

## CAPITALIZATION

Rules governing capitalization reflect convention practices; that is, they have been established by custom and usage. By following these conventions, a writer tells a reader, among other things, what words are important. In earlier times writers capitalized most nouns and many adjectives at will; few conventions of capitalization or punctuation were consistently observed. Today most capitalization follows definite rules that are fully accepted and practiced at all times. Dictionaries are helpful in determining capitalization practices, but they do not show all capitalized words. To develop skill in controlling capitals, study the rules.

### Proper Nouns

Capitalize proper nouns, including *specific* names of persons, places, schools, streets, parks, buildings, religions, holidays, months, nicknames, agreements, and so forth. Do *not* capitalize common nouns that make *general* reference.

#### Proper Nouns

Jefferson James  
 Mexico, Canada  
 Cypress College  
 Ohio State University  
 Stoner Avenue Park  
 Catholic, Presbyterian  
 Empire Room, Royal Inn  
 Veterans Day, Easter  
 Golden Gate Bridge  
 House of Representatives  
 Senate  
 January, February, March  
 the Windy City, the Big Apple  
 Stipulation of Interest Agreement  
*The Online English Grammar*  
 Microsoft Word  
 U.S. Postal Service

#### Common Nouns

a young man on a basketball team  
 neighboring countries of the U.S.  
 a community college  
 a university  
 a picnic in the park  
 representatives of two religions  
 a room in a hotel  
 on these holidays  
 a bridge over the bay  
 components of government  
 first three months of the year  
 nicknames of cities  
 an agreement between companies  
 a Web site  
 a word processing program  
 a trip to the post office

### Proper Adjectives

Capitalize most adjectives that are derived from proper nouns.

Victorian furniture	Socratic method
Danish pastry	British thermal unit
Keynesian economics	Herculean task
Arabic alphabet	Greek symbols

Do not capitalize those adjectives originally derived from proper nouns that have become common adjectives (without capitals) through usage. Consult your dictionary when in doubt.

mandarin collar	homburg hat
french fries	china dishes
manila folder	diesel engine
india ink	charley horse

### Beginning of Sentence

Capitalize the first letter of a word beginning a sentence.

Inventory and sales data are transmitted electronically.

### Geographic Locations

Capitalize the names of *specific* places such as states, cities, mountains, valleys, lakes, rivers, oceans, and geographic regions. Capitalize *county* and *state* when followed by the proper noun.

Oregon, Washington, Idaho	Rogue River, Mississippi River
Oklahoma City, Salt Lake City	Atlantic Ocean, Indian Ocean
San Fernando Valley	New England, Texas Panhandle
Lake Michigan, Salton Sea	European Community (EC)
Broward County, Cook County	New York State

### Organization Names

Capitalize the principal words in the names of all business, civic, educational, governmental, labor, military, philanthropic, political, professional, religious, sports, and social organizations.

Federal Emergency Management Agency  
 International Association of Administrative Professionals  
 United Farm Workers of America  
 National Football Association  
 National Association of Letter Carriers  
 Communications Satellite Corporation  
 Securities and Exchange Commission  
 National Park Service  
 Screen Actors Guild

The Boeing Company (capitalize *the* only when it is part of the organization's office name—as it would appear on the organization's stationery).

Generally, do *not* capitalize *committee*, *company*, *association*, *board*, and other shortened name forms when they are used to replace full organization names. If these shortened names, however, are preceded by the word *the* and are used in formal or legal documents (contracts, bylaws, minutes, etc.), they may be capitalized.

- Did you know that the company will pay certain medical benefits?
- The Treasurer of the Association is herein authorized to disburse funds.

### Academic Courses and Degrees

Capitalize the names of numbered courses and specific course titles. Do not capitalize the names of academic subject areas unless they contain a proper noun.

- Becky expects to enroll in Keyboarding I, Office Administration 32, and Accounting 28.
- Lee excelled in business management, Spanish, and computer applications.
- All accounting majors must take business English and business law.

Capitalize all abbreviations of academic degrees whether they stand alone or follow individuals' names. Do not capitalize general references to degrees.

- Wei-Li Tsai hopes to earn A.A., B.S., and M.S. degrees.
- Central States University offers bachelor's and master's degrees.
- Elizabeth S. Wright, Ph.D., teaches psychology in the spring semester.
- Glenda R. Hanson is a certified P.L.S.

### Seasons

Do not capitalize seasons unless they are personified (spoke of as if alive).

- Last winter we talked about summer vacations.
- "Come, Winter, with thin angry howl. . ."—Burns

### Title of People

Capitalize courtesy titles (such as *Mr.*, *Mrs.*, *Ms.*, *Miss*, and *Dr.*) when they precede names. Also capitalize titles representing a person's profession, company position, military rank, religious station, political office, family relationship, or nobility when the title precedes the name and replaces a courtesy title.

- Students greeted Ms. Nudity Bynum and Mr. Peter Jones.
- Speakers included Professor Jackie Harless-Chang and Dr. Ann Lee.
- Sales figures were submitted by Budget Director Magee and Vice President Anderson.
- Will Major General Donald M. Franklin assume command?
- Appearing together were Rabbi David Cohen, Archbishop Sean McKee, and Reverend Thomas White.
- We expect President Bush to offer support for Senator Tom Watson and Mayor Warren Rivers in the next campaign.
- Only Aunt Arlene and Uncle Keith had been to Alaska.
- Onlookers waited for Prince Charles and Queen Elizabeth to arrive.

Do not capitalize a person's title—professional, business, military, religious, political, family, or one related to nobility—when the title is followed by an appositive. You will recall that appositives rename or explain previously mentioned nouns or pronouns.

- Only one professor, Malcolm Randall, favored a tuition hike.
- Republican candidates asked their president, George W. Bush, to help raise funds.
- Reva Hillman discovered that her uncle, Paul M. Hillman, had named her as his heir.

Do not capitalize titles or offices following names.

- Leon Jones, president of Allied Chemical, met with Cecille Stone, director of Human Resources.
- After repeated requests, Rose Valenzuela, supervisor, Documentation Services, announced extended hours.
- George W. Bush, president of the United States, conferred with Robert Hollingsworth, senator from Wyoming.
- Alexander M. Berquist, chief justice of the Supreme Court, promised a ruling in June.

Generally, do not capitalize a title or office that replaces a person's name.

- Neither the president of the company nor the executive vice president could be reached for comment.
- An ambitious five-year plan was developed by the director of marketing and the sales manager.
- The president conferred with the joint chiefs of staff and the secretary of defense.
- At the reception the mayor of New York spoke with the governor of New Jersey.

Capitalize titles in addresses and closing lines.

Ms. Carol A. Straka  
Executive Vice President, Planning  
Energy Systems Technology, Inc.  
8907 Canoga Avenue  
Canoga Park, CA 91371

Very sincerely yours,  
  
Benelle H. Robinson  
Marketing Manager

Do not capitalize family titles used with possessive pronouns.

my mother	our aunt
his father	your cousin

But do capitalize titles of close relatives when they are used without pronouns.

Please call Father and Uncle Joe immediately.

### Numbered and Lettered Items

Capitalize nouns followed by numbers or letters except in page, paragraph, line, size, and verse references.

Gate 69, Flight 238	FHA Form 2900-4	Building I-63-B
Invoice No. 15891	Volume II, Appendix A	Medicare Form 72T
page 6, line 12	State Highway 5	Supplement No. 3

### Points of the Compass

Capitalize *north*, *south*, *east*, *west*, and their derivatives when they represent *specific* regions. Do not capitalize the points of the compass when they are used in directions or in general references.

the Middle East, the Far East	heading east on the turnpike
the Midwest, the Pacific Northwest	the west of town
the East Coast, the West Coast	eastern Maine, western Illinois
Easterners, Southerners	southern Georgia
Northern Hemisphere	in the northern corner

### Departments, Divisions, and Committees

Capitalize the names of departments, divisions, or committees within your own organization. Outside your organization, capitalize only *specific* department, division, or committee names.

- Sue works in our Communication Service Department.
- Dr. Nguyen is director of the Northeast Division of Barco.
- Send your employment application to their human resources department.

- Grievances are referred to our Personnel Practices Committee.
- A steering committee has not yet been named.

### Governmental Terms

Do not capitalize the words *federal*, *government*, *nation*, or *state* unless they are part of a specific title.

- Neither the state government nor the federal government would fund the proposal.
- The Federal Trade Commission regulates advertising in all the states.

### Product Names

Capitalize product names only when they represent trademarked items. Except in advertising, common names following the manufacturers' names are not capitalized.

Coca-Cola	DuPont Teflon	Kodak camera
Kleenex	Ray-Ban sunglasses	NordicTrack Walkfit
Iomega Zip disk	Whirlpool washer	Styrofoam cup
Play-Doh	IBM computer	Chrysler Jeep
Q-Tip swab	Excel spreadsheet	Formica counter

### Published and Artistic Titles

Capitalize the principal words in the titles of books, magazines, newspapers, articles, movies, plays, songs, poems, Web sites, and reports. Do *not* capitalize articles (*a*, *an*, *the*), conjunctions (*and*, *but*, *or*, *nor*), and prepositions with three or fewer letters (*in*, *to*, *by*, *for*, etc.) unless they begin or end the title. The word *to* in infinitives (*to run*, *to say*, *to write*) is also not capitalized unless it appears as the first word of a title or subtitle.

By the way, remember that the titles of published works that contain subdivisions (such as books, magazines, pamphlets, newspapers, TV series, plays, and musicals) are italicized or underscored. Titles of literary or artistic works without subdivisions (such as newspaper articles, magazine articles, poems, and episodes in a TV series) are placed in quotation marks.

- Harris's *Easy World Wide Web—Worth Waiting For*
- "How to Get the Most From a Placement Service" appearing in *Newsweek*.
- *Saturday Night Live*
- Gershwin's "An American in Paris"
- *Life Is Beautiful*
- "Career Development," a link at *Hoover's Online*

### Beginning Words

In addition to capitalizing the first words of a complete sentence, capitalize the first words in quoted sentences, independent phrases, enumerated items, and formal rules or principles following colons.

- Bill Gates said, “The more successful I am, the more vulnerable I feel.”
- No, not at the present time.
- Our office manager repeated his favorite rule: Follow the company stylebook for correct capitalization.
- Big utilities formed an alliance to sell the following:
  1. Electricity
  2. Natural gas
  3. Energy management services

### **Celestial Bodies**

Capitalize the names of celestial bodies such as Jupiter, Saturn, and Neptune. Do not capitalize the terms *earth*, *sun*, or *moon* unless they are used as the names of specific bodies in the solar system.

- Where on earth did you find the ancient typewriter?
- Venus and Mars are the closest planets to Earth.

### **Ethnic References**

Terms that relate to a particular culture, language, or race are capitalized.

- In Hawaii, Asian and Western cultures merge.
- Both English and Hebrew are spoken by Jews in Israel.
- African Americans and Hispanics turned out to support their candidates.

Note: Hyphenate terms such as *African-American* and *French-Canadian* when they are used as adjectives (*African-American* collection or *French-Canadian* citizens). Do not hyphenate these terms when they are used as nouns.

### **Words Following *Marked* and *Stamped***

Capitalize words that follow the words *marked* and *stamped*.

- Although it was stamped “Fragile,” the box failed to protect the mirror.
- That bill was marked “Paid in Full” on September 15.

### **Special Uses of Personal Titles and Terms**

Generally, titles are capitalized according to specifications set forth earlier. However, when a title of an official appears in the organization’s minutes, bylaws, or official documents, it may be capitalized.

- The Controller will have authority over college budgets.
- By vote of the stockholders, the President is empowered to implement a stock split.

When the terms *ex*, *elect*, *late*, and *former* are used with capitalized titles, they are not capitalized.

- Everyone wondered what position ex-Vice President Gore would take.
- Mayor-elect Cortazzo addressed the city council.

Do not capitalize *sir*, *ladies*, and *gentlemen* when used in direct address.

**Exercises:** Correct errors you find in capitalization.

1. All employees are expected to attend a Training Session for Stress Management to be held in the magnolia room in peachtree plaza on Tuesday, March 31.
2. Born in Dade county, Mr. nunez grew up in the state of florida.
3. All Ford Motor Company Cars and Light Trucks carry a Warranty.
4. In the Fall Christopher Ahrens plans to study spanish, accounting, Management, and Keyboarding.
5. Use India ink to make dark headings on the manila folders.
6. Pelee island is located on the Canadian side of lake erie.
7. Regulations of the Occupational Safety and health admistration result in costly expenses for our Company.
8. Salt lake city, in the State of Utah, was founded by Brigham Young and a small Party of Mormons in 1847.
9. The winner in this year's dog show sponsored by the Westminster kennel club was a Doberman Pinscher from a german breeder.
10. Elise hoped to complete A.A., B.A., and M.A. Degrees in different Colleges.
11. Nicolle Scott, a member of our marketing research department, will be our new Far East representative.
12. Please consult figure 13D in appendix B for instructions in computing the depreciation of equipment.
13. We will ask sales manager Sperazza to be chairman of an investigation committee.
14. Both mother and aunt grace received Nokia Cell Phones as Christmas gifts.



15. The Fishing Industry in the Pacific northwest is reeling from the impact of recent Federal regulations.
16. Our business manager and our executive vice president recently attended an e-business seminar in southern Illinois.
17. My Uncle recommended that I read the article titled “The Do’s and taboos of international trade.”
18. Address the envelope to Ms. Susan Sutkowski, director, employee services, Omega Corporation, 304 Hilyard Street, Eugene, Oregon.
19. The president met with the secretary of state to discuss peace talks in the Middle East.
20. Centron Oil Company, with headquarters in western Texas, distributes its products throughout the entire northern hemisphere.
21. Because the package was marked “fragile,” we handled it carefully.
22. The guiding principle of capitalization is this: capitalize *specific* names and references, but do not capitalize *general* references.
23. Magical miniature creatures such as leprechauns, fairies, and elves appeared in tales from ancient egyptian, grecian, roman, and even hispanic and asian cultures.
24. The Late President Theodore Roosevelt is remembered for his initiation of policies to conserve American natural resources.
25. Spacecraft from earth have recently been sent to the planets Mars, Jupiter, and Venus.
26. Money traders watched carefully the relation of the american dollar to the chinese yuan, the european euro, and the japanese yen.
27. The library of congress featured a collection of african-american writers.
28. You, Sir, are in danger of being held in contempt of court.
29. Our Organization’s bylaws state the following: “The Secretary of the Association will submit an agenda two weeks before each meeting.”
30. Large tracks of amazon tropical rain forest have been cleared for the following:
  - a. cattle ranches

- b. lumber
- c. tax incentives