



Tantalizing Titles

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by Julie H. Ferguson

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Article and book titles are crucial to selling your work; not only selling it to your readers, but also selling it to a publisher. Certainly no book is saleable without an original idea and its name needs to be equally fresh too.

I can hear you saying, "But publishers often change titles, so what's the point?" Indeed they do but, whether we like it or not, the titles we use in our query letters affect editors and agents positively or negatively. The opportunity to create an outstanding first impression with a zinger of a title must not be missed at the query stage, especially by authors seeking publication for the first time.

Tantalizing titles are challenging to develop – many non-fiction authors agonize over them throughout the entire writing process. Here are some tips and strategies to create innovative titles that captivate both editors and readers at the get-go.

Main title:

- Short is sweet – 2-5 words, max;
- Catchy, upbeat, exciting, or humorous for non-fiction;
- May imply a promise;
- Hints at the subject.

Sub-title (non-fiction only):

- Clarifies what the book is about;
- Probably a more serious phrase than main title;

Two favourite non-fiction zingers of mine are:

- ***Tongue-Fu!***® *How to Deflect, Disarm, and Defuse Any Verbal Conflict* by Sam Horn (St. Martins-Griffin, 1997);
- ***Greatcoats and Glamour Boots: Canadian Women at War*** by Carolyn Gossage (Dundurn 1991).

Novelists can, of course, do without the sub-title altogether and have much more freedom when naming their books. However, it is worth striving for a title that will captivate an editor or agent.

Although titles cannot be copy-righted, using or modifying one that is well-known is not going to help your cause one iota. Imagine sending a query out about your "Gone with the Wind"!

My first book took ten years to write and I never worried much about the title. I just knew that it would come to me – either in the shower or walking along a beach. It did too – but in the middle of the night. Too good to forget, I got up and wrote it down. All six publishers I queried commented on my terrific title when they first responded. *Through a Canadian Periscope* was never changed....

Try this book for irresistible ideas, *2001 Greatest Headlines* at:
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