

Essay Titles

Now I want to spend a little bit of time specifically talking about titles that have to do with literature. So if you're writing an essay, let's say, in English, in and English course, one thing you want to do is you want to make reference to either the author, or the title, or both even. So the author and the title are very important because mentioning them indicates to the reader what you're talking about. If you do only that, if you have the author and the title, that's a pretty terrible beginning actually because it doesn't really tell the reader what you're arguing about this text. So we want to do a little bit more, and one basic approach would be just add those keywords in the title, "The Fear of Adultery," and then we have our author and title. So that's one way to do it. You can also play around with it. So if you want to go more to the creative side, you could say something like, "Much Ado About Cuckoldry." Cuckoldry is where you, well, if you're a husband and your wife cheats on you then you're the cuckold. So in this case we're talking about adultery but we're doing it in a kind of creative way by using a little bit of the title here and changing it somewhat. So that's one way to do it, but essentially what you have to think about is that balance, again, between being informative and being creative. This one here, the last one, is more creative, this one is more informative. Maybe it would be best to provide some kind of in-between solution, in-between title, but I'll leave that up to you. On the whole, the main thing is to make sure that, at the very least, you refer to the author in the title and then you add some keywords. Let's finish with some advice about what not to do. And first of all, what you want to avoid is what's called melodrama. So melodrama is where you have a title that's erring on the side of creativity, and it's kind of over-the-top. Any title that you could sort of add dot dot dot to (feeling it ... how mysterious!)--any title like that is melodrama, and you should really avoid it. As you can see here, there are no keywords. If you saw these titles in a list of other titles, you would say, "well what is this about?" "Seething with Anger"--is this an essay about anger? Is it about literary texts? Who is the man from nowhere? What does it mean to be "feeling it"? And having marked many papers at the university level, I can tell you that these titles are all too frequent, and you can do much better than this. And then the last point to make is that we want to avoid something that's called metadiscourse. Now you might be wondering, what is that? Well, without talking at any length about metadiscourse, the basic point is that you want to avoid language that talks about the process of doing research, the process of writing and thinking and so on. And meta discourse is a word that kind of describes that type of language. So if you look at these titles here, we're going to cross out some information that's definitely metadiscourse, and these are things that you can do without. So the first one here, we could get rid of the first bit, "An Exploration of." Any kind of [writing an academic paper for publication](#) is going to be an exploration by default. So then we're left with "Omitted Stage Directions in Shakespeare's Hamlet." And I should mention these are all made up titles, just like some of the previous ones, and they're rather nonsensical. Next one, we can get rid of "A Brief Discussion of." We can also get rid of "A Detailed Analysis." Let's hope that your essay is detailed and a good analysis. We can get rid of, let's see here, "A Historical Overview," and then we just have "The Development of Hitler's Mustache during World War II" because if it's going to deal with the development, then it's already historical, and any kind of essay is some type of overview. And then the last one, we can get rid of "A Detailed Study," and again we start with "The Long Term Effects." So really try to do that: get rid of metadiscourse, and then your title will still be informative, but it will be much more to the point.