

## Column: Tips on Research and Publication

### CHOOSING AN APPROPRIATE TITLE FOR YOUR MANUSCRIPT

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Titles are a guide to the content of the manuscript. Written well, they convey the essence of what follows and attract the readers to explore further. Good titles also create an impression among the editors and reviewers of the paper.

#### Why care about titles?

The most important reason one should take utmost care while writing the title is that it will be read much more often than the manuscript or the abstract. Only a tiny proportion will read the complete manuscript, and the chances increase when the title intrigues them.

After publication, it is usually the first part of the paper the journal readers see. It appears on the journal issue contents page and may also be part of email notifications or internet search results. Besides the names of the authors and the journal, only the titles are included in the references.

Furthermore, the abstracting and indexing of the manuscript are dependent on the words used in the title and hence, are important during retrieval. Every word used in the title should be well chosen and appropriately written. Incorrect use of words in the title may make the manuscript obscure during searches in today's world, and it will not reach the readers.

The title can also influence the citations a manuscript receives. For example, longer titles and those with punctuation have more citations than very brief ones. Titles with country names receive fewer citations.

#### Types of titles

Titles can be written in four basic styles: descriptive, colon (or hanging), declarative, and question. Occasionally, there can be a combination of these basic types.

*Descriptive title:* This includes a short phrase that encapsulates the article's theme. It helps maintain the suspense about the outcome of the study. It is one of the most commonly used forms of writing a title and is encouraged by the editors. Typically, declarative titles include the independent variable, dependent variable, and population studied.

*Quality of the reviews submitted by attendees of a workshop on peer review*

*Gender differences in perceived social support and stressful life events in depression*

*Colon (Hanging) title:* This is another common form of title that includes two phrases in succession. One advantage of this format is that it allows a progression from the general topic to a specific one. However, the old format of series papers, with a title-subtitle format (e.g., Mood disorder. I. Clinical manifestations), is not encouraged by editors and hence is not recommended. The preferred style is hanging title with a colon instead of a roman numeral.

*Auditory P300 event-related potential: Normative data in the Indian population*

Access the article online:

<https://kjp-online.com/index.php/kjp/article/view/343>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30834/KJP.35.1.2021.343>

Received: 19/05/2022. Accepted: 19/07/2022.

Web publication: 02/08/2022

QR Code



How to cite the article: Praharaj S K, Ameen S. Choosing an appropriate title for your manuscript (Column: Tips on Research and Publication). Kerala Journal of Psychiatry 2022;35(1): 74-77

*Efficacy and safety of levosulpiride versus haloperidol injection in patients with acute psychosis: A randomized, double-blind study*

**Question titles:** These are titles that pose a question. Questions have an inherent grab and attract readers. Try to avoid questions unless the issue remains unsettled or you have come up with a clear answer. Specifically, write the title as a question if the manuscript does not have a simple answer to the research question.

*Is clonidine useful for the treatment of clozapine-induced sialorrhea?*

*Does lizard tail lacing heighten cannabis addiction?*

**Declarative title:** A title that includes the answer to the research question is a declarative title. Such titles that give a statement are fine if the study poses a simple question with a clear answer. Do not use it if there is a complex answer or interpretation, as it can oversimplify or exaggerate the findings. Also, some readers may lose interest in the paper after reading the title and be misled. Rosner advised against using such "assertive sentence titles" as they can hype or trivialize scientific reports.

*Meningocele and ankyloblepharon with olanzapine following in utero exposure to olanzapine*

*Higher impulsivity and HIV-risk taking behaviour in males with alcohol dependence compared to bipolar mania*

**Combination title:** This includes any combination of the above four styles.

*Paroxysmal perceptual alteration: drug-induced phenomenon or schizophrenic psychopathology?*

*Why do manuscripts get rejected? A content analysis of rejection reports from Indian Journal of Psychological Medicine*

### **What is a good title?**

Gastel and Day defined a good title as "the fewest possible words that adequately describe the paper's contents." The purpose is to inform the reader about the content accurately. It should be simple, direct, clear, and attractive. It is recommended to include at least two keywords for indexing purposes. Also, the title should be short, i.e., about 12 words or less.

Peat identifies the characteristics of effective titles: 1)

identify the main issue of the paper; 2) begin with the subject of the paper; 3) are accurate, unambiguous, specific, and complete; 4) do not contain abbreviations, and 5) attract readers.

### **How to prepare a good title?**

#### *Specific journal requirements*

Some journals set a limit on the maximum length of the titles. For example, the title should not exceed 10–15 words, two printed lines, or a specified number of characters, including the white spaces. For titles, brevity is desirable.

#### *How short should it be?*

Titles that are too short do not convey adequate information to the reader as they contain general rather than specific terms and are hence avoided. In contrast, long titles contain unnecessary information and "extra words" that can be easily removed. Some of these "extra words" appear at the beginning of the title, such as "A study on" or opening with "The," "A," or "An." These words can be avoided because they do not serve an indexing purpose.

*Efficacy of repetitive transcranial magnetic stimulation in mania (too short)*

*A study of the efficacy of high-frequency suprathreshold repetitive transcranial magnetic stimulation of the right prefrontal cortex of the brain in patients having bipolar affective disorder, current episode mania (too long)*

*Efficacy of high-frequency suprathreshold repetitive transcranial magnetic stimulation of right prefrontal cortex in bipolar mania (appropriate)*

#### *Add relevant information*

As the title has the potential to attract readers, it should contain all relevant keywords. That way, the readers can decide accurately whether it is relevant to their purpose or not.

The Consolidated Standards of Reporting Trials (CONSORT) (<http://www.consort-statement.org>) and Strengthening the Reporting of Observational studies in Epidemiology (STROBE) (<https://www.strobe-statement.org>) guidelines suggest adding the study type in the title. However, if the study design is obvious in the sentence, it can be

omitted (the second example).

*Mirtazapine for antipsychotic-induced acute akathisia: a systematic review and meta-analysis of randomized placebo-controlled trials*

*Outcome of mood stabilizer discontinuation in bipolar disorder after five years of euthymia*

When presenting temporal trends, include the period covered by the investigation.

*Temporal trends in clozapine use at the time of discharge among people with schizophrenia at two public psychiatric hospitals in Taiwan, 2006-2017*

Include the geographic location if it has an impact on the translation of the findings to individual clinical practices.

*Borderline personality disorder and its association with the bipolar spectrum and binge eating disorder in college students from south India*

Place the most important keyword in the title at the beginning, which is a position of power. We have made the important key phrase bold for easy understanding.

*Effect of **theta-patterned, frequency-modulated priming stimulation** of low-frequency right prefrontal cortex rTMS in depression*

***Theta-patterned, frequency-modulated priming stimulation** enhances low-frequency right prefrontal cortex rTMS in depression*

#### *Avoid abbreviations*

Abbreviations should be avoided in the title. However, if used, they should be spelled out in the title. There is a trend to have an acronym for the study name, which finds a place in the title. It should be spelled out to help the readers.

Stigma, Empathy, and Attitude (SEA) educational module for medical students to improve the knowledge and attitude towards persons with mental illness

Is unipolar mania a distinct entity: findings from the bipolar disorder course and outcome study from India (BiD-CoIN study)

#### **Common errors in the title**

##### *Avoid ambiguity in phrases*

Sometimes the placement of words can cause ambiguity, i.e., the title can have more than one meaning. Following are some common errors that are best avoided:

##### a) Pay attention to pronouns.

Managing immune diseases in the smartphone era: how have apps impacted disease management and their future?

In the above title, where it says "their future" in the end, it is not clear if the pronoun "their" refers to "diseases" or "apps."

##### b) Avoid misplaced modifiers.

*Publications in high impact journals from India in the last two years – A reality check*

In this case, the reader may interpret that the study is about high impact journals published from India because "high impact journals" and "from India" are placed together. The following version conveys the intended meaning correctly: "Publications from India in high impact journals in the last two years."

##### c) Lists should be parallel.

*Perspectives, attitude, and practice of lithium prescription among psychiatrists in India*

We can call a list like this parallel when the portions before the commas can be meaningfully combined with the phrase they refer to. Here, though "practice of lithium prescription" makes sense, "perspectives of lithium prescription" or "attitude of lithium prescription" does not. To have a parallel list, the title should have been "Perspectives on, attitude about, and practice of lithium prescription among psychiatrists in India."

##### *Avoid silly errors*

Small errors in spelling change the meaning of the title. Also, such silly mistakes reflect badly on the authors. Readers get turned off by such errors and are less likely to read the entire paper. The following examples are titles of actual published papers. For easy understanding, we have made the erroneous words bold.

*A **perspective** study of cutaneous manifestations in primary psychiatric disorders in a tertiary care hospital*

**Corelation** of learning disability and school refusal

Avoid pejorative terms

*How women cope with alcoholic husbands*  
*Psychopathology of the elderly*

Do not sacrifice clarity to make a title witty

The title should be clear. Sometimes, the authors try to make the title witty but end up with an ambiguous title.

**Simple steps to write the title**

According to various authors, to write a good title, you can follow the below steps: 1) Make a list of keywords about your study; 2) Name the independent and dependent variables; 3) For each term in the list, come up with several alternatives, synonyms, or related expressions; 4) Once you have generated a fairly extensive list of keywords, use varying combinations and sequences to generate as many titles as possible; 5) Reflect on these permutations, adding to and deleting from the list as you write and refine the manuscript's main text; 6) Get feedback on your candidate titles from as many people as possible; 7) Draft a provisional title when doing the initial draft of the manuscript; and 8) Revise and refine it several times during the course of writing the manuscript.

**Tips for attractive titles**

As mentioned before, titles need not be catchy. They need not be too pedantic, either. Sometimes clever titles are appreciated by editors and attract readers. This is more applicable to viewpoints or less formal reviews than original articles. Here are some suggestions for writing an attractive title.

a) Use wordplay.

*Oxytocin and postpartum depression: Delivering on what's known and what's not.*

*Clarifying the confusion about confusion: Current practices in managing geriatric delirium*

*Facial emotion recognition deficits: The new face of schizophrenia*

b) Include a saying.

*The emperor has no clothes: A review of the 'pornography addiction' model*

*Editors can lead researchers to confidence intervals, but can't make them think*

c) Use a quote.

*'It's like having a physician in your pocket!' A critical analysis of self-diagnosis smartphone apps*

**Running title**

This refers to a shortened version of the title that is usually mentioned on each page of the published manuscript. Some journals require this and specify the maximum number of characters allowed. One method is to include only the dependent and independent variables in the running title.

**Title:** *Efficacy of repetitive transcranial magnetic stimulation in alcohol dependence: a sham-controlled study*

**Running title:** *rTMS in alcohol dependence*

For studies that do not have independent variables, mentioning the dependent variable only is an option.

**Title:** *Psychotic symptoms in COVID-19 patients. A retrospective descriptive study*

**Running title:** *Psychotic symptoms in COVID-19*

**Last chance to make a first impression**

A title reflects the story that follows. A poorly written title makes the manuscript obscure. Hence, the title of a manuscript should be concise, specific, informative, and attractive. It should not contain any unnecessary information or jargon.

**Suggested readings**

Gastel B, Day RA. How to write and publish a scientific paper. Eighth edition. Santa Barbara, California: Greenwood, 2016.

Cargill M, O'Connor P. Writing scientific research articles - Strategy and steps. Second edition. Oxford, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013.

Peat J. Scientific writing - Easy when you know how. London: BMJ Books, 2002.