Creating Effective Titles

The title of your paper is the first-and sometimes the only-acquaintance a reader will have with what you have written. Thus, your title can help or hinder those who must file or catalogue your paper as well as those who search those files and catalogues for helpful information; your title can also create positive or negative impressions about your paper in potential readers’ minds. Moreover, developing an effective working title early in the process of researching and drafting your paper can help you in determining and maintaining a focus as you proceed (keep in mind, of course, that you will probably revise this title a number of times before you are through). Here, then, are some strategies to help you in creating a title that will inform and interest your reader while serving as a focussing tool for you.

✓ Your title should describe your paper’s contents clearly and specifically.

Compare:  “Gothic Madness”
           with
           “Gothic Madness in Three Southern Writers”¹

Further, your title should in some way reveal your stance on the topic, or pose an interesting question about it.

Compare: “Revision” or “Revising College Essays”
with
“The Agony of Revision,” “Revision as Discovery,” or “Is an Essay Ever Really Finished?”

Compare: “African Masks”
with
“African Masks: The True Faces of Society”

Finally, your title should entice your reader/provoke his or her interest. Here is one model often used by authors of articles:

Interesting phrase of quotation: Informative Subtitle

\textit{as in}

“Dying to be Thin: The Lure of High-Risk Fad Diets”

“Zero at the Bone”: Metaphors of Coldness in Emily Dickinson’s Poetry”
