

## Book Titles

By Azalea Dabill

Selecting a title is a big deal to us as writers in one respect, and in another it is not. I say this because our title may be, and probably will be, changed. Start with the best title you can, the one that carries your dream high, wide, and true; but it is best to finalize the perfect title after the work is finished, at least in fiction. Then your theme is more apparent, and it is easier to draw words out of your mind that fit.

That is the beauty of titles. They are made of words. Many titles may fit one book, so don't despair if your publisher wants to change it.

But do try for a title that encapsulates the spirit of your work, and that does not have exact or similar competitors, especially in the same genre. A good place to find titles that are out in the world, are book catalogs, and library catalog searches. The Internet is good for this. Susan Page, in *The Shortest Distance Between You and a Published Book*, says,

A spectacular title can add focus, energy, and excitement to your book project in its early phases. The *process* of title-searching may help you to zero in on your book's most distinctive features. And of course, a compelling title is a critical tool for marketing your book later on. . . . Often, coming up with the perfect title is difficult. . . . So start looking for a fabulous title now. And get your friends and family and co-workers in on the process. Here is a job where collective inspiration works extremely well. Common wisdom is that when you find the perfect title, you will know it instantly. In my experience, this is true sometimes but not others. It may take you a while to realize that you have blundered into brilliance; one title will slowly begin to separate itself from all the others.

I've found that a story lends its own largeness or littleness of spirit to its title. I come away from every journey into a story-world with a kind of ash of disappointment or a glow of joy. A good title cannot fix a bad book. But on the other hand, a "so-so" title cannot ruin a good one. It *can* put off a customer.

A good title should be exciting to the author and give a reader a mind-picture of the story. A picture that fits the book cover and extrapolates off it. According to Susan, a fiction title may: coin a new term, give away a book's secret, embody itself in metaphor, state itself, ask a pertinent question, frame an idea with a simple explanation after a colon, be a single word, be a variation of another title; you get the endless idea. Your title should tug at a reader's curiosity, and intrigue with a distinct feeling. By reader, I mean *your reader*, the person who likes your kind of book. Not every person who spells out your title will feel its pull; only your readers will, or should.

Certain titles do go with certain genres. *Love Among the Roses* says romance all over it, while *The Falcon and the Staff* would be fantasy. Besides a book's title, the cover, back blurb,

and first pages give me everything I need to decide whether a book is one I'm interested in. Titles can say a lot. Choose wisely.

*In this flyer where I use block quotes (if applicable), I have changed to single-spacing for readability.*