

## Writing a Great Title

### Titles are important for your *reader*

- A title contributes to the argument developed in the rest of the essay. By identifying the topic, argument, and method of the essay, a strong title begins the work of informing and/or convincing readers.
- A strong title indicates to your instructor/marker that you have understood the question and the concepts. One of the first things your instructor or marker will look for is whether the assignment question has been answered. A clear title helps demonstrate that it has been.
- Another function of the title is to capture readers' attention and interest.

### Titles are useful to the *writer*

- The title is a “privileged” place in the text, because it draws the reader's most complete attention. Take advantage of that fact. Use the title's privileged position to express your ideas clearly and to articulate your argument.
- A title chosen early in the writing process can help writers stay on track during the writing process. Alternatively, creating a title at the end of the writing process can function as a check for the writer. If coming up with a title is difficult, it may indicate that the essay's main ideas or point is unclear.

### What a great title looks like

Titles for academic essays are often very long. Don't be surprised if your title is two or more lines long. Often, titles are split into two parts, the main title and a subtitle, separated by a colon. The main title and subtitle are usually a combination of:

Catchy Phrase, Quotation, or Clever Hook
Example: It's a Frog's Life
An Informative Phrase about the Content, Organization, and Method(s) Used in Your Writing
Example: A Description of the Habitat and Breeding Patterns of the South American Tree Frog

The two parts can be reversed depending on what the writer wants to emphasize.

Catchy phrase as main title
It's a Frog's Life: A Description of the Habitat and Breeding Patterns of the South American Tree Frog
Catchy phrase as subtitle
A Description of the Habitat and Breeding Patterns of the South American Tree Frog: It's a Frog's Life

Different citation styles have different rules for capitalization and punctuation in titles. The above examples are in MLA; be sure to follow the appropriate style guidelines for your assignment.

## How to develop an appropriate title for your essay

### *Write your essay*

Most often, titles are written at the end of the writing process, so the first step in creating a great title is to write your essay.

### *Consider your audience*

Think about your intended audience: what is most likely to appeal to them? Content? Humour? Since your intended audience is likely your instructor, review the style that they use in the assignment guidelines/course outline. Can you match it?

### *Re-read the assignment guidelines*

If there are any specific instructions about the title, follow them. Otherwise, try to use words or phrases from the assignment guidelines in your title. Certain key phrases that are often used are analyze, assess, compare/contrast, define, describe, discuss, evaluate, illustrate, outline, summarize. Turn these verbs into nouns.

- An Analysis of. . .
- A Summary of . . .

If there is an essay question, phrase your title as an answer to it. Avoid using a question as your title.

### *Re-read your essay*

If a good title doesn't suddenly come to mind, write down your topic and key words from your essay. These words reflect the main concept or ideas of the whole essay. Join these words together in a sentence or sentences. Convert these sentences into shorter phrases.

### *Re-work your title*

Occasionally, a title will pop into your mind fully formed, but most often, titles need to be written, expanded, and edited several times. Make the title as informative as possible, even if it seems long or wordy. Don't hold back—reveal your conclusions. Be direct and enthusiastic.

## Final thought

Ideally, this handout has helped you to craft a great title for your essay. While a great title is important to strive for, don't get too stressed out about finding the *perfect* title. The most important thing is finishing the essay and letting people read it.