

Brainstorming Titles

Writing titles can be tricky, and next to writing conclusions might be one of the dreaded part of the composing process! Luckily, Richard Leahy, who was a director of the Boise State Writing Center for many years, put together this list¹ of prompts to get you started. Once you have generated a list of possible titles, you can experiment by combining parts of various titles. Surely, out of a list this long you should arrive at something that captures readers' interest and gives them a sense of the essay's focus (and perhaps tone), which are two key functions of an effective title.

- Copy out of your draft a sentence that could serve as a title. o Write a sentence that's not in your draft that could serve as a title. o Write a title that is a question beginning with What, Who, When, or Where.
- Write a title that is a question beginning with How or Why.
- Write a title that is a question beginning with Is/Are, Do/Does, or Will.
- Pick out of the essay some concrete image—something the writer can hear, see, taste, or feel—to use as a title.
- Pick another concrete image out of the essay. Look for an image that is a bit unusual or inspiring.
- Write a title that begins with an –ing verb (like "Creating a Good Title").
- Write a title that begins with On (like "On the Titles of Essays").
- Write a title that is a lie about the essay. (You probably won't [shouldn't] use this one, but it might stimulate your thinking.)
- Write a one-word title—the most obvious one possible.
- Write a less obvious one-word title.
- Write a two-word title.
- Write a three-word title.
- Write a four-word title.

¹ This list was originally published in "Twenty Titles for the Writer" which appeared in *College Composition and Communication*, Vol. 43, No. 4., 1992.

- Write a five-word title.
- Think of a familiar saying, or the title of a book, song, or movie, that might fit your essay.
- Take the title you just wrote and twist it by changing a word or creating a pun on it.
- Do the same with another saying or title of a book, song, or movie.
- Find two titles you've written so far that you might use together in a double title. Join them together with a colon.

Conclusion

Remember an effective title will capture a reader's interest and give them a sense of the essay's focus. A title can reflect the writer's tone, too. Coming up with a title can sometimes feel like a lot of pressure, but taking time to use prompts like the ones above to brainstorm and play with possibilities can help!