

TEMPTING TITLES

Like a hat on a head or the front door to a house, the title of an academic article offers a powerful first impression. Is the title dry, technical, straightforward? Most likely, the author's main goal is to transmit research data as efficiently as possible. Does the title contain opaque disciplinary jargon? Perhaps the author unconsciously hopes to impress us, whether by appealing to a shared expertise ("You and I are members of an exclusive club") or by reminding us of our ignorance ("If you can't even understand my title, don't bother reading any further"). Is the title amusing, intriguing, provocative? Here is an author who is working hard to catch our gaze, engage our interest, and draw us in. In many disciplines, however, such a move goes against the academic grain and even contains a significant element of risk: a "catchy" title might well be regarded by colleagues as frivolous and unscholarly.

Several years ago, I attended a higher education research conference at which a presentation titled "Evaluating the E-learning Guidelines Implementation Project: Formative and Process Evaluations" was offered at the same time as one called "'Throwing a Sheep' at Marshall McLuhan." Guess which session drew the bigger audience? "Throwing a sheep" is a method of getting someone's attention on the popular social-networking Web site Facebook; Marshall McLuhan is the educator and media theorist who