

## Steps for Facilitating the Wall of Wonder (WoW)

In my October 2008 feature article on [Modern Analyst](#), “Exploring Requirements with a Wall of Wonder”, I discuss using a storyboarding collaboration pattern dubbed, “Wall of Wonder”. It is based on an approach to storyboarding I learned from the [Institute of Cultural Affairs](#). (From the original article: “The group uses text or diagrams to build requirements, an iteration plan, or other important deliverables by successively using individual, subgroup, and whole group activities to generate items such as desired project features, business rules, use cases or user stories, data elements, screen navigations, and so on. I call it a Wall of Wonder (WoW) because of the wondrous results groups can achieve.”).

[Figure 1](#) illustrates the process. Following is a detailed description of the steps:

### 1. Make individual listings.

- a) Briefly explain the overall flow to prepare participants. Make sure they have paper or cards, and then ask the focus question. (Remember, the focus question sets the content for the Wall of Wonder and is critical to the process).
- b) Ask the focus question. Allow people to think and brainstorm alone for five to seven minutes, listing their answers on the card or paper.
- c) Ask participants to mark their top three items, thereby sorting those they consider most important, relevant, useful, or critical. I prefer to give them a neutral criterion for sorting by saying, "Draw a star next to your top three items."

### 2. Assign one item per card, in subgroups.

Divide the group into subgroups. Determine the subgroups ahead of time or form them at this point. The task of the subgroups is to arrive at a list of items in response to the focus question by sharing, merging, converging, and adding to their cards. Shoot for seven to nine items, creating a card for each. I usually have the group choose a *leader* to keep them on task and on time and a *recorder* to do the recording for the group. I instruct the recorders to:

- Use a black marker to write one item per card.
- Describe the item with three to five words (cut to the chase).
- Write big.

**3. Post cards on the wall.**

Reconvene as a whole group. Ask for one card per group using questions such as "Which card was most obvious to your subgroup?" "Which card did you select the quickest?" or "Which is your most controversial card?" As you place each card on the wall, read it *exactly as it is written* and ask the group if they have clarifying questions. If there are any questions or puzzled looks, ask the team members who wrote the card to explain its meaning and intent. Continue this process until all detail cards are posted.

**4. Group cards.**

As this process unfolds, guide the team in grouping the cards. (Often, participants intuitively start to tell you to do this. If they don't, ask them whether anything on the wall "goes together.") Moving the cards, form columns or clusters, depending on the deliverable. Create new cards whenever a new item arises, when an item needs to be clarified, or when header cards are suggested.

**5. Create header cards.**

Create a header card for all groups or clusters. If you were writing a header card for data elements in a data model, for example, the header card would be the name of the data entity or business object to which the data element belongs. If you already have header cards from an earlier step, then ask participants to reconsider the label and ensure that it is still relevant and meaningful.

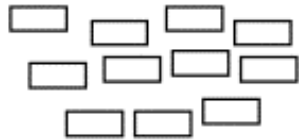
**6. Analyze groupings.**

- a) Extend the content of the wall by asking everyone to review his or her original list. As they do this, ask them whether any cards should be added.
- b) Quality check the end product (see Table 2 for examples), and then use your decision rule process to reach closure. (3)

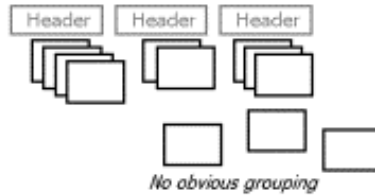
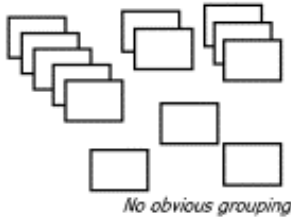
*Note: As a follow-up to creating the Wall of Wonder, consider conducting a structured discussion of the wall's contents. Ask the group to reflect on both the product they created (and its implications for the project) and on the process they used to create it. Pausing to debrief -- to process both your product and your process - offers rich learning opportunities and is the mark of a truly collaborative team.*

Figure 1: Wall of Wonder Process

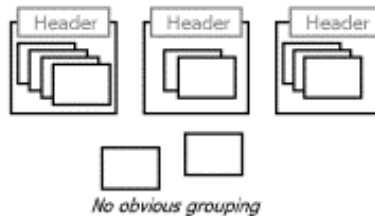
1. Participants **individually list** items.
2. Form subgroups of participants and write **one item per card**.
3. **Post cards** , randomly on the wall
4. **Group cards** into related clusters.
5. Summarize the theme that ties each group together and **create header cards**.
6. **Analyze** groupings.



4. **Group cards** into related clusters.



6. **Analyze** groupings.



**Reference:**

Gottesdiener, Ellen. [Requirements by Collaboration: Workshops for Defining Needs](#), Addison-Wesley, 2002.