

Appendix 6

EVOLUTION OF A TITLE

Suppose that the following six titles are meant to describe the same study. Some of them are better than others. None of them may be fitting for a specific manuscript. Your choice will depend on which words are most important and which best describe the study involved. Think in terms of the words and the arrangement of words that will lead a reader to the central points in your study. The publisher may also have certain criteria for titles such as length and the use of scientific names.

Sample titles:

1. Controlling the Bollworm
2. Investigations into the Effects of Several Selected Phenolic Acid Compounds on the Mortality Rate, Developmental Time, and Pupal Weight Gain of the Cotton (*Gossypium hirsutum* L.) Bollworm (*Helicoverpa zea* Boddie) in Studies Involving Larvae Fed a Synthetic Diet in the Laboratory
3. The Effects of Selected Phenolic Compounds on the Mortality, Developmental Time, and Pupal Weight of *Helicoverpa zea* Boddie: Synthetic Diet Studies
4. Benzoic and Cinnamic Acids in Synthetic Diets Retard Development of *Helicoverpa zea* Larvae
5. Influence of Benzoic and Cinnamic Acids on Mortality or Growth of Bollworm Larvae
6. Response of *Helicoverpa zea* Larvae to Benzoic and Cinnamic Acids

Number 1 might serve as a headline for an article in a newsletter for cotton producers, but it contains too little information to describe a scientific study.

Number 2 is too long and the inclusion of all these words cannot be justified. Certainly, the first three and the last three words can be omitted. Then why not “selected” rather than “several selected”? Why not “phenolic acids” rather than “phenolic acid compounds”? Why not “mortality” rather than “mortality rate”? Why not “pupal weight” rather than “pupal weight gain”? And can’t we simply say “bollworm larvae” instead of “bollworm in studies involving larvae”? There is probably no need for the scientific name for cotton because we are naming the cotton bollworm and not the cotton plant. Whether the scientific name *Helicoverpa zea* Boddie appears in a title will depend on the style of the publisher. The authority Boddie might be omitted. Or the scientific names might be used and the common name cotton bollworm might be omitted. These choices would be based on the style of the publisher and the importance of the words for the audience.

Number 3 is also rather long. We might omit “The effects of” and “the” before “mortality,” but we still have a long title and must make some other choices. Can we save the “synthetic diet studies” for the abstract? Some publishers avoid two-part titles with the colon. Can we say “development” rather than “developmental time”? Or can we combine the words “developmental time and pupal weight” into a simple term like “growth”? Again, answers to these questions depend on what we need to best describe the study and which key words will allow the readers to retrieve a publication relevant to their interests.

Number 4 is perhaps short enough but could still be improved with the omission of “in synthetic diets” unless that information is vital to a brief description of the study. This title adds a detail by naming the specific phenolics used. This information may be worth the extra space needed. However, the title breaks a convention in scientific writing by using an active verb “retards” that describes the outcome of the study. Characteristically, popular press uses such verbs in headlines, but the scientific report simply describes results of a research effort and discusses outcomes but allows the reader to decide on any final conclusion that can be drawn from the work. What happens under the controlled conditions of a given experiment may not constitute a universal truth, and the active verb appears to be proclaiming such a truth.

Number 5 is about the same length and is similar to number 4 except that it avoids the active verb and uses the common name of the species rather than the scientific name. The choice of name would depend on which one you and your publisher believe will best communicate the information with your audience. The use of “mortality or growth” is somewhat more specific than “development” in number 4 and may be worthy of the extra two words especially if we can get rid of “in synthetic diets.”

Number 6 is less descriptive of the paper’s content but conserves words. Here I reserve the mortality and growth for the abstract and generalize with the word *Response*. Such a title may be the best choice especially for display on a poster or slide.