



# Writing a Statement of Purpose

Ask these questions:

## What is it?

A statement of purpose is a sentence that you write, which states, in some detail, what you want to learn about in your research project. The statement guides you as you work so that you will read and take notes only on what's needed for your project.

## Why do I need to do it?

Writing a statement of purpose will do four things to help you:

- You will get more interested in your project.
- It will keep you from getting overwhelmed and panicky at all the information you may find.
- It will help you develop a [thesis statement](#), which comes later on in the research process.
- It saves you valuable time and effort.

## When and how to do it:

After you focus your topic and after some overview reading, write a sentence that says what you want to learn about. Don't worry if you're not totally sure; your statement of purpose may change three or four times before you're done. To write the sentence, first answer these questions for yourself as best as you can:

1. What is my real personal interest in the topic?  
(There will always be something that can interest you.)
2. What do I specifically want to learn about my topic?  
(Don't overwhelm yourself with too many things. Two or three are plenty.)

**Start your statement of purpose with words like "I want to learn about..."**

For example:

One person was very concerned about air pollution and wanted to know if the government is doing anything to stop it.

Her statement of purpose was this: **I want to learn about what is being done by our government to stop air pollution.**



This statement of purpose will lead her to eventually write a thesis statement in which she will be able to make an assertion (a statement she can defend) and support it with the evidence she has gathered in her research.

Her thesis statement may sound something like this: "In the United States, government regulation plays an important role in the fight against air pollution." Or, conversely, "United States government regulation has little effect in the fight against air pollution."

Whichever the case, she will use the evidence she has gathered in her research to prove her thesis statement.

**Make sure your statement of purpose is specific enough.**

A Bit Too General	Much Better, More Specific
"I want to learn about the Dalai Lama."	"I want to know what role the Dalai Lama plays as the spiritual leader of the Tibetan people."
"I want to learn about 50 Cent."	"I want to learn about what has influenced the music of 50 Cent."
"I want to find out about teen gangs."	"I want to find out some ways to stop teen gang activity."
"I want to learn about AIDS."	"I want to know how close we are to a cure for AIDS."
"I want to know about pro basketball."	"I want to know what it takes to be a professional basketball player."
"I want to find out about the Marshall Plan."	"I want to know if the Marshall Plan still has any effect on the world's economy."
"I want to find out about Porsches and Trans Ams."	"I want to compare the performance of a Porsche 911 and a Pontiac Trans Am and see which I will buy when I have the money."



"I want to learn about teen pregnancy."	"I want to know how teenage pregnancy affects young fathers and young mothers differently."
"I want to find out about the juvenile criminal justice system."	"I want to know what juveniles experience when they get put in legal detention for committing a serious crime."
"I want to learn about the Crusades."	"I want to know why Christians and Muslims fought so hard with each other during the Middle Ages."

Created by Holly Samuels, Librarian at Cambridge Rindge & Latin School in 2004.  
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