

# Writing Effective Purpose Statements

A purpose statement is a declarative sentence which summarizes the specific topic and goals of a document. It is typically included in the introduction to give the reader an accurate, concrete understanding what the document will cover and what he/she can gain from reading it. To be effective, a statement of purpose should be:

- Specific and precise - not general, broad or obscure
- Concise - one or two sentences
- Clear - not vague, ambiguous or confusing
- Goal-oriented - stated in terms of desired outcomes

Some common introductory phrases for purpose statements include:

- "The purpose of this paper/letter/document is to..."
- "In this paper, I will describe/explain/review/etc. the..."
- "My reason for writing is to..."
- "This paper will discuss the..."
- "The purpose of this paper is twofold: to \_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_"

## Examples of Ineffective Purpose Statements:

- (1) "The purpose of this paper is to describe the changes that are occurring in corporate America."

*Critique:* too vague and broad. No clear expectation of what the reader will learn. *Questions:* What specific changes in corporate America will be described? What types of changes? What aspects of corporate America will be discussed? Will this paper also discuss the effects of these changes?

- (2) "The purpose of this report is to discuss the eating disorders Anorexia and Bulimia."

*Critique:* too vague and broad. It is not clear what aspect of these disorders will be discussed, or what the reader will learn. *Questions:* What specific aspects of these eating disorders will be discussed? The causes of these disorders? The signs or symptoms of these disorders? The effects of these disorders? If so, what types of effects - physical, emotional, psychological?

- (3) "This article will cover the different ways a company can become organized."

*Critique:* obscure and misleading. It is not clear what is meant by "different ways" or "become organized." These terms are vaguely stated and ambiguous. *Questions:* What is meant by "different ways" and "become organized"? What, specifically, will the reader learn about companies and how they become organized? Any specific types of organization? Any specific types of companies?

## Examples of effective purpose statements:

- (1) "This paper will describe four common causes of co-worker conflict in organizations and explain how to use a five-step procedure to constructively manage this conflict."

*Critique:* Very specific about what aspects of conflict will be discussed. Very precise about how much information will be given. Very clear about what the reader will learn.

- (2) "This report will explain how supervisors can use four planning strategies to improve employee productivity in the workplace."

*Critique:* Very specific about what will be discussed (planning strategies), and what the outcome will be for the reader (how to improve employee productivity).

(3) "This purpose of this report is to describe the main causes of traffic congestion in Seattle."

*Critique:* Leaves no doubt about the report's main purpose. Specific about the focus of the traffic congestion (Seattle).