



Figure 1 The Writing Center and Academic Resource Center logo

CAPITALIZATION

Capitalization is when the first letter in a word, or a series of words, is written in capital letters. A good way to remember the general rules of capitalization is that *proper nouns* are capitalized, and *common nouns* are not capitalized. *Proper nouns* are the names of specific people, places, and things. *Common nouns* name all items that are not proper nouns.

The Main Uses of Capital Letters

Capitalize the first word in a sentence or a direct quote.

Janis bought a cake for her students.

"**I'm sleepy**," whined Billy.

Capitalize names and the word I.

The house that **Sarah** bought burned down two years ago.

Carol wants fish for dinner; **I** would prefer chicken.

Capitalize specific place names.

We took a stroll down **Sunset Boulevard**.

Steve went to **Kennedy High School**.

Pat visited **New York** last year.

Capitalize days of the week, months, and holidays.

My class meets on **Wednesdays**.

Carol's birthday is in **July**.

I am going to Aspen for **Christmas**.

Capitalize the names of commercial products.

My father uses **Tide** to wash his laundry.

Kellogg's Corn Flakes is my favorite kind of cereal.

I prefer shopping at **Ralph's**.

Capitalize the names of organizations.

The **Internal Revenue Service** audited Priscilla.

Jerry attended the bake sale held by the **Catholic Church**.

Marcia joined the **Debate Team**.

Capitalize the titles of books, magazines, articles, stories, poems, films, television shows, songs, and papers. Always capitalize the first letter of every title.

Do not capitalize prepositions.

Ernest Hemingway wrote ***A Farewell to Arms***.

Peter watches ***Friends*** every night.

Other Uses of Capital Letters

Capitalize names that show family relationships or titles when they can be replaced with a proper noun.

Original Sentence:	Replaced With:
I am going to visit my Grandma Pam.	I am going to visit Pam.
"You don't have to wash those dishes, Mom," he said.	"You don't have to wash those dishes, Nicole," he said.
"Your car is ready, Senator."	"Your car is ready, Madeline."
I am going to see the Pope.	I am going to see John Paul.

Do not capitalize family relationships or titles when they cannot be replaced with a proper noun.

Original Sentence:	Cannot Be Replaced with:
Everyone has two grandmothers.	Everyone has two Judys.
You should go visit your mother.	You should go visit your Frances.
I did not vote for our current president.	I did not vote for our current George.
The newest partner in the law firm won his case today.	The newest Carter with the law firm won his case today.

Capitalize the name of specific courses.

This semester, Josh is taking three **Women’s Studies** courses.

Pilar is in my **Political Science** 1 class.

Capitalize the names of languages.

Hilda speaks **English, French, and German.**

Norman writes poetry in **Japanese.**

Capitalize the names of geographic locations.

Steve plans to visit **Africa** this summer.

Estela was born in the **Yucatan.**

Capitalized the names of historical periods and events.

My ancestor fought in the **Revolutionary War.**

Oliver Cromwell governed England during the **Interregnum.**

Capitalize the names of races, nations, and nationalities.

Though Maki’s family is **Korean**, she was born in **Japan.**

Martin Luther King, Jr. was an **African-American** leader who fought for Civil Rights.

Capitalize the openings and closings of letters.

Dear Bob, To Whom it May Concern:

Sincerely, Thank you,

Exercise 1:

The following sentences have words that need capitalization.

Underline the words and write them with capitalization on the line.

1. cordelia moved to Los Angeles. _____
2. Mary converted to the methodist faith. _____
3. Over the summer, I read *waiting for Godot*. _____
4. Pablo likes coca-cola; i prefer Pepsi. _____
5. Pamela traveled from oklahoma to hollywood. _____
6. I take my little brother trick-or-treating every halloween. _____
7. blue wall paper looks better in this room than green. _____
8. During his birthday party, phillip ordered lobster. _____
9. Erica plans to join the federal bureau of investigation when she graduates.

10. Last night, we watched "Beauty and the beast." _____

Exercise 2:

Rewrite the following sentences with capital letters.

1. lucy and ricky drove across the united states.

2. claude monet painted in the impressionist period.

3. f. scott fitzgerald wrote *the great gatsby*.

4. i plan to take english 101 this semester.

5. my friend from switzerland can speak five languages: english, french, german, dutch, and italian.

This Handout is based on the following texts:

Fact Monster/Information Please. "Capitalization." Pearson Education. 2007. Web. 15 September 2010.
<<http://www.factmonster.com/ipka/A0771333.html>>

Purdue OWL. "A Little Help with Capitals." The OWL at Purdue. 07 April 2010. Web. 15 September 2010.
<<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/592/1/>>

Please visit our website at www.lavc.edu/WCweb/index.html for additional resources and services. Revised 07/05/18