

Course Name: Academic Writing

Course Convenor: Dr. Nour Toumi

Session: Writing Titles (Week 5)

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### Objectives:

1. Identify the definition of titles and subtitles
2. Recognise the characteristic of a good dissertation title
3. Understand the function of subtitles

### What is a title?

- The title is the part of a paper that is read the most, and it is usually read first. It is, therefore, the most important element that defines the research study.
- The title summarizes the main idea or ideas of your study. A good title contains the fewest possible words needed to adequately describe the content and/or purpose of your research paper.
- A title is the name/identity of a piece of writing.

### Characteristics of a good dissertation title

1. **Not too long** that the title contains **unnecessary, confusing or redundant words**. Avoid language, such as "A Study to Investigate the...", or "An Examination of the....". These phrases are obvious and generally superfluous unless they are necessary to convey the scope, intent, or type of a study. Make every word in the title works hard. The recommended length of a title is no **more than 12 words (APA, 2009)**. Longer titles can be more difficult to remember and, as Jamali and Nikzad (2011) found, articles with longer titles are downloaded slightly less than those with shorter titles (at least in biological sciences).
2. **A title which is too short** often uses words which are **too broad**; thus, **does not tell the reader what is being studied**. For example, a paper with the title, "African Politics" is so non-specific. This title could be a title of a book . It is so ambiguous that it could refer to anything associated with politics in Africa. A good title should provide information about the focus and/or scope of your research study.
3. **No abbreviation or numerical values**. Do not use acronyms in the title without spelling them out (Hartley, 2012). Readers who are not familiar with their meaning may simply skip your article even though it is relevant to their search.

4. **Irony and humour** in the title may help you attract more readers, but they **should be avoided** most of the time (Hartley, 2008). The problem with them is that they **may not be understood by readers**, and they also tend to be **culture specific**. Moreover, your article will probably **appear less often** in the search results if you decide to replace the words carrying the main meaning with a humorous phrase.
5. **Academic writing is a serious and deliberate endeavour**. Avoid using humorous or clever journalistic styles when creating the title to your paper. Journalistic headlines often use emotional adjectives [e.g., incredible, amazing, effortless] to highlight a problem experienced by the reader, or use "trigger words" or interrogative words (e.g., how, what, when, or why) to persuade people to read the article or click on a link. These approaches are viewed as counter-productive in academic writing. A reader does not need clever or humorous titles to catch their attention because the act of reading is assumed to be deliberate based on a desire to learn and improve understanding of the research problem. In addition, a humorous title can merely detract from the seriousness and authority of your research.
6. You can sometimes use a colon to add additional information to the title, such as the methodology that was used (e.g., 'Brain activation during perception of face-like stimuli: An eye-tracking study').
7. Make sure your research title describes (a) **the topic**, (b) **the method**, (c) **the sample**, and (d) **the results of your study**. You can use the following formula: [*Result*]: A [*method*] study of [*topic*] among [*sample*].

*Example:* Meditation makes nurses perform better: A qualitative study of mindfulness meditation among German nursing students

8. If you use a quote as part of the title, the source of the quote is cited [usually using an asterisk and footnote],
9. If you decide to include a catchphrase or a hook, use a colon. A catchphrase should be related to the context of the study.

E.g., The PhD viva: **Tragedy or triumph?**

### Subtitles

Subtitles are frequently used in social science research papers. **Examples of why you may include a subtitle:**

1. **Add substance to a literary, provocative, or imaginative title or quote**, e.g., "Listen to What I Say, Not How I Vote": Congressional Support for the President in Washington

2. **Qualify the geographic scope of the research**, e.g., "The Geopolitics of the Eastern Border of the European Union: The Case of Romania-Moldova-Ukraine"
3. **Qualify the temporal scope of the research**, e.g., "A Comparison of the Progressive Era and the Depression Years: Societal Influences on Predictions of the Future of the Library, 1895-1940"
4. **Focus on investigating the ideas, theories, or work of a particular individual**, e.g., "A Deliberative Conception of Politics": How Francesco Saverio Merlino Related Anarchy and Democracy"
5. **Identify the methodology used**, e.g. Student Activism of the 1960s Revisited: A Multivariate Analysis Research Note

### How to write a title?

#### **Step one: Ask yourself the following questions:**

1. What is my paper/dissertation about?
2. Who/what did I study?
3. What techniques or methods did I use? (optional)

#### **1. What is my paper/dissertation about?**

My study examines whether training students to develop semantic/concept maps and text synthesis during reading academic texts would enhance their metacognitive accuracy and comprehension monitoring.

#### **2. Who/what did I study?**

Second language learners

#### **3. What techniques or methods did I use?**

My study involved a mixed-methods research design (qualitative and quantitative approaches).

Quantitative data collection methods involve a reading comprehension tests, vocabulary test, error detection tasks and a working memory span test. The qualitative aspect includes a stimulated recall task using eye-tracking.

#### **Step two: Highlight keywords in your answers**

#### **Step Three: Use these keywords to form a sentence**

concept maps, text synthesis, metacognitive accuracy, comprehension monitoring, Second language learners, a mixed-methods research design

This study is a mixed-methods research which investigates whether generating concept maps and text synthesis would enhance second language learners' comprehension monitoring and metacognitive accuracy.

#### **Step four: Create a working title, delete all unnecessary words from the sentence**

\_\_\_\_\_ a mixed-methods research \_\_\_\_\_ whether concept mapping and text synthesis enhanced second language learners' comprehension monitoring and metacognitive accuracy.

#### **Step 5: Create a final title**

The effects of concept mapping and text synthesis on L2 learners' comprehension monitoring and metacognitive accuracy: A mixed-methods study.

#### **Example:**

##### **What is my paper/dissertation about?**

My study compares different **representations of Black identity** in different contexts. In other words, it explores the different ways of how Black identity is represented, and how these representations differ from one context to another (villages, cities and nations).

More specifically, I study the relationship between **fathers and sons** in Black communities and how it is influenced by the culture of the oppressor/colonizer.

##### **Who/what did I study?**

I study **Nigerian and African American novels in the 20<sup>th</sup> century**, including Hughes's "Not Without Laughter" (1930), Achebe's "Things Fall Apart" (1958), Baldwin's "Go Tell It on the Mountain" (1953), Ralph Ellison's "Invisible Man" (1952), .....

##### **What technique or method did I use?**

I used **psychoanalysis**.

#### **Step 2:**

**Representation of black identity**

**Fathers and sons**

**Nigerian and African-American novels**

**20<sup>th</sup> century**

**Psychoanalysis**

#### **Step 3:**

This study uses a psychoanalytical approach in studying the representation of Black identity portrayed in the relationship between fathers and sons in Nigerian and African-American novels in the 20<sup>th</sup> century

**Step 4: Delete all unnecessary words and create a final title**

█ a psychoanalytical approach █ Black identity █  
█ fathers and sons in Nigerian African-American novels in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

**Final title:**

Fathers and sons: A psychoanalytical study of black identities in 20th century Nigerian and African American novels

**Practice 1:**

What my dissertation is about?

This study attempts to trace Katherine Mansfield's quest for wholeness and self-harmony beneath the mercurial, ambivalent quality of her character.

Who/what did I study?

I study how the writer has transcended the sense of tragedy that characterized her short life and aspired to intertwine her "Hundreds of selves" and embrace life. "Hundreds of selves" is a quote from Katherine Mansfield's short stories, including "the Garden Party", "Bliss", "Marriage a la mode" and "Psychology".

**Practice 2:**

What is my dissertation/article about?

This article explores how the social media networks of Facebook and Twitter have been used as mobilising tools during revolutions and uprisings of some Arab countries. It tries to assess the relationship between the traditional Arab channels such as Al-Jazeera and Al Arabiya and new media, and shows how the latter appears to have stolen the lead from traditional media

Who/what did I study?

Public discourse in Facebook and twitter outlets during the uprising revolution in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Syria and Yemen.

What methodology did I use?

The article uses a multi-method approach, combining survey data with qualitative data from interviews. Surveys were distributed to 1000 people across the 5 countries, and 789 surveys were received back.

**Practice 3:**

What the study is about?

This article explores the role of contemporary music in the lives of young Muslims in Great Britain. For this group, music has emerged as a powerful tool in the negotiation of personal and group identity, and is also a marker of the way in which Muslims have arguably come to be positioned differently to other groups, notably African-Caribbean, in recent times (Modood 2006).

Who/what did I study?

The use of hip-hop music by Muslims in London as a medium for articulating complex cultural representations at the level of both individual and collective.

Methodology used?

In contrast to recent ('macro') sociological analysis which has compared Islamic life and culture in different European countries, and also that which has focused on specific, local communities (the 'micro' approach), the research reported upon here has operated at a 'meso'-level: mapping the interactions between local Muslim social/cultural spaces with the supra-national expression of Muslim identity as represented by the *ummah*.