Tips for Finding a Good Title

A good title is an important part of a paper; it communicates what the topic of the paper will be and catches your reader’s attention. Unfortunately, thinking of a great title can also be extremely difficult. Here are a few suggestions:

Do It Last

How can you come up with a title when you don’t even know what your paper is going to be about? A title is like putting a cherry on a sundae. It adds to the sundae, but you don’t begin with the cherry first. While writing a title first may work for some writers, it may not work for all. After your paper is written, choose a phrase or two that strikes you as relevant and interesting. Maybe one of these phrases can be worked into a title.

Don’t Be Cute

You might get a good chuckle out of the clever pun you’ve found for your paper. Maybe all your friends thought it was a hilarious title. But bear in mind that your professor might not find it so funny. In fact, they may even find it offensive.

- Bad Titles: “World War II: Hitler’s Revenge!” “Oh My God, They Killed Lincoln!”

Don’t Be Dull

There’s nothing more horrendously dull than a title that just curls up and dies while it is being read. These kinds of titles state the obvious and include titles that communicate nothing but the general topic of the paper. Dull titles are often vague, like these:

- Bad Titles: “Christopher Columbus” “Dropping the Atomic Bomb”

Give Your Reader Information About Your Paper

Readers should have a general idea about what your topic and thesis will be. This is especially important for argumentative or informational papers (such as when you’re answering a specific question).

- Good Titles: “Paradise Lost: Columbus’ Destruction of America” “Quest for Fire: How the U.S. Won the Atom Bomb Race”

Look To Your Paper

Sometimes a good title can be mined from your paper itself. Read through your paper and look out for distinctive phrases or quotes that could work as a title.

Ask A Reader

Ask a writing consultant, classmate, roommate, a friend what he or she thinks your paper is about. This “say back” could help you find a central idea for your title.