

Understanding Agile Charts: Burnup vs. Burndown

"Welcome, future PMPs! In Agile, we need simple, powerful ways to see our progress at a glance. Think of these charts as the project's 'dashboard.' Both Burndown and Burnup charts show our progress over time, but they tell slightly different stories. Understanding the difference is key to diagnosing your project's health and communicating effectively with your team and stakeholders. Let's break it down."

Comparison Table: Burnup vs. Burndown Charts

| Comparison Point | Burndown Chart (The Countdown) | Burnup Chart (The Progress Report) |
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| Primary Goal | To show how much work is remaining over time. It answers the question: <i>"Are we on track to finish?"</i> | To show how much work has been completed against the total scope . It answers: <i>"How is our progress, and has the scope changed?"</i> |
| What It Tracks | A single primary line: Work Remaining . The line moves downwards towards zero. | Two primary lines: 1. Work Completed (goes up) 2. Total Scope (a "ceiling" line) |
| A Simple Analogy | Draining a bathtub . You are only focused on how much water is <i>left</i> in the tub and when it will be empty. | Building a brick wall . You track two things: how many bricks you've laid (progress) and how high the wall is supposed to be (total scope). |
| Visual Representation | Y-Axis: Work (Story Points, Hours, etc.) X-Axis: Time (Sprints, Days) The line starts high on the left and trends down to the bottom right. | Y-Axis: Work (Story Points, etc.) X-Axis: Time (Sprints, Days) The <i>Completed Work</i> line starts low and trends up. The <i>Total Scope</i> line is a flat line above it. |

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| How It Handles Scope Change (Key Differentiator) | Poorly. If new work is added, the "Work Remaining" line goes UP . This looks like the team made negative progress, which is confusing and demoralizing. | Excellently. The <i>Completed Work</i> line is unaffected and continues its upward trend, showing the team is still productive. The <i>Total Scope</i> line simply jumps up to a new level. This clearly and transparently separates progress from scope creep. |
| Main Advantage | Simplicity. It's very easy to read and understand at a glance. It gives a quick, direct answer to "Are we on schedule?" | Transparency & Clarity. It provides a richer story by tracking scope changes separately from the team's progress. This is invaluable for stakeholder communication. |
| Main Disadvantage | Can be misleading. It "hides" the impact of scope creep. A project can look behind schedule when, in reality, the team is working effectively but the scope has grown. | Slightly more complex. It requires a stakeholder to interpret two lines instead of one. (Though this is a very minor drawback.) |
| Best Used When... | The scope is fixed and stable (e.g., a time-boxed Sprint). Its simplicity is perfect when there are few variables. | The scope is variable or likely to change (e.g., a Release or the project as a whole). It provides a more honest and complete picture of the project's health. |

Instructor's Key Takeaways & Exam Pointers (Rita Mulcahy Style)

- **The "So What?" for the Exam:** The PMP exam will test your *interpretation* of these charts. You won't just identify them; you'll need to look at a chart and diagnose a project's problem.
- **The Golden Question:** If you see a Burndown chart where the line suddenly goes *up*, the most likely cause is **scope was added**. The team didn't suddenly "un-finish" work!
- **Burnup is Your Friend for Scope Creep:** Remember, a Burnup chart is the superior tool for visualizing and communicating the impact of scope changes. It protects the team by showing that their progress continued, even as the finish line (the total scope) moved further away. This



aligns with the PMBOK® Guide's principle of creating a collaborative and transparent environment.

- **Think "Value Delivery":** In the spirit of the PMBOK® 7th Edition's "Measurement" performance domain, both charts are about visualizing the delivery of value. The Burnup chart, however, gives a clearer picture of both the value delivered (*Work Completed*) and the total value expected (*Total Scope*).