

Writing a STATEMENT OF CONTROLLING PURPOSE

Once you have decided on a fairly limited topic, your next step is to write a **statement of controlling purpose**. This is a sentence or pair of sentences that tells what you want to accomplish in your paper. It is called a statement of controlling purpose because it controls, or guides, your research. The statement of controlling purpose usually contains one or more key words that tell what the paper is going to accomplish. Key words that often appear in statements of controlling purpose include *analyze, classify, compare, contrast, define, describe, determine, establish, explain, identify, prove, and support*.

To come up with a statement of controlling purpose, you will have to do a considerable amount of preliminary research. That is because before you can write a statement of controlling purpose, you have to know enough about your topic to have a general idea of what you want to say in your paper.

A controlling purpose can be to...

Establish (or to prove false) one or more statements: The purpose of this paper is to prove that tobacco is a harmful and addictive drug.

Determine the relative value of two or more things: The purpose of this paper is to compare solar, wind, and wave energy to determine which is the most reliable, practical, and cost-effective alternative energy source.

Analyze something into its parts and to show how those parts relate to one another: The purpose of this paper is to describe the stages in the television production process and to explain how those stages interrelate.

Define something: The purpose of this paper is to define the phrase "freedom of the press" by explaining the nature of and limits on press freedom under the law.

Explain causes and effects: The purpose of this paper is to explain the various causes of the destruction of Brazil's rain forests.

Establish a cause-effect relationship: The purpose of this paper is to present the scientific evidence that suggests that the wearing of seat belts reduce the severity of injuries in accidents.

Describe the development of something over time: The purpose of this paper is to describe how rock-and-roll developed from roots in blues, gospel, and country and western music.

Identify and describe a general trend: The purpose of this paper is to show that a major extinction of South American plant and animal species is now occurring.

Classify individual items into groups or categories: The purpose of this paper is to classify African myths into several distinct categories (creation stories, lineage stories, etc.)

Relate a part to a whole: The purpose of this paper is to examine the place of the worm in the ecosystem of a forest.

Compare and/or contrast two subjects to determine their degree of similarity or difference: The purpose of this paper is to compare and contrast the views of nature in the poetry of Emily Dickinson and Robert Frost.

Examine a technique: The purpose of this paper is to examine the use of the technique of allegory in *The Scarlet Letter* by Nathaniel Hawthorne.

Explain a general concept by means of specific examples: The purpose of this paper is to explain the concept of a paradox through examples from math, language, and art.

Explain the main idea or message of something: The purpose of this paper is to explain the political message of John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*.

The list of possible controlling purposes given above is far from complete. So do not worry if the controlling purpose that you come up with does not fall into one of the categories above.

Your controlling purpose may change as you do your research.

When you begin writing your research paper, you will replace your controlling purpose with a **thesis statement**, a statement of your main idea. The thesis statement will not contain the phrase "the purpose of this paper is..."