

Titles



While titles are often overlooked by writers, they are key to introducing readers to a text and encouraging them to read the work and engage with the ideas. Below are some helpful guidelines for composing a title, but always tailor your work to your audience and assignment.

Functions of a Title

- Makes the general topic known and indicates your particular stance, helping differentiate it from similar texts
- Helps readers find and select your work by using searchable, key terms and generating interest in your topic
- Sets the tone for the paper and alerts the reader about what to expect
- Gains the trust and interest of the reader before any text is read

Possible Sources for a Title

- A pertinent phrase from the paper
- An adaptable quotation from another source
- A key phrase or idea from the thesis statement
- A relevant question addressed in the paper

Various Options for a Title

- Use words or phrases that have double or clever meanings.
Example: Love Stinks: Pheromones and Their Influence in Dating Relationships
The phrase *Love Stinks* uses the word *sink* in both its literal and figurative meanings.
- Take a common phrase and put a spin on it.
Example: When Good Writers Go Bad
This title could be used for a paper on the common writing errors of college students.
- Use words that surprise or encourage curiosity.
Example: Marxist America
Since most US residents think that the country is democratic and not Marxist, this title surprises the reader.

Considerations for Titles

- Be mindful of the audience. Do not offend your reader in an attempt to generate interest.
- Make the title fit the paper content, tone, and audience. If your paper is a strict report of information, a humorous title may not be appropriate.
- Revise the title as you revise the paper. If the major ideas of the paper change, then the title will have to reflect the change in topic.
- Don't use quotes around the title of your paper (unless it's a quotation).
- Be cautious about colons in titles and know how to use them effectively. The part before the colon is often clever and catchy; the part after the colon is descriptive. When done well, this type of title can both attract interest and explain the paper. When done poorly, such a title can be lengthy, confusing, or distracting.
- If you are publishing your work, consider what key terms readers will use to search for similar texts, and include those words in your title.
- When in doubt, go for a short, simple, and straightforward title over an unduly lengthy or complex title.