MoSCoW Prioritization

Force every item into one of four buckets — Must, Should, Could, or Won't have this time. The Won't bucket is the point: it draws a shared, defensible line between what is truly essential and what is merely nice to have.

45 minutes
Strategy
Beginner

H HOW TO RUN

1 Define the Buckets — 5 min

Align on the four labels — Must have (the project fails without it), Should have (important but survivable), Could have (nice if there's room), Won't have this time (explicitly out of scope for now). Set the constraint you're prioritizing against: a deadline, budget, or release.

2 First Pass — Individual — 10 min

On their own, each person places every item into a bucket. Go with instinct; you'll reconcile next.

3 Reconcile as a Group — 20 min

Go item by item. Place agreements fast; disagreements are the conversation. Watch the Must bucket — if more than ~60% of items are Musts, push items down.

4 Stress-Test the Musts — 10 min

For each Must ask, 'If we cut this, does the project genuinely fail?' If not, it's a Should. The shorter the Must list, the more useful it is.

KEY TIP

Defend the Won't list — teams treat it as a parking lot they'll empty next week; it only works if it's real, visible, and revisited on a schedule.

O OBJECTIVES

- Participants will: Agree on what is genuinely essential versus merely desirable
- Make the trade-offs explicit instead of implied
- Name what they're consciously not doing this time

M MATERIALS

- ☐ Four labeled zones: Must / Should / Could / Won't (wall, whiteboard, or board columns)
- ☐ Sticky notes or cards for each item being prioritized
- ☐ Markers for everyone
- ☐ The list of items, features, or scope to prioritize
- ☐ A clear deadline or constraint to prioritize against

P PARTICIPANTS

4 to 12 people

F FACILITATOR NOTES

REMEMBER

- Watch the 60% rule: if most items land in Must, the exercise failed — a healthy split is a lean Must list with real weight in Should and Could.
- Tie every Must to the constraint; 'Must' is meaningless in the abstract — it's always 'must, in order to hit X by Y,' so keep pointing back at the deadline or budget.
- When two people bucket the same item very differently, you've found a misalignment about what the project is even for; don't rush past it.
- Great for release planning, scoping, and any time the team insists everything is a priority.