

MoSCoW prioritisation

Sort requirements into four agreed groups, so the essentials are protected and the rest can flex when time or money runs short.

GROUP	OUR TEST	EFFORT GUIDE
Must have	Would we stop go-live without it?	At most about 60%
Should have	Hurts to drop; a workaround exists	The rest
Could have	Wanted; the first to drop	About 20%
Won't have this time	Agreed out for now; written down	None this time

Our own table and tests; the effort guide is DSDM's (Agile Business Consortium). Percentages of the effort available.

WHAT IT IS

MoSCoW sorts requirements into four groups, from **must have** down to **won't have this time**. Dai Clegg described it with Richard Barker in 1994; DSDM (Dynamic Systems Development Method) made it a core practice. DSDM's guide: musts at most about 60% of the effort, could about 20%, the buffer that protects the date. The sponsor or customer decides; the project manager runs the process and turns each must into acceptance criteria.

HOW IT WORKS

- 01 Agree the tests and who decides before ranking.
- 02 Check the effort against the guide.
- 03 Write down the won't-haves; give each must acceptance criteria.
- 04 Review the priorities at each gate or iteration.

MID-LEVEL · WORKED EXAMPLE

Apply it well

The situation: A city team has eight months to move resident parking permits online. Its supplier's fixed price covers about 100 days of feature work, but the requests add up to 140.

The project manager agrees the go-live test first, then proposes and the sponsor decides: musts 55 days (55%), shoulds 25, coulds 20 (20%): $55 + 25 + 20 = 100$. A 40-day mobile app is won't have this time, because the service works in a phone's browser.

In the exam: Sort four or five requirements, give the test behind each must, show that the effort fits the guide, and say who decided and when it is reviewed.

SENIOR · WORKED EXAMPLE

Design and lead it

The situation: A city is joining 14 online services under one login over 30 months, in three waves of services, under a board. Each service owner wants their own features first.

The project manager agrees one set of tests with the steering board, which settles conflicts between services. Accessibility is a must in every service, by law. Priorities are reviewed at each wave, and a new must pushes out work of the same size or goes to the board.

In the exam: Show the process you designed for many owners: shared tests, who decides between them, legal musts, reviews, and how you kept expectations realistic for those who lost out.

WHERE IT SITS

IPMA · ICB4	PMI · PMBOK® GUIDE 8 · PMP® EXAM	APM · BOK 8 · PMQ EXAM
4.5.2.3: sponsor, top managers or customers set priorities; requirements become acceptance criteria	Guide: ranking methods, MoSCoW among them (p. 187); the backlog (§2.2). Exam outline: Domain II, tasks 2–3	BoK (APM's Body of Knowledge) §5.1.3: prioritise by value, cost, risk and size, then baseline. PMQ (APM's Project Management Qualification) 16a, 17a

Sources: Clegg & Barker, CASE Method Fast-Track (1994); Agile Business Consortium, DSDM handbook: MoSCoW; IPMA ICB4 (2015); PMI, PMBOK® Guide, 8th ed.; PMI, PMP® Examination Content Outline (2026); APM Body of Knowledge, 8th ed.; APM, PMQ handbook (v6, 2026)

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