



The Beacon

Your guiding light for writing and publishing

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Tantalizing Titles

Article and book titles are crucial to selling your work; not only selling it to your readers, but also selling it to a publisher. Certainly no book is saleable without an original idea and its name needs to be equally fresh too.

I can hear you saying, "But publishers often change titles, so what's the point?" Indeed they do but, whether we like it or not, the titles we use in our query letters affect editors and agents positively or negatively. The opportunity to create an outstanding first impression with a zinger of a title must not be missed at the query stage, especially by authors seeking publication for the first time.

Tantalizing titles are challenging to develop – many non-fiction authors agonize over them throughout the entire writing process. Here are some tips and strategies to create innovative titles that captivate both editors and readers at the get-go.

Main title:

- Short is sweet – 2-5 words, max;
- Catchy, upbeat, exciting, or humorous for non-fiction;
- May imply a promise;
- Hints at the subject.

Sub-title (non-fiction only):

- Clarifies what the book is about;
- Probably a more serious phrase than main title;

Two favourite non-fiction zingers of mine are:

- ***Tongue-Fu!***® *How to Deflect, Disarm, and Defuse Any Verbal Conflict* by Sam Horn (St. Martins-Griffin, 1997);
- ***Greatcoats and Glamour Boots: Canadian Women at War*** by Carolyn Gossage (Dundurn 1991).

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From the editor's desk

The Canadian Writer's Guide, (13th edition) is hot off the presses with contributions from over eighty Canadian writers, one of whom is me with three items. The 553 pages are chock-full of useful tips and up-dated information about writing and getting published in Canada. Sections at the back deal with national grants, literary agents, writing schools and conferences, as well as contests. Sales proceeds go to the Canadian Authors' Association and the book can be found in local and online bookstores. The volume is well worth its \$27.95 price tag and no serious writer should be without it.

I haven't heard from many of you recently about your writing and publishing successes – drop me an email and let me know how things are going and if you need help with a particular topic. I will endeavour to devote a future column to it.

Julie H Ferguson

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Authors Must be Able to Speak in Public...

Many clients of Beacon Literary Services wail, "I'm a writer, not a speaker" when I tell them that public speaking is a requirement for every aspiring author, both before and after publication.

Before publication of articles and books, writers should be articulate whether speaking to one person or many, whether on the phone or in person. You may meet an agent or editor at a conference and need to present your book in short order; you may get lucky and reach an editor on the phone; you may be writing a how-to book and need to lecture or lead workshops. After publication, there are media interviews, the need to promote your book to bookstores, readings and book signings, etc.

If the prospect of speaking with a well-known editor or getting up on the platform terrifies you, get to Toastmasters without delay. You won't regret it even if you don't like it. Go long before your manuscript is accepted because the skills you learn will be useful from the get-go. Toastmasters helps everyone who joins, providing training and support for even the most timid.

Who knows? You may even find yourself paid for readings in libraries and schools! Certainly, you will sell more copies of your book if you are willing to speak in public.

For 10 tips on improving your speaking skills, try:
www.toastmasters.org/tips.asp.

Forthcoming events (see website for details)

Mar 1: Mini-Writers' Conference in Surrey, BC. Includes **How to Craft Irresistible Query Letters** at 10am or 1:15pm. At Guildford Park Secondary School. \$79 for the day, incl. lunch.

Apr 11: Promote Write! for *Meet the Pros* of the Canadian Association of Professional Speakers, Malaspina room, Waterfront Hotel, Vancouver, 7:00pm.

Apr 15: Writing with Power!! for selected middle school students of Coquitlam's SD 43, 9:15-11:45am, Riverview Park School.

Apr 26: Writing Online (9-12 noon) and **Writing with Power!!** (1-4pm) for the Surrey Creative Writing Diploma Program.

Jun 14: Speaking and Writing: A Guide to Promotional Writing for Professional Speakers, for the Fast Track program of the Canadian Association of Professional Speakers. Waterfront Hotel, Vancouver, 1:30-4:30pm

Tantalizing Titles...../cont

Novelists can, of course, do without the sub-title altogether and have much more freedom when naming their books. However, it is worth striving for a title that will captivate an editor or agent.

Although titles cannot be copyrighted, using or modifying one that is well-known is not going to help your cause one iota. Imagine sending a query out about your "Gone with the Wind"!

My first book took ten years to write and I never worried much about the title. I just knew that it would come to me – either in the shower or walking along a beach. It did too – but in the middle of the night. Too good to forget, I got up and wrote it down. All six publishers I queried commented on my terrific title when they first responded. *Through a Canadian Periscope* was never changed....

Try this book for irresistible ideas, "2001 Greatest Headlines" at:
www.professionalspeaker.com/2001_greatest.htm.

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