



*Illinois Valley Community College  
Writing Center*

## **WRITING AN ESSAY TITLE**

### **Writing Titles**

Titles create the first impression of an essay:

- It is important that your title creates interest and draws readers into your essay.
- Titles should be descriptive and provocative.
- Effective essay titles should reflect the purpose and tone of your essay. For example, if you are writing about a serious topic such as assisted suicide, you would not want your title to be humorous.
- It is often a good idea to write your title later in the writing process. In other words, don't try to title your essay before you have it written. At first, you may want to use a tentative title which will likely change as you revise your drafts.
- Effective titles often pull words or phrases from the essay in which they are used.
- Avoid using clichéd phrases as titles. For example, "Beauty is Pain" is an overused phrase that has little impact on a reader.

Below are a few examples of real, interesting titles from existing works:

1. *Statement of essay's focus*: "Only Daughter"
2. *Question*: "Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?"
3. *Unusual angle*: "Thirty-Eight Who Saw Murder Didn't Call the Police"
4. *Controversy*: "A Peaceful Woman Explains Why She Carries a Gun"
1. *Provocative wording*: "The Man Who Was Almost a Man"
5. *Quotation*: "'The Black Table' is Still There"
6. *Humor*: "The Idiot's Guide to Art"

### **Capitalizing Titles**

Capitalize the major words of titles. Minor words—articles, prepositions, and coordinating conjunctions—are not capitalized unless they are the first or last word of a title or subtitle.

Here are a few examples:

1. "Why Boys Don't Play with Dolls"
2. "I Want to Hold Your Hand"
3. "The Men We Carry in Our Minds...and How They Differ from the Real Lives of Most Men"

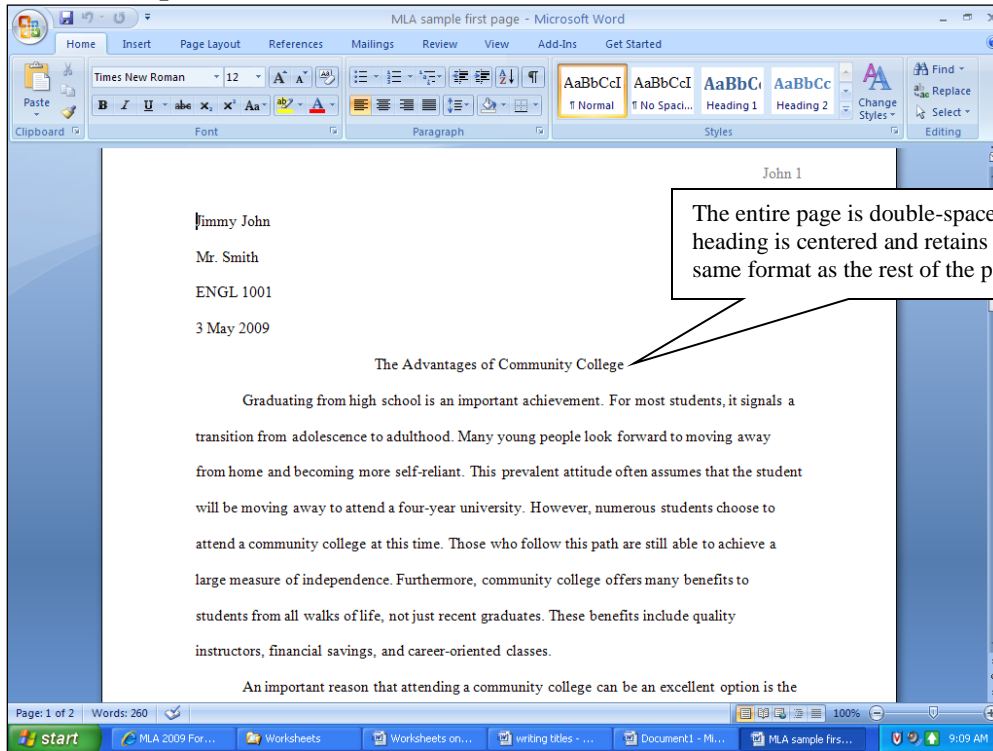
### **Formatting Titles**

MLA—Titles should be one double-space below the heading and centered on the page. Titles should not be bolded, italicized, underlined, or placed in quotation marks.

APA—APA does not provide guidelines for preparing the title page, but most instructors will ask you to include one. Follow the instructor's guidelines.

See the reverse of this sheet for examples of titles in MLA and APA format.

## MLA example



## APA example

