

21 Ideas for Finding the Just-Right Title

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We writers often can't title our work. We're too close to it. That's why I was delighted to discover a whole section on titling in Will Dunne's book *The Dramatic Writer's Companion* (for full info, see http://willdunne.com/dwc_guide.html). All the material below is drawn from it; I've paraphrased and presented just a few of many examples.

Actually, Dunne suggests using the naming process not mainly to name, but "to explore the big picture of your story, figure out what matters most, and maybe even find a title." Here are his 20 takes on the subject; he points out that some titles overlap categories. *Brideshead Revisited*, for example, covers #1, #10, and #17 (I just had to add that, because it's one of my favorite novels).

What would your title be if it . . .

1. Summed up your whole story in a single word? (*Proof, Cats, Rent, Hairspray*)
2. Used so many words we could barely remember them all? (*Oh Dad, Poor Dad, Mama's Hung You in the Closet and I'm Feeling So Sad*)
3. Asked a question? (*Isn't It Romantic? What Price Glory?*)
4. Issued an order, warning, or advice? (*Play It Again, Sam; Don't Drink the Water*)
5. Named your main character? (*Hamlet, Tiny Alice, Anna in the Tropics, Captain Phillips, Philomena*)
6. Described your main character? (*The Miracle Worker, Lord of the Rings, Psycho, Wolf of Wall Street*)
7. Issued a statement from the main character? (*I Am a Camera; I Married a Werewolf*)
8. Named your two most important characters? (*Romeo and Juliet, Thelma and Louise*)
9. Described a set of characters? (*Angels in America, The Odd Couple, Dallas Buyers Club*)
10. Highlighted the setting? (*Our Town, Avenue Q, Little Shop of Horrors, Cabaret, Nebraska*)
11. Highlighted the date or era? (*Twelfth Night, The Year of Living Dangerously*)
12. Focused on something physical? (*Schindler's List, The Diary of Anne Frank*)
13. Highlighted a certain feeling or mood? (*Wicked, Desire Under the Elms, American Hustle*)
14. Combined two elements? (*Arsenic and Old Lace, Cries and Whispers*)
15. Suggested a lesson? (*How the West Was Won, How to Succeed in Business...*)
16. Used a metaphor? (*The Silence of the Lambs, A Doll's House, The Lion in Winter, Gravity*)
17. Summed up the main event? (*Waiting for Godot, Death of a Salesman, 12 Years a Slave*)
18. Identified the subject of the story? (*Betrayal, Six Degrees of Separation, A Beautiful Mind*)
19. Identified the genre or category of your story? (*Pulp Fiction, Love Letters*)
20. Made a literary allusion? (*Of Mice and Men, A Raisin in the Sun, and the thousands of stories, books, poems, and plays based on phrases in Shakespeare*)
21. Drew on a key phrase from the text? (*A Streetcar Named Desire, A Wrinkle in Time*)