

Choosing Your Dissertation Title

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Since the title of your dissertation is the first thing that a reader will see and read, it is worth spending a great deal of time to give a favorable first impression of your study. Once you begin writing your dissertation proposal you might want to start with a *working title*. This should be descriptive and enable you to focus on your investigation. The working title can act as a stepping stone to your final dissertation title.

Your final dissertation title needs to provide a clear, concise, and accurate description of what your dissertation is about. Most universities limit the title to 15 words. Check to see what the word limit is for your university. The problem and the type of investigation should be discernable from the title.

A good dissertation title is original. It tells the reader what your dissertation is about without giving away the ending ☺. A good dissertation title also draws your audience in, so your dissertation will likely be read by those interested in your area of study.

A dissertation title is different from a research paper title in that it must not only be indicative of the content of the text, but also assist researchers in locating your manuscript. Unlike research papers, which typically are not published unless they are transformed into journal articles, dissertations from accredited

universities are usually published in the ProQuest Dissertations & Theses (PQDT) database, also known by many as UMI.

In order to be both compelling and informative, dissertation titles can make use of a two-part structure: a primary and *compelling* title that cleverly names the work and draws the reader into the study, and an *indicative* sub-title that details what your study is truly about. These two elements are frequently separated with a colon. Therefore, a standard format for a dissertation title can be [compelling title]: [indicative sub-title]. Please note: Some universities do not support the use of a colon (:) and prefer that the title be as concise (and dry☺) as possible.

An example a study determining why teachers are not using calculators in their classrooms could be: *The Wasted Resource* [compelling title]: *Factors affecting calculator use in the classroom* [indicative subtitle]. If your university does not allow for a colon (“:”) in the title, or for a subtitle, then you would eliminate the compelling title and use only the subtitle.

A dissertation that is a literary analysis of George Orwell’s *Animal Farm* focusing primarily on symbolism in the novel could be: *Brutality and Injustice* [compelling title]: *An analysis of symbolism in Orwell’s Animal Farm* [indicative subtitle].

Dissertation Titles: Do's and Do Not's

1. Do **not** use a complete sentence as a title. No periods.
2. **Do** make certain that the title makes complete sense.
3. Do **not** use abbreviations.
4. Do **not** put forth the research question itself as the main title.
5. Do **not** make the main title and the sub title the same.
6. **Do** make the subtitle, if used, more elaborate than the main title. The indicative subtitle should include words that reflect the primary objective of the investigation.
7. **Do** create a title that sound good and flows well.

Keep in mind that the dissertation title on the abstract page must be identical to the title on the dissertation title page.