

MoSCoW Prioritization

Framework: MoSCoW (Must Have, Should Have, Could Have, Won't Have)
Use for: Feature, requirement, or scope prioritization — forcing explicit triage when everything feels like a priority.
Time required: 30–60 minutes for an initial sort. Plan for one round of debate before locking.

How to use this template

The four categories:

Category	Meaning	Target % of scope
M — Must Have	Non-negotiable for launch / delivery. Without these, the product doesn't work or the project fails.	~60% of effort
S — Should Have	Important but not critical. High value; can be descope'd if pressed but should be the last to go.	~20% of effort
C — Could Have	Nice to have. Will be dropped under time or resource pressure without significantly affecting core value.	~20% of effort
W — Won't Have (this time)	Explicitly out of scope for this version. Saying "won't have" is important — it gives the team permission not to build it and prevents scope creep.	—

The discipline: - If everything is a Must Have, MoSCoW isn't working. Force real triage. - The "Won't Have" list is as important as the Must Have list — it's the explicit list of what's been scoped out. - MoSCoW is for a specific release or time box, not forever. Something in "Won't Have" today can be a Must Have in the next cycle.

Context

Product / project / release: ____
Time box / deadline: ____
Team: ____
Date: ____
Facilitated by: ____

MUST HAVE

Without these, the product/project fails or isn't usable. Zero negotiation.

Item	Owner	Effort estimate	Rationale for Must Have

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Total estimated effort — Must Haves: ____

 SHOULD HAVE

High value; important but the product can ship without them. First to defend in scope conversations.

Item	Owner	Effort estimate	What we lose without it

Total estimated effort — Should Haves: ____

 COULD HAVE

Nice to have. Will be dropped under time or resource pressure. Build only if all Should Haves are done.

Item	Owner	Effort estimate	Notes

Total estimated effort — Could Haves: ____

✗ WON'T HAVE (this release)

Explicitly out of scope. Saying this out loud prevents scope creep and gives the team permission not to build it.

Item	Why out of scope	When to revisit

Effort balance check

Category	Effort	% of total
Must Have		
Should Have		
Could Have		
Total in scope		100%

Is the Must Have % reasonable? Target: ~60% of total effort. If Must Haves are >80%, either the team is over-committing or the definition of "must" is too loose.

Does the combined Must + Should fit in the time box? ☐ Yes ☐ No — need to descope

Descoping log

When items move categories under pressure, log the change and the reason:

Date	Item	Moved from	Moved to	Reason

Sign-off

Name	Role	Signature	Date

MoSCoW is a prioritization technique developed by Dai Clegg at Oracle in the 1990s. Covered in the Frameworks & Mental Models Guide on biztechprimer.com.

Generated for biztechprimer.com — free to use and adapt.