

Declarative Titles

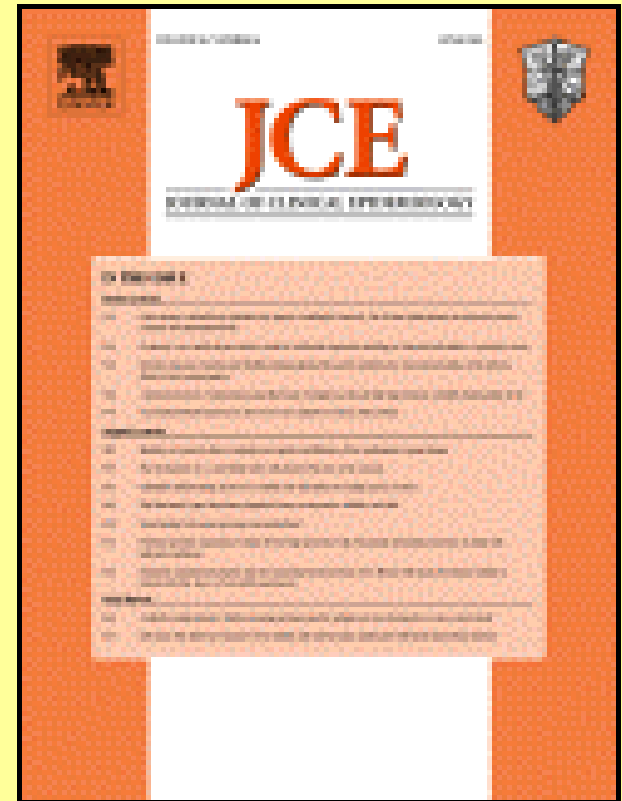
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Associate Editor

Journal of Clinical Epidemiology



About JCE

- Published monthly, by Elsevier
- Aimed at promoting the quality of clinical epidemiological research and improving the knowledge base for the diagnosis, prognosis, prevention and treatment of health conditions *through the advancement and application of innovative methods.*





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ISSN: 0895-4356

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JM is responsible for commissioning new reviews and declarative titles

More info about JCE

- **1st issue published in 1955**
- ***Impact Factor of 2.227 (1993)
increased from 2.039 in 1991***
- **4 Associate editors-
international membership**

Why the move to a common title format?

- Editorial decision at JCE. The new criteria was partially implemented in early 2003 with full implementation in 2004. Due to the editorial process, new journal issues with declarative titles started appearing in the fall of 2004.
- An associate editor (JM) is responsible for ensuring that articles titles are informative.
- *Thanks to David Sackett (Policy Advisory Board member) for assistance in initial development and implementation.*

- It is hoped that by using more informative titles that readers of JCE will be able to better assess the content of the information in the article.
- This should in turn (hopefully) help busy clinicians and researchers keep up with the literature.

- Effectiveness and efficiency in distilling information for readers
- Better Impact Factor for JCE?
 - Could this lead to better indexing (esp for non-rct studies)?
 - Easier to identify relevant studies = more references and a higher impact factor?

Indicative vs. Declarative Titles

- **An indicative title gives the purpose of a study**
- **An declarative (or informative title) gives the conclusion**

Background literature

More Informative Titles. ACP Journal Club. v121:A10, July-Aug, 1994.

By disclosing each article's conclusion in its title, we hope to help busy clinical readers become even more efficient in their efforts to keep up with the literature.

A contrary opinion

Neville W Goodman. *Survey of active verbs in the titles of clinical trial reports.* BMJ 2000;320:914.

There may be arguments for reviews and editorials carrying informative titles, but they are too often wrong to have any place in the reporting of research. Journals should ask for indicative titles, or alter investigators' informative titles during sub-editing.

Where's the evidence?

Richard Smith. Informative titles in the *BMJ*. *BMJ* 2000;320:915.

I have failed to find any solid evidence on the readability of declarative titles including active verbs. But journalists, who know a thing or two about getting people to read what they write, believe strongly in the use of declarative titles and the inclusion of active verbs.

***"Freddie Starr ate my hamster" is
one of the great titles of our
time.***

***"Freddie Starr and my hamster: a
personal account" would have
long been forgotten.***

The basics.....

1. Name the study architecture
 - Should include the study design within the title.

2. Give the results
 - Should include the 'answer' (the results or main message of the conclusion) within the title.

3. Use the past tense for a single investigation, Should state verbs in the past tense for individual studies (whose results might be over-ruled by later studies or meta-analyses), and in the present tense for systematic reviews (whose results are unlikely to be over-ruled by later studies).
4. Should be no longer than 15 words.
5. Should not include formal study names.

Gender vs. sex

- "Sex" is used when we're talking about X & Y chromosomes, and "gender" when we're talking about social roles)
- Give the answer (women), not just the category of the answer (sex).

Review process

1. Author electronically submits manuscript
2. An editor reviews and decides if it fits within JCEs scope, quality etc.
3. Manuscript goes to peer review
4. Final copies of accepted manuscripts sent to JM for title review – negotiation with author
5. Final proofs to Elsevier

Examples

- Before: Sex was a Demographic Predictor of Response to a Postal Questionnaire Study of Specialist Physicians
- After: Female specialists were more likely to respond to a postal questionnaire about drug treatments for Alzheimer disease.

- Before: Low incorporation of results of clinical trial quality assessment in systematic reviews
- After: An analysis of systematic reviews indicated low incorporation of results from clinical trial quality assessment

- Before: Electronic databases have a varying degree of validity
- After: Local and national electronic databases in Norway demonstrated a varying degree of validity

- Before: Searching for clinical trials – Simplified search strategies can be effective
- After: Simplified search strategies were effective in identifying clinical trials of pharmaceuticals and physical modalities

- Before: Canadian Acute Respiratory Illness and Flu Scale (CARIFS) measures functional severity of illness in children
- After: A children's acute respiratory illness scale predicted functional severity and family burden

What's next?

- Can we measure if more informative titles will help readers to be able to better assess the content of the information in the article?
- What do the other editors think?
- Will this help the journal's impact factor?

Questions, comments.....

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