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Correspondence

Prof. Dr. Jay N Shah
Editor in Chief
Journal of Patan Academy of Health
Sciences
Email: editor@pahs.edu.np,
drjaywufei@hotmail.com

‘Writing good effective title for journal article’

Jay N Shah

Editor in Chief, Journal of Patan Academy of Health Sciences

Documentation is the best effective way of communication. It also serves as a proof that can be examined and re-examined when needed. Therefore, it should be understandable to others.

World Wide Web and internet has enormous potential of searchable electronic data useful for research. However, there is simply so much information in the world that it is estimated it will take 300 years to index them. And till then, it’s a myth that ‘all is there on the net and we can find it’. Among millions of data, it becomes more important to attract readers to find the relevant information they require.^{1,2}

Science is virtually dead without publication. Researchers have duty to communicate their work and findings to the broader scientific community for peer attention and reproducibility. Besides scientific research, written document is important in all aspects of life. The “Williams v. HRH, Cal. Court of Appeal, September 9, 2009’ California case affirmed a \$5.8 million judgment against a broker, but the real lesson of the case is buried deep in its text, and is, simply, “If it’s not in writing, it doesn’t exist.”³

simplicity with concise statements is basic requirement of the title. ‘Waste’ words that do not add meaning and unnecessary increases the length may also mislead the indexing of the article.

Title is the ‘label’ of an article to make it ‘stand out’ in the subject area. Good title is the basic and important aspect of writing. It summarizes the content of the manuscript in fewest effective words possible to draw readers’ simplicity with concise statements is basic attention. It should match the content of manuscript and convince them to read the full text. There is no fixed rule but ideally 10 to 15 words are appropriate. Very long title may be confusing and distract attention of readers.

Title should be ‘simple, brief, clear and attractive’ to precisely ‘tell readers’ about the research paper. It may not be a grammatically complete sentence. Redundant words like verbs and articles are best omitted.

Waste words make title long and distracting. These are ineffective and unnecessary words, which when removed will not alter the meaning of title. Commonly used waste words- “a study of ...”, “investigations of ...”, “observations on ...”. Abbreviations or acronyms are avoided, for e.g. ‘Escherichia coli’ not ‘E. coli’, calcium not ‘ca’, write ‘generic names’ of chemical or drug and not formulas or brand names are used.

In digital world today, people simply 'scan' titles to search through databases for information relevant to the need. Title is the key to ensure that the article is 'picked' up by various search engines, otherwise the paper is lost and do not reach the intended audience. The keywords and phrases in the title facilitate digital software to 'catch' the words for indexing and make it accessible for literature search.

Therefore, the words in the title should include the key-phrases to effectively and accurately highlight the content of the article for indexing and retrieval. This will allow other writers to 'cite' and list the title in their references. This will eventually increase the readership and visibility of article.

A good title helps reader to 'understand and believe' the content of manuscript and prepare them what is to be followed in the full text article. Writing a good title is a 'process' with revisions, revisions and more revisions to include the research theme of 'what, how, where, when, who'. Study design, e.g. 'randomized trials, systematic reviews, meta-analyses' helps draw attention of readers. This is recommended by 'reporting guidelines' and is also preferred by most 'peer reviewer' and journal 'editors'.

There are millions of publications accessible on internet today. It is important to include 'the main key phrases' of the article in the title to make it descriptive, unambiguous and accurate. Readers and search engine look for 'key phrase' and not a single word e.g. 'wound infection' is more appropriate than simply 'infection'. Most of us simply 'skim titles' to find out what information is available on a subject. When title grabs our attention, then only we go further to read the abstract and then to full papers. This is similar to reading morning newspaper, first we 'scan' the headlines and only if it is of interest, we read the detail news.

EXAMPLE OF STEPWISE REVISION TO WRITE AN EFFECTIVE TITLE:

First, answer all the possible research questions: What the article is about? What study designs was used? Who/what was studied? How it was done? Where it was done? What were the results?

- Paper studied use of prophylaxis antibiotic in cholecystectomy
- Studied reduction in wound infection after routine prophylaxis
- Study sample was low-risk elective laparoscopic cholecystectomy
- It was a randomized clinical trial.
- Research was done at university teaching hospital

- There was no decrease in wound infection after routine prophylaxis.

Second, from the answers list key phrases/words to include in the title

- Prophylaxis antibiotic therapy
- Randomized trial
- Clinical study of cholelithiasis patients
- Elective laparoscopic cholecystectomy
- Low risk cholecystectomy patients
- Tertiary care university teaching hospital, Nepal
- No significant decrease in wound infection

EXAMPLE OF GOOD TITLES:

1. Antibiotic prophylaxis in cholecystectomy.
2. Antibiotic prophylaxis in laparoscopic cholecystectomy
3. Antibiotic prophylaxis in low-risk laparoscopic cholecystectomy
4. Routine antibiotic prophylaxis in low-risk laparoscopic cholecystectomy
5. Routine antibiotic prophylaxis in low-risk laparoscopic cholecystectomy is unnecessary
6. Routine antibiotic prophylaxis in low-risk laparoscopic cholecystectomy is unnecessary: clinical trial
7. Routine antibiotic prophylaxis in low-risk laparoscopic cholecystectomy is unnecessary: A randomized clinical trial at tertiary hospital
8. Routine antibiotic prophylaxis in low-risk laparoscopic cholecystectomy is unnecessary: A randomized clinical trial at Patan Hospital
9. Routine antibiotic prophylaxis in low-risk laparoscopic cholecystectomy is unnecessary: A randomized clinical trial at Patan Hospital, Patan Academy of Health Sciences, Nepal [22 words]
10. Routine antibiotic prophylaxis in low-risk laparoscopic cholecystectomy is unnecessary: A randomized clinical trial at Patan Hospital, Nepal [17 words]

The study of Routine antibiotic prophylaxis to investigate wound infection in low-risk elective laparoscopic cholecystectomy patients is unnecessary: A randomized clinical trial at Patan Hospital, Patan Academy of Health Sciences, Kathmandu, Nepal [31 words]

Waste words- the study of..., to investigate wound infection..., do not alter the meaning when removed; elective- is unnecessary word as 'low risk' is more broad to include this and other criteria; Nepal- this will increase readers interest will also somewhat tell the readers it is in nepal and deleting 'Patan Academy of Health Sciences' will significantly alter meaning and decrease word count from 22 to more ideal 17.

Title is important. It influences the visibility of paper by attracting more readers. Search engines and abstract databases list titles where readers 'scan' to find relevant papers. It is crucial that title summarizes the work.

This is helpful to start with, a 'draft title', and 'revise' as the manuscript progresses. Experiment with several types, one after another, adding and deleting words/phrases that appear in abstract and manuscript. Compare each title that best summarize paper. Try removing unnecessary words without significantly making it longer is the best way not to make title unnecessarily long.

Title may be constructed in many different 'types', for example, 'descriptive' to tell the reader what the study is about or 'declarative' to make a statement about the outcome or 'interrogative' to put a question or a 'compound titles' to combine different types in one, separated by colons or question marks.

Specific features of titles has impact on downloads and citation of the articles. More than half of all published articles fail to get noticed and are never cited.² Among many factors (e.g. journal availability, open access, specialty etc), the 'construction' of title itself is important.

Today 'literature search' is mostly electronic. Online databases for e.g. PubMed, google, do not always provide full text, but list only titles and abstracts. Computerized electronic retrieval systems classify the articles based on information in the title. The 'comprehensive title' with clear description of the study, design and findings may contain more 'keywords

and phrases' to be identified by search engines and also readers may find relevant. Of course this does not mean longer titles with 'waste words' that is not picked up by indexing software. Simply aiming to publish in high impact factor journal does not guarantee download and citations, because very often the IF is influenced by one or two 'highly' cited articles.

Some journals require 'short title'- a shorter version of the title, up to 40 to 50 characters (including letters and spaces) to appear on each page of the manuscript.

The **authors'** names and **institutional affiliation** of authors are listed below the title in a set rule with criteria of 'authorship, number of author, sequencing' etc.⁴

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