



School of Liberal Arts

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Developing Effective and Appropriate Titles

One of the most overlooked elements of a student's paper is the title, but the title is your opportunity to make a good first impression. An effective title catches your reader's attention, gives them an idea of the paper's content, and reveals the writer's attitude toward the topic. Titles must also be appropriate for the subject and tone of the paper; do not use a cutesy title for a term paper on a serious topic. Generally, titles should be concise and not simply a repetition of assigned topic or research question.

STRATEGIES FOR DEVELOPING EFFECTIVE TITLES

Titles can come in many forms, from a single word to a lengthy phrase, from a clever rhyme to a grim analogy. Below are some strategies for creating an appropriate and effective title.

- A. Choose a memorable phrase or quote from your paper.

Example: An Assault on Our Womanhood (A phrase used in a paper on ovarian cancer)

- B. Use a thought-provoking question.

Example: What Killed the Dinosaurs? (A paper on theories on the dinosaurs' extinction)

- C. Grab the reader's attention with an exaggeration.

Example: A Hole as Deep as the Ocean: The True Story of the Black Hole of Calcutta

- D. Use a famous quotation.

Example: We Didn't Start the Fire (A paper on civil protest in the United States, quoting Billy Joel's famous song)

- E. List items that are mentioned in your paper, but may seem to have nothing in common.

Example: Mirrors, Blood, and Wolves: Imagery in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*

- F. Use alliteration or rhyme.

Example: Femme Fatale or Fragile Flower: Queen Marie Antoinette

- G. Capitalize on diverse meanings of words.

Example: Get a High! (A paper on hiking, playing on the "elevation" and "euphoria" definitions of the word "high")

DOs AND DON'Ts OF GOOD TITLES

- Do grab your reader's attention.
- Do offer some clue as to what the paper covers.

- Don't simply restate the topic.
- Don't just repeat the leading question from the instructor's assignment sheet.
- Don't be boring.
- Don't use a funny title for a serious topic and vice versa.

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