

Your essential 'how-to' guide to choosing book titles

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Academic book titles often appear to be chosen by their authors without any thought to their interpretation by internet readers scanning through long lists of potentially relevant entries. Both completely formal or vacuous titles are prevalent in STEM disciplines and the 'hard' social sciences. And in the 'soft' social sciences and humanities, authors often seem to choose deliberately obscure, idiosyncratic or even actively mis-directing titles in order to make a particular intellectual impression. Here we present a simple 'how-to' guide to choosing a book title.

Choosing a book title intelligently can radically increase the ability of other academics and researchers to first find out about the piece of work, then to remember it when needed, and hence to retrieve its details and cite it, perhaps months or years later. The checklist below may be helpful to work through. In the current digital era all authors should check their potential titles against main search engines, as suggested in point 6 below.

1. How many words are there in the title? How many of these are theory or theme words?
2. Is there a main title and sub-title separated by a colon or other device? [usually a good idea] Or is integrated in one piece? [less good]
3. Is the book meant to be of interest
A: primarily for theory reasons? Is it solely theoretical?
B: primarily for empirical reasons? Does it have any theory interest?

Conventionally this is signalled as follows:

	Before the colon	After the colon
Primarily theoretical book	Theory or thematic words	Empirical or field words
Primarily empirical book	Empirical or field words	Theory or thematic words

In choosing words bear in mind that the sub-title may often be left off by other authors citing your work. It also may not show up in many abbreviated internet listings.

4. Does the title accurately characterize the book as a type of academic work, making clear its discipline and approach? Are the thematic or theory words included in the title fashionable or recent? In which case, will they endure? Or are they familiar or long accepted? In which case, are they already over-used? Who will like these words and who dislike them?
5. Look carefully at the 'ordinary language' words in the title. Are they 'filler' words only? In which case, are they needed? If not, do they have a clear and precise meaning or implication that you want your title to express? (Most ordinary language words with substantive content will have multiple meanings).
6. Type the whole title (in double quotes " ") into Google Books and check against the table below. Then type the three or four most distinctive or memorable words separately into the search engine, and check again.

Full title in quotes	Three or four most distinctive title words
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	Full title in quotes	Three or four most distinctive title words
How many items show up?	- None (good). - Many (poor).	- None (bad). - Very few (bad). - Modest number (good) -Lots and lots (bad)- it's an inverted U-curve here.
How do most of the other references or items that show up relate to your topic and subject matter?	- Very close (good). - Close (OK). - Remote (bad). - Completely different topic (very bad).	
Does the search show that you are using terms, phrases or acronyms that	- Have the same meaning as you are using (good). - Or have a number of different meanings from your sense (bad)	

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