

Creating effective titles for your scientific publications



You work for months, maybe years, to plan and conduct your study. You write it up carefully, reporting every piece of data accurately. You get the approval of your co-authors and double-check everyone's conflicts of interest for the disclosure form. You are ready to submit it when you remember that your work needs a title. "No problem," you say. "I'll just throw something together."

Hold on—that's not a good idea. The title of a scholarly article really does matter, for several reasons (Video 1, available online at www.VideoGIE.org). It is the first thing a reader will see, so it helps him or her decide whether to read the rest of the article (Fig. 1).¹ If you are publishing in a subscription model, it helps the reader decide whether to buy the whole article. Later, when the reader is writing his own article and wants to cite yours, he can find it more easily if you have given it an effective title. If the article is cited more, it will help your H-Index and G-Index, building your reputation and credibility. Furthermore, if your article is highly cited, it helps the publishing journal's Impact Factor. Journal editors know which authors' articles are highly cited and will react with interest when they see another article submitted by that author in the future.

Several elements make up an effective title (Table 1). Studies have shown that shorter titles receive more citations; most recommend 10 to 15 words or between 31 and 40 characters.²⁻⁶ Punctuation is important: commas and colons have been shown to increase citations, but articles with question marks or exclamation points are cited less frequently.⁷ Keywords that help researchers find your article when they use search algorithms are critical, so make sure that your title accurately reflects the key concepts of your article.^{4,8,9}

Avoid abbreviations or jargon in your title.^{3,4,9} People from other fields whose research intersects with yours might cite you if they can find your article, but if you use abbreviations or jargon specific to your field, their searches won't uncover your article.

Some authors think attracting attention with humor or puns is a good idea, but that practice is actually counterproductive.^{3-5,9} Your title should reflect the tone of the article and of the journal, and because we are dealing with scholarly publications, that means the title should

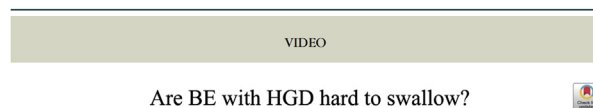


Figure 1. Example of a poor title. It has a problem with grammar ("Are" instead of "Is"), it attempts to be funny, it is in the form of a question, uses abbreviations, does not have clear keywords, and does not make the point of the article clear.

TABLE 1. Elements of a good title for a scholarly publication

Element	Good title	Poor title
Length	10 to 15 words or 31 to 40 characters	Longer than 15 words
Punctuation	Commas, colons, or semicolons	Question marks and exclamation points
Keyword use	Yes	No
Abbreviations	No	Yes
Jargon	No	Yes
Humor	No	Yes
Geographic location	No	Yes
Correct grammar and spelling	Yes	No
Follows journal guidelines	Yes	No
Clearly states the point of the article	Yes	No

be formal as well. If you are writing an editorial or opinion piece, you might get away with a less-formal title, but for the most part, making your readers laugh should not be a priority.

Poor grammar and incorrect spelling are jarring and irritating to many readers as well as to editors and reviewers, so check and double check that the title is grammatical and everything is spelled and punctuated correctly. If you are using an editing or translation service to assist you with the composition of your article, be sure to include the title in the content submitted for review to catch errors you may have overlooked.

Above all, remember that your title is a reader's first impression of your article, so make sure that impression is effective. Do all you can to create a title that is professional and does justice to the article you have worked so hard to create.

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