Statement of Purpose

What do you mean by a "statement of purpose"?

Look at this example from the ISEP International Student Exchange Program application form:

In a clear, thoughtfully prepared short essay (about 500 words) in English, introduce yourself and present your reasons for wanting to work/study in the United States. Use this essay to tell about your strengths and special interests that may not be evident in other materials you have submitted. Explain why you are a strong candidate for an ISEP exchange, referring to such items as educational achievements, intellectual and personal interests and career goals. Do not include specific references to or justifications for wanting to study at a particular site.

Why is the statement of purpose so important?

UCAS (the central university applications system in the UK) gives the following information:

It is not only important - it is an extremely important part of an application. It offers you an opportunity to give information about yourself which is not provided elsewhere on the form. A comprehensive and well-written personal statement may be a key factor in persuading the person reading your application to offer you a place; in contrast, vague statements such as "I want to be a teacher" tell the recipient very little and are unlikely to improve your chances of an offer.

Your personal motivation, current interests and activities and future plans, together with the qualifications you have listed elsewhere, will decide whether you will be a successful exchange student / trainee.

What should I write?

First of all, be comprehensive: don't leave anything important out (e.g. non-examined studies). Official qualifications are only part of the picture: your subjective view of your past and present (relevant) experience, and future plans, supplies the missing information. Only you know all the details about yourself - if you leave something out, no one will ever know!!

Secondly, notice these key words (previously mentioned above) and write about these topics. In general, these are the expected topics you should include - check your application form for other information.

Educational achievements.

Intellectual and personal interests, current interests and
activities

Personal motivation

Career goals and future plans

Don't forget to write about reasons why you became / are interested in your studies, what you are particularly interested in and why, and stress the importance of the exchange place to further your future plans.

Thirdly, remember to write about activities in which you have been in a position of authority or have had to demonstrate communication skills.

Finally, give a positive picture of yourself and your outlook on life (this is not the place for listing your failures!). Also don't be too modest. If you have done particularly well, received a prize, award, scholarship, don't be afraid to mention it. In US applications this is particularly important.