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System Requirements Guidance

Naming Needs & Use Cases

Useful and Not-So-Useful Verbs

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1 Introduction

Clear requirements start with clear names. This guide explains how to name Needs and Use Cases using a short verbal phrase, provides a vocabulary of verbs that work well in those phrases, and lists verbs that tend to produce vague or untestable names.

Use it as a quick reference when drafting, reviewing, or modelling system requirements.

2 Naming Needs and Use Cases

2.1 The ACTION on an OBJECT pattern

At a minimum, the name of a Need or Use Case should state what the system has to do, expressed as:

An ACTION on an OBJECT

Examples of well-formed names:

- **Conserve water** (action: conserve; object: water)
- **Detect intruder** (action: detect; object: intruder)
- **Dispense ticket** (action: dispense; object: ticket)

2.2 The verb test

To check that the ACTION word really is a verb, try two things: put “to” in front of it, and add “-ing” to the end. If both results are sensible verb forms, the word is suitable.

Word	“to” + word	word + “ing”
Conserve	to conserve ✓	conserving ✓
Safety	to safety ×	safetying ×

“Conserve” passes both checks, so “Conserve water” is a good name. “Safety” fails both, so a name such as “Safety check” should be reworded, for example to “Check safety interlock”.

2.3 Quick checklist

- Does the name start with a verb that passes the verb test?
- Is there a clear OBJECT that the action is applied to?
- Is the verb free from the “not so useful” list in Section 4?
- Could someone test or demonstrate that the action happens?

3 Useful Verbs

The table below lists 227 verbs that have proved useful for naming Needs and Use Cases. The list is not exhaustive; if you need a different verb, apply the verb test in Section 2.2 and check it against Section 4.

Letter	Verbs
A	Absorb, Accelerate, Access, Accommodate, Act, Activate, Actuate, Adapt, Add, Adjust, Agitate, Alert, Align, Analyse, Apply, Approve, Assemble, Assign, Assure, Attach, Attenuate, Attract
B	Balance, Blend, Bore, Burn, Bury, Buy
C	Calculate, Carry, Check, Circulate, Clean, Collate, Communicate, Conceal, Conduct, Conserve, Constrict, Contain, Control, Convert, Convey, Cook, Cost, Cover, Create, Cut
D	Dampen, Decide, Define, Deliver, Demonstrate, Depress, Design, Detect, Determine, Diagnose, Differentiate, Direct, Dispatch, Dispense, Display, Dispose, Distribute, Drain, Drill
E	Eject, Eliminate, Emit, Enclose, Enter, Expel, Extend, Extract
F	Fasten, Feel, Fill, Finish, Fix, Flash, Flow, Fly, Force, Form
G	Generate, Glide, Grasp, Grind, Grip, Group, Grow, Guide
H	Heat, Hold, House
I	Identify, Illuminate, Imbibe, Impede, Increase, Indicate, Induce, Inform, Initiate, Input, Inspect, Instruct, Insulate, Integrate, Invoke, Isolate
J	Jettison, Join, Jump
L	Learn, Limit, Load, Locate, Lock, Log, Lubricate
M	Maintain, Manage, Manoeuvre, Manufacture, Market, Measure, Metre, Mill, Mix, Modify, Modulate, Move
N	Navigate, Negate, Neutralise, Notify
O	Observe, Obtain, Order, Organise, Orient, Output, Overhaul, Override
P	Paint, Pay, Perform, Permit, Pivot, Plan, Position, Power, Press, Prevent, Print, Produce, Prognose, Protect, Pump
R	Receive, Rectify, Reduce, Regulate, Release, Relocate, Remove, Repair, Reserve, Resist, Restrain, Retain, Rinse, Rotate, Route
S	Scrap, Seal, Secure, Select, Sell, Send, Sense, Shear, Shift, Ship, Sign, Sound, Spin, Squeeze, Stamp, Start, Steer, Stop, Store, Submit, Supply, Support
T	Tap, Target, Teach, Tend, Throw, Transfer, Transmit, Transport, Trim
U	Unify, Unite, Unload, Update
V	Validate, Vaporise, Verify, Vibrate, Visualise
W	Warn, Wash, Watch, Weigh, Weld, Wet, Wipe, Wire, Wring
Z	Zip, Zoom

4 Not So Useful Verbs

Some verbs do not describe an action on an object. They instead demand a property or an unspecified level of performance. Names built on them are often called “pseudo functions”: they sound like requirements but cannot be directly designed, tested, or demonstrated.

4.1 Verbs to avoid

Achieve	Allow	Appoint
Confirm	Cope	Enhance
Encourage	Exceed	Facilitate
Improve	Meet	Promote
Provide	Satisfy	

4.2 Why they cause problems

Using these verbs does not define an action on an object. It implies that a property exists or that some unspecified level of performance is reached. For example:

- **Provide reliability** – reliability is a property, not an action.
- **Facilitate availability** – availability is a property, and “facilitate” does not say what the system does.

4.3 How to rewrite them

Ask: “What does the system actually do to deliver this property, and to what?” Then name that action. Properties such as reliability or availability can be captured separately as measurable quality attributes.

Weak name	Rewrite	Why it is better
Provide reliability	Detect fault; Repair fault	States concrete actions on a clear object.
Facilitate availability	Maintain service; Restore service	Names what the system does to stay available.
Allow user access	Authenticate user; Grant access	Describes the behaviour, not the permission.
Enhance performance	Reduce response time	Gives a measurable object and direction.
Confirm order	Verify order; Acknowledge order	Picks the precise action intended.
Safety check	Check safety interlock	Replaces a noun with a verb and object.

Note: “Improve” and “Meet” are treated as not-so-useful and so are intentionally excluded from the list in Section 3.