

# HOW TO CREATE A GREAT BOOK TITLE

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THAT GRABS ATTENTION & HELPS SELL  
THE BOOK

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## INTRODUCTION

### WHY IS A GOOD BOOK TITLE IMPORTANT?

Publishing a book is a lot like having a baby — you create something you're proud of in a labor of love and you want to give it its best shot in the world.

Just like you would with an actual baby, you must put thought into what to call your book.

*The title should reflect its personality and the essence of its content. It should be captivating and evergreen — just like a baby name.*

Your book title (and cover) is the very first impression. It is a critical chance for you to grab attention and set expectations for what comes next.

When a book is on a shelf, all people have to base their split-second judgement on is the title (and cover).

A great title can help sell your book and make it stand out from the others, while a bad one can doom it to obscurity.

Regardless of the route you take to get your book out in the market — self-publishing, finding an agent, or approaching publishing houses — it is very important to have a title that is appealing.

If you decide on self-publishing, picking the right title will help get potential readers' attention, boost the chances of being found online, and increase your book sales.

In case you want to approach an agent or a publisher, there is no better way to increase your visibility among thousands of other pitches than an interesting title.

In other words, if you choose smartly, your book's title becomes a very potent marketing tool.

Both the title and the cover are, in fact, equally important!

Think about the last time you looked at a bestsellers list or browsed Amazon. Here is what probably caught your eye:

1. The cover design of the book, and
2. The title

Does an amazing book title pave a path for your book's success?

Obviously, it cannot be the only factor! A good cover page and some amazing content — along with a targeted marketing strategy — are all key ingredients to becoming a bestselling author.

Many an avid reader has picked up a book from the store solely due to the intriguing title glaring at them.

So if you don't neglect the process of naming your book, it may just sell a few books for you.

Though a good title cannot always guarantee sales, a bad one will hurt your sales in the best-case scenario and, at worst, alienate your core readership.



## GETTING STARTED

PICK A WORKING TITLE AND STAY FLEXIBLE

**D**o not set your title in stone right away. Oftentimes, traditional publishers change the title as your book approaches publication. And when you're self-publishing, you may find yourself tweaking your title throughout the process.

SOMETIMES, the author may not even be the person who comes up with the best book title. So keep your ears open for suggestions from your editor or even your beta readers.

*As an author, you may become numb to the flaws of your work, including your book's title, since you are so emotionally invested in it.*

DO NOT GET COMMITTED to one title. Be open to the possibility of finding better options down the line.

. . . .

DO NOT GET defensive if your editor, beta reader or any other individual related to your book doubt your choice of title.

IF YOUR CREATIVE juices are occupied with the writing process and you cannot come up with a suitable title, you can create a *working title* and finalize it once you finish your manuscript.

HAVING a title in place *before* you start writing can help you stay on point as you write your book.

AND WHEN YOU'RE FINISHED, your book may have changed in scope, or an appropriate title may have popped up along the way.

MAYBE A CATCHY or meaningful phrase from your manuscript that captures the essence of your book will become the final title.

A CLASSIC EXAMPLE of this type of title is Harper Lee's famous *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

## WHAT MAKES A GREAT BOOK TITLE?

THE 5 KEY COMPONENTS OF A GOOD BOOK TITLE

**W**hen you consider how companies shell out millions of dollars on research to name their products and media houses spend countless hours trying out different headings for their articles, you too should exert a considerable amount of time and energy when it comes to naming your book.

THIS IS a crucial decision that you should put a considerable amount of thought into so your book has its best chance of succeeding.

So, *do not*:

- Make a gut decision on this
- Randomly browse bookstores for inspiration
- Quickly come up with something off the top of your head

SO WHAT DO MOST good book titles have in common?

. . .

THERE ARE no set-in-stone rules for coming up with the perfect title. However, there are some patterns and commonalities many good book titles share that may help you choose your own.

THERE ARE five key components I want you to keep in mind when choosing a title for your book.

### **The 5 Key Components of a Great Book Title:**

1. Grabs Your Attention
2. Easy to Remember (& Search for)
3. Self-Explanatory (Gives Some Hint about the Theme)
4. Easy & Not Awkward To Say
5. Short

THESE GUIDELINES MAKE your title recognizable, targeted toward your niche, and easy for someone to remember when they recommend your book.

BECAUSE OF THIS, your book will get noticed, be remembered, and shared with other potential readers.

#### **1. Grabs Your Attention**

If you've ever been to a bookstore, you would know how distracting it is. There are a plethora of books waiting to be devoured. Now, imagine your target audience there. What will make them pick up your book? That's right — a title that arouses their interest and

creates a good first impression. Needless to say, a boring title will not attract readers.

IT DOES NOT MATTER how you plan on grabbing their attention! Go all out if you want. You can make your title confrontational, debatable or even scandalous. Your only aim must be for your title is to make people stop and take notice.

*“The 4-Hour Workweek also bothered some people and was ridiculed by others, which I took as a positive indicator. It’s not accidental that Jay Leno parodied the book on-air—the title lends itself to it, and that was by design. You can’t have strong positive responses without strong negative responses, and beware—above all—the lukewarm reception from all. ‘Oh, that’s nice. I think it’s pretty good,’ is a death sentence.” - Tim Ferriss*

THIS TITLE HAS tremendous emotional appeal because of its promise to improve life in a dramatic way.

IN INTERVIEWS, Ferriss said he purchased ads through Google AdWords with a variety of different titles in order to best determine which title had the most appeal.

HE CREATED ads for several titles and noted which got the most clicks in a week.

HOW MUCH APPEAL do you think his book would have if he used a title like this one: *How I Make a Living Selling Pills* (Ferriss sells vitamins online)?

## 2. Easy to Remember (& Search for)

It's easy to get a reaction from someone and then be forgotten. The key is to get that reaction *and be memorable while doing so*.

HERE'S WHAT YOU WANT: your book's title should not only be the first thing your reader hears about your book, it should also be the hook that leads them to buy your book.

IF YOUR BOOK is recommended to a potential reader by a friend or family member, but they can't remember the title, it is a missed opportunity because they won't be able to find it — whether on- or off-line.

*Often, the book title is all a potential reader will ever see and if the title can draw some interest, that is a good first step. Books are often bought through recommendations. So when a friend recommends a book to us, the title serves as the thing we have to remember to get what we want. That is why it becomes important to make sure your title is memorable.*

FURTHERMORE, your book must also be easy to search for.

ONLY FAMOUS AUTHORS need not worry about their book titles being searchable since their brand attracts attention to their books.

BUT SINCE MOST of us aren't JK Rowling, we must take into account if our potential title will be found easily through search.

. . . .

IDEALLY, your title must easily be discovered on Amazon or Google — the tools that are used right now to find anything and everything.

AND KEYWORDS PLAY a significant role when it comes to visibility on the internet.

IF YOU WANT your book to pop up every time someone searches for “how to balance your heart chakra” — that is a great potential book title.

THE TITLE IS a big factor for the probability of your book showing up in response to a search term, so this is something to take into strong consideration when titling your book.

### **3. Self-Explanatory (Gives Some Hint about the Theme)**

If you're writing a fiction book, you have the artistic liberty to be creative with your title, even if it doesn't give away much about your book. But for nonfiction, both the title and the subtitle should indicate what your book is about.

YOU CAN'T EXPECT your readers to spend much time trying to figure it out. Make it easy for them to understand and you'll increase the chances of your book engaging your potential readers.

IF YOU ARE unsure whether your book's title conveys adequate information, ask yourself: Will I have to explain myself beyond the title, when someone asks my book's name?

. . . .

IF SO, you probably need to change your title.

**DON'T OVERTHINK YOUR TITLE:** If the title is too clever or goes over their heads, they will feel stupid, and probably won't buy your book.

IF YOU USE terms or phrases that people don't immediately understand or don't convey what your book is about, you are hindering your chances of success.

HOWEVER, that doesn't necessarily mean your book's title needs to be "dumbed down."

FOR EXAMPLE: Malcolm Gladwell's bestselling book, *Outliers*, does a great job of cluing you in on what it's about without exactly describing the content.

#### **4. Easy & Not Awkward To Say**

This rule is rooted in the theory of cognitive fluency. The theory states that people will remember and engage more with words they can comprehend and pronounce. Same goes with book titles!

IN OTHER WORDS, try not to sound too esoteric and sophisticated if you want to attract some interest in your book.

PEOPLE DON'T LIKE to feel awkward and stupid, so make it easy for people to say and you'll get more people talking about your book.

. . . .

YOU WILL ALSO SAVE yourself a lot of time correcting media and potential readers who can't pronounce your book title.

TRY SAYING your title out loud. If it sounds too cluttered or doesn't roll off your tongue easily, it must be changed.

IF A PERSON CANNOT PRONOUNCE the book's title, or worse, if it makes them sound stupid when they say it out loud, they will probably not buy the book. And they probably won't want to talk about it with other people due to the fear of being judged.

WORD OF MOUTH can be crucial when it comes to marketing your book, so don't overlook how it makes people feel to talk about your book.

IF SAYING out your book title makes someone feel stupid or silly, you need to change your book title.

FOR EXAMPLE, if your book is titled "*Why Sexism is Great*," most people will not be telling their friends about it — no matter how good your book is. Why? Because they would be judged for buying a book like that in the first place.

SOCIAL CONTEXT MATTERS a great deal when it comes to selling your book.

## **5. Short**

In general, short titles are ideal. They are memorable, easier to say, and also provide adequate space for great book cover design.

. . .

MANY PEOPLE HAVE the misconception that long titles are the only way to inform the target audience of the book's concept.

*Let the title communicate the primary concept. Use the subtitle if you feel the need to get wordy.*

IDEALLY, keep the number of words in the title to 5 or less. The subtitle can delve deeper into the context or explain the concept more clearly.

SHORT TITLES, apart from being easy to say and type, can also easily fit in URLs or anywhere else without cluttering the space.

SHORT TITLES ARE ESPECIALLY great for ebook stores on cellphones, which can have small displays and screens.

LOOKING at Malcolm Gladwell's *Outliers* again, he used the subtitle, *The Story of Success*, which is also short and to the point.

\*PLEASE NOTE: Do not use a one-word title if you can help it. In the online space, the search engines present millions of results. In that case, your title may get lost among the other books titles that contain the same word. Your chances of encountering duplicate titles also increases.

. . .

FOR INSTANCE: If your nonfiction book is titled “Bubbles,” your chances of ranking first for that keyword are pretty slim — you’d be competing against anything from soap bubbles

For example: If you title your nonfiction book “Bottles,” it’s going to be very difficult to rank as the first search result — you’d be competing against people selling hot water bottles, books on the ecological impact of plastic water bottles, and research on bluebottle flies.

AVOID confusion by striking the balance between cryptic titles and ones that attempt to summarize the entire book on the front cover.

IN THE NEXT chapters I’m going to give you some actionable steps that will help you come up with the perfect title for your book.

## STEP 1: CREATE YOUR BOOK GOALS

**Y**our goals for your book determine what type of title you pick. If you want to build a brand out of your nonfiction book, your title options are quite different than if you want to publish a racy thriller.

LET'S examine all the functions your book title can serve, and the places for potential use, before I walk you through the precise process of thinking up title ideas:

### **How A Book Title Can Be Used:**

- To sell the book to readers
- Establish the author's authority in a subject
- Be a hook for the author to get media visibility
- Branding for a company, author, conference, or course materials
- Advertise/market the book
- Used in speeches, slides, or other in-person activities

- Used in reviews, blog posts, articles, etc.
- Something the author has to say in all their press appearances
- Become a defining part of an author's future bio
- Decorate the cover
- Identify the Amazon/B&N listing
- Start a line of books
- Use on t-shirts, flyers, or other promotional material
- Brand a main character or character's name (Harry Potter)

THE POINT of this whole list is simple: Know which of these objectives apply to your book, and make sure your title can serve those objectives.

FOR EXAMPLE: If your goal is to build a brand, make sure your book title is your brand.

DAVE ASPREY'S first diet book is called *The Bulletproof Diet*, because that's his brand: Bulletproof. The book is about selling everything around the book, not just the book itself.

IF YOUR GOAL is authority in your field, make sure the book title sounds authoritative to whom you are trying to speak.

WHIMSICAL DOESN'T WORK in serious academic fields, whereas serious doesn't work in comedic fields.

IF YOUR GOAL is to get media attention and raise your visibility, make sure the book title appeals to media and makes them want to cover you.

## STEP 2: BRAINSTORM SOME TITLES

**B**rainstorming for titles is not a specific thing you do for an hour, but rather a long term process. It may take you months and hundreds of book title ideas to finalize your title.

**BUT YOU START** by simply brainstorming titles. Literally start a file and write down every working title you can think of for your book.

**I KNOW** that telling someone to brainstorm is like telling someone to “be creative.” There is no best way to brainstorm, but there are a lot of best practices.

**THIS IS** list every possible way we know of to find a good book title, complete with examples (remember, these techniques are not just for your main title, they will be the basis for your subtitles as well).

. . .

MOST OF THESE are for nonfiction titles, though some can be used for novel titles.

ALSO, don't be afraid to put bad titles on your brainstorm list.

BAD TITLES actually help you because they will get you to a good title. Here are some best practices:

### **Use Clever or Noteworthy Phrases From The Book**

This is very common in fiction, and can work well with novel titles. It also works well with nonfiction books where the concept of the book can be summed up quickly or with one phrase.

EXAMPLES:

- *The Black Swan*
- *Lecturing Birds On Flying*
- *I Hope They Serve Beer In Hell*

### **Use Both Short and Long Phrases**

A great method is to start with a really long title and work your way down to a much a shorter title.

THE GOAL IS the main title be as short as possible — no more than 5 words — and let the subtitle offer the context and include important keywords.

## Use Relevant Keywords

For nonfiction especially, search matters. You want to make sure that when someone searches for the subject or topic of your book, it will come up on Google and Amazon.

BUT IT'S A BALANCING ACT, because you don't want to sacrifice the authenticity of the work for what looks and feels like a search string query.

IF YOU ARE unsure of this, go look on Amazon and see how often subtitles and titles use additional keywords to attract more search engine traffic.

### EXAMPLES:

- *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People: Powerful Lessons In Personal Change*
- *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*
- *Predictable Revenue: Turn Your Business Into A Sales Machine With The \$100 Million Best Practices Of Salesforce.com*

## Make a Promise of a Benefit

Some of the best titles promise to help readers achieve a desired goal or get some wanted benefit. They specifically call out an end result that people want.

### EXAMPLES:

- *How To Win Friends and Influence People*

- *Getting Things Done*
- *Think And Grow Rich*

### **Be Simple and Direct**

Some of the very best titles are just basic statements about what the book is. There is nothing wrong with this, it can work well, especially for strictly instructional books.

EXAMPLES:

- *Getting Past No*
- *Steve Jobs*
- *The Power Of Habit*

### **Target an Audience**

As I said, people use titles to judge if the book is for them. Part of helping people understand this can be targeting them in your title.

YOU CAN TARGET specific audiences by naming them or by describing their characteristics. This works especially well if you have a series of books, and then do versions targeted to specific niches.

EXAMPLES:

- *What to Expect When You're Expecting*
- *Physics For Future Presidents*

## Offer a Specific Solution to a Problem

This is very popular in the self-help and diet spaces. You tell the reader exactly what problem your book solves in the title.

THIS IS similar to the promise of a benefit, but not the exact same thing; a benefit is something additive, like being sexy. A solution to a problem takes away something negative, like losing weight.

EXAMPLES:

- *Man's Search for Meaning*
- *6 Ways to Lose Belly Fat Without Exercise!*
- *Secrets of Closing The Sale*

## Use Numbers to Add Credibility

Specifics, like numbers, add credibility and urgency to your titles. They can provide structure for your information, or they can make hard things seem easier.

SPECIFICITY ENABLES people to engage the idea in a more concrete way, and gives bounded limits and certainty on time frames as well.

EXAMPLES:

- *The 48 Laws of Power*
- *The Five Love Languages: The Secret to Love that Lasts*
- *The 21 Irrefutable Laws Of Leadership*

## **Pique The Reader's Curiosity (But Withhold The Answer)**

Using statements that seem to be impossible, unusual contrasts, or paradoxes can make readers curious about what is in the book.

THE IDEA IS to make a claim or statement that seems a little far-fetched or fantastical, but promises delivery. This is very popular now with headline writing on sites like UpWorthy and ViralNova.

THE ICONIC RECENT example of this with books is one we already mentioned, *The 4-Hour Workweek*. Everyone wants to know how to work only 4 hours a week, except it seems impossible, so you pick up the book to see what that guy is talking about.

EXAMPLES:

- *Networking Is Not Working*
- *10% Happier*
- *Who Moved My Cheese?*

## **Use Metaphors or Symbols Associated With The Themes in Your Book**

Humans think in symbol and metaphor. Using these powerful devices can help you create a title that really resonates.

THE ICONIC METAPHOR-BASED series is "*Chicken Soup for the Soul*." The title signals the warm, nurturing feeling that our culture associates with chicken soup and connects it to something else – stories that nurture your soul.

. . .

## EXAMPLES:

- *Lean In*
- *The Untethered Soul*

**Use Alliteration**

Alliteration is the use of the same letter at the beginning of all or most of the words in your title. This makes things easier for humans to remember.

## EXAMPLES:

- *The Mighty Miss Malone*
- *A Storm Of Swords*
- *The Pop-Up Paradigm*

**Alter a Popular Phrase**

This is common in book titles and tends to work well — taking a famous phrase and altering it in a way that makes sense for you book.

THIS WORKS because it's close to something people know, but not exactly the same thing.

## EXAMPLES:

- *The War of Art*
- *Assholes Finish First*

## Use Slang

Slang can work really well, especially if it's used in a way that is non-intuitive but also novel.

### EXAMPLES:

- *Ain't Too Proud To Beg*
- *No Mopes Allowed: A Small Town Police Chief Rants and Babbles about Hugs and High Fives, Meth Busts, Internet Celebrity, and Other Adventures*

## Try cliché formats (or reversing them)

There are a ton of book-naming tropes that can work well if used correctly:

- The Art of [TOPIC]
- The Myth of [TOPIC]
- Confessions of [TOPIC]
- How to [TOPIC]
- The Joy of [TOPIC]
- The End of [TOPIC]

### Examples:

- *The Art of Racing In The Rain*
- *The Myth of Male Power*
- *Confessions of An Economic Hitman*
- *How to Train Your Dragon*
- *The Joy of Sex*
- *The End of Science*

DONE POORLY, these kinds of titles can seem clichéd and cloying instead of fresh. This technique is best used when it offers a twist — but isn't so far out that it confuses the reader.

### **Consider Coining a Phrase or New Word**

This is very helpful, especially if you want to create a brand or company or extended product line out of your book, or brand a character name.

THE PROBLEM with this is that it's not an easy thing to do. Many authors try to create new words; few succeed, so try this sparingly. The most important element of this technique is that the word is easy to say and understand.

EXAMPLES:

- *Babbitt*
- *Denialism*
- *Essentialism*

### **Use Amazon/Goodreads/Wikipedia For Inspiration**

If you're feeling stuck, you can always go look at how other books are named.

- **Wikipedia's list of best selling books of all time**
- **Goodreads list of best book titles**
- **Amazon's current best selling books**

## **Use Copywriting Manuals For Ideas**

If you are truly stuck and cannot think of anything, read some books about copywriting.

THEY ARE NOT SPECIFICALLY about book titling, but copywriters have to understand the sell triggers, and they will give you tons and tons of examples. These are three of the best out there:

- *POP!: Create the Perfect Pitch, Title, and Tagline for Anything*
- *The Ultimate Sales Letter: Attract New Customers. Boost your Sales*
- *Advertising Headlines That Make You Rich: Create Winning Ads, Web Pages, Sales Letters and More*

### STEP 3: CHECK COPYRIGHTS AND TRADEMARKS

**F**irst off, let me very clear about this: you cannot copyright titles.

TECHNICALLY, you can call your book “*To Kill A Mockingbird*” or “*Lord Of The Rings*” or even “*The Holy Bible*.”

THAT BEING SAID, copying a popular book makes it VERY hard for your book to stand out, and pretty much guarantees a lot of negative reviews from people who are not getting the book they expected.

THAT BEING SAID, you can trademark a title, if it is part of a larger brand.

FOR EXAMPLE: THE TERM “BULLETPROOF” is trademarked in the health and fitness space by Dave Asprey. You (probably) can’t title a book “The

Bulletproof Diet” because it infringes on a trademark (not the copyright).

IF THIS IS CONFUSING, and you have a book title you think might be a trademark infringement, then talk to an IP attorney.

## STEP 4: CHECK KEYWORDS AND POPULARITY

**W**hether you're a famous author or this is your first book, Kindle Keywords can be an important part of any book marketing strategy.

KINDLE KEYWORDS ALLOW your book to be discovered by hungry shoppers on the world's largest book market, Amazon, even while you sleep.

THEY HELP MAKE it so that your book gets discovered without having to do major marketing. Plain and simple, they can be important, especially for nonfiction writers.

THIS ARTICLE HAS some great info on the steps you can take for researching Kindle Keywords:

<https://kindlepreneur.com/how-to-choose-kindle-keywords>

. . . .

IT'S ALSO a great idea to look at other books in your genre and sub-genre, especially the bestselling ones.

LOOK at the top twenty or so bestselling books on Amazon in the categories your book will fall in, or go to a book shop and browse the entire section on your genre.

AT THIS POINT you're trying to get a feel for what's currently working — and selling — for other authors in your genre, especially those covering similar topics.

## STEP 5: PICK YOUR FAVORITES

**A**t this point, you should have a long list of title ideas. Once that's done, you can move on to the next step: picking your titles.

I CANNOT EMPHASIZE how important this next step is:

*Everyone has opinions on book titles. Most of them will not be of any help to you because most people in your friends and family circle won't be in your target market.*

EVEN PEOPLE who get *paid* to come up with book titles (editors, publishers, etc.) can be bad at it.

SO FOLLOW the steps I've outlined in the following chapters and you will come up with a great title for your book.

## TEST #1: IMAGINE YOUR READERS SAYING THE TITLE

**H**ere's a great test as to whether or not you have a good book title: imagine one of your readers talking about your book at a party to other people.

IF YOU CAN SEE them confidently saying the book title aloud, and the people listening nodding and immediately either understanding what the book is about based on that (and perhaps a sentence or two of explanation), or asking for a further explanation because it sounds interesting, then you've got a good title.

IF YOU IMAGINE any other reaction than this one, you need to re-think your title, and probably change it.

REMEMBER, so much of book marketing boils down to word of mouth, and word of mouth is all about people signaling things to other people. You want your book title to inspire and motivate the right people to talk about it, because it lets them signal the right things to their friends.

## TEST #2: (OPTIONAL) TEST ACTUAL CLICKS

**H**ere's one of the keys to testing your titles: test both the main title and subtitle and test them in many different iterations.

USUALLY WHAT YOU'LL find is most things test about the same, while there will be one thing that clearly tests better as a title and another that clearly tests best as a subtitle.

THIS IS a helpful article on the step-by-step process of using Google Adwords to test a title:

<http://itrevolution.com/phoenix-project-google-adwords-title-subtitle-testing>

IF YOU HAVE a large audience already, you can also use **Survey Monkey** to poll them.

IF THE TWO options above don't fit your need, or you've already mined Facebook enough without defining results, then perhaps **PickFu** can be of use.

**PICKFU.COM** is a service that allows you to submit your book titles or covers and have anonymous people vote on which one they like best.

**SUPER EASY TO** use and quick to setup – plus very affordable. A lot of people have had success with this strategy.

I WOULD ALSO RECOMMEND **Google Survey**. This is real market testing of real people and can be done fairly cheaply.

## HOW NOT TO TEST YOUR TITLE

**M**ost of the things authors do to test their titles aren't very helpful.

FOR EXAMPLE: posting on social media is NOT TESTING YOUR TITLE. In fact, posting on social media is about the worst possible way to test a title.

WHY IS THIS?

WELL, your social media friends are probably not your audience, and a tweet about the title won't help you.

AND EVEN WORSE, everyone on your social media has an agenda relative to the author that will often put you off-kilter.

. . . .

FRIENDS AND FAMILY don't work. Generally speaking, they want to make you happy.

THEY DON'T WANT to give you an objective answer. Or they want to make sure you look good, but they don't know what will actually make you look good.

FURTHERMORE, oftentimes colleagues will be critical — because they are jealous. It happens a lot, and they will give you bad advice, even if only unconscious.

AND SOME AUTHORS will go to their marketing teams for title advice, which can often lead you way off-kilter.

*Do you know the saying that a camel is a horse designed by committee?  
When you start getting opinions from lots of different sources, you get the  
“camel effect” hardcore.*

## DOES YOUR BOOK NEED A SUBTITLE?

**I**f you're doing a nonfiction book, yes, probably so. In nonfiction publishing, there's a trend of evocative or abstract titles, followed by a subtitle that communicates the content (and is packed with delicious keywords that the Amazon search engine can't resist).

THIS IS ALSO another way to get around long titles — and to add a little panache to an otherwise dry subject matter.

*The way I like to frame it is that the title is the hook, and the subtitle is the explanation. The subtitle is the promise of the book.*

BOOKS NEED a subtitle if it's necessary to contextualize the subject alluded to in the main title.

. . . .

TYPICALLY, the subtitle tells the reader some combination of what the book's central premise is, who the book is for, and what promise the book delivers on or need it meets.

SOME EXAMPLES where subtitles help contextualize the title and deliver the promise of the implied title:

*The 4-Hour Workweek: Escape The 9-5, Live Anywhere, and Join The New Rich*

See how the title hooks you by being interesting, and the subtitle explains the premise? Very well done.

*Daring Greatly: How the Courage to Be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent, and Lead*

It's a bit long, but the same thing is going on here; the subtitle contextualizes and frames the title, which is clear, easy to understand, and say.

*Kitchen Confidential*: This originally had a subtitle, "Adventures In The Culinary Underbelly," but it was later dropped.

No subtitle was needed on this work of nonfiction, because the meaning is clear, especially when paired with a picture of a chef on the front (and because it became very famous, which helps).

*The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda and the Road to 9/11*

This is an example of a book where the subtitle is very important. That title could mean many things, but the subtitle quickly signals what the book is about and who it's for.

## AMAZON'S RULES FOR TITLING YOUR BOOK

**T**here are no actual rules when it comes to naming your book. Editors and agents might have their own rules of thumb (don't swear in a title, for example).

BUT HEY, it's your book and you can call it what you want to. That being said, each retailer has its own particular rules and standards for titles — rules you'll need to adhere to if you intend to publish there.

LET'S take a look at Amazon's guidelines. Not permitted in Amazon book titles:

- Unauthorized reference to other titles or authors – so don't think you can get away with titling your book "*Stephen King's Dreams.*"
- Unauthorized reference to a trademarked term.
- Reference to sales rank (e.g., "bestselling") – even if it is a bestselling book.
- Reference to advertisements or promotions (e.g., "free") – a

lot of people search for 'Free books', which is why Amazon doesn't want you to call it that.

- The title field should contain only the actual title of your book as it appears on your book cover.

WHILE AMAZON DOESN'T ALWAYS EFFECTIVELY police their own rules, if you want to build a reputation as an author, you'll naturally want to avoid underhand practices.

