



"Information That Works!"

Ten Techniques for Writing Terrific Titles

A good course title can mean the difference between a course that zooms off the charts and one that just doesn't live up to its potential. The title is your first chance to catch the reader's interest, so it is one of the most important components of your course description.

The purpose of a course title is to attract the interest of the reader to the class. It is your first opportunity to "sell" a class, so it is very important to make your course titles work hard for you.

Here are ten techniques for writing course titles that will grab the reader's interest and sell the course idea.

Make the course title interactive. For example, a course title such as "Auto Mechanics" effectively describes course content. But the same course, called "Why Does My Car Ping, Ping?" immediately forces the reader to respond mentally and, therefore, become involved with the course description.

Ask the reader a question. "Who Are Those Strangers in Your Dreams?" The question demands an answer and is an excellent way to get mental response from your readers. But be cautious. Use this technique sparingly, or your readers will become befuddled by too many unanswered questions.

Make the course title personal. The easiest way to do this is to use the word "you" in the title. "Three American Artists You Should Know" is a very effective description for a class on three American painters. "What To Say After You Clear Your Throat" is an innovative and personal title for a class on parenting.

Use familiar phrases that have positive connotations. This is an effective technique, because the reader immediately makes a positive association with the class based on his/her recall of the phrase used in positive situations in the past. One good example is "Movers and Shakers," a title for a beginning dance class.

Identify the target audience in the course title. One program offered a course called "Investment Basics" and very few people enrolled. When the title was changed to "Investment For Young Married Couples," 15 couples signed up. The title clearly identified the target audience, and participants knew that the course was for them. "Calling All Shower Singers" immediately lets the reader know that a beginning singing class is intended for those who like to sing, regardless of talent.

Create a sense of reader identification with the course. By writing titles that recall universal experiences, the reader will feel a personal identification with the topic and is more likely to respond to the class. "Small Talk For Big Occasions" is one example. We have all felt that sense of inadequacy at cocktail parties, and this class title speaks to that experience. "One Minute Stress Management" speaks to the universal experience of all of us in today's high pressure, hectic society.

Use quantitative titles and state or imply specific outcomes of participating in the class. “Ten Ways to Turn Out Terrific Kids,” “Fruitful Friction” and “Taming the Wild Semicolon” are some examples. Another example of course descriptions that imply specific outcomes are those beginning with the words “how to...”, e.g., “How to Build Your Own PC.” Notice that titles implying or stating outcomes often include a verb.

Use humor. Making people laugh is a good way to get them involved and to create a positive feeling about a class. “The Smelly Sneaker Contest” and “Understanding Your Cat” are two good examples.

Create a sense of curiosity and fun or a sense of discovery and unique experience. “Brain Teasers” is a very effective title for a class on mathematical reasoning and problem solving. “The Magic of Your Mind” promises discovery of something wonderful within yourself. This technique is especially useful with topics that might seem intimidating.

Keep course titles simple, nonthreatening and positive. For topics that are potentially intimidating, use a title that alleviates that impression. For example, one program changed the name of a class from “Astronomy” to “Star Sighting” and realized a significant increase in enrollments.

Keep it positive. Programmers at the University of Maine at Augusta point out that it is difficult to sell courses with negative connotations. As an example, their course “Clearing Your Mind: Freedom From Guilt” was canceled for low enrollment. A similar course on how to conquer anxiety and negative feelings offered by the Adult School of Montclair, N.J., and entitled “Winner’s Workshop” was a smashing success.

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Ph: 800-678-5376

www.lern.org

Info@lern.org