

How to Choose a Working Title for Your Manuscript

Finding the right title for your manuscript is one of the most challenging pieces of the project. You want the name to go down in history, evoke emotion in your readers, and lead to sales. It's an essential and huge part of writing a book – or anything else for that matter.

Read on to learn more about choosing the best working title for your manuscript. Run through the exercise worksheets at the end for a full brainstorm session.

Why You Need a Working Title

Using your creativity to choose a working title for your manuscript early in the writing process is invaluable. The working title is more than a convenient way to refer to your story. It's an important decision, and one you must get right for your book to succeed.

A title also:

- Helps you stay focused
- Generates enthusiasm and inspiration
- Convinces an agent or publisher of your book's value
- Sells a book to prospective readers

Never, ever refer to your manuscript as 'untitled.'

What if I Change My Mind Later?

No problem!

You probably will change your title at some point. Most people revise and tweak the working title as the story progresses. Traditional publishers or editors may also suggest a title revision.

How to Decide on the Perfect, Eye-Catching Title

Some books have long, drawn-out titles. Others are short and clever. Most titles take on a combination of both, using short titles and elaborative subtitles.

Depending on the type of book you're writing, the subtitle could be just as vital as the main title. In trade books and memoir, for example, the title attracts attention while the subtitle defines the benefit of the book's position compared to its competitors.

Print books require special consideration as well. If your book sells in a bookstore, you want to select a title that easily fits on the spine. The spine is often the only visible part of your book while it's on the shelf, so it sells the book as much as the cover.

Regardless of what type of book you write or how you publish, the title should be eye-catching. Titles must accomplish six main objectives:

- Explain what the manuscript is about, as precisely as possible
- Pique a reader's curiosity and interest
- State who your audience is or what type of readers will benefit from the story
- Advertise the benefits of reading the book or what the story delivers
- Dive into the book's features and what distinguishes it from others
- Sound memorable or catchy (not embarrassing to say or overly long)

Finally, the title you choose should make you (the author) feel enthusiastic, motivated, excited, and accomplished.

Brainstorming a Working Title: Popular Techniques

Authors use various techniques to form successful titles. All of the examples you see on the list below are from mainstream publishers, bestsellers, or classics.

X and Y

Example: *War and Peace*

Pick your two main topics and mesh them together. You can change one of the things with subsequent books too, like *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*.

Alliteration

Example: *The Mighty Miss Malone*

Popular in children's books, alliteration makes a title or phrase easier for people to remember.

Superlative Adjectives

Example: *The Ultimate Weigh Solution*

Try words like ultimate, definitive, revolutionary, etc.

Juxtaposed and Incongruent Terms

Example: *Intimate Strangers*

Use words that don't seem like they would go together to stand out.

Introduce a Number

Example: *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*

Explain the number of steps, rules, laws, or keys that outline your book. If you don't know the exact number yet, using the word 'series' can help. *A Series of Unfortunate Events*, for example, lets us know the story continues. Numbers add credibility.

Invoke Your Strategy

Example: *Roadmap to Entrepreneurial Success*

What's the goal of your book? Use words like program, method, roadmap, plan, strategy, solution, strategy, system, etc.

Show Your Worth

Example: *A Survival Guide for Buying a Home*

How does your book help your readers? Try using words to name it, like a handbook, bible, survival guide, complete guide, step-by-step guide, indispensable guide, hands-on guide, etc.

Explain the Benefit

Example: *Good to Great*

Think about the benefit(s) your readers gain from your manuscript. Will reading your book help them accomplish anything or get anywhere?

Target a Specific Audience

Example: *What to Expect When You're Expecting*

People use titles to figure out if a book is right for them, so they help your readers find you easier.

How To

Example: *How to Satisfy a Woman Every Time... and Have Her Beg for More!*

When Naura Hayden first published her book (*How to Satisfy a Woman Every Time... and Have Her Beg for More*) as *Astro-Logical Love*, it flopped. She changed the title and slightly altered a few bits on content, and the book became a #1 bestseller.

Add Alarm

Example: *Future Shock*

Bring in immediacy by adding shock value.

Name Drop

Example: *Steve Jobs*

Invoke a prestigious or famous name to grab attention.

Bring in Humor

Example: *Are You Dumb Enough to Be Rich?*

Anything ironic, irreverent, or funny that relates to your story.

Fill in the Blank

Example: *The Business Valuation Book*

The blank book. What's the blank for your book?

Noteworthy Phrases

Example: *The Black Swan*

Fiction titles work well with a unique or smart concept from the book, which sums up in a single phrase.

Solve a Problem or Offer a Solution

Example: *Man's Search for Meaning*

Self-help and dieting book titles often tell the reader what the book solves.

Create Curiosity

Example: *10% Happier*

Pique your prospective reader's attention with statements that seem impossible or make the readers curious about the book's content.

Brainstorming a Working Title: Worksheet 1

Write down at least 30 title ideas in less than 30 minutes. Set a timer and allow your mind to run wild.

Don't worry about the number as you go. There's room at the bottom if you run over 30.

- 1. _____
- 2. _____
- 3. _____
- 4. _____
- 5. _____
- 6. _____
- 7. _____
- 8. _____
- 9. _____
- 10. _____
- 11. _____
- 12. _____
- 13. _____
- 14. _____
- 15. _____
- 16. _____
- 17. _____
- 18. _____
- 19. _____
- 20. _____
- 21. _____

- 22. _____
- 23. _____
- 24. _____
- 25. _____
- 26. _____
- 27. _____
- 28. _____
- 29. _____
- 30. _____

Brainstorming a Working Title: Worksheet 2

Head to your local bookstore or go to your library's website. Search through the titles on the shelves or the bestseller lists. Check out the recently published books. Pay attention to the types of titles that attract your attention. List out your five favorites here.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Now, look for the titles similar to your idea. Search the library database for similar books based on your topic and see what other authors have already taken. Track the books similar to your working title ideas here. (You might need to come back to them later to make sure you don't copy any copyright titles).

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Finally, brainstorm ways to combine elements from popular titles and books similar to yours, emulating the details you find compelling. Try to come up with ten titles.

1. _____

2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____

Brainstorming a Working Title: Worksheet 3

Write out ten words to describe your characters, plot, and setting. Each line should only include a single word that you associate with each subject. It doesn't have to include adjectives or make sense. Just write what comes to mind to see if something sparks from it.

Characters:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____

Plot:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____

Setting:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____

Next, think. Do any of these words have a recurring theme? How can you combine them to form a working title? Write down ten title ideas from the words you come up with before.

1. _____
2. _____

3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____