Biomedical Writing

Titles

“Look then into thine heart and write”

Longfellow, Voices of the Night

Sarah L. Poynton
Key things to consider:

- More people read the title than any other part of the paper
- There is more than one way to structure a title
- Title should be audience and purpose specific – this is NOT a case of “one size fits all”

Sarah L. Poynton, Johns Hopkins University, 2014
Some strategies:

(A) Overview

(B) Statement of main result

(C) Question

(D) Two part title……..General: specific

(E) Other strategy?
Suitability of different types:

(A) Overview – all purpose

(B) Statement of main result - all purpose

(C) Question – conference abstract?

(D) Two part title – complex title, one of a series

(E) Other strategy - ????
Example 1: *Giardia lamblia*

Let us imagine we want to publish the results of a study on the flagellate parasite *Giardia lamblia* that lives in the human intestine.

The different regions of the intestine are different microhabitats.

The parasite is most common in the small intestine, and very rarely found posteriorly – we also know that pH varies along the length of the intestine.....

we were curious ...what is the relationship between parasites and pH?

Sarah L. Poynton, Johns Hopkins University, 2014
Possible titles

(A) Overview

Human intestinal pH profile and microhabitat preference of the flagellate *Giardia lamblia* (Diplomonadida)
(B) Statement of main result

Intestinal pH profile in humans does not predict microhabitat preference of the flagellate *Giardia lamblia* (Diplomonadida)
(C) Question

Can intestinal pH profile in humans predict microhabitat preference of the flagellate *Giardia lamblia* (Diplomonadida)?
(D) Two part title……General: specific

*Giardia lamblia* (Diplomonadida): microhabitat preference and intestinal pH profile in humans
Example 2: Neonatal sepsis in Bangladesh (courtesy of Dr. Grace Chan)

1. Increased risk of early-onset neonatal sepsis with maternal bacterial colonization and chorioamnionitis in Dhaka, Bangladesh

2. Increased risk of early-onset neonatal sepsis associated with maternal bacterial colonization and chorioamnionitis in Dhaka, Bangladesh

3. Maternal bacterial colonization and chorioamnionitis is associated with increased risk of early-onset neonatal sepsis in Dhaka, Bangladesh

4. Maternal risk factors, bacterial colonization and chorioamnionitis, for early-onset neonatal sepsis in Dhaka, Bangladesh
What are some of the challenges with these titles?

Which works best and why?

What alternatives can you suggest?
Suggested solution....

Early-onset neonatal sepsis in Bangladesh: increased risk associated with maternal bacterial colonization and chorioamnionitis
How did this help?

1. Broke down a long, complex title into two parts
2. Identified a hierarchy
3. Omitted unnecessary detail
Exercise time!

Writing interesting titles