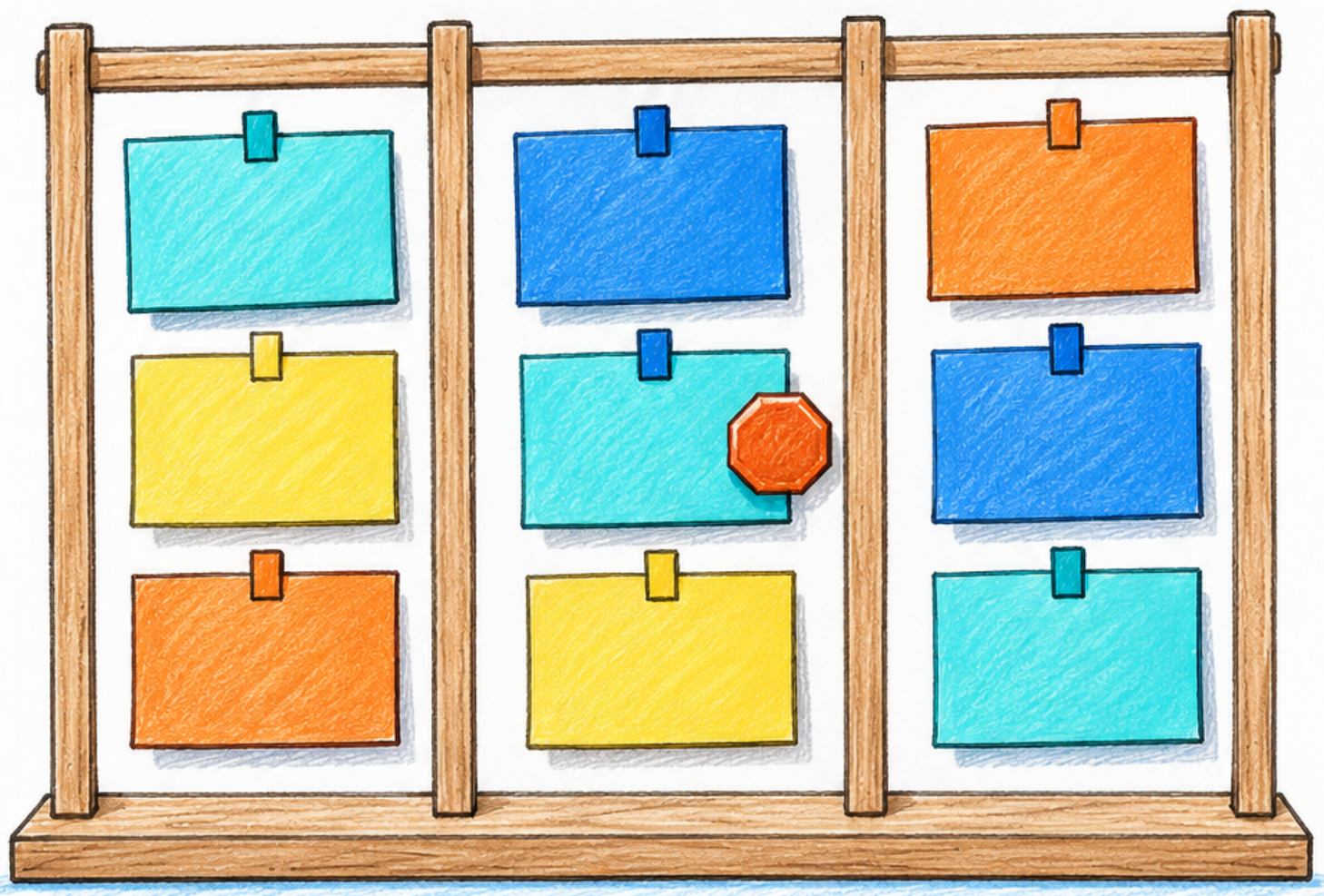
How to Build a Kanban Board for Your Team



Start with the workflow problem

A board should help the team finish useful work and improve how it flows.

Define the purpose

Kanban is a strategy for optimising the flow of value. A board makes the defined workflow visible, while policies, WIP control, measures and improvement make it actionable.

Maintenance-team case

A small team handles website fixes. Many items are started, review waits are hidden and nobody can tell which open fix needs attention.

Use the workbench

Build the board from the actual work and decision boundaries. The goal is a shared operating system, not simply attractive columns.

TAKE IT TO YOUR PROJECT

Name the flow problem the board should help you see.

Define the work items

Cards should represent meaningful units the team can track consistently.

Choose a unit

Identify the item type, its purpose and appropriate boundaries. Large vague initiatives may need splitting before useful flow measures or policies can be applied.

Maintenance case

"Fix search-filter reset" is a more manageable item than "improve the website." Record the user need and observable completion conditions.

Check comparability

Different item types can have different size and risk. Make important distinctions visible when using history to forecast or improve the system.

TAKE IT TO YOUR PROJECT

Write a card title with a clear user result.

Set the workflow boundary

Start and finish definitions determine what the team counts and measures.

Define the points

Agree when an item is considered started and when it is finished. Distinguish an unstarted queue from work in progress and make the delivery boundary explicit.

Maintenance case

Ready holds unstarted eligible fixes. Work starts when pulled into Doing and finishes when verification and the agreed delivery conditions are met.

Check the handoffs

If a release queue sits outside the finish boundary, users may still wait after the board reports completion. Choose boundaries suited to the purpose.

TAKE IT TO YOUR PROJECT

State the exact event that starts and stops the clock.

Choose states that reflect the work

Columns should show meaningful changes in condition or responsibility.

Map the path

Identify the states an item passes through, including important waiting. Keep the model understandable and detailed enough to reveal relevant decisions.

Maintenance case

The compact board uses Ready, Doing, Review and Done. Review includes the agreed verification step, and its wait needs to remain visible.

Tailor from evidence

If one column hides several distinct queues or handoffs, consider whether another state helps. Do not add columns that change no useful decision.

TAKE IT TO YOUR PROJECT

Explain the purpose of each proposed column.

Write explicit movement policies

People need to know when a card can move.

Define the conditions

State entry and exit criteria, required evidence, selection rules, WIP control and relevant exceptions. Keep the policies visible and understandable.

Maintenance case

A card enters Review only with the change, test evidence and known limitations attached. Done requires the agreed verification and delivery conditions.

Test the policy

Use an ordinary item and an exception to check whether two team members would make the same movement decision.

TAKE IT TO YOUR PROJECT

Write one clear condition for entering Review.

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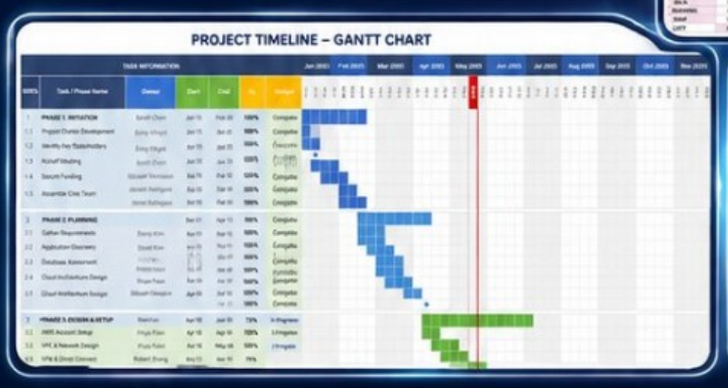
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Add the essential card information

A card needs enough context to support delivery and flow decisions.

Choose useful fields

Include ID, result, owner or collaboration point, relevant dates, acceptance conditions, dependencies and blocking information where appropriate.

Maintenance case

K03 records the timeout problem, the observable expected behaviour, the start time and a linked external input. The team can discuss it without relying on a private message.

Avoid clutter

Keep detail accessible without turning the board into an unreadable form. The information should help the next person act and interpret the item's state.

TAKE IT TO YOUR PROJECT

Choose the fields needed to make one card actionable.

Set an initial WIP control

Control started work so the system can focus on completion.

Use a starting policy

Choose a workable explicit control on work from start to finish, such as limits on states or the whole system. Confirm how blocked items are counted.

Maintenance case

Doing has an illustrative limit of 2 and Review a limit of 1. With two cards in Doing and one in Review, total WIP is 3.

Inspect the effect

A limit is a decision aid, not a target to fill. When a step is full, help existing work progress or examine the constraint before starting more.

TAKE IT TO YOUR PROJECT

State what the team will do when Review reaches its limit.

Make blocked work visible

An item can stop moving while still consuming system capacity.

Record the situation

Show the blocker, effect, owner and next action. Keep the item in its relevant workflow state unless the defined policy says otherwise.

Maintenance case

K03 waits for an external API detail. Mark it blocked, keep its age visible and count it within the current WIP boundary.

Act on the signal

Seek the missing input, consider suitable collaboration or escalate the decision. Moving the card to an invisible parking area can hide the waiting.

TAKE IT TO YOUR PROJECT

Choose a blocked item and identify its next useful action.

Agree how work is pulled

Available capacity and explicit selection rules should guide the next start.

Define the choice

Clarify who selects eligible work, which priority factors matter and what input is required. Pull only when the receiving step has capacity under the agreed rules.

Maintenance case

When Review clears K02, the next eligible completed change can enter. A new styling request does not automatically displace an existing high-impact fix.

Handle urgency visibly

Define a proportionate exceptional-work policy with decision authority and its effect on current commitments. Avoid treating every request as an emergency.

TAKE IT TO YOUR PROJECT

Write a selection rule for the next Ready item.

A worked board snapshot

Use the sample to practise reading queues, WIP and completion.

Read Ready and Doing

Ready contains K07 and K08, neither started. Doing contains K03 and K04, so Doing WIP is 2 under the current boundary.

Read Review and Done

Review contains K02, giving total WIP 3. Done contains K01, which has crossed the defined finish. The current state does not by itself describe weekly throughput.

Use the snapshot

Ask which item is oldest, blocked or most important to finish. The board becomes useful when the team acts from that evidence.

Ready	Doing / 2	Review / 1	Done
K07	K03 blocked	K02	K01
K08	K04	-	-

TAKE IT TO YOUR PROJECT

Count WIP from the sample and explain why Ready is excluded.

Review flow together

A short working conversation can keep attention on progress and constraints.

Inspect the items

Look at ageing work, blocked items, full states, dependencies and the next feasible action. Use the shared objective and relevant policies.

Maintenance case

Review is full and K03 is ageing. The team helps complete verification and obtains the missing input rather than giving everyone another new task.

Record useful actions

Name the action, owner where needed and next check. The conversation should adapt work, not only provide individual status updates.

TAKE IT TO YOUR PROJECT

Choose the first question you would ask at today's board review.

Measure the four basic flow signals

Keep the units and workflow boundaries consistent.

WIP and throughput

WIP counts started, unfinished items at a point in time. Throughput counts items finished in a specified interval. If three items finish in a week, throughput is 3 items per week.

Age and cycle time

Work item age measures elapsed time since start for an unfinished item. Cycle time measures elapsed start-to-finish time for a finished item.

Maintenance example

An item started at day 4 and still open at day 7 has age 3 days. A finished item from day 1 to day 5 has cycle time 4 days.

TAKE IT TO YOUR PROJECT

Define a clock and unit before comparing your team's measurements.

Use history for an expectation

A useful forecast states a time, probability and relevant assumptions.

Define the SLE

A service level expectation forecasts how long an item should take from the defined start to finish, with an associated probability. Use suitable evidence as it becomes available.

Maintenance case

If 17 of 20 comparable completed fixes finished within 6 days, the observed proportion is 85%. Examine whether future work and conditions are comparable before using that pattern.

Inspect the exceptions

An ageing item nearing the expected time is a signal to investigate. A probability statement is not a guarantee for every individual item.

TAKE IT TO YOUR PROJECT

Write an expectation with its boundary, time unit and evidence.

Handle demand and exceptional work

Incoming work should remain understandable while existing work progresses.

Define the policies

Clarify replenishment, item classes where useful, urgent decisions and what happens when demand exceeds capacity. Keep the effects visible.

Maintenance case

A critical access failure needs fast attention, but bypassing limits can delay other work. The authorised owner weighs impact and the team records the changed plan.

Review the system

Repeated emergencies can reveal upstream causes or an unsuitable operating arrangement. Address the pattern as well as the individual incident.

TAKE IT TO YOUR PROJECT

Identify one recurring urgent item whose cause deserves investigation.

Improve one part of the workflow

Use a bounded change with a measure and a review point.

Form a hypothesis

State the problem, proposed change and expected effect. Choose evidence that can show whether the change helped without harming quality or sustainability.

Maintenance case

The team tries two planned review windows daily for two weeks. It compares waiting and completion evidence with a suitable previous period, considering demand changes.

Adapt from results

Keep, revise or stop the experiment based on what was learned. The aim is improved value flow, not rigid adherence to an initial board design.

TAKE IT TO YOUR PROJECT

Design a small improvement and its review question.



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Your board launch check

Make the workflow understandable before expecting consistent use.

Check the definition

Work items, start and finish, states, WIP control, policies and service expectation should be clear. Confirm the intended value and decision owners.

Check the operation

Can people move an ordinary and exceptional item consistently, see blockers and age, and use relevant measures to improve flow?

Use the maintenance case

The board now reveals waiting and supports capacity-aware choices. Review it with the people doing the work as conditions and evidence change.

TAKE IT TO YOUR PROJECT

Walk one real item from Ready through its verified finish.