

THE TITLE

A shorthand title may prove adequate in the early stages of a project. The working title of every paper, article, or book you write, and the date of your current draft, should appear on every page. If your working title encapsulates your problem statement and helps to keep you ever mindful of focus, so much the better. Be thinking about possible final titles from the beginning and jot down ideas as they occur. During the long interim between the start-up of a project and a completed first draft, the title is one of the few tangible aspects you can share that both announces and summarizes your study. In a reflective article “From Title to Title,” Alan Peshkin, whose several book-length studies on aspects of American communities and education provide excellent models of qualitative research, described how, during the course of a field study, the evolving sequence of possible titles reflected his thought process as he continuously refined his research focus (Peshkin 1985).

Selecting a title is serious work, but it can also be fun. A common practice in scholarly writing is to assign what amounts to a double title. As a consequence, two long, independent, often seemingly unrelated subtitles, joined by a colon, may be attached to even the shortest of articles. One of these titles may be creative, even catchy. The “catchier” it is, the greater the need for a subtitle that gives a clear indication as to content.

Some of my early favorites among such titles are Suzanne Campbell-Jones, *In Habit*, with the informative subtitle *A Study of Working Nuns* (1978), and Shari Cavan’s *Liquor License: An Ethnography of Bar Behavior* (1966). Janet Spector’s *What This Awl Means: Feminist Archaeology at a Wahpeton Dakota Village* (1993) presents a title that promises not only some serious digging but a lively read.

I caution against being too cute. Titles can come back to haunt you and may detract from your purpose. If the lighthearted part of your title is on the clever side, its complement, the subtitle, should accurately describe the nature of your work. From firsthand experience, I also advise against using unfamiliar words in a title, especially place names about which the pronunciation is uncertain. My first book title included the word *Kwakiutl* (HFW 1967); a later book took the name *Bulawayo*, a city in Zimbabwe, for part of its title (HFW 1974a). Those names conveyed important information, but I discovered that many readers

avoided the them—and thus never referred to either book by title—preferring not to stumble over an incorrect pronunciation. An article or book with a title that one cannot pronounce is not a likely candidate for becoming a topic of conversation.

My partner Norman and I are credited by Ron Rohner for suggesting *They Love Me, They Love Me Not* (Rohner 1975) as the title for his then-newly-completed manuscript, but our creative inspiration would have done a grave disservice without the complementary subtitle: *A Worldwide Study of the Effects of Parental Acceptance and Rejection*. Similarly, *Teachers Versus Technocrats* (HFW 1977) proved an effective title for a case study of the dynamics of educational change, but it sorely needed its subtitle, *An Educational Innovation in Anthropological Perspective*, to bring it to the attention of its intended audiences. Granted, either of these subtitles is a mouthful, but they helped inform potential readers and signaled fair warning as to their serious orientation. I like to chide academic colleagues about their long titles, but we are not alone. The complete title of a Charles Dickens classic, usually referred to only by the name of its central character, is *The Personal History, Adventures, Experiences & Observation of David Copperfield The Younger of Blunderstone Rookery (Which He never meant to be Published on any Account)*.

Should a Hollywood studio approach me with the unlikely possibility of making a film based on this monograph, I'll cast about for a much snappier title (something like *Romancing the Keys?*) to replace the cumbersome *Writing Up Qualitative Research*. Until they do, however, my conscience is clear. The present title succinctly and accurately conveys enough about the contents to hold its own in the marketplace of ideas. It is short, but not too short to communicate. Exceedingly short titles may render a disservice. One that comes to mind is Gregory Bateson's succinctly titled *Naven* (Bateson 1936). Although eventually recognized as an "eccentric classic" (Geertz 1988:17), the book's title only compounded the obscurity in which it remained shrouded for more than two decades. But it would be hard to top *Rc Hnychnyu* (Salinas 1978) for a title guaranteed to scare off any but the most dedicated student able to recognize that the account deals with the Otomí people and language.

Computerized databases have added another reason for including critical locator words in a title or subtitle, especially for book-length works. If important identifying words do not appear in the title, the work will not "come up" during a computer search and may not

attract attention in a publisher's catalog. The "cute" alternative title suggested above, *Romancing the Keys*, is a good example of a bad example. And think how *Bird by Bird* might have been cataloged on an electronic bibliography had Anne Lamott not added the subtitle *Some Instructions on Writing and Life!*

FRONT MATTER

It may seem a bit obvious that front matter goes at the front of a book. Except for a Table of Contents, augmented perhaps with an executive summary, I am not convinced that loading up with customary "front matter" baggage is a great idea. Let me review some of these "matters" with an eye to placing them elsewhere (i.e., at the back of the book instead of the front) or eliminating them altogether. This may be another of those times when you need to put yourself in your readers' shoes. Readers are anxious to get to the content of your study; this is no time to get in their way!

Dedication. Academic authors sometimes go overboard with the well-intended but subject-to-abuse practice of dedicating works, particularly works of limited scope or modest appeal. My suggestion is to *acknowledge* the help and support of others (including your spouse and offspring who, it would seem, somehow *were* able to convey the isolation they suffered during the prolonged period you devoted to writing) rather than express gratitude or affection in a dedication. I think that dedications should be reserved for the finest of works and the most special of people. With lots of special people in mind, I have been able to resist encumbering anyone with a dedication thus far. It's always tempting, but I intend to hold out a bit longer. Your call, of course; if you insist on indulging yourself, keep the dedication simple.

Preface. Prefaces, like any prefatory statement, serve the important function of setting forth the purposes and scope of what lies ahead. They give the author a personal opportunity to invite the reader to come in for a closer look, with the blessing of the publisher, who probably views this as an opportunity to promote the book to a potential buyer. If you originally submitted a formal prospectus with the hope of gaining the publisher's interest in publishing, you might think