

Mission Writing Guide

1. Effective mission statements have four key elements: Value, inspiration, plausibility, and specificity. In a couple of short sentences, you should be able to convey the value of your company or why your brand exists, inspire and encourage your employees, sound completely reasonable and plausible, and be as specific and relevant as possible.
2. Try to sum up your entire company's mission in one or two sentences. Think of it this way: Your mission statement, at its absolute best, should be able to double as your slogan. Concise mission statements are also more memorable and effective.
3. The idea here is to choose whether you want your company's statement to reflect its short-term goals or its long-term aspirations. Be sure to choose only one; specificity is key to an influential mission. While short-term mission statements allow you to be more specific with your goals, they must be updated more often to stay relevant. If you want the statement to be a long-term reflection, use global language indicative of your company's purpose, regardless of how much your company might expand in the future.
4. Distribute drafts of the mission statement to every employee and ask them what, if anything, should be added or changed.
5. No company ever stays the same. Tweaking your statement ensures that it constantly parallels the direction of your company.

A Mission Statement should be a one-sentence, clear, concise statement that says who the agency is (the name, that it is a nonprofit, and what type of agency it is), what it does, for whom and where. Period.

The Purpose Statement

The purpose statement clearly states what your organization seeks to accomplish: Why does your organization exist? What is the ultimate result of your work?

Purpose statements usually include two phrases:

- an infinitive that indicates a change in status, such as to increase, to decrease, to prevent, to eliminate, and
- an identification of the problem or condition to be changed.

The Business Statement

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Business statements often include the verb "to provide" or link a purpose statement with the words "by" or "through."

The next puzzle piece is to ground your vision in practical terms. This is where developing a mission statement, the next step in the action planning process, comes in. An organization's mission statement describes what the group will do and why it will do that.

1

Ask yourself why you are in business. This is the core question that will determine the tone and content of your mission statement. Why did you start this business? What goals do you hope to achieve?^[1] Figure out the main purpose of your business as a way to get the brainstorming session started. Here are a few related follow-up questions you can also ask yourself:

- Who are your customers, or the people you aim to help?
- What role do you play in the industry or field?

2

Figure out your company's defining characteristics. The tone of your mission statement should reflect your company's style and culture - its personality, if you will. Think about how you want your customers and other companies to perceive you, and write down the traits you believe best represent your company. Think about the following questions:

- Is your company conservative and solid, or are you aiming to be groundbreaking and cutting-edge in style?
- Do you want to be seen as a company with a sense of humor and a playful side, or would that be too unprofessional?
- What's your company culture like? Is there a strict dress code and a formality to the place, or are people allowed to come to work in jeans?

3

Determine what makes your company stand out. Your mission statement doesn't have to be shocking or "unique" as long as it clearly expresses your goals and style. However, if you're attempting to do something out of the ordinary with your business, you should put that in your mission statement. Is there anything that makes your company special? Write it down.

4

Make a list of your company's concrete goals. Finally, your mission statement should include one or more solid goals. What's your long-term plan for the company? What are your short-term plans? What's the most important thing you're trying to do?

- Your goals can be centered around customer service, dominating a certain market, helping make people's lives better with your product, and so on.
- Keep your company's personality in mind when writing down your goals. The two should reflect one another.

1

Define your company by way of an actionable goal. Now that you've brainstormed plenty of ideas, it's time to narrow them down to the best and most interesting to get at the heart of your company and what it has to offer. Write a sentence that captures what your company is and what it aims to do.^[2] Here are a few examples:

- From Starbucks: "Our Coffee. It has always been, and will always be, about quality. We're passionate about ethically sourcing the finest coffee beans, roasting them with great care, and improving the lives of people who grow them. We care deeply about all of this; our work is never done."^[3]
- From Ben and Jerry's: "Product Mission: To make, distribute and sell the finest quality all-natural ice cream and euphoric concoctions with a continued commitment to incorporating wholesome, natural ingredients and promoting business practices that respect the Earth and the Environment."^[4]
- From Facebook: "Facebook's mission is to give people the power to share and make the world more open and connected."^[5]

2

Add concrete, quantifiable elements. Steer away from writing a mission statement with a big, idealistic vision that isn't rooted in anything concrete. Mission statements that sound like they were spewed from a mission statement generator^[6] cause people's eyes to glaze over and defeat the purpose.

- Instead of saying something like "We aim to make the world a better place," tell which customers you aim to help. Look back at your brainstorming notes for concrete ideas.
- Instead of saying something like "We'll continue to innovate to make our product the best it can be," say something real about what you're developing. What constitutes "best" in your field?

3

Add some personality. Play with the language to reflect your company's personality and style. If your company is formal and conservative, your language should be formulated to match. If your company is playful and fun, you can get creative with the language to emphasize that side of your company. Look back at your brainstorming notes for ideas.

- Word choice is important, but the structure of your mission statement can also help you make a point. Some companies start with one word that totally encapsulates the mission of the company, then write a sentence or two elaborating.
- Consider breaking it down into several smaller mission statements. What's your mission in terms of your product? How about your customer service mission? If you want to elaborate on a certain area that's important to your company's image, go ahead.

4

Leave out the fluff. A statement with too many adjectives can end up seeming meaningless. "We collectively aim to synergistically customize multimedia-based, next-generation empowerment tools." What? As you write your mission statement, choose words that mean something to you and your company. Remember that the point of a mission statement is to communicate the truth about your company. Write what you know!

5

Make sure it's not too long. Your mission statement should be clear and concise and, in most cases, no longer than a short paragraph. This makes it easier to repeat, copy, and showcase for the world to see. Don't get muddled up in a wordy mission statement you won't be able to describe to someone when they ask what your mission is. In the best-case scenario, your mission statement will become your slogan.

1

Get other company members involved. If your company has other employees, they should also have a say in the mission statement. Make sure it accurately reflects people's vision for the company. You might be off track if you read it to other employees and they stare at you blankly.

- That said, writing anything, even a mission statement, is difficult when many people give their opinions. There's no need to completely alter it unless people don't think it's accurate or honest.
- Have someone proofread your mission statement to correct spelling and grammatical errors.

2

Test it out. Put your mission statement on your website, print it on brochures, and find other ways to share it with interested people. What reactions does it elicit? If you like the feedback you're getting, your mission statement is serving its purpose. If it seems to confuse people, you might need to revisit it.

- A mission statement should lead people to ask intelligent questions. People should want to know more.

- **Revise it when necessary.** As your company evolves, so should your mission statement. Never let it seem dated or full of information that's no longer relevant to your company's situation. You should revise it about once a year to keep it fresh. There's no need to start from scratch, but it's a good idea to continually evaluate whether the statement still reveals the heart and soul of your company.