

Writing a Good Research Title: Things to Avoid

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When [writing manuscripts](#), too many scholars neglect the research title. This phrase, along with the abstract, is what people will mostly see and read online. Title research of publications shows that the [research paper title does matter a lot](#). Both bibliometrics and altmetrics tracking of citations are now, for better or worse, used to gauge a paper's "success" for its author(s) and the journal publishing it. Interesting research topics coupled with good or clever yet accurate research titles can draw more attention to your work from peers and the public alike.

It would be helpful to have a list of what should never go into the title of a journal article. With this "don'ts" list, authors could have a handy tool to maximize the impact of their research. Titles for research manuscripts need not be complex. It can even have style. They can [state the main result](#) or idea of the paper (i.e., declarative). Alternatively, they can indicate the subject covered by the paper (i.e., descriptive). A third form, which should be used sparingly, conveys the research in the form of an open question.

A Handy List of Don'ts

- The period generally has no place in a title (even a declarative phrase can work without a period)

- Likewise, any kind of dashes to separates title parts (however, hyphens to link words is fine)
- Chemical formula, like H₂O, CH₄, etc. (instead use their common or generic names)
- Avoid roman numerals (e.g., III, IX, etc.)
- Semi-colons, as in “;” (the colon, however, is very useful to make two-part titles)
- The taxonomic hierarchy of species of plants, animals, fungi, etc. is not needed
- Abbreviations (except for RNA, DNA which is standard now and widely known)
- Initialisms and acronyms (e.g., “Ca” may get confused with CA, which denotes cancer)
- Avoid question marks (this tends to decrease citations, but posing a question is useful in economics and philosophy papers or when the results are not so clear-cut as hoped for)
- Uncommon words (a few are okay, but too many can influence altmetric scoring)
- Numerical exponents, or units (e.g. km⁻¹ or km/hr)
- Vague terms (e.g., “with” could be re-written with a more specific verb; “amongst” rectified by simpler word ordering)
- Cryptic/complex drug names (use the generic name if allowed to)
- Obvious or non-specific openings with a conjunction: e.g., “Report on”, “A Study of”, “Results of”, “An Experimental Investigation of”, etc. (these don’t contribute meaning!)
- Italics, unless it is used for the species names of studied organisms
- Shorten scientific names (not *coli*, but write instead *Escherichia coli*)
- Keep it short. Aim for 50 to 100 characters, but not more (shorter titles are cited more often) or less than 13 words

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Use the List

Take some time out to look at a good research title example. It could be one that you liked or a recognized collection of best research titles. Discuss these with your colleagues and co-authors. [Write several title drafts](#) in various forms, either in the declarative or descriptive form, with or without a colon. Then use the list above as a [guide to polish and winnow](#) your sample research title down to an effective title for your manuscript.

A great title should [interest the reader](#) enough to make him/her want to download your paper and actually read it. Importantly, in selecting the words, aim to both pique the reader’s curiosity and sum up the research work done. Bear mind, too, that a good title should also ensure your publication is easily found. This is now crucial for digital indexing and archiving purposes.

10 TIPS

HOW TO CHOOSE ATTRACTIVE RESEARCH TITLES



- 1** Frame a simple and concise title; choose words that are absolutely essential.
- 2** Use a descriptive phrase rather than a sentence for efficient content delivery.
- 3** Include critical keywords from your research in the title to increase its visibility.
- 4** Avoid jargon, non-standard abbreviations, units, or special symbols.
- 5** Request/incorporate meaningful suggestions from your peers/mentor(s).
- 6** Maintain the word count between 5 and 15 words to ensure readers' interest and focus.
- 7** Include action phrases (verbs) in your title wherever possible.
- 8** Conform to the journal requirements—character limit, formatting guidelines, etc.
- 9** Summarize the research paper's key findings effectively for your target audience.
- 10** Create multiple titles and choose the one that best conveys the uniqueness of your research.

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Research Titles in the 21st Century

Remember, a good [research paper](#) title is now essential. However, it is no substitute for good quality science and scholarship. Exaggerated or sensational titles, especially those that make unwarranted generalizations, may well get more attention from the media. Given the growing use of Twitter and other social media platforms, the research paper title is clearly gaining value and importance. Title research, therefore, is critical to understand what effect a given type or use of a research title has on its readership.

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Cite this article

Enago Academy, Writing a Good Research Title: Things to Avoid. Enago Academy. 2017/07/17. <https://www.enago.com/academy/writing-a-good-research-title-things-to-avoid/>