

94 Nonfiction Title Tips

Claudia Gere



Name Your Book

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Contact

Claudia Gere Claudia Gere & Co. LLC 113 Leonard Road Shutesbury, MA 01072

413-259-1741

Claudia@ClaudiaGereCo.com www.ClaudiaGereCo.com

A Note from the Author

Coming up with the right title can be one of your greatest challenges when creating a book. Using this booklet will take you one step closer to finding the right one—giving you ideas and examples to propel your imagination.

You might be torn between using the most obvious, self-explanatory title rather than investing the time to find the kind of title that makes your book a household name.

You might develop a working title then realize when the book is finished it is no longer relevant or doesn't hold the same meaning for friends and colleagues.

The best thing you can do for your book is give it a title that attracts the attention it deserves from the right audience. I invite you to use these tips to inspire your search for the perfect title.

I wish you and your book success.

Warmest regards,

Gaudi Gere .

Claudia Gere

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Getting Started

1. Give your book the right title.

The title is the most important sales tool for your book, both in stores and as a way to attract agents and publishers. A title can make or break the success of a book.

2. Know the title's purpose.

The purpose of the title is to attract attention. The more WOW factor your title has and the more your potential audience connects with it, the more likely the potential buyer will turn the book over to read the sales copy on the back or look at the table of contents.

3. Know the subtitle's purpose.

The primary purpose of the subtitle is to inform and attract the right audience. Create a subtitle that explains more concretely who the book is for and why your audience will want to read it.

4. Name a book after writing.

Often it is better to choose a title once your manuscript is finished or nearly so. For some people, writing a book is a journey and the content or purpose can change enough to require a different title.

5. Research similar books.

Avoid using the same or a similar title in your area of expertise. Look at the competition by searching an online bookstore, look at titles at your local bookstore, or ask your local bookstore to check the Books in Print database. While no one can copyright a book title, some books, such as the For Dummies series, have a trademarked brand name.

6. Create a working title.

A title that simply and clearly states what the book is about and who it is for will serve you well while you're writing. When you can't come up with the title you want, a working title will help sell your book to potential agents and editors better than a bad attempt at being clever. Often a publisher will change the title anyway.

7. Start a word and phrase list.

List all of the words and phrases that remind you of your book: the benefits, topics, search keywords, metaphors, and aphorisms. Make a list of synonyms and then their antonyms. And ask what animal does it remind you of, what color, what object, what famous person?

8. Keep a questions list.

To find out what problem your book solves, pay attention to the questions people ask you about your area of expertise. Or take opportunities to ask: What is your biggest challenge, most common mistake, or worst nightmare?

9. Hold a brainstorming session.

Ask your relatives, friends, and colleagues to help you generate ideas for your title. Use the book 24/7 *Innovation* by Stephen Shapiro (www.StephenShapiro.com) to inspire creative brainstorming.

10. Test different titles.

As you're working on your book, see which titles your friends and colleagues like. Give them two or three to choose from. Keep an open mind to the one they tell you is best; ask them why; ask them for other suggestions.

11. Create your book pitch.

Capture in one to three sentences the essence of what your book is about, who it is for, what the book promises to do for the reader, and why you are the right person to write it.

12. Post your book pitch.

Having the idea of your book in front of you where you can see it often will help keep the need for a title in both the forefront and subconscious of your mind.

13. Let the perfect title surface.

Often the best titles come when you least expect it. Shel Horowitz was struggling with a working title of *Win-Win Marketing*. When he decided to go after an endorsement from former president Jimmy Carter, he wanted something better. The perfect title came in an unexpected moment: *Principled Profit* (www.principledprofit.com).

14. Let the title come to you.

Put the job of creating a title into your subconscious. Many authors report a title dropping out of the sky, coming in the waking hours of the morning, or while taking a walk. Find a reflective technique that works for you.

15. Run a contest.

If you don't have your own marketing list, Marcia Yudkin's naming company, Named at Last (www.namedatlast.com), may be able to help.

16. Start with a word.

Avoid starting your title with a number, abbreviation, or article such as "the," which can make searching for your book alphabetically more difficult. While people like

numbers to quantify a benefit, titles starting with a non-word are more difficult to find.

What Makes a Title Good?

Create a title that is catchy, compelling, and concise.

The best titles are easily understood and remembered: ◆ *Nothing Down* ◆ *One Minute Manager* ◆ *Rich Dad Poor Dad.*

18. Create a clever title.

Not everyone can create a clever title. Study the ones you think are clever and ask yourself why. *Good to Great* is self-explanatory. It implies you need to read this book to be great and promises to tell you how.

19. Create a compelling title.

Create a title that compels readers to want to buy the book: *Steal These Ideas! Marketing Secrets That Will Make You a Star*.

20. Create a title that is short.

The shorter the main title is the larger the type can be and the more it will stand out from the other titles, especially on a bookstore shelf or Web site.

21. Be sure your title fits.

Look at books with a similar page count to see how your title will fit on the cover, and even more important, on the spine. Beyond just fitting, make sure it stands out from the other books surrounding it on the shelf.

22. Settle for clear over short.

Your title should convey the audience and topic clearly, even if it takes a long title to make that happen.

23. Settle for clear over clever.

Not every successful title is catchy, compelling, and concise. It's better to have a title that tells what your book is about and whom it is for than one that is overly cute and clever. Your publisher will probably want to change it anyway.

24. Use a unique title.

Many books on leadership are published each year, creating a very crowded market. Some of the best selling authors avoid using the word leadership in the title: *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*. Make sure your title stands out from the competition. Especially in a saturated market where there are already many books on the same topic, how will yours be different? Can you focus on a niche?

25. Include keywords.

More and more people are looking for books on the Web. Include commonly used keyword search terms for your book topic in the title or subtitle so people will have an easier time finding your book.

26. Say what the book is about.

The easiest title to create is often one that is simple, straightforward, and clearly tells people what the book is about. Word of Mouth Marketing: How Smart Companies Get People Talking.

27. Hone in on your audience.

Clearly stating whom the book is for will make your audience's decision easier and faster. *Strong Women Stay Slim* is clearly an exercise book for women who want to be slim.

28. Embrace the magic of three.

Include one example or three, never four. People feel comfortable with the balance and rhythm of three. *Eat, Pray, Love*; or *Everyday Grace*: *Having Hope, Finding Forgiveness, and Making Miracles*.

What Motivates Buyers? 29. Identify a problem.

Look for the problem your book solves that no one else's does. *The Publishing Game: Best Seller in 30 Days*.

30. Point out mistakes to avoid.

People will want to know what mistakes they need to avoid as much as what they need to do to succeed: Nice Girls Don't Get the Corner Office: 101 Unconscious Mistakes Women Make That Sabotage Their Careers ◆ Resumes from Hell: How (Not) to Write a Resume and Succeed in Your Job Search by Learning from Career-Killing Blunders.

31. Cure a headache.

People will buy a book to avoid the pain from someone else's experience: *How to Avoid Marrying a Jerk*.

32. Make a promise.

Explain what benefit the book promises to deliver: How Not to Look Old: Fast and Effortless Ways to Look 10 Years Younger, 10 Pounds Lighter, 10 Times Better. Make a promise the reader can't resist: The Happiest Baby on the Block: The New Way to Calm Crying and Help Your Newborn Baby Sleep Longer.

33. Alleviate fear.

The Coming Economic Collapse: How You Can Thrive When Oil Costs \$200 a Barrel instills fear about a coming economic collapse, then promises to tell how readers can thrive.

34. Point out consequences.

Be explicit about what bad thing might happen (especially if the reader does not have the information provided in your book): *The Gift of Fear: Survival Signals That Protect Us from Violence.*

35. Instigate intrigue.

Create curiosity or intrigue. With the title, *The Power of a Positive No*, you might wonder how that is possible. In *The Ultimate Question: Driving Good Profits and True Growth*, you might be curious to know what the ultimate question is.

36. Challenge your audience.

Dare to Prepare and Now, Discover Your Strengths both use a strong verb to challenge readers.

37. Overcome challenges.

Finding out how to overcome a challenge, hurdle, or obstacle provides great motivation for buying a book. Show in your title how you will solve the reader's greatest challenges: Resilience at Work: How to Succeed No Matter What Life Throws at You.

38. Use power verbs.

Both "learn" and "succeed" are very powerful and descriptive verbs: *Ready to Learn:* How to Help Your Preschooler Succeed.

39. Add power adverbs.

Identify the outcome the reader desires or needs using a descriptive adverb. An adverb describes how the reader will take action. In this case "easily" makes the promise more appealing: *Dancing on the Table: Easily Elegant Recipes to Keep the Joy in Entertaining.*

40. Add power adjectives.

Identify the outcome the reader desires or needs with an adjective. Here the outcome promises to be record breaking: *Record Breaking Auction: 101 Tips.* This one promises both you and your child will get smart: *Get Smart: Nine Sure Ways to Help Your Child Succeed in School.*

41. Know the buzzwords.

Before they become hackneyed, incorporate buzzwords, for example: spiritual, rich, and buzz. *The Power of Now: A Guide to Spiritual Enlightenment.*

42. Promote the expert author.

If your purpose is to promote the author's expertise, then include the author's name in the title: Rutstein on Fitness • Dr. Montgomery's Method Losing Weight Quickly and Effortlessly.

43. Say something outrageous.

Kimberly Brittingham witnessed people scribbling the title, FAT Is Contagious: How Sitting Next to a Fat Person Can Make YOU Fat, as she traveled on the subway reading this fake book for her study on discrimination against fat people.

44. Stand out.

Look at what everyone else is doing and then do something to stand out. One of the biggest challenges is recognizing what no one else is doing.

How Can You Appeal to Your Audience?

45. Create a series title.

Selling one book in series means a lot of repeat sales. People who like one book will want to buy the others. Fern Reiss created The Publishing Game series: *Find an Agent in 30 Days* ◆ *Best Seller in 30 Days* ◆ *Publish in 30 Days*.

46. Make your title a brand.

A brand is memorable, and can mean repeat business --- Chicken Soup for the Soul and the For Dummies series both create credibility and allegiances.

47. Ask a question.

A title can ask a question your audience needs to know the answer to or one you know they have asked themselves: *Damn! Why Didn't I Write That?*

48. Compliment your audience.

The Intelligent Advisor appeals to people who want to be smart about their financial investing. Why Bright Kids Get Poor Grades will appeal to parents who want to believe their children are smart, even though they're not getting straight A's. Who doesn't want to be a star: Steal These Ideas! Marketing Secrets That Will Make You a Star.

49. Glorify your audience.

The Unheralded: Men and Women of the Berlin Blockade and Airlift. People who know that it takes 10 on the ground to keep one pilot flying will be especially attracted to this book.

50. Use a celebrity's name.

Celebrity sells books. If you happen to be famous, even if it is just in your field, then

your name should be prominent. For Jack Welch's book, *Winning*, his name comes first and dominates the cover.

51. Use negatives appropriately.

How Not to Look Old: Fast and Effortless Ways to Look 10 Years Younger, 10 Pounds Lighter, 10 Times Better ◆ Don't Make Me Think.

52. Highlight a niche audience.

When your book addresses a niche audience, be sure that it is obvious from the title. Leading Geeks: How to Manage and Lead the People Who Deliver Technology will appeal directly to Information Technology managers. Suze Orman makes it obvious who her different audiences are: Women and Money and The Money Book for the Young, Fabulous & Broke.

What Formulas Work? 53. Highlight the expert author.

[Author's Name] on [Author's Topic] is a formula that works best if you are famous or want to be known for a particular expertise, for example, *Rutstein on Fitness*.

54. Solve a problem.

[Topic]: Why [state problem] and What You Can Do About It. Although these titles tend to be longer, they make a promise that is hard to resist: E-Myth: Why Most Businesses Fail and What You Can Do About It ◆ High Maintenance Employees: Why Your Best People Will Be Your Most Difficult and What You Can Do About It ◆ The Truth About the Drug Companies: How They Deceive Us and What to Do About It.

55. State the topic as an art.

The Art of Seduction ◆ Getting Things Done: The Art of Stress-Free Productivity ◆ The Art of Happiness: A Handbook for Living.

56. State the topic as a science.

From a book with the title, *Why We Buy: The Science of Selling*, people will expect a very smart explanation.

57. Explain how to.

Buyers will expect value from a book that promises how to do something. *How to Talk So Kids Will Listen and Listen So Kids Will Talk.*

58. Write a guide.

A guide or practical guide should provide the essential information in a logical sequence: *That Movie in Your Head: Guide to Improvising Stories on Video* lays out a stepby-step procedure using improvisation to make interesting movies. A complete guide will provide all of the information.

59. Create the unofficial guide.

An unofficial guide often garners as much attention, if not more, than official guides: The Unofficial Guide to Making Money on eBay • The Unofficial Guide to Walt Disney World 2008.

60. Write a handbook.

A handbook should provide information in a handy, easy-to-access way: The Credit Repair Handbook: Everything You Need to Know to Maintain, Rebuild, and Protect Your Credit.

61. Write the manual.

A manual should provide complete information in a well-organized, easy-to-access way: *The Self-Publishing Manual: How to Write, Print, and Sell Your Own Book.*

62. Insert the Word Versus.

Using versus implies controversy: *Boeing versus Airbus*: The Inside Story of the Greatest International Competition in Business.

What Devices Work?

63. Repeat words.

Rather than being redundant, repeated words create rhythm and emphasis: Change Your Thoughts - Change Your Life: Living the Wisdom of the Tao ◆ Body Drama: Real Girls, Real Bodies, Real Issues, Real Answers.

64. Use a double entendre.

Words or phrases that have two meanings will cause intrigue and be better remembered. *Losing It* refers both to weight loss and losing control. *Know Can Do!* is a play on the familiar phrase "no can do."

65. Choose one powerful word.

If you are a noted author, are writing a book to promote your name, or have a great subtitle, one word can be very effective: *Execution: The Discipline of Getting Things Done*.

66. Use the author's last name.

If your last name lends itself to a clever title, use it: *Basic Black: The Essential Guide for Getting Ahead at Work (and in Life)* by Cathie Black.

67. Create an acronym.

In the title *POP! Stand Out in Any Crowd*, POP stands for purposeful, original, and pithy.

68. Find a metaphor.

Who Moved My Cheese, Blue Ocean Strategy, and The Black Swan are all metaphors that help explain complex topics. Using a metaphor is often a simple way to communicate difficult or new concepts and also creates intrigue.

69. Create a twisted metaphor.

Twist words to change a common metaphor and explain the subject of your book: *Take the Bully by the Horns*.

70. Use alliteration.

A thesaurus can help you pick words to create similar sounds: *Crucial Conversations: Tools for Talking When Stakes Are High.*

71. Pick rhyming words.

Belly Fat to Belly Flat uses repeat words and rhyming to create a memorable title.

72. Twist a familiar aphorism.

A familiar statement, or twisted one, can be compelling: *A New Leash on Life* ◆ *Free Lunch*, instead of, "there's no such thing as a free lunch."

73. Find a maxim.

Similar to an aphorism, it is a phrase whose truth is self-evident: *Being Dead is No Excuse:* The Official Southern Ladies Guide to Hosting the Perfect Funeral.

74. Create an oxymoron.

An oxymoron combines two terms that contradict each other. *Servant Leader* is intriguing because of the juxtaposition of the two contrasting terms.

75. Use the device called upaya.

Goal Free Living, by Stephen Shapiro, shifts readers' perspectives by opening the mind to a new way of looking at goals, although the advice ultimately isn't to live goallessly.

76. Find everyday phrases.

If the title sounds spontaneous, chances are it will be more memorable: *He's Just Not That into You*.

77. Challenge convention.

Challenging conventional wisdom attracts attention. The incorrect sequence of action in the title *Ready, Fire, Aim* is humorous. *The World is Flat* immediately garners attention because it so obviously contradicts what we've learned.

78. Depict extremes.

Use words that create vivid contrast. *Made to Stick: Why Some Ideas Survive and Others Die* would be much less enticing if it ended with "don't survive." *Eat More, Weigh Less* contrasts more and less; *Stop Whining, Start Living* presents a vivid contrast.

79. End with a power word.

Ending on the word "cure" is more powerful than ending on a weak word, for example: be, about, or it. Each phrase in this title ends with a powerful word: Who Killed Health Care? America's \$2 Trillion Medical Problem - and the Consumer-Driven Cure.

What Words Sell Books? 80. State a promise.

Easy, free, or simple promise a better way: *The Easy Way to Stop Smoking* ◆ *The Magic of Thinking Big* ◆ *Good Food Fast*. Avoid words that imply effort such as work or even learn.

81. Guide and organize.

Many words promise to make a subject easy to learn by telling how it is organized or categorized: keys, steps, principles. *The Success Principles* ◆ *The 9 Steps to Financial Freedom* ◆ *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership* ◆ *The 3 Keys to Empowerment*.

82. Paint vivid pictures

Use words that paint vivid pictures. *Guerilla Marketing* paints a picture of someone who is hell-bent on getting the word out using

unconventional tactics. Use a thesaurus to find descriptive words.

83. Put "you" in the title.

Using the word "you" or "your" makes a title more personal, more inviting. What Got You Here Won't Get You There: How Successful People Become Even More Successful ◆ What to Expect When You're Expecting.

84. Give people hope.

Words such as cure, inspiration, and miracle give people hope. *The Age of Miracles: Embracing the New Midlife* ◆ *Natural Cures* "They" Don't Want You to Know About.

85. Coin a new term or concept.

Especially for books describing a new trend, these terms became buzzwords and part of the vernacular very quickly: *Freakonomics* ◆ *The Tipping Point* ◆ *Long Tail*.

86. Simplify complex topics.

Use simple terms to explain complex or potentially intimidating topics. *You're Broke Because You Want to Be.*

87. Quantify in numbers.

Every promise will have greater merit if you can quantify how long, how many, or how few. The 4-Hour Workweek ◆ 1001 Ways to Market Your Books ◆ The First 90 Days: Critical Success Strategies for New Leaders at All Levels.

88. Qualify with adjectives.

Guide to Growing Delicious Vegetables, Fruits & Herbs is more enticing by simply adding the word delicious. Use the word best only when you substantiate it with something of value: Your Best Life Now: 7 Steps to Living at Your Full Potential.

89. Choose familiar words.

Be sure everyone knows what the words in your title mean. *After Iraq: Anarchy and Renewal in the Middle East* will appeal those who know what anarchy means. *Moniker Mastery* could be the title for this book, but how many know moniker is slang for name?

90. Make up a new word

Thinkertoys, a play on Tinkertoys^{®1}, is a book on creativity. The Metrosexual Guide to Style defines a new audience. Here's how Sam Horn uses alphabet substitution for creative titles. Pick a keyword from your list. Say the word out loud substituting the first letter of the word with each letter of the alphabet. Starting with the keyword phrase "kung fu" and finally substituting "t" she came up with Tongue Fu: How to Deflect, Disarm, and Defuse Any Verbal Conflict. ²

91. Use exposé language.

Words such as truth, problem, trouble, lies, confessions, and scandal can attract attention; just make sure it's the right kind. While your book topic might lend itself to this language, be careful not to alienate buyers. These books both use exposé language tastefully: An Inconvenient Truth • PostSecret: Extraordinary Confessions from Ordinary Lives.

92. Use insider language.

Everyone wants a competitive advantage and an insider's wisdom. Use words such as secrets, tips, tricks (only in an ethical context), confessions, and answers: *Secrets of the Millionaire Mind*.

¹ Tinkertoys is a registered trademark of Hasbro. ²http://www.oneminuteu.com/default.taf?page=c ontent&id=902. *How can I create the perfect book title?* (Sam Horn, Accessed February 19, 2008)

Final Thoughts

93. Listen to your colleagues.

Don't get so attached to your pet title that you can't hear criticism. If you have to explain it, if they ask you questions about it, or if they can't correctly answer the question, "What do you think the book is about?" then you need to create a new title that everyone understands instantly.

94. Listen to your publisher.

Publishers have more collective wisdom than any one person; they have the experience, statistical data, and know-how to sell books.

10 Tips to Promote YOUR Business with this Booklet

(We will be glad to customize the book for you.)

- 1. Send this booklet to your clients at yearend, thanking them for their business.
- 2. Use this booklet as a "thank-you" for a sales appointment.
- 3. Mail this booklet to your prospect list to stay in touch with them.
- 4. Offer this booklet free with any purchase during a specific time or with a certain purchase amount or to open a new account.
- Distribute this booklet to prospects at a trade show.
- 6. Give this booklet as an incentive for completing a questionnaire or survey.
- 7. Include this booklet in a mailing of your invoices, as a thank-you.
- 8. Package this booklet with a product you sell, as a "value added."
- 9. Deliver a copy of this booklet to the hands of the first "x" number of people to enter a drawing, come to your store, or sign up for your newsletter.
- Provide copies of this booklet to people and organizations who can refer business to you.

What are you waiting for?

For bulk order pricing contact the author directly, or consult the Web site: www.ClaudiaGereCo.com 413.259.1741 Claudia@ClaudiaGereCo.com

About Claudia Gere

Claudia Gere helps smart people become outstanding authors. She is president (also called high gear) of Claudia Gere & Co. LLC. She has over 25 years of experience in all aspects of publishing. She has held positions as diverse as vice president of marketing, managing editor, program manager, and project director for Fortune 100 technology companies and privately owned entrepreneurial endeavors.

Her work and the work of those she has managed, edited, and promoted has been published by major publishers including Houghton-Mifflin, McGraw-Hill, Macmillan, and Wiley, among others. She has successfully secured industry-recognized literary agents and publishing contracts for first-time authors.

She holds a bachelor's degree in English, a master's in management, and currently sits on the board of directors for Hidden-Tech (www.hidden-tech.net), a 1900-member virtual organization of small and homebased businesses that come together to share resources, beat isolation, and create alliances. You can learn more about her and her work at www.ClaudiaGereCo.com.

Claudia Gere

Helping Smart People Become Outstanding AuthorsTM

www.ClaudiaGereCo.com Claudia@ClaudiaGereCo.com 413-259-1741

Claudia Gere & Co. LLC 113 Leonard Road Shutesbury, MA 01072