

Writing and Tutorial Center

The Art of Writing Academic Titles

The titles of your essays are important, since they are generally the first point of contact with your reader. They have two main functions: 1) to say clearly what you are investigating in your paper, and 2) to pique your readers' interest. You want to sound clever but also scholarly; it's a delicate balance. Below is a list of (fake, but typical) titles of academic essays on art, design and architecture topics:

"The Invisible Made Visible: Transparency and Layering in Digital Architecture"

"Beyond the Frame: Spatial Politics in Installation Art of the 1970s"

"Weaving Memory: Textile Traditions in Contemporary Indigenous Art"

"Visual Analysis"

"Concrete Dreams: Brutalist Architecture as Social Commentary"

"The Digital Brush: Algorithm-Assisted Art in the 21st Century"

"Living Walls: Biophilic Design in Urban Architecture"

"Shadows and Light: James Turrell's Manipulation of Perception"

"My Report About Moby Dick"

"The Sustainable Canvas: Ecological Materials in Contemporary Art Practice"

"Feminine Spaces: Gender Politics in Postwar Interior Design"

"Breaking the Grid: Deconstructivist Approaches in Graphic Design"

"Sacred Geometry: Mathematical Principles in Islamic Architecture"

"Draft 1"

"The Social Sphere: Public Space Design in Digital Age Cities"

"The Internet in Modern Society"

"Color as Language: Abstract Expressionism's Visual Vocabulary"

"Compare and Contrast"

"Folded Time: Origami Influences in Contemporary Architecture"

"The Vernacular Voice: Regional Identity in Modern Design"

QUESTIONS FOR ANALYSIS

What do you notice about the form of these titles?

Do you notice any poetic aspects to these titles?

Which two titles do you like best? Why?

Which titles seem the least interesting to you? Why?

What do you think is the purpose of the first part of the title? What about the second part?

GENERAL CONVENTIONS FOR WRITING ACADEMIC TITLES

Use a metaphorical or attention-grabbing first part, but make sure it truly relates to your content.

Avoid overly clever wordplay that might seem unprofessional (context is important here, of course).

Follow with a more specific, descriptive second part.

Address recognized themes in the field, and use discipline-specific terminology.

Maintain scholarly tone while allowing for some creativity.

Keep the subtitle informative enough to stand alone (it tells your reader specifically what you will be addressing, both your topic and your viewpoint on it).