English Capitalization Rules

Capitalization is the writing of a word with its first letter in uppercase and the remaining letters in lowercase.

1. Sentences
This one’s easy. Always capitalize the first word of a sentence. Here are some examples:

- The cat is sleeping.
- Where did I put that book?
- Hey! It’s great to see you! How have you been?

2. After a colon
In most cases, you don’t need to capitalize after a colon. For example:

- I have one true passion: wombat racing.

There are a couple of exceptions. One is when the word following the colon is a proper noun.

- There is only one place I want to visit: New York City.

The other exception depends on style (MLA, APA, Turabian, etc.). When the words following the colon form one or more complete sentences, you may or may not capitalize.

APA capitalizes the word after a colon if it introduces one complete sentence.

- This is why I didn’t come to the party: My dance team is holding extra practice to prepare for a competition.

For MLA and Chicago Style, the word following a colon is capitalized when the colon introduces multiple complete sentences.

- Maggie wears a brimmed cap at all times for these two reasons: Strong light often gives her a headache. She also likes the way it looks.

3. Quotes
Capitalize the first word of a quote when the quote is a complete sentence. Here are some examples:

- Mario asked, “What is everyone doing this weekend?”
• Stacy answered, “My sister and I are going to the water park.”

**However, do not capitalize the first word of partial quotes.**

• Gretchen said she was “too busy” to join the gym.
• Mr. Thompson described the rules as “extremely difficult to understand if a person does not have a law degree.”

4. **Titles**

The capitalization rules for titles of books, movies, and other works vary a little between style guides such as **MLA, APA, or Turabian**. Please consult specific guides on how to capitalize titles of journals, books, TV series, YouTube and other resources.

In general, you should capitalize the first word, all nouns, all verbs (even short ones, like *is*), all adjectives, and all proper nouns.

• Jane Austin’s novel *Sense and Sensibility* is better than *Pride and Prejudice*.

That means you should lowercase articles, conjunctions, and prepositions—however, some style guides say to capitalize conjunctions and prepositions that are longer than five letters. For Example:

• Did you know that the movie *The Mountain Between Us* was based on a novel?

5. **Names and proper nouns**

You should always capitalize **people’s names**. These are one type of **proper noun**. Remember that such nouns name a specific person, place, or thing. Here are some examples:

• My favorite author is Jane Austen.
• Have you met my dog, Boomer?
• One day I hope to climb Mount Kilimanjaro.

6. **Family member titles**

You should capitalize family member titles when addressing your own relatives.

• For example: Hello, Mother.
A good rule to follow is to capitalize them if they are used as **proper nouns**, as in the previous example. The word *Mother* is a proper noun standing in for the mother's name.

Capitalize words such as Mother, Father, Grandmother, Grandfather, Son, Daughter, Brother, and Sister when they are used in place of the person's name.

Family member titles are also capitalized when used before a family member's actual name.

- For example: I invited **Uncle Chet** to the baseball game. (In this case, this is not a direct address.)
- Hey, **Mom**, where’s the remote control?
- Daniel will finally meet **Uncle Maurice** at the family reunion.
- What have you been up to, **Grandma**?

**When not to capitalize family member titles:**

If used as **common nouns**, do not capitalize. For example:

- We honor all mothers in May.

Do not capitalize them when they follow **possessive pronouns** such as her, his, my, our, and your.

- Margo and **her mom** are going to the museum.
- **My brother** is visiting from Chicago until Sunday.
- The children interviewed their **grandparents** for a class assignment.

7. **Cities, countries, companies, religions, political parties, nationalities, and languages**

The names of cities, countries, nationalities, and languages are **proper nouns**, so you should capitalize them. Here are some examples:

- We experienced some beautiful **Southern California** weather last fall when we attended a **Catholic** wedding in **San Diego**.
- **English** is made up of many languages, including **Latin, German,** and **French**.
- My mother is **British**, and my father is **Dutch**.
- The capital of **Botswana** is **Gaborone**.

8. **Days, months, and holidays, and seasons**

The names of days, months, and holidays are proper nouns, so you should capitalize them. Here are some examples.
• I hate Mondays!
• Tom’s birthday is in June.
• Oh no! I forgot about Valentine’s Day!

The names of seasons, however, are not proper nouns, so there’s no need to capitalize them.

• I hate winter!
• Having a summer birthday is the best.

9. Time period and events

Specific periods, eras, and historical events that have proper names should be capitalized. Here are some examples:

• Most of the World War I veterans are now deceased.
• People often think that the Middle Ages lacked any scientific advances, but this is simply untrue.
• Middle school students often enjoy studying the social changes that took place during the Roaring Twenties.

However, centuries—and the numbers before them—are not capitalized. For example:

• In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, England blossomed into an empire.

10. Adjectives derived from proper nouns.

Here are some examples:

• the Golden Gate Bridge
• the Grand Canyon
• Russian song
• a Shakespearean sonnet
• a Freudian slip

With the passage of time, some words originally derived from proper nouns have taken on a life and authority of their own and no longer require capitalization. Here are some examples:

• herculean (from the mythological hero Hercules)
• quixotic (from the hero of the classic seventeenth-century novel Don Quixote)
• draconian (from ancient-Athenian lawgiver Draco)
The main function of capitals is to focus attention on particular elements within any group of people, places, or things.

We can speak of a lake in the middle of the country, or we can be more specific and say Lake Michigan, which distinguishes it from every other lake on earth.

**Capitalization Reference List**

- **Brand names** (for example Dunkin’ Donuts, Exxon, Nike)
- **Companies** (for example: Amazon, Target, Greif Bros. Corporation)
- **Days of the week and months of the year** (for example: Tuesday, April)
- **Governmental matters** Congress (but not congressional), the U.S. Constitution (but not constitutional), the Electoral College, Department of Agriculture.
  - **Note:** Many authorities do not capitalize federal or state unless it is part of the official title: State Water Resources Control Board, but state water board; Federal Communications Commission, but federal regulations.
- **Historical episodes and eras** (For example: the Inquisition, the American Revolutionary War, the Great Depression)
- **Holidays** (for example: Easter, Kwanzaa, Ramadan, Hanukkah)
- **Institutions** (for example: Oxford College, the Juilliard School of Music)
- **Manmade structures** (for example: The Empire State Building, the Titanic)
- **Manmade territories** (such as Berlin, Montana, Cook County)
- **Natural and manmade landmarks** (such as Mount Everest, the Hoover Dam)
- **Nicknames and epithets** (for example Babe Ruth, Lady Gaga)
- **Organizations** (for example: American Center for Law and Justice)
- **Planets** (for example: Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn)
  Policies vary on the capitalizing earth, moon, and sun. It is usually not capitalized unless it is being discussed specifically as a planet. (For example: We learned that Earth travels through space at 66,700 miles per hour.)
- **Races, nationalities, and tribes** (for example: African American, Caucasian, Asian, East Indian, Dutch, Italian, Navajo, Seneca.)
  **Note:** white and black in reference to race are lowercase.
- **Religions and names of deities** (for example: Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism)
  - **Note:** Capitalize the Bible (but not biblical) Torah, Koran, Veda). Do not capitalize heaven, hell, the devil, satanic.
- **Special occasions** (for example: the Olympic Games, the Cannes Film Festival)
- **Names of streets and roads** (for example: Pensacola Street, Appleyard Drive)
Lowercase Reference List

Here is a list of categories not capitalized unless an item contains a proper noun or proper adjective (or, sometimes, a trademark). In such cases, only the proper noun or adjective is capitalized.

- **Animals**
  These are lowercase unless part of the animal’s name is an adjective derived from a proper noun: antelope, black bear, Bengal tiger, yellow-bellied sapsucker, German shepherd

- **Elements**
  Always lowercase, even when the name is derived from a proper noun: einsteinium, nobelium, californium

- **Foods**
  Lowercase except for brand names, proper nouns and adjectives, or custom-named recipes: Tabasco sauce, Russian dressing, pepper crusted bluefin tuna, Mandy's Bluefin Surprise

- **Heavenly bodies besides planets**
  satellite, moon, orb, star, asteroid, comet

- **Medical conditions**
  Epstein-Barr syndrome, tuberculosis, Parkinson's disease

- **Minerals**
  calcium, chloride, copper

- **Plants, vegetables, and fruits**
  These follow the same rules as names for animals: poinsettia, Douglas fir, Jerusalem artichoke, organic celery, Golden Delicious apples

- **Seasons and seasonal data**
  spring, summertime, the winter solstice, the autumnal equinox, daylight saving time

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**Sources:**

Grammar Book: https://www.grammarbook.com/punctuation/capital.asp
