

Size matters for science paper writers, study finds

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Credit: Petr Kratochvil/Public Domain

Short really is sweet when it comes to scientific paper titles, according to researchers looking for the secret to academic stardom.

A succinct title made a study more likely to be cited by fellow academics—the gold standard for measuring its reach, the British team wrote in a study published Wednesday by the *Royal Society Open Science*

journal.

"These results are consistent with the intriguing hypothesis that papers with shorter titles may be easier to understand," and thus more eye-catching, according to researchers from the data science lab at Britain's Warwick Business School.

The study itself was entitled: "The advantage of short paper titles"—a terse offering in the verbose world of [scientific publishing](#).

More common are such tongue-twisters such as: "Compartmentalization of membrane trafficking, glucose transport, glycolysis, actin, tubulin and the proteasome in the Hermes Body of epididymal sperm b", the title of another paper carried by the same publishing group.

To illustrate the "short is sweet" phenomenon, researcher Adrian Letchford offered a tale of two studies published in 2010 in the prestigious journal *Science*.

"The role of particle morphology in interfacial energy transfer in CDSE/CDS heterostructure nanocrystals," was cited 68 times, and "A draft sequence of the neandertal genome" 700 times.

The researchers waded through some 140,000 papers, focusing on those most-cited between 2007 and 2013, with titles ranging from one to 55 words.

They found a strong correlation between the length of a paper's title and the number of times it was quoted by fellow scientists.

"In 2011, each character added onto a paper's title had a tendency to reduce the number of citations by approximately 1.78 percent," said Letchford.

But he argued there was also a risk in excessive economy of words.

"My colleagues and I could have called it 'Paper Titles', or if we were really bold, 'Titles,'" Letchford said of the team's own study.

"But this really doesn't help anyone to understand what the paper is about," he added. "A [paper](#) might be better off with a title that is short as well as informative."

Letchford stressed that ultimately, "a piece of research's quality and intrinsic significance should have the most impact on its success."

But previous studies have shown that an author's reputation, the prestige of the journal, the field of study and the use of a colon in the title can also play a role in whether it succeeds or fails.

More information: The Advantage of Short Paper Titles, *Royal Society Open Science*, [rsos.royalsocietypublishing.org ... /10.1098/rsos.150266](https://rsos.royalsocietypublishing.org/doi/10.1098/rsos.150266)

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