

# Writing Requirements Properly

**2011 NDIA System Engineering Conference  
San Diego, California**

**Presented by  
AI Florence  
The MITRE Corporation**

# Class Participation

**Determine the problems with these 3 requirements:**

3.2.5.9 All computer-resident information that is sensitive shall have system access controls. Access controls shall be consistent with the information being protected and the computer system hosting the data.

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The interval for propagating changes to suppliers shall be configurable.

# Introduction 1 OF 3

- A Government agency, while re-developing legacy systems, reversed engineered the existing requirements.
- The examples represent several legacy systems that are in the process of redevelopment in a modernization effort.
- The examples depict only the requirements effort – they do not reflect any other lifecycle activities: design, implementation, test or operation.

# Introduction 2 of 3

- It needs to be noted that requirements do not “live alone”
  - They depend on other requirements and/or
  - on clarifying commentsto present a complete view of the functionality associated with a related set of requirements.
- A related set of functional requirements may be introduced with a preamble describing the capability of the functional set.
  - The preamble does not itself establish requirements; this is done later in the requirements’ specifications.
- Some requirements may be amplified with clarifying comments which are, again, not part of the requirements, but add understandability.

# Introduction 3 OF 3

- Some requirements are documented sequentially with the requirements stated first setting the “stage” for the following requirements which add more and more capability.
  - The later stated requirements depend on the earlier requirements to complete their functionality.
  - An example may be the use of the word “processing”. If the processing of a functional set of related requirements has been described in earlier requirements the later requirements may amplify and/or reference the processing without having to restate the processing.



# Critical Attributes 1 OF 3

The following are some critical attributes that requirements must adhere to:

**Completeness:** Requirements should be as complete as possible.

*(They should reflect system objectives and specify the relationship between the software and the rest of the subsystems.)*

**Traceability:** Each requirement must be traceable to some underlying source, such as a system-level requirement.

*(Each requirement should have a unique identifier so that the software design, code, and test plans can be precisely traced back to the requirement.)*

**Testability:** All requirements must be testable in order to demonstrate that the software end product satisfies its requirements.

*(In order for requirements to be testable they must be specific, unambiguous, and quantitative whenever possible. Avoid vague, general statements.)*



## Critical Attributes 2 OF 3

**Consistency:** Requirements must be consistent with each other; no requirement should conflict with any other requirement.

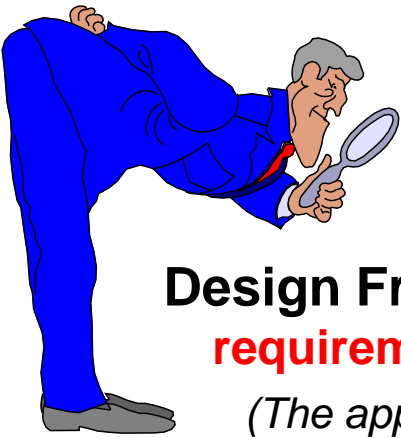
*(Requirements should be checked by examining all requirements in relation to each other for consistency and compatibility.)*

**Feasibility:** Each requirement must represent a feasible representation.

*(Requirements that have questionable feasibility should be analyzed during requirements analysis to prove their feasibility.)*

**Unique identification:** Uniquely identifying each requirement is essential if requirements are to be traceable and testable.

*(Uniqueness also helps in stating requirements in a clear and consistent fashion.)*



## Critical Attributes 3 OF 3

**Design Free:** Software requirements should be specified at a requirements level not at a design level.

*(The approach should be to describe the software requirement functionally from a system point of view, not from a software design point-of-view, i.e. describe the system functions that the software must satisfy. A requirement reflects “what” the software shall accomplish while the design reflects “how” the requirement is implemented.)*

**Use of “shall” and related words:** In specifications, the use of the word "shall" indicates a binding provision.

*(Binding provisions must be implemented by users of specifications. To state non-binding provisions, use "should" or "may". Use "will" to express a declaration of purpose (e.g., "The Government will furnish..."), or to express future tense.<sup>2)</sup>*



# Examples

- With domain knowledge of the system, several teams reverse-engineered and defined requirements.
- They represented:
  - the users
  - the contractors
  - the acquisition organization
- This author was assigned as a consultant to guide the teams in the proper specification of requirements.
- The following examples show some of the requirements:
  - as initially specified by the teams
  - followed by this author's critique (against the critical attributes)
  - and as re-specified based on the critique

# Example 1

## Initial specification:

Software will not be loaded from unknown sources onto the system without first having the software tested and approved.

## Critique:

- If it's tested and approved, can it be loaded from unknown sources?
- If the source is known, can it be loaded without being tested and approved?
- Requirement is ambiguous and stated as a negative requirement, which makes it difficult to implement and test.
- A unique identifier is not provided, which makes it difficult to trace.
- The word "shall" is missing.

## Re-specification:

3.2.5.2 Software **shall** be loaded onto the operational system **only after it has been tested and approved.**

# Example 2

## Initial specification:

3.4.6.3 The system shall prevent processing of duplicate electronic files by checking a new SDATE record. An e-mail message shall be sent.

## Critique: .

- Two “shalls” under one requirement number.
- Vague requirement: need to define the e-mail message.
- The requirement has design implications, SDATE record.
- A requirement should specify what the data in the record are and not the name of the record as it exists in the design and implementation..
- As specified it cannot be implemented or tested.

## Re-specification:

3.4.6.3 The system shall:

- a. prevent processing of duplicate electronic files by checking the **date and time** of the submission, and
- b. send the following e-mail message:
  1. **request updated submission date and time, if necessary, and**
  2. **the processing was successful, when successful.**

# Example 3 1 OF 2

## Initial specification:

3.2.5.7 The system shall process two new fields (provides production count balancing info to states) at the end-of-state record.

## Critique:

- This requirement cannot be implemented or tested.
- It is incomplete. What are the two new fields?
- “Info” should be spelled out.

## Re-specification:

3.2.5.7 The system shall provide the following data items (provides production count balancing **information** to states) at the end-of-state record:

- a. **SDATE, and**
- b. **YR-TO-DATE-COUNT**

# Example 3 2 OF 2

## Re-Critique:

- This rewrite has design implications SDATE record and YR-TO-DATE-COUNT.
- From a requirements viewpoint it should specify what the data in the records are, not the name of the record as it exists in the design and implementation.

## Re-Re-Specification:

3.2.5.7 The system shall provide the following data items (provides production count balancing information to states) at the end-of-state record:

- a. submission date and time, and
- b. year-to-date totals.

# Example 4

## Initial specification:

3.2.5.9 All computer-resident information that is sensitive shall have system access controls. Access controls shall be consistent with the information being protected and the computer system hosting the data.

## Critique:

- Two “shalls” under one identifier.
- The requirement is vague and incomplete. Need to identify the sensitive information.
- What does “consistent” mean?
- As specified it cannot be implemented or tested.

## Re-specification:

3.2.5.9 All sensitive computer-resident information **shall** have system access controls, consistent with the level of protection. (*Reference Sensitive Information, Table 5.4.1 and Level of Protection for Sensitive Information, Table 5.4.2*)

# Example 5

## Initial specification:

3.3.2.1 The system shall have no single point failures.

## Critique:

- This is an ambiguous requirement. Needs identification of what components and/or functions the “no single point failures” applies to.
- As specified it cannot be implemented or tested.

## Re-specification:

3.3.2.1 The *following* system components shall have no single point failures:

- a. host servers,
- b. networks,
- c. network routers,
- d. access servers,
- e. hubs,
- f. switches,
- g. firewalls, and
- h. storage devices.

# Example 6

## Initial specification:

3.2.7.1 The system shall purge state control records and files that are older than the operator or technical user-specified retention period.

## Critique:

- Requirement is incomplete and vague without specifying the retention period or providing a reference as to where the information can be obtained.
- Requirement cannot be implemented or tested as stated.

## Re-specification:

3.2.7.1 The system shall purge state control records and files that are older than the retention period **input into the system by either the:**

- a. operator, or
- b. technical user.



# Example 7 1 OF 2

## Initial specification:

3.2.6.3 The system shall receive and process state return data from the State Processing Subsystem. The system shall provide maintenance of the state data files and generate various reports.

## Critique:

- Two “shalls” under one requirement number and multiple requirements in the specification.
- The word “process” in the first shall is vague. Need to define the processing required.
- The second “shall” does not provide for valid requirements; they cannot be implemented or tested as stated.
  - Needs identification of type/amount of maintenance required.
  - “various reports” is ambiguous.

# Example 7 2 OF 2

## Re-specification:

3.2.6.3 The system shall receive:

- a. production data that contains data from multiple states, and
- b. state total amount for one or more states,  
extracted by the Returns Processing Subsystem.

3.2.6.4 The system shall **parse multi-state data** to respective state files.

3.2.6.5 The system shall display a **summary screen reporting the results** of processing for each state containing:

- a. **state totals,**
- b. **state generic totals, and**
- c. **state unformatted totals.**

# Example 8

## Initial specification:

3.2.7.1 The system shall not prevent the individuals from entering the year for which they intend the payment, but shall provide a check-point for them to ensure that they are not making a mistake in entering the correct year.

## Critique:

- This is a negative requirement, negative requirements should not be specified. They cannot be implemented.
- A requirement should have all conditions that are required. If conditions are not required they will not be implemented.
- Two “shalls” under one requirement number.
- Suggest that this requirement be structured in a positive fashion.

## Re-specification:

3.2.7.1 The system **shall**:

- a. **allow individuals to enter the payment year**, and
- b. provide a check-point to ensure that individuals enter the correct payment year.

# Example 9 1 OF 2

## Initial specification:

After the system receives the Validation file, the system shall:

- notify the individual about acceptance or rejection.
- the acceptance file must contain the name and ZIP code of the individual.
- rejected validation request must include the Reason Code.

## Critique:

- The second and third bullets don't make sense, try to read them as such:
  - the system shall the acceptance file must...
  - the system shall rejected Validation...
- Use of both “shall” and “must”.
- No unique identifier, use of bullets. Bullets cannot be traced.
- This requirement is ambiguous and cannot be implemented or tested.

# Example 9 2 OF 2

## Re-specification:

- 3.2.7.3** When the system receives a validation file, the system **shall**:
- a. reject the file if it does not contain the individuals:
    1. name, or
    2. ZIP code, and
  - b. notify the individual about acceptance or rejection with a reason code. (*Reference Reason Code, Table 5.4.8*)

# Example 10

## Initial specification:

- 3.2.8.2 The enrollment process shall take from one to ten calendar days to complete for all payment types.
- 3.2.8.3 The enrollment process shall take no more than three days to complete for:
  - a. credit payment, and/or
  - b. note payment.

## Critique:

These requirements are inconsistent and in conflict with each other.

## Re-specification:

- 3.2.8.2 The enrollment process shall take:
  - a. one to three calendar days to complete for:
    - 1. credit payment, and
    - 2. note payment, and
  - b. one to ten calendar days to complete for all other payment types.

# Example 11

## Initial specification:

3.2.9.1 When doing calculations the software shall produce correct results.

## Critique:

- Really? This is not a requirement.
- This type of requirements should not be specified!
- It should be deleted.

## Re-specification:

Requirement deleted.

# Summary

- The teams identified over 1000 requirements.
- The issues with their initial specification represented the entire spectrum of the following critical attributes:



- completeness
- traceability
- testability
- consistency
- feasibility
- unique identification
- design free
- use of shalls

- The teams were receptive to the critique, resolved issues and implemented the recommendations willingly.
- The requirements resulting from this effort were:
  - reviewed with senior management
  - accepted as specified
  - baselined, and
  - allocated to development teams for implementation.



# Conclusion

- If sufficient time and proper effort is taken to validate requirements against critical attributes during their definition and specification, software projects will improve their probability of success considerably.
- If this is not done, projects pay the consequences during implementation, integration and test – not to mention during operation.



**But you knew that, didn't you?  
(I hope!)**

# Contact Information

*Al Florence*  
*[florence@mitre.org](mailto:florence@mitre.org)*  
*703 395 8700 – Cell*  
*303 955 2286 – Home*