

**Grabbing Readers:
How to Focus Your Paper's Title and Contents on Its Major
Theoretical Contribution Rather than the Local Context of the Study**

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Abstract

Which of the following two titles did the author(s) of the journal article or book actually use: (A) “Client-Hairdresser Conversations in the Beauty Saloon Industry in Metropolitan Regions of Turkey” or (B) “How Marketplace Performances Produce Interdependent Status Games and Contested Forms of Symbolic Capital” (Üstüner and Thompson, 2012)? Here are two additional titles to select one from: (A) “Meetings and Past-Times of Young Male Friends in the North End of Boston” or (B) “Street Corner Society” (Whyte, 1943). This chapter offers a primer on writing titles and relating the scholarly content of your academic paper—to contribute original theory to a discipline and get your paper accepted for publication. The chapter offers tenets—sets of helpful rules for writing titles and paper content—for increasing readers’ interest and editors’ acceptances of authors’ paper submissions for publication in SSCI journals.

Keywords: article; coach; paradox; reader; rules; title

INTRODUCTION

This essay focuses on ten useful rules-of-thumb to consider when writing a title for a paper that you plan to submit for publication consideration to an editor of a scholarly journal in the behavioral sciences including 16+ subcategories of journals in the general field of business, economics, and management. Combining these ten rules provides an algorithm (a checklist, see Gawande (2010) on the value of checklists) designed to be useful for increasing clarity and the attention, understanding, and acceptance that your paper receives by the editor and hopefully reviewers.

THE RULES

Rule 1: Ask Your Coach if the Title is the Right One for Your Paper

According to Gawande (2011) each of us needs a great coach who offers insights and reviews our actions in situ. “In situ” refers to the specific context--the specific paper that you are about to submit to a journal editor. A great coach is a coach that is helpful and has had several successes herself/himself in writing papers appearing in major journals in your field. If you are an early career scholar, consider seeking a qualified coach; a useful metric for a qualified coach is whether or not the potential coach has an i10-index greater than ten, that is, the coach has written eleven or more publications each having ten or more citations. A senior colleague at your college/university who you are comfortable asking for advice often makes a great coach.

Do not be so overconfident in the quality of the title of your paper that you submit without asking your coach, “Is this title the right one for this paper?” Of course, also ask your coach to read the paper and provide comments. Remember to thank your coach for her/his suggestions in reading a draft of your paper; do so on the bottom of the title page of your paper.

Not only does applying this rule (almost) always improve the quality of the title of your paper and its contents, editors consider papers having such acknowledgements to be higher in quality usually than papers giving no indication of such early reviews. The first tenet is to recognize that you will improve your thinking and writing via coaching as master-writer Gawande (2011) informs us. The title to the present chapter offers a hint for answering the two title-quiz questions correctly--focus your main title on the paper's major theoretical contribution. "B" is the answer to each of the two quiz questions in the abstract.

Rule 2: Read the Articles/Titles in Your Field Having the Highest Citation Impact

The implicit tenet for this second rule is that high impact papers more often than not have great titles. Adopting this perspective for a moment, go to Harzing.com's "publish or perish" software and click on journal impact and type in one of the high-citation impact journals in your discipline. Read the titles of the top twenty articles by citation impact appearing in the journal.

Rule 2 raises the question of what journals to search to identify relevant journals. Early career scholars experience a number of difficulties in writing papers for publication in acceptable scientific journals. "Acceptable" refers to journals in prestige rankings of academic journals; Harzing (2014) provides journal rankings for 22 ranking studies. Among the listing in Harzing (2014), for example, is the "WIE 2008," is the WU Wien Journal Rating May 2008 List developed by the Wirtschaftsuniversität Wien (Vienna University of Economics and Business Administration); the list of journals ranked for 2008 includes only journals with an A+ and A rankings. The "*Financial Times* Top 45 Journals Used in Business School Research Rankings" is another useful ranking of elite business-related journals (FT, 2014). The journal rankings by the Australian Business Deans' Council (ABDC, 2013) is a third list; this list ranks journals into four levels of prestige: A* (A star), A, B, and C (not well: faculty members' publications

appearing in C ranked journals receive zero credit or minus credit for such articles at some of the 40 universities in Australia). The Google.com/scholar journal listing for articles' impacts is the fourth and final listing receiving mention. Google provides journal listings for articles' impacts for 16 subcategories of 'Business, Economics & Management.' For example, Table 1 shows the top ten Google journals in 2014 by impact for the marketing subcategory. Consider taking time to download listings of the titles of the top-cited articles in a few of these journals.

Table 1 here.

Using a search of "The Journal of Marketing" (JM) at Harzing.com, Table 2 is a list of the top twenty articles by number of citations appearing in the JM. What do you notice about the titles in this list? The following words appear a few times each: service, model, relationship, conceptualizing, consumer, and theory. While the second rule is **not** to suggest to use words appearing in the top-cited articles in prestige journals, do consider focusing your title on the theoretical contribution that your paper is making and not on the specific context of the study that your paper reports. Ask yourself the following two questions. What is the contribution to theory that your paper is making? Does your title indicate that contribution?

Notice that only one paper refers to a country by name (Sweden) among the twenty titles appearing in Table 2. Unless your paper is to test a theory across several countries avoid a country, state, city, or place in your title. Focus the title on identifying the theory and the theoretical contribution that the paper delivers. If you download the most cited articles in each of the top ten journals by citation impact appearing in Table 1, you will find "model" and "theory" or "theoretical" appearing more often than other words in the first article of each list. Be sure to answer in the title, and especially the paper, the question, "What theoretical contribution is this paper making to the discipline?" Your title should respond explicitly to the

implicit conclusion that many editors and reviewers are prone to reach when reading a submission: The contents of this paper are relevant only to the context in the author's study. Show how the study in your paper is generalizable to theory as well as generalizable to contexts beyond the one that you report.

Rule 3: Use Two Titles--the First Five Words or Less

The main title might state the topic and the subtitle an implied or explicit proposition. Gawande's (2010) checklist title illustrates such a title: "The Checklist. If something so simple can transform intensive care, what else can it do?"

The main title might state an action and the subtitle one or more paradoxes that relate to the main title. Woodside and Chebat (2001) illustrate such a title: "Updating Heider's Balance Theory in Consumer Behavior: A Jewish Couple Buys a German Car and Additional Buying-Consuming Transformation Stories." If an editor insists, the authors could delete the subtitle due to length restrictions.

Rule 4: Avoid "Replication" and "Extension" in Your Title.

Replication studies are highly valuable but gaining acceptance of such studies is difficult --and the difficulty is increasing according to Evanschitzky, Baumgarth, Hubbard, and Armstrong (2007). Reviewers and more than a few editors falsely believe that a second or third study with findings confirming the findings in an earlier study provides no new information (Evanschitzky and Armstrong, 2013). Independent confirmation of findings is the most powerful method available for establishing accuracy. However, a consistent negative bias exists in the review processes of many (read, most) academic journals towards replications.

Thus, a paradox exists! Replications are highly valuable reading that many reviewers and editors perceive to have little value. Resolving the paradox and achieving success in getting replications accepted for publication include taking several steps. First, start framing the title of your paper with “updating” or “supporting” or “extending” or “refining” or “additional testing” rather than “replicating.” A synonym for “replicating” is “duplicating”--and “duplicating” is close to “copying” which is not far away implicitly from “plagiarizing.” The suggestion is that an unintended consequence of using “replication” is “nothing new” at best and at worst stealing.

A second step is to read the literature supporting the usefulness of replication and how to do replications. Uncles and Kwok (2013) is solid fundamental reading on the value of replications and how to do them well. When offering a replication study, be sure to cite and discuss three to six articles that describe the high value of replication research and their near total lack of appearance in journals (a third step). A fourth step is to build in replications into your own original studies. Uncles and Kowk (2013, p.1403) advocate the “the replication process should be integral to the design of the original research project—not something dismissed as “a limitation of the study” for others to resolve at a future date.”

Starting the process of replication with the original study serves four purposes: to establish whether the findings hold again (starting convergence analysis to determine scope); to indicate where findings might not hold again (starting boundary search to determine boundary conditions); to signal the researcher's belief in the importance of replication; and to demonstrate that the findings are replicable (if they can be replicated at least once or

twice, possibly they can be replicated more often). (Uncles and Kowk, 2013, p. 1403)

Rule 5: Avoid Openings with Low Information Content: Words to Avoid Include “Critical”, “An Empirical Analysis of”, “The Major Determinants of”, and “The Effects of”

Great titles get to the issue very quickly. Here is a great title, “Focusing on the forgone: How value can appear so different to buyers and sellers.” Note that this title starts with a paradox that violates the old saw, “Out of sight, out of mind.” The second half of the title offers a promise to answer the riddle of how value can appear to be so different between buyers and sellers. Dan Ariely and his colleagues are brilliant at writing great titles as well as doing and writing-up great studies (cf., Carmon and Ariely, 2000).

Rule 6: Describe a Paradox

A paradox is an inconsistency, an irony, a contradiction, impossibility, an illogicality. Readers read on when an author presents a paradox. “Rational irrationality” is another paradox. How can irrationality be rational? Go to [Google.com/scholar](https://www.google.com/scholar); enter “rational irrationality” and 962+ answers (explanations) will appear. Readers love to read quandaries and ruminate on solutions to quandaries.

Rule 7: After Achieving 5,000+ Citation, Write Your “The General Theory” Paper

A book by John Maynard Keynes (1936), “The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money” has nearly 24,000 citations. This book has had a huge impact in economics and public policy! In addition, [Google.com/scholar](https://www.google.com/scholar) includes 433,000 results for “the general theory of.” Offering a general theory of anything commands a lot of attention. Usually your general

theory should offer different theories and explain specific context where each context applies within your general theory. Wait at least ten years and no more than 40 after publishing your first scholarly journals before writing your general theory--build up your knowledge, confidence, and publication record (maybe to 100+ articles) before writing at least your first general theory paper. However, do not stop working and revising until after completing and seeing your general theory in print.

Rule 8: Use an Intriguing Turn that Generates a Vision: “Gone with the Wind,” “The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life,” and “Street Corner Society”

Measured by citation impact, “The Tourist Gaze” (Urry and Larsen, 2011) is the most intriguing turn of phrase in the business/management subdiscipline of hospitality and tourism. “The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life” (Goffman, 1959) is another exceptional, delightful, and high impact turn of phrase. “Street Corner Society: The Social Structure of an Italian Slum,” William Foote Whyte’s (1943) first book--and his Ph.D. dissertation at the University of Chicago--is a third great turn of phrase. Note the effective use of two titles by Whyte. His book is a participant observation study about life in the North End of Boston during the Great Depression. The book that is a compelling reading often follows a great title.

Rule 9: Write Three Possible Titles and Show Them to Three Colleagues Separately and Ask, “Which One Can I Get You to Read and Comment on for Me?”

Who applies this rule? Use a “behavioroid” step in implementing this rule. Instruct your participants that you have found three books at Amazon.com, each with one of these three titles. “I wish to buy one of these books for you. The price is about the same for each book. I will order one book for you today. Which one should I buy for you? (I am sorry that I can only tell

you the title of each book.) Which one do you want as a birthday gift? Please pick one and please think aloud as you go about selecting your present.” Write distinctly different titles in preparing this game (test). Frequently your least favorite will be most chosen among ten people that you ask to participate in the study.

Rule 10: List a Sequence of Acts for your Title

“Eat pray love” is a great title. This book was an unexpected run-away hit for the author (Gilbert, 2006) and then a successful movie. I am expecting the same for “embrace perform model: complexity theory, contrarian case analysis, and multiple realities” (Woodside, 2014). Note the subtitle clarifies the main topics of the article.

CONCLUSION

Titles vary in quality and impacts just as article do. Take the time and make the effort to try several or all of the rules appearing in this chapter. Doing so is likely to improve both the quality, acceptability, and the impact of your article.

A short concise title that conveys the central contribution of the article is more likely to pop up in a search and, therefore, more likely to be cited (at all and more frequently) than a lengthy title. In this way, a short title with appropriate key words contributes directly to the impact of the article. A final suggestion for you to consider!

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Table 1
Google.com/scholar Journal Listing by Article Citation Impact

Rank	Journal	h5-index	h5-median
1	Journal of Marketing	65	111
2	Journal of Business Research	62	84
3	Journal of Consumer Research	51	68
4	Journal of Marketing Research	50	76
5	Industrial Marketing Management	47	69
6	Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science	45	65
7	Journal of Product Innovation Management	43	61
8	Marketing Science	42	65
9	European Journal of Marketing	36	50
10	Journal of Retailing	34	59

Note. The h5 index is the h-index for articles published in the last 5 complete years. It is the largest number h such that h articles published in 2009-2013 have at least h citations each; thus the Journal of Marketing as published 65 articles with each of these articles having 65 or more citations. The h5-median is h5-median for a publication is the median number of citations for the articles that make up its h5-index.

Source: http://scholar.google.com.au/citations?view_op=top_venues&hl=en&vq=bus_marketing (accessed September 2, 2014).

Table 2
Top Twenty Articles by Citation Impact Appearing in “The Journal of Marketing”

Cites	Per year	Rank	Authors	Title
✓ h 14825	511.21	2	A Parasuraman, VA Zeithaml, LL Berry	A conceptual model of service quality and its implications for future research
✓ h 14083	704.15	1	RM Morgan, SD Hunt	The commitment-trust theory of relationship marketing
✓ h 9378	360.69	3	VA Zeithaml	Consumer perceptions of price, quality, and value: a means-end model and synthesis of evidence
✓ h 8280	306.67	4	FR Dwyer, PH Schurr, S Oh	Developing buyer-seller relationships
✓ h 8134	387.33	6	KL Keller	Conceptualizing, measuring, and managing customer-based brand equity
✓ h 8083	367.41	5	JJ Cronin Jr, SA Taylor	Measuring service quality: a reexamination and extension
✓ h 6900	287.50	7	JC Narver, SF Slater	The effect of a market orientation on business profitability
✓ h 6765	281.88	8	AK Kohli, BJ Jaworski	Market orientation: the construct, research propositions, and managerial implications
✓ h 6559	364.39	9	VA Zeithaml, LL Berry, A Parasuraman	The behavioral consequences of service quality
✓ h 5804	276.38	10	BJ Jaworski, AK Kohli	Market orientation: antecedents and consequences
✓ h 5397	224.88	11	JC Anderson, JA Narus	A model of distributor firm and manufacturer firm working partnerships
✓ h 5343	267.15	12	S Ganesan	Determinants of long-term orientation in buyer-seller relationships
✓ h 5165	303.82	13	PM Doney, JP Cannon	An examination of the nature of trust in buyer-seller relationships
✓ h 5136	342.40	15	RL Oliver	Whence consumer loyalty?
✓ h 5050	252.50	14	GS Day	The capabilities of market-driven organizations
✓ h 4803	218.32	16	C Fornell	A national customer satisfaction barometer: the Swedish experience
✓ h 4555	253.06	17	DL Hoffman, TP Novak	Marketing in hypermedia computer-mediated environments: conceptual foundations
✓ h 4554	227.70	18	EW Anderson, C Fornell, DR Lehmann	Customer satisfaction, market share, and profitability: findings from Sweden
✓ h 4286	142.87	538	C Grönroos	A service quality model and its marketing implications
✓ h 4248	177.00	19	MJ Bitner	Evaluating service encounters: the effects of physical surroundings and employee responses
✓ h 3938	164.08	20	MJ Bitner, BH Booms, MS Tetreault	The service encounter: diagnosing favorable and unfavorable incidents

Source: Harzing's publish or perish (accessed September 2, 2014).