wants us to add the possibility to pay with bitcoins. Luckily we can use a service called EasyBitcoin that will do all the complicated things for us: The service will take care of receiving the money and later transfer it to our bank account. When the customer decides to pay on our web page, then they will have a third option available. After choosing the bitcoin payment the customer will see the page of the EasyBitcoin service. On that page they will have to enter their wallet number and password. If everything is correct our online shop is displayed again with a message that the payment succeeded. Of course if something goes wrong, they can go back and choose a different way to pay.

Love,
Your Grandson