

Capitalization

NC State Writing and Speaking Tutorial Services * NC State Graduate Writing Center
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What is capitalization?

Capitalization is the process of using an uppercase letter in writing to indicate beginnings, such as the start of a sentence, as well as to denote proper nouns and adjectives, and titles.

Beginning Capitalization

- Beginning of a sentence: *It is important to eat fruit.*
- Beginning of a direct quote that is a full sentence: *Darlene wrote, "It is important to eat fruit."*
- Beginning of a full sentence within parentheses: *He thinks eating vegetables is important. (We think so too.)*
 - Do not capitalize if the parentheses are within a sentence already: *It is important (and wise) to eat fruit.*
- Optional: Beginning of an independent clause after a colon: *There is one great reason to eat fruit: It tastes great!*
 - **EXCEPTION:** Do not capitalize if a list follows the colon and is not a complete sentence.
Mom and Sally will need supplies for her party: balloons, cake, hot dogs, and bug spray.

Proper Nouns and Adjectives

Proper nouns and adjectives name specific persons, places, things, and concepts. They are denoted in writing with a capital letter.

- Names:
It is a long drive, but Sally and I take turns riding in the front seat.
- Names of relatives that indicate family relationship when used with name:
We always stop halfway to see Uncle John.
 - **EXCEPTION:** Do not capitalize names indicating family relationship when used without a name.
My aunt is usually at work.
- Names of relatives when used as a proper name:
Uncle John always tells Mom that we should stay for dinner.
- The first person personal pronoun "I":
Uncle John made hamburgers for us, and I ate two.
- Titles that precede a name and refer to a specific person:
Mom and Uncle John talk during dinner about Governor McMadeup, an old friend of theirs.
 - **EXCEPTION:** Do not capitalize titles that follow names or are used in a general sense.
They also knew Karen Jones, a former governor.
- Capitalize official titles of a specific person's position when they don't precede a name.
Maybe we can meet the President of the United States next!

- Names of national, political, racial, social, civic, and athletic groups:
Thurgood Marshall was the first African-American justice of the Supreme Court.
- Words in the titles of books, articles, and songs:
*After we left, I read my favorite short story, "Shooting an **E**lephant," during the ride.*
 - **EXCEPTION:** Do not capitalize short prepositions, conjunctions, or articles unless they are the first word of the title.
*In case I finish this story, I have another one, "The **B**east in the **J**ungle," with me.*
 - **EXCEPTION:** When citing sources for works cited pages, double check the capitalization requirements of your citation style. In APA style, only the first word in an article title is capitalized unless there are also proper nouns.
Potter, H. J. (2014). Attendance demographics at **H**ogwarts during the **l**ast century.
Journal of International Magical Academies, 77(7), 1-8.
- Directions such as North, South, East, and West when they refer to a section of a country:
*North Carolina is in the **S**outh.*
 - **EXCEPTION:** Do not capitalize directions when they are given as cardinal directions.
North Carolina is south of Virginia.
- Days of the week, months of the year, and holidays:
*We will arrive on **F**riday and stay until **A**ugust. I can't wait for fireworks on the **F**ourth of **J**uly!*
- Seasons when used in a title or in a specific/formal sense:
*Because school starts soon, I need to prepare for the **F**all 2016 semester.*
 - **EXCEPTION:** Do not capitalize the name of a season if it is referred to generally.
My favorite season is fall.
- Countries, specific locations, nationalities, and specific languages:
*I would like to visit **Q**uebec, **C**anada, so I am considering taking some **F**rench classes.*
- Time periods and events:
*I learned about the **A**ge of **E**nlightenment from an intelligent guest at the **H**oliday **G**ala.*
 - **EXCEPTION:** Do not capitalize century numbers.
*She had learned about the time period from her **e**ighteenth-century literature class.*
- Trademarks and companies:
*My sister is asking for an **A**pple laptop for her graduation gift.*
- Names of God, specific deities, religious figures, and holy books:
*Deities: **B**uddha, **Z**eus, **G**od the **F**ather, **A**llah*
*Religious figures: **M**oses, **M**ohammed, the **V**irgin **M**ary*
*Holy books: the **B**ible, the **K**oran, the **V**edas*
 - **EXCEPTION:** Do not capitalize the non-specific use of the word "god."
*Different cultures have different **g**ods.*

Works Consulted:

Purdue University Online Writing Lab (<https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/>); Towson University Writing Center (<https://webapps.towson.edu/ows/>); *The Everyday Writer*, 5th ed. (Lunsford)