

SPiN: Strategic Planning in Nonprofits

## Mission Statement Assessment Tool

Your mission statement has an important job: It answers the question “What do you do?” This Cosmo-style quiz will help you decide whether it needs a quick spruce or major overhaul.

This quiz is based on the teaching and writing of the totally awesome Erica Mills of Claxon Marketing. I think the quiz is pretty fun, but if you want to save time or learn directly from the master, skip to the resources section. Ready? Let’s go!

**Write your mission statement from memory in the box below. DO NOT LOOK IT UP.** If you don’t remember, do your best.

**Okay, now look it up and write it word for word in this box.**

**1. Did you have it memorized?**

- A. Word for word      B. More or less      C. Kind of?      D: Not even close

**2. How many words are in your official mission statement?**

- A. 8-15      B. 16-30      C: 31 or more

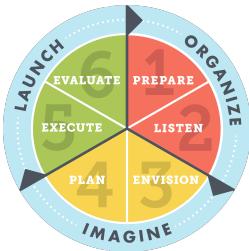
**3. Go to <https://readability-score.com/text/> and type your mission statement into the box.**

Check the column on the right: What's the Flesch-Kincaid Readability Score? \_\_\_\_\_

Look below the Flesch-Kincaid Score. What's the average grade level? \_\_\_\_\_

**4. Circle all the verbs in your mission statement. How do they make you feel?**

- A. Energized! I love these verbs!    B. I have no opinions about these verbs    C. These verbs put me to sleep



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**5. Do you use the verbs “support” or “provide”?** Yes No

**6. Say your mission statement out loud. How did it feel?**

- A. It rolled right off my tongue
- B. Okay, but not really natural
- C. I felt silly saying it

**It's time to tally up your score. More points, better. Fewer points, not as good.**

1. **A** = 4 points, **B** = 3 points, **C** = 2 points, **D** = 1 point
2. **A** = 3 points, **B** = 2 points, **C** = 1 point
3. Flesch-Kincaid: **0-40** = 1 point, **41-60** = 2 points, **61-100** = 3 points  
Average grade level: **Above 12** = 1 point, **9-12** = 2 points, **5-8** = 3 points
4. **A** = 3 points, **B** = 2 points, **C** = 1 point
5. **Yes** = 0 points, **No** = 1 point
6. **A** = 3 points, **B** = 2 points, **C** = 1 point

### What does it all mean?

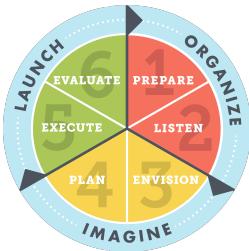
This assessment is *not* the definitive evaluation of your mission statement. Remember, your mission answers the question “What do you do?” A statement that doesn’t do its job doesn’t help you. Read on to learn some ways to improve your mission statement. Then, decide if they make sense for your org. If you need a major overhaul, check out the resources section.

### Question 1: Is your mission statement easy to remember?

**Take-away:** Want a memorable mission statement? Keep it simple.

**Why it matters:** When someone asks “What does your org do?” you want to answer without fishing around in the depths of your brain. Most forgettable mission statements are too long and too complicated. They try to tell people *everything* your organization does in one sentence. That may seem like a good idea, but as Erica says, “If you tell someone everything, they remember nothing.”

**Tips and tricks:** Get together and decide the *first thing* that you want people to know about your organization. Then, focus your mission statement on that *one thing*.



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### Question 2: Is your mission statement too wordy?

**Take-away:** Want a memorable mission statement? Keep it short! Shoot for 8-15 words.

**Why it matters:** A short, concise mission statement starts a conversation. If folks want to know more, they will ask questions! You will have a conversation and they'll learn a lot about your organization. If you hit them with a paragraph of text they won't know where to start. They'll walk away and forget everything.

**Tips and Tricks:** Boil your mission down to 8-15 words focused on the first thing you want to be known for. It may sound crazy, it may sound impossible, but you can do it!

### Question 3: Does anyone know what you're talking about?

**Take-away:** Reading level tools can help you figure out whether people outside your organization can understand your mission statement.

**Why it matters:** Big words are really fun. They make you look smart. They make you sound important. But they don't always help folks understand. A complex sentence loaded with jargon will mask the important information.

**Tips and tricks:** You want to whip out your mission statement at barbecue when someone asks "What does your org do?" Swap jargon for regular language. Shoot for a Flesch-Kincaid score of 80-100 and about 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> grade level.

### Question 4 and 5: How exciting are your verbs?

**Take-away:** Verbs energize your sentences energy. Snappy, memorable verbs give your mission statement some pizzazz.

**Why it matters:** When you use awesome, active, punchy verbs your sentence has personality and action. When you use boring verbs, or the same verbs *everyone else uses* ("support" and "provide", I'm looking at you!) your mission does not make an impression.

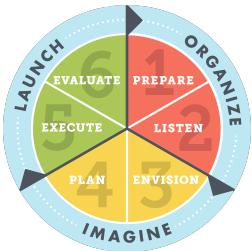
**Tips and Tricks:** Write the number one thing you do on a piece of paper. Now, pick out some rockin' verbs. Run them through The Wordifier on Erica Mills' website to see how often other organizations use your verbs. Choose under-used verbs to give your mission statement unique character.

### Question 6: Can you actually say this sentence?

**Take-away:** You want to be able to say this statement out loud! If it works out loud it will work on paper. The reverse is not true.

**Why it matters:** The most cost effective way to market your organization is through face-to-face conversations. If you can't say your new statement at a BBQ without feeling like a robot, you're missing out on a lot of opportunities.

**Tips and Tricks:** If your mission statement is already short, readable, and packed with punchy verbs it's probably easy to say. Unless you used too many interesting verbs. There's a tradeoff between speak-ability and uniqueness. Find a balance by saying each variation out loud and going with one you will actually use.



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### ***Whew. That was SO MUCH INFORMATION.***

Yup. It sure was. Good news is you don't have to take my word for it. To learn from the master herself, read the following short pieces by Erica Mills and other greats.

“Great Mission. Bad Statement.” Erica Mills. Stanford Social Innovation Review. Jan 2016.

[http://ssir.org/articles/entry/great\\_mission.\\_bad\\_statement](http://ssir.org/articles/entry/great_mission._bad_statement)

“How to Write a Mission Statement in 15 min flat.” Erica Mills. LinkedIn. Nov 2015.

<https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/how-write-mission-statement-15-minutes-flat-erica-mills>

“The 8 word mission statement: Don’t Settle for More.” Kevin Starr. Stanford Social Innovation Review. September 18, 2012. [http://ssir.org/articles/entry/the\\_eight\\_word\\_mission\\_statement](http://ssir.org/articles/entry/the_eight_word_mission_statement)

“The Cure for your completely incomprehensible mission statement.” Erica Mills. Claxon Marketing Blog. <http://www.claxonmarketing.com/2014/07/28/the-cure-for-your-completely-incomprehensible-mission-statement/> July 18, 2014.

“Mission Matters Most: To thrive, a nonprofit organization must develop—and adhere to—a clear statement of its core purpose.” Kim Jonker and William F. Meehan III. Stanford Social Innovation Review. [http://ssir.org/articles/entry/mission\\_matters\\_most](http://ssir.org/articles/entry/mission_matters_most) February 19, 2014.

*This tool was developed for SPiN by Alison Driver, University of Washington Evans School of Public Policy and Governance, in Spring 2016.*