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From the Editor...

Make the Title Count

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The title and abstract of an article are two of its most important elements. They are the first parts that readers see, and when they provide significant information about the paper's content, they have the potential to grab readers' attention and attract them to the article. The title and abstract are often the only parts of a journal article that are freely accessible online and available for searching. They also are used for indexing an article and other types of publications for databases such as PubMed (MEDLINE) and the Cumulative Index to Nursing and Allied Health Literature (CINAHL) and by search engines such as Google. When relevant keywords and terms are used in the title, and the abstract describes clearly the content of the paper, they can facilitate indexing the article, which is critical for searching and discovery. The title and abstract are important for editors who may scan them to decide on appropriate peer reviewers. For many journals reviewers read the title and abstract to determine their expertise for critiquing a manuscript, but more importantly they may get an impression of the paper from reading those two parts. Annesley (2010) suggested that the title is "the face of the paper" (p 357).

This editorial provides guidelines for writing the title of a journal article. The guidelines also apply to preparing the title of a book chapter and other types of publications. A later editorial will describe strategies for writing the abstract of the paper.

Inform Readers about Content in Paper

Titles should be clear, informative, and detailed (Hartley 2012). After reviewing the title, readers should know what the article is about and whether the article is a research report about the topic; has a clinical, educational, or policy focus; or presents a methodology for studying that topic. The title should not only provide readers with a summary of the contents of the article but also should motivate them to read it (Jamali & Nikzad 2011).

For research reports, the title should convey the aim of the study and also include the type of study or level of evidence, for example, if the study was a randomized control trial, observational study, pilot study, or systematic review, among others. This specificity in the title not only informs readers about the design and strength of the evidence but also alerts researchers performing meta-analyses and other types of reviews (American Medical Association [AMA] 2007). This principle can be seen in the following example:

Original: Problem-based learning and students' clinical judgment skills
Better: Problem-based learning and nursing students' clinical judgment skills: A systematic review

The original title does not indicate if the paper is a research report or a description of problem based

learning strategies. It also does not specify the student population: are these medical, physical therapy, nursing, or another group of students? The revised title informs readers that the article is a systematic review of this topic in nursing education.

Keep Titles Concise

The title should be concise but long enough to indicate the content of the article. One way to keep the title concise is to avoid using unnecessary phrases such as "A Study on", "A Report of", "Role of", "Development of", and similar phrases. For example:

Original: A study of the relationship between media viewing and obesity in school-aged children
Better: Media viewing and obesity in school-aged children

Another way to keep the title concise is by avoiding the use of adjectives such as "new," "novel", and "validated," among others (Annesley 2010). It is expected that the article presents new information, describes a novel approach, and uses validated tools. More importantly, these extra title words do nothing to further convey the content of the paper.

How concise should the title be? *The Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (APA) recommends that titles be no longer than 12 words (APA 2009). Some studies have examined the relationship between title length and citation rates, but the findings have been mixed. In a study by Jacques and Sebire (2010), articles with longer titles were cited more frequently than papers with shorter titles. The authors analyzed the titles of the 25 most cited and the 25 least cited articles published in medical journals. The most cited articles had longer titles: they ranged from 7–34 words (median 18) compared to 4–21 words (median 9) in the least cited articles (Jacques & Sebire). The median difference was 9 words ($P < .0001$). There was a significant positive correlation between the number of words in the titles and citation rates ($rho = 0.62$, $P < .0001$). Although not related to length, titles that included the name of a country were among the poorly cited articles; none of the well-cited articles included a reference to a specific country (9/25 versus 0/25; $Z = 3.3$, $P < .001$).

In another study, Jamali and Nikzad (2011) examined 2,172 titles in six open-access journals. They found that articles with shorter titles (median length 8 words) were downloaded slightly more than those with longer ones (median length 10 words). However, there were no significant correlations between title length and number of citations. The issue with using downloads as the outcome measure is there is no way of determining if the user actually read the article.

Longer titles may suggest that the article itself is longer (Yitzhaki 2002). Longer articles are likely to have more extensive reference lists, and studies show those papers are cited more frequently than papers with shorter reference lists (Althouse et al. 2009, Neff & Olden 2010, Oermann & Shaw-Kokot 2013, Selgen 1997). It also could be that longer titles include more keywords and are found more easily in a search. Studies are needed to better understand the relationship of title length and citation rates as this is not clear.

Avoid Declarative Sentences and Questions in Titles of Scientific Articles

AMA reference style indicates that declarative sentences should not be used for scientific article titles because they may overemphasize a conclusion (AMA 2007, p 9). With declarative titles authors often state their conclusions rather than what the article is about. "Television viewing leads to obesity in school-aged children" is an example of a declarative title. While declarative titles are appropriate for editorials, news stories, commentaries, and other similar types of papers, they should be avoided for journal articles. Titles that include questions also are not recommended for

manuscripts submitted to scientific journals (AMA 2007, Jamali & Nikzad 2011).

Be Careful with Subtitles

Some journals have requirements about titles and may specify whether subtitles, which usually follow a colon in the title, can be used. If subtitles are used, they should not include keywords and terms that describe the article's content and instead should provide supplementary information to help readers understand the focus of the paper (AMA 2007, Oermann & Hays 2010). The main title should always be able to stand alone in conveying the content of the paper. In the following example, the original main title "Heart failure" is too broad and does not indicate that this article is about a new screening tool for identifying patients with heart failure in the hospital.

Original: Heart failure: Evaluation of a screening tool
Better: Evaluation of a heart failure screening tool

Subtitles can be avoided sometimes by rearranging the main words as seen in the revised title in the example.

Include Keywords and Terms in the Title

A clearly written title with keywords and terms that represent the main topics in the paper may facilitate indexing of the article and locating it in a search. For example, in PubMed (MEDLINE) the content of an article is described using controlled vocabulary terms known as Medical Subject Headings (MeSH). These MeSH terms are used to index articles and help users search PubMed for relevant papers. Articles in PubMed are indexed by subject experts who read the title and introduction, scan the article focusing on the Methods and Results sections, read the summary or conclusions section, scan the abstract for missed content, and review the keywords supplied by the author and publisher (US National Library of Medicine 2013). Including relevant keywords and terms in a title may facilitate indexing not only for PubMed and other bibliographic databases, but also for articles indexed on journal websites and by search engines such as Google (Annesley 2010). Hays (2010) suggested that authors search for keywords in the MeSH and CINAHL (Subject) Headings databases to improve the likelihood that a user’s query will retrieve the author's title.

The order of the words in the title also should be considered. Annesley (2010) recommended placing the most important terms at the beginning of the title to get readers' attention. It also may be of value to scan previous issues of the journal to which the paper is being submitted to review acceptable titles for that journal. Acronyms should not be included in titles without first spelling them out (Hartley 2012). They may be unfamiliar to potential readers. Titles also should not include humorous phrases even for editorials, opinion pieces, and informal writing. Many humorous phrases are not understood in other regions and countries and may be misinterpreted by readers.

Authors have their own ways of preparing manuscripts and may write the title and abstract at the end to ensure they reflect the main content in the paper. While this is an appropriate strategy, Cals and Kots (2013) cautioned that authors should take time to write the title and abstract. They recommended authors re-read the manuscript, record the keywords and terms from different sections of the paper, and use those to develop potential titles.

Summary

The title of a manuscript has the ability to give a "good first impression" to the editor, reviewers, and readers. The title should be clear, informative, and detailed for potential readers to understand the

content in the paper and decide if it is relevant to their work. With a carefully crafted title, you can attract potential readers to your article and your work: make the title count.

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