



## Titles And Subtitles

A title is the first piece of language a reader encounters. Before the blurb, before the sample pages, before anything else, the title sets the expectation. A strong title is memorable, meaningful, and aligned with the book's tone. Subtitles, especially in non-fiction, sharpen that promise and help the reader understand exactly what they'll gain.

### **A Quick Prompt to Get You Started**

*If someone could only remember five words about my book, what would I want them to be?*

### **What Makes a Strong Title**

A good title doesn't explain the book, it evokes it. It creates a feeling, a question, or a sense of intrigue.

Strong titles tend to be:

- Short - often 1–5 words, unless it needs more
- easy to say - spoken aloud without stumbling
- easy to remember - rhythm matters
- emotionally charged - tone, mood, or promise
- genre-appropriate - readers recognise the type of story instantly

A title is a signal. It tells the reader what kind of experience they're stepping into.

## **Fiction Titles**

Fiction titles often lean on mood, metaphor, or a central image.

Common approaches:

- Character-focused (“Eleanor Oliphant Is Completely Fine”)
- Place-focused (“The Night Circus”)
- Object or symbol (“The Goldfinch”)
- Tone-driven phrase (“A Man Called Ove”)
- Conceptual or thematic (“Station Eleven”)

The key is resonance, the title should feel like the book’s emotional centre.

## **Non-Fiction Titles**

Non-fiction titles work differently. They need clarity first, creativity second.

Effective non-fiction titles:

- identify the topic
- speak directly to the reader’s need
- promise a benefit or transformation
- use strong, active language

Clarity beats cleverness every time.

## **Subtitles (Mostly for Non-Fiction)**

The subtitle is where you explain the book’s purpose. It’s your chance to answer the reader’s unspoken question: *What will this do for me?*

A strong subtitle:

- clarifies the subject
- identifies the audience
- highlights the outcome or benefit
- uses plain, confident language

Think of the title as the hook and the subtitle as the handshake.

## **Finding the Right Balance**

Titles and subtitles work best when they complement each other.

For example:

- Creative title + clear subtitle
- Clear title + benefit-driven subtitle
- Short title + descriptive subtitle

You're aiming for a combination that is both memorable and informative.

## **Common Mistakes to Avoid**

- titles that are too long
- subtitles that read like academic abstracts
- vague promises ("A Journey Into Life")
- overly clever wordplay that obscures meaning
- titles that don't match the book's tone

If a reader can't understand the book's purpose in three seconds, the title isn't doing its job.

## **A Simple Exercise**

Write:

- five creative titles
- five clear titles
- five subtitles

Mix and match them. Patterns will emerge, and often the strongest combination is one you didn't expect.

## **A Final Thought**

A title doesn't need to be perfect. It needs to be *true*. When your title captures the heart of the book and your subtitle clarifies the promise, you've created a doorway the reader will want to walk through.

But do remember this is just guidance, you might want to deliberately go against one of the pointers to stand out, ensuring it meets the other criteria suggested.