

## Developing an Effective Title

San Francisco Edit

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The title defines the contents of your manuscript in as few words as possible. An effective title “sells” your manuscript to the reader immediately and influences whether or not a reader will read the manuscript.

The title is essential in bringing your manuscript to the readers' attention, especially where the database being searched does not include the abstract of the article. It should include all essential words in the right order so the topic of the manuscript is accurately and fully conveyed. An excellent title is the key to ensuring your article will be found. An improperly titled paper may be lost and never reach its intended audience.

Your title will be read by many more people than the rest of your manuscript. Indexing services will use the title to categorize your paper. Authors who cite your paper will include the title in their list of references, which, in turn, will be read by thousands of readers.

1. Write the title early in the writing process and critique it the same as any other section of the manuscript.
2. A title should be the fewest possible words that accurately describe the content of the paper (the recommended length is 10 - 12 words).
3. The golden rule is: Express only one idea or subject in your title.
4. Put an important word first in the title.
5. Use key words which highlight the main content of your manuscript and can be understood, indexed, and retrieved by a database search.
6. Be concise. Omit all waste words such as "A study of ...", "Investigations of ...", "Observations on ...".
7. Eliminate redundant words such as verbs and articles so the title functions as a label rather than a sentence.
8. Use simple word orders and common word combinations.

9. Be as descriptive as possible and use specific rather than general terms: for instance, include the specific drug name rather than just the class of drug.
10. Write scientific names in full, for instance *Escherichia coli* rather than *E. coli*.
11. Avoid using abbreviations and acronyms; they could have different meanings: for instance "Ca" for calcium could be mistaken for "CA", which means cancer.
12. Refer to chemicals by their common or generic name instead of their formulas.
13. Avoid the use of Roman numerals in the title as they can be interpreted differently: for instance, part III could be mistaken for factor III.
14. Do not use words such as "significant", which are considered too strong, state your conclusion too boldly, and trivialize your manuscript by reducing it to a one-liner.
15. Make certain that your title and abstract match the final version of your article.

If you need additional help see our other newsletters such as *Twelve Steps to Developing an Effective First Draft of your Manuscript* at <http://www.sfcedit.net/newsletters.htm>.