

# Planning Poker



## Orientation

What can this unit help you with?

- Coordinate a capacity planning for your project
- Find out which resources and pitfalls an activity might incorporate
- Share more available information in a team

After working through this unit...

- ... the student should understand the method
- ... the student should be able to explain the method to others
- ... the student should be able to participate in the method

## Input

In Planning Poker, the team members in a Scrum Team jointly assess the complexity and time required for each task. Planning Poker cards are often used. A task is read aloud and then each team member chooses a card from his card set (and concealing it from the others) showing the number of days he estimate the effort required to complete the task.

If the estimates are far apart, the team members with the highest and lowest estimates must explain their assumptions. The other team members listen to the arguments and rethink their own estimates. After that, they play poker again. The estimates should now converge.

In this way, all the tasks to be completed in the next sprint are estimated and summed up in terms of complexity and effort. This is the number of Story Points that will be realized by the team in the next Sprint.

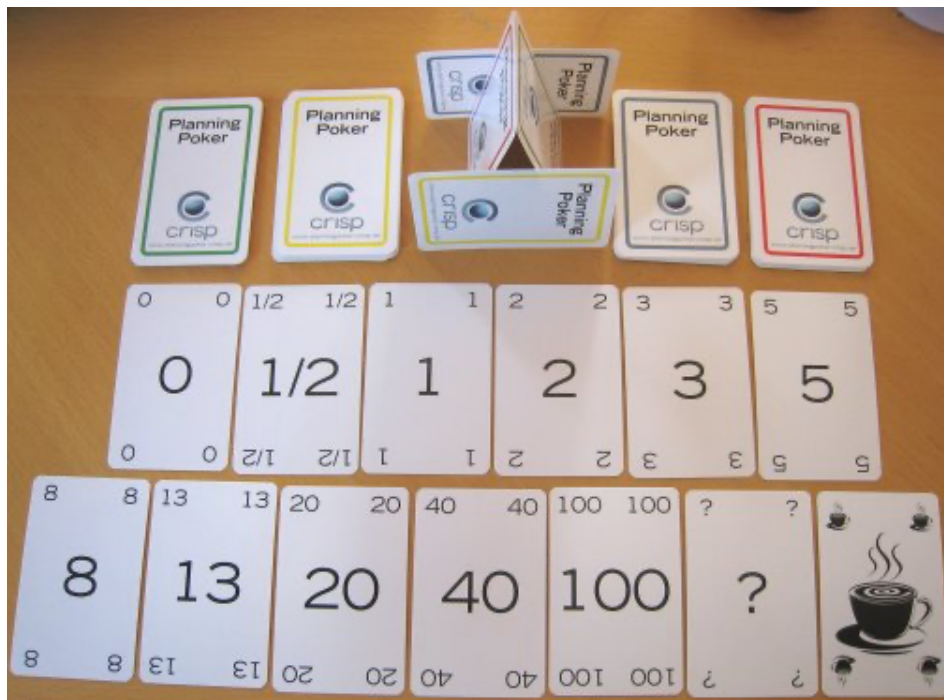


Figure 1. Planning Poker Cards

Accurate estimation promotes effective planning, and you have a variety of options when choosing a method of estimation. The key is to find the one that best suits your team and allows you to make the most helpful sprint forecasts. There are a number of proven options to choose from.

## Fibonacci sequence

0, ½, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13, 20, 40, 100

You may remember the Fibonacci sequence, a series of numbers where each number is the sum of the two preceding numbers. For example,  $1+2=3$ ,  $2+3=5$ , etc. This estimation method follows the same basic approach, but optionally includes ½ and then rounds off the higher numbers in the sequence to avoid the appearance of too high a precision.

In general, the higher the estimated effort, the less accurate the estimate. A task estimated at 21 is not necessarily accurate and certainly less accurate than a task estimated at 3. The abstraction of the modified sequence reminds both team members and product owners that estimates are just that: estimates.

## T-Shirt Sizes

XXS, XS, S, M, L, XL, XXL, XXL

Designing the task as a T-shirt size is well suited for projects that cannot work with clearly defined functions or prototypes for the tasks. They also make it easier to access the assessment and make it clear whether, for example, you prefer to complete four small tasks or one large task.

For teams who want to use this method again and try it out, it also has the advantage that the T-shirt sizes are not yet directly associated with certain hours. While 5 effort points can be quickly linked to 5 hours or days, an "M" simply offers a relative feeling of effort compared to the other stories. Teams can move faster through the planning if they focus on the overall picture rather than small details.

## Capacity Planning

Although not necessarily an effort scale, capacity planning can be a great tool for teams new to the world of agile collaboration. Instead of throwing your team into the proverbial Agile Deep End with unknown pointing scales, new teams can determine capacity through a concrete measure that everyone understands: time.

In this model, basic arithmetic will help you well:

- Hours/day x number of team members x days in the sprint = sprint capacity

We all know that a typical working day is 8 hours, but when was the last time you worked 8 full hours at your desk? Your calculations should include time for phone calls, standups, brainstorming, holidays, service trips and other "interruptions". Assuming 6-6.5 effective hours per team member per day provides a more realistic approach to accurate planning.

Let's take a five person team with a four-week stage. For this project each team member is scheduled for 1 day per week and we assume an effective working time of 5 hours per working day:

- 5 hours/week x 5 persons x 4 weeks = 100 hours capacity

Equipped with your capacity, you can start planning. Instead of using relative effort points like the previous scales, the team estimates the number of hours required for each prioritized task.

Remember that each method you choose takes time and communication to master, and the newer the team, the harder it is to estimate efforts correctly.

## Exercise

For the exercise you should try out the planning poker method yourself.

Imagine you are planning to build a **plant tub** for your vegetables (l/w/h: 200cm/70cm/50cm) on the weekend with two other people (family, friend or colleagues) and want to estimate how much time you should plan for the the taks at hand. Proceed as follows:

- Get in contact with two other people with whom you are planning the task together.
- Agree on an estimation method (Fibonacci, T-Shirt-Sizes, etc.)
- Play two rounds of poker in which you each

1. Place your estimate of how much effort the task is without revealing it
2. Reveal your estimates and discuss your differences
3. Repeat

## Submission

For your submission, please imagine you are the leader of a small team of five who work on a design pitch for a new smartphone app which presents your organisation (company, university, etc.) to the public. For your first meeting you have identified some task which have to be handled first. In order to estimate the effort for each task, you decided to conduct a planning poker round. Answer the following questions and send them to your lecturer:

- How would you prepare for the planning poker round?
- How would you instruct your team to participate in the planning poker method?
- What results would you be able to get after doing a planning poker round?
- How would you document your work?

You can answer the questions in a text or use the voice message tool below.

## Further information

1. More methods for Planning Poker can be found here: <https://technology.amis.nl/2016/03/23/8-agile-estimation-techniques-beyond-planning-poker/>
2. A short explanation video can be found here: [https://youtu.be/oFbnCW/Wg\\_NY](https://youtu.be/oFbnCW/Wg_NY)
3. About the advantages, disadvantages and alternatives to Planning Poker: <https://www.extremeuncertainty.com/alternatives-planning-poker/>