

Writing an Effective Title and Persuasive Discussion

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Title

Title: Importance

- First thing editor sees on submission (can prejudice way paper is handled)
- First thing reader sees in contents list (may be discarded by casual reader or even worker in field)
- Not much advice about titles
 - Concise and informative (ICMJE)
 - Concise and descriptive, not declarative (*N Engl J Med*)

Titles: Types

- Indicative (states what paper covers, not what it says)
- Informative (good to start the writing with)

Title: Guidelines

- Indicate subject matter (but do not say the why, what, and so what of the study)
- Be accurate
- Be brief (dispense with definite articles, excessive adjectives, noun salads)
- Be interesting (allure as well as inform), not sensationalist

Title: Guidelines

- Indicate subject matter
- Be accurate

An epidemiological study of the quantity and effect of heat received by male employees of a hospital kitchen and nearby male doctors in the dining room shows an increased risk of excitement in the male employees only

Title: Guidelines

- But do not say the why, what, and so what of the study

An epidemiological study of heat received by male employees of a hospital kitchen and doctors in the dining room and its relationship to excitement

Title: Guidelines

- Be brief (dispense with definite articles, excessive adjectives, noun salads)

Heat received by residents in and near a hospital kitchen and its relationship to excitement: an epidemiological study

Title: Guidelines

- Be interesting (allure as well as inform), not sensationalist

Hospital kitchen, heat exposure, and excitement: an epidemiological study

Title: Other guidelines

- Avoid abbreviations, except standard ones
- Avoid nonspecific openings (“A study of...”, “A review of ...”)
- Use subtitles if permitted, especially if title exceeds 100 characters

Title: Summary

- Write out key words of study and string them together, to start with
- The simpler the title, the better
- Consider the target readership
- Be brief – short titles are clearer and more interesting
- Avoid excessive adjectives and noun strings
- Do not be sensationalist

-- *J S Lilleyman, 2000*

Discussion

Research paper as argument

- A research paper is based on principles of critical argument
- Major evidence is from the paper
- Other evidence comes in Discussion

Sequence

- Main findings (answer to research questions)
- Previous work (in support and against)
- Discussion of methods
- Strengths and pitfalls
- Relevance to practice
- Summary and need for further study

Main findings

- State concisely the central conclusions or answer
- Do not repeat data (these belong in Results)

“In this study, more than half the delegates attending conferences slept through the presentation. The only adverse event was that these individuals had difficulty falling asleep that night.”

Previous work

- Quote previous papers that have been stimulus for present one
- Such papers should feature in Introduction and Discussion
- State new technology or information that require new look at those papers

“In 1991, Sahu et al had reported on sleeping patterns in delegates attending conferences. They based their conclusions, however, on statements issued by the speakers. We analyzed EEG patterns in the delegates”

Previous work

- Avoid temptation to bury papers that state exactly what you have (to make your paper look unique)
- In fact, they should be in Introduction as well
- Equally important, give full coverage to counter-evidence

Previous work

- Avoid detailed critiques of all papers on subject
- Be thorough in literature search, but confine attention to major players
- Take help of senior colleagues to separate big guns from also-ran

Discussion of methods

- Few methods are perfect; so present a brief appraisal
- Especially important if method is new or unusual
- Can be used to state how your method is improvement on earlier ones

“It is common knowledge that speakers cannot be trusted to be unbiased when reporting on sleep induction in delegates. Our use of the EEG is more objective, although it has not been extensively validated.”

Relevance to practice

- Discuss clinical relevance or basic science implications of study
- Most papers are not major breakthroughs, but add to the jigsaw
- State how your study fits in

“Our study has confirmed the worst fears expressed by organizers of conferences. As a result of our study, it has now become practice in our institute to electrify chairs to help delegates stay awake.”

Need for further study

- Provide ideas for further study
- If you are continuing in the field, make sure you are well into the 'further study' before opening the idea
- If not, you can claim precedence for the idea
- If ideas for further study show serious lacunae in yours, don't publish

“Some questions remain unanswered from our study. We do not know the long-term risks of sleep deprivation in delegates or the brain-numbing effects of weak electric shocks.”

Concluding paragraph

- Trend is toward avoiding concluding paragraphs
- Editors tend to delete them, to avoid repetition

Conclusion

Aims of Discussion

- To state the main findings
- To highlight any shortcomings of the method
- To compare the results with other published findings
- To discuss the implications of the findings

-- Alastair A Spence, 2000