How to Find a Good Title
For Your Paper

1. USE a memorable line from the essay itself. Love Should Start Little, Decidedly Delicious, Added to the List, The Best Balance, No Drunkalogues Here, Not Open for Discussion, Winter Came, I’m Dying to Meet You, Travel Down That Road.

2. CHOOSE a concrete image—something the reader can hear, see, taste, smell, or feel. Screaming, Abuelita’s Pozolé, Burnt Toast, Knobby Knees, He Smelt Like Blood, Silk Stockings, Feel the Rancor.

3. ASK a question. Strange or Inappropriate? Who Let the Dogs Out? What Were You Thinking? When Will It End? Where is the Justice? Free or Cheap?

   Note: If you choose to use a question as your title, be sure to answer that question somewhere in your paper.


5. TRY a play on words, or a "twist" of an existing expression. Burglars Can Be Choosers, The Cancelled Czech, A Hearse of a Different Color, Suture Yourself.

6. GIVE us a hint (be a little mysterious, but not too mysterious). Sea of Harleys, Perception of Normalcy, Mini-Mental-Money-Murders, A Thorn Still Pricks Me.

7. TRY word association (words that have a "double meaning," and refer to more than one thing). The Dead Zone, A Good Mark, Forced Labor, Howl with Rage, Step Up My Game.

8. USE an “ing”-word to give a sense of action. Pleading Guilty, Forcing a Smile, Bearing Thorns, Overreacting, Sitting Alone, Shredding Walzer, Tackling Thoreau, Wild Wilde, Pondering Plato, Backing Bacon.

9. DIVE into a thesaurus and rework a dull title into something more interesting. Affairs of U.S. Presidents becomes Pondering Presidential Peccadillos. How the Media Lies to America becomes - Publishing Piranhas -Broadcasting Blunders -The Papers’ Promise - Fabricating Reality.
10. A Few Rules of Thumb

✓ Using the name of the assignment as your title may be the least effective title for an essay. Paper #3, or Self Reflection Essay, just doesn’t do much.


✓ CREATE a title that captures readers' attention. The Odd Man or My Child might be your best work, but the title won't capture attention. Better choices might be: The Making of a Moron, Waterproofing Your Child, Who Moved My Cheese, Daddy Was an Undertaker, or The Generosity of the Dead.

✓ CREATE a title that is easy to remember. Complicated or hard to pronounce titles might make it difficult for your reader to feel motivated to read your paper. Murder on the Wzcyiubjekistan Express may be the best writing you've ever done, but your reader will stumble over it. While your paper or story may be complex, that doesn’t mean that your title should be. Across the Desert by Coyote, One Way Trip to the Cemetery, Saving Fish from Drowning, Lost in the Details, Be Bold with Bananas.


Additional titles created by Writing Center staff and excerpts from English 85 student assignments.