

Choosing a Research Title

Have you found yourself looking at book titles, wondering which ideas would make your career more successful? The list of titles is almost limitless. The more time you spend looking at the list, the more confused you may become.

What I have tried to do is to identify common terms and reassemble them in such a way that clarity is derived from chaos. What I have learned in doing this is that there is no one thought process that appears to demonstrate a truly workable solution. Perhaps a solution is to simply see what “sticks” when the collective relevant ideas are tossed at the wall.

The challenge in research is: What do you actually test? What ideas are most important, and how does one design, organize, recruit, and perform a research project deriving meaningful outcomes that can be “thrown against the collective wall” of mankind’s knowledge? To use a pasta analogy, do we need a certain minimum number of noodles sticking on the wall to qualify? If we start with 100 pieces of spaghetti and only 50 stick, does this qualify, or does it fall short of the target number of noodles stuck on the wall? What effect size and what clinical difference this makes are all important and highly relevant questions. Well, with numerous efforts at throwing something against the wall, I realized that this effort may have landed me in “hot soup”!

So now, I need to ask if there was a fundamental design error in my study. To stay with the analogy, maybe I needed to be testing different shapes of “noodles,” such as fettuccine, angel hair, ziti, fusilli, or others. Do I count, or do I weigh (a matter of measurement)? Should we perform a sample size analysis to ensure that we are using enough? Would the study be best conducted on a pre-manufactured pasta, or should it be fresh? I think you get the point.

Who would have thought that this question could be so complex? At the beginning of the day, the study was initiated to ensure that my time would be spent wisely. I did not want to jump off on some sort of tangent, taking me on frivolous pathways. As I look at this list of factors, perhaps ignoring only the question of how we look at book titles to read the most compelling research, all of those were indeed addressing valid research items—well, maybe not dental implant research—and yet I’m wondering if I may have stepped off in the wrong direction.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Steven E. Eckert DDS MS".

Steven E. Eckert, DDS, MS
Editor-in-Chief