Online academic journals enhance an article's visibility, link it rapidly to the appropriate literature, and bring it to more scholars who will use it, increasing the chances of citation. Yet writing and editing an article for online publication in a way that takes advantage of these benefits differ from preparing one for print journals in a few small, but important, respects. To be cited, articles must be both visible in an electronic environment and perceptively relevant to their key audience from the outset. This chapter covers some techniques for maximizing online visibility, from selecting search engine-friendly titles and abstracts to tips for effective, but often overlooked, strategies that authors and editors can use once an article is published. It summarizes an article written for journal article authors (originally published in Politics & Policy at http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1747-1346.2011.00342.x/full) on what editors can do to encourage authors to write with maximum online impact in mind.

Academic journal publishing is changing. Fast. The ways scholars search for, find, store, retrieve, evaluate, and even read academic research have changed dramatically over the last decade and are likely to evolve more quickly in the future as new technologies and apps emerge. It is thus no surprise that the readership and subscription trends of many journals are moving inexorably toward online-only use. Demand for journal issues read as an integrated whole has given way to the single-article download as the favoured method, permitting selectivity in an era of information overload. As a result, scholars gain more freedom to tailor article consumption to their specific research needs. One consequence in terms of impact ranking is that the number of views and downloads of individual articles may be starting to count in the same way as the number of citations indexed for a piece. Of course, this is to make its title search-engine-friendly. As both producers and consumers in this market, we need a greater awareness of our own research methods for finding and selecting relevant literature in promoting search engine-savvy writing techniques.

Optimal online visibility rests mainly on how easy an article is to find by those who will view, download, and (it is to be hoped) cite it. The most effective way of ensuring this is to make its title search-engine-friendly. As both producers and consumers in this market, we need a greater awareness of our own research methods for finding and selecting relevant literature in promoting search engine-savvy writing techniques.

As a paper's title largely determines how close to the top of a reader's search results it will appear, titles should be constructed carefully, with keywords in mind. Article titles are now largely sorted by machines first and humans second. As consumers of research online, our search practices already reflect an awareness of the limitations of virtual reasoning in our keyword choice and combination. As producers, we have some catching up to do!

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Search engines rank literal association and clarity in titles above subtle wit or learned references to Aesop's fable of the ant and the grasshopper. Traditionally, the identity of the publishing print journal provided sufficient context for the erudite reader to appreciate such titles. Online searches
for single articles across multiple journals, publishers, and disciplines turn up a wider array of results, but search engines lack the ability to contextualize nonliteral meaning. And without a stable context, sometimes so do we. When we type ‘hooves’ not only retrieve ‘horses’ before ‘zebras’ they retrieve ‘hooves’ first. As (re)searches, we understand this, as writers, and especially editors, we need to.

The best search engine-friendly titles provide a clear description of the study’s subject and indicate its central argument or findings. This does not mean titles should be uncreative or dull. Search engines deliver initial visibility, but if the search process cannot navigate whether an article is read and not including, unique memorability, and phrases in a title together with keywords distinguishes it in the reader’s mind, making it easier to recognize it in their download library or to find it again later on the net. Analysis conducted independently on scientific, medical, and psychological journal articles also reveals a consensus that longer titles are more positively correlated to higher citations than short ones, as a colon, an informative subtitle, and the use of non-quotidian language. So, encourage authors to ‘write for readers not robots’, but confirm that at least the title the robots can understand.

One way to verify this is to run searches in different engines with prospective title(s), then enter variations of its keywords. If the top 50 results are not close to the paper’s subject and do not include that shares one or two keywords with related work. A note in the acceptance letter requiring authors to conduct this check in their final polish saves time later, but a quick editorial corroboration is recommended.

There are a few exceptions to the purely descriptive title rule. Ambitious titles are trickier for search engines to handle, but if they are constructed well they can work tremendously for views and downloads in other ways. One etched forever in my brain is ‘Get your tongue out of my mouth ‘cause I’m kissin’ you’ goodbye: the politics of ideas’, which still featured in the Policy Studies Journal’s top downloads in the last year. The search phrase for the politics of ideas confirms that this title is not especially search-friendly, which still featured in the library or to find it again later on the net.

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