

COMING UP WITH A

BOOK TITLE

TIPS FOR NEW AND UPCOMING AUTHORS



# HOW TO COME UP WITH A TITLE FOR YOUR BOOK

TIPS FOR NEW AND UPCOMING AUTHORS



## HOW DO I DECIDE ON THE PERFECT TITLE FOR MY BOOK?

- Well, that should be easy! Right? Just search the Internet for possible book title cover names from other books. Find one that received good reviews and use it! **WRONG!**
- You saw an unpublished title somewhere, it sounds cool, and it's kinda what you want, so you decided to use it! **WRONG!**
- You want to name your book after your cute pet because everyone loves pets! **WRONG!**

There are proven and preferable ways to decide on a title for the book based on the story you're writing and none of the above will do it! The recommendation is to aim for your book's title to be different, memorable, evocative, unforgettable, and most of all, original.

Have you ever heard or read the phrase: "*Never judge a book by its cover?*" That phrase has been used to relate to people as well. However, that statement is very true when taken literally, for a book cover, especially if you want to brand and market/sell your book.

### **PAY ATTENTION HERE:**

According to the Marketing section of NY Book Editors: "... your book's title is the most important marketing strategy you have. It doesn't matter if you self-publish or go with a traditional publisher, whether you have an enticing cover design, or whether you have nailed the first line of your novel. It doesn't even matter if you've written a good story... at least, not at first." (<https://nybookeditors.com/2017/02/coming-perfect-title-novel/>)

## MARKETING YOUR BOOK

Marketing is very important for any type of branding. Marketing is the the promotion of a particular product or company by means of advertising using a unique and distinctive design.

As a person, your "brand" is your style and how you are seen and perceived by others, what you want people to know about you, and whether to get to know you better or not. Think Facebook here. Most people on that platform really want to know who you are, and what you are about before they befriend you. So, most people will try to market themselves in the best light (though not all will). Well, the same could be applied to your book's title. Thus, coming up with a title for your book must give the potential reader some insights into the story within the book, and that story begins on the cover, with the book's title and imagery (if any is used). If the book's title is typography only, then the typeface (font) you choose will need to do the job of telling or beginning to tell the story. It gives somewhat of a visible "voice" to the story.

The title of your book should entice the potential reader to your book, the story, any benefit that story might bring to them, even though you may not be a well-known author, and hopefully lead to an eventual purchase or two, despite the price tag!

## GETTING THE BOOK'S TITLE RIGHT IS VERY IMPORTANT

As the saying goes, you never get a second chance to make a first impression, and once your book is published that holds true. Here's a short list of original titles of updated well-known and well-read books before they were eventually renamed and published:

ORIGINAL NAME	UPDATED AND PUBLISHED NAMES	AUTHORS
<i>- First Impressions</i>	—Pride and Prejudice	Jane Austen
<i>- Tomorrow is Another Day</i>	—Gone With the Wind	Margaret Mitchell
<i>- Atticus</i>	—To Kill a Mockingbird	Harper Lee
<i>- Twilight</i>	—The Sound and The Fury	William Faulkner
<i>- They Don't Build Statues to Businessmen</i>	—Valley of the Dolls	Jacqueline Susann

Would they have been as successful and well-known had they kept their original titles? Perhaps we would never know. However, one thing we can see though, is that the original titles are far removed from the updated ones.

# THEN WHAT MAKES A GOOD TITLE?

The first thing to note is that book titles are not protected by copyright, which means that two books can have the same title. However, you would not want to name your book's title after another, or would you?

According to the U.S Copyright Office, the U.S. agency that processes and registers copyright applications, "Copyright doesn't protect names, titles, slogans, or short phrases."

However, the title can be trademarked, and that can "protect words, phrases, symbols, and/or designs that set apart the goods of one party from those of others."

#### According to Wikipedia:

A copyright is a type of intellectual property that gives its owner the exclusive right to copy, distribute, adapt, display, and perform a creative work, usually for a limited time. The creative work may be in a literary, artistic, educational, or musical form. Copyright is intended to protect the original expression of an idea in the form of a creative work, but not the idea itself. A copyright is subject to limitations based on public interest considerations, such as the fair use doctrine in the United States.

# ABOUT COPYRIGHT AND TRADEMARK

And according to "tutorialspoint," here are the differences:  
(<https://www.tutorialspoint.com/differentiate-between-trademark-and-copyright>)

## Differences

The major differences between a trademark and a copyright are as follows –

Copyright	Trademark
The symbol for copyright is ©	The symbol for trademark is ™
Music, software, movies etc. are copyrighted.	Goods and services have a trademark.
It protects from copying, selling	Others can't use similar words or phrases etc.
Comes under Indian copyright Act 1957	Comes under Trademark Act 1999
Shields original creation.	Shields Marks (brand marks).
Issued for the long term.	Issued for a short term, when compared to copyrights.
Examples – Batman characters in comic books, movies.	For example, only the Nike Company can use the word NIKE and nobody else can use the word.

Here are a couple of fun small-group exercises for brainstorming that you can begin with:

Get a small group together (5-8 people). Divide a sheet of paper into two vertically. One on side list the name(s) of persons in the story and places where the story takes place. On the other side, list ideas of what the story is about and the different times and seasons in which the story takes place. Now set about to randomly pair words from both lists. Exhaust all possibilities. You might be surprised that you can coin a title from this process.

According to MIRO (<https://miro.com/guides/online-brainstorming/brainstorming-ideas>)

Map out – don't throw out – bad ideas

One of the biggest roadblocks to free thinking is the anxiety that comes with feeling that your ideas will be dismissed as “dumb” by your co-workers or boss. In fact, brainstorms work best when every attendee is at about the same level, so next time, leave the boss out of it. You can loop them back in when it feels right, but for now they're on a need-to-know basis. Use the beginning of a brainstorm to come up with as many “bad” ideas as you can. Not only will this generate a few laughs but it will spur positive energy and keep productivity high.

**GIVE IT A TRY!**

# YOUR BOOK'S TITLE MUST BE:

## 1. UNIQUE:

Brainstorm and make every attempt to come up with a title that was never used before, so do your research, and try to come up with a one-of-a-kind, personal and unique name for your book. Brainstorming is the process of either individual or in small groups generating ideas, mulling over words and phrases, until you find a solution, a name that works.

**Check the Internet for more tips on how to have successful brainstorm sessions.**



Image source: created by vectorpocket - [www.freepik.com](http://www.freepik.com)

## 2. MEMORABLE:

A book's title must be easily read, easily pronounced, and easily remembered in the language in which it is written, and for the audience for which it is written.

Some authors don't have to come up with unusual or remarkable titles. They can achieve success by the popularity of their name or create a series of titles based on beloved (and popular) characters, such as the Harry Potter series by J.K. Rowling:

- *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*
- *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*
- *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*
- *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*
- *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*
- *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*
- *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*

However, most authors aren't that lucky, especially new authors, and they must work hard at a title for their book, a title that would tempt, entice, attract, pull, appeal, and draw the reader in all at the same time, just by the book's title alone. In other words, the title must sell! If there is an image on the cover, then the title needs to support the image in some way. What does that mean? Well, that means that if the book is about bicycles, and the title speaks to that, then the image should not be that of motorcycles. Makes sense?

## 3. AVOID CONFUSION WITH OTHER TITLES:

**It is very important to choose a title that is not like another book's title.** Here are some examples:

1. *The Girl on the Train* by Paula Hawkins vs. *The Girl From the Train* by Irma Joubert
2. *Gone Girl* by Gillian Flynn vs. *Gonzo Girl* by Cheryl Della Pietra
3. *Golden Son* by Pierce Brown vs. *The Golden Son* by Shilpi Somaya Gouda

**The point here is that you want your book to be found easily and not confused with another book that sounds like it. That can mislead.**

## GENRE:

It is very important to know your story's genre, which means that you must know whether the story is a *thriller, mystery, adventure, romance, fantasy, horror, adventure, memoir, fiction, non-fiction, etc.* Genre refers to the types of books that fall into a specific category, and are categorized by their style, tone, time, target audience, etc. Research successful books in your genre to seek inspiration for how/what they are titled. **Find your book's genre and stick with it!**

The above processes and tips will go a long way in helping you find the perfect title for your story. Naming your book should not be rushed, but it must be treated as the most important and take precedence, as it is the first impression the potential reader and hopefully buyer will get a glimpse into your book's story, and your writing.

**ON THE RIGHT**   
**ARE QUESTIONS YOUR  
BOOK MUST ANSWER FOR  
THE READER:**

*Excerpted from The Book Fox:  
<https://thejohnfox.com/2016/07/how-to-create-good-book-titles/>*

## WHO IS THE NOVEL ABOUT?

### Examples:

- Forrest Gump (*Winston Groom*)
- The Lord of the Rings (*J. R. R. Tolkien*)
- Oliver Twist (*Charles Dickens*)

## WHAT IS THE NOVEL ABOUT?

### Examples:

- The Hunger Games (*Suzanne Collins*)
- The Hunt for Red October (*Tom Clancy*)
- To Kill a Mockingbird (*Harper Lee*)

## WHEN DOES YOUR NOVEL TAKE PLACE?

### Examples:

- Nineteen Eighty-Four (*George Orwell*)
- Love in the Time of Cholera (*Gabriel García Márquez*)

## WHERE DOES YOUR NOVEL TAKE PLACE?

### Examples:

- Salmon Fishing in the Yemen (*Paul Torday*)
- Cold Mountain (*Charles Frazier*)
- A Passage to India (*E.M. Forster*)

## WHY SHOULD SOMEONE READ YOUR STORY?

### Examples:

- John Dies at the End (David Wong) - *Does John really die at the end?*
- The Heart is a Lonely Hunter (Carson McCullers) - *In what way is the heart a hunter?*
- As I Lay Dying (William Faulkner) - *Why is she dying?*

*Do some research to get the answers to these questions.*

## WHO IS THE AUDIENCE FOR YOUR STORY?

Just like any other product or service on the market, identifying and targeting the audience for your book is very important. You cannot just write a story, title and publish it and hope that people will buy it. It doesn't work like that!

Ask yourself these questions to be able to locate your audience:

- What is the book's story/message about?
- What is the main message you want to let your audience know?
- What benefit would your story bring to your audience?
- How does your book differ from your competition (other books)?
- the potential reader and hopefully buyer will get a glimpse into your book's story, and your writing.

So now that you have an idea of who your target audience is, you need to set about researching and finding who and where they are by creating a persona (the character of a person that is perceived by others). Find people whom you know read the genre of your book, and these can be among your colleagues, friends, and family. Focus on their demographics (statistical data relating to a group(s) of people), such as gender, age, physical characteristics, education, income level, interests, activities, opinions, and social status to name a few). This type of research is crucial in coming up with a real audience for your book. Some authors even go the extra mile to visualize their audience by creating an actual visualization, by creating a character with a name who can be representative of the people in that audience. Remember too that you can fall into that category.

### CONSIDER THIS EXAMPLE:

Tanya is 23 years old, lives in New York and attends the State university. She is in her final year of English studies, loves to read and works part time as a manager at a local bookstore. She devours articles on relationships each day over dinner in her small apartment. Tanya makes time to go to the local gym twice a week and loves to shop at the local grocery store for nutritious packaged meals. She has been steadily dating and last year she and her boyfriend traveled to Spain on their first vacation together. Tanya did not forget to pack a couple of her favorite books which she plans to read during some downtime.

Does Tanya sound like she could be you? Maybe? However, you are not writing for yourself, although you are the story's author. You may be part of the group of like-minded individuals who engage in the same activities and love some of the same things. So your audience is broader than you. Your story is also not written for "everyone." Therefore you must consider your audience very carefully, in terms of demographics, which is the statistical data relating a particular sector of a population.

## BOOK PUBLISHERS:

Book publishers sometimes help the author/writer with the naming of their book and would need to know how to title a book in order to hook potential readers and boost sales. The book's title is the first thing a reader sees or should see, so it should help to convey a little about the story, the tone and the voice of your book.

A good title will generate some interest, but a great title will intrigue and become memorable, and can turn your book into a best seller on the New York Times best-selling list, meaning that you can potentially sell at least 5,000 – 10,000 copies of your book in one week via several retailers! But, with digital publishing and promotion, traditional book publishing is fast becoming a thing of the past, as no author wants to have their books end up sitting on bookstore shelves for years, possibly forever! So again, the title of your book cannot be overestimated.

## WHAT COMES FIRST?

Now, don't for one minute think that you need to know the title of your book before writing or telling your story. You don't! Focus on telling the story first, fleshing out the details and then writing your first draft. During that phase a possible title may jump out from nowhere.

After the draft and you're confident that you've nailed the story, then begin brainstorming the title. Return to the section on being unique and on brainstorming, but don't be limited to just that idea. If the creativity is flowing among the group challenge yourselves to come up with 10-20 or more possible titles. Then begin asking yourselves the questions to see if they answer the readers' questions listed previously. This takes time so don't give up, or don't rush it. Take a break and come back another day for another brainstorm session. Remember to make your book's title a priority.

Does your book need a tagline, sometimes called the *hook*, a short phrase that gives some insight into the story? The tagline should support the title, should be short and designed to suck the reader in, by evoking some type of feeling or emotion. For example, if there was a tagline for *The Wizard of Oz* it could be *Let's Follow the Yellow Brick Road...*, giving the potential reader a feeling of adventure and wanting to read the book to be able to follow the road to see where it leads (which could possibly be to the end of the book).

If you have an editor(s), and you should, share the possible titles and taglines with them, as after reading your draft, they may have a good idea of which of the titles and tagline (if any) will work best for your story. You can also bounce your titles and taglines off friends and family who might be familiar with the story. In the end you can be confident and breathe a sigh of relief when the final title (and possibly a tagline) is chosen.



## WHO AM I?

By now you must be wondering who I am and what do I know about book covers. My name is Kathleen, and I am a Professor of Graphic Design as well as the owner of a small design studio creating Custom and Pre-designed Book Covers for authors.

For over 20 years I have taught courses in the use of the Adobe Creative Suite, specifically Photoshop, Illustrator, and InDesign; Basic and Advanced Typography, Publication Design, Prepress and Printing and Packaging Design.

My students' designs have won many awards from recognized competitions such as Graphic Design USA, Society of Publication Designers, The One Show, and 48-HR REPACK, to name a few, and secured them very good jobs in the industry. One of my favorite projects in my upper-level course is the design of an entire research publication beginning with the book's cover. I have also won several book cover design awards, DVD/CD album awards, presented at several design conferences, and designed several State publications for the District of Columbia and Georgia. I consider myself a veteran designer, and have designed over one hundred book covers, a few winning awards. Here are a couple of my most recent award-winning book covers: *Voices*, *Plastered in Pretty* and *Deathbed Experiences* with images provided by the clients.

I am presently working on several short, quick-read, topics related to book design, including how to select the right imagery for your book cover, and typefaces that work for your book titles. To the right are three award-winning book cover designs for different authors. The design task was to choose an appropriate typeface for their book covers.

There are many book cover designers, but one trend that's developing is that of pre-designed book covers. If you're working within a limited budget, you have a short publishing deadline, or you just don't have the time to wait on a custom cover design, selecting a pre-designed, one-of-a-kind, high quality book cover might be the way to go. Artwork for pre-designed covers come with either original art, original photography or licensed stock photos purchased from several photo banks. Pre-designed covers show placement for titles and authors' names, with creative use of typography.

The typeface or font chosen for your book's title is also very important. Remember that your book cover is your audience's first introduction to your content, so how you choose type for a book's cover should consider legibility and readability for both the title and the author's name. The best fonts for book covers might depend on things like genre, audience, style, tone and much more.

With pre-designed book covers, the writer/author can contribute by having input in the choice of typography, as well as color, working closely with the designer, and have some vested interest in the cover design's final look and feel. It's always important to consider your target audience and the communicative qualities of your typographic choices.

Remember, it's your work and your story!!

