

Capitalization Rules

Rule 1

Capitalize the first word of a quoted sentence.

Examples:

*He said, "Treat her as you would your own daughter."
"Look out!" she screamed. "You almost ran into my child."*

Rule 2

Capitalize a proper noun.

Example:

Golden Gate Bridge

Rule 3

Capitalize a person's title when it precedes the name. Do not capitalize when the title is acting as a description following the name.

Examples:

*Chairperson Petrov
Ms. Petrov, the chairperson of the company, will address us at noon.*

Rule 4

Capitalize the person's title when it follows the name on the address or signature line.

Example:

*Sincerely,
Ms. Haines, Chairperson*

Rule 5

Capitalize the titles of high-ranking government officials when used before their names. Do not capitalize the civil title if it is used instead of the name.

Examples:

*The president will address Congress.
All senators are expected to attend.
The governors, lieutenant governors, and attorneys general called for a special task force.
Governor Fortinbrass, Lieutenant Governor Poppins, Attorney General Dalloway, and Senators James and Twain will attend.*

Rule 6

Capitalize any title when used as a direct address.

Example:

Will you take my temperature, Doctor?

Rule 7

Capitalize points of the compass only when they refer to specific regions.

Examples:

*We have had three relatives visit from the South.
Go south three blocks and then turn left.*

Handout 1.10

We live in the southeast section of town.

Southeast is just an adjective here describing section, so it should not be capitalized.

Rule 8

Always capitalize the first and last words of titles of publications regardless of their parts of speech. Capitalize other words within titles, including the short verb forms *Is*, *Are*, and *Be*.

Exception:

Do not capitalize little words within titles such as *a*, *an*, *the*, *but*, *as*, *if*, *and*, *or*, *nor*, or prepositions, regardless of their length.

Examples:

The Day of the Jackal

What Color Is Your Parachute?

A Tale of Two Cities

Rule 9

Capitalize *federal* or *state* when used as part of an official agency name or in government documents where these terms represent an official name. If they are being used as general terms, you may use lowercase letters.

Examples:

The state has evidence to the contrary.

That is a federal offense.

The State Board of Equalization collects sales taxes.

We will visit three states during our summer vacation.

The Federal Bureau of Investigation has been subject to much scrutiny and criticism lately.

Her business must comply with all county, state, and federal laws.

Rule 10

You may capitalize words such as *department*, *bureau*, and *office* if you have prepared your text in the following way:

Example:

The Bureau of Land Management (Bureau) has some jurisdiction over Indian lands. The Bureau is finding its administrative role to be challenging.

Rule 11

Do not capitalize names of seasons.

Example:

I love autumn colors and spring flowers.

Rule 12

Capitalize the first word of a salutation and the first word of a complimentary close.

Examples:

Dear Ms. Mohamed:

My dear Mr. Sanchez:

Very truly yours,

Handout 1.10

Rule 13

Capitalize words derived from proper nouns.

Example:

I must take English and math.

English is capitalized because it comes from the proper noun *England*, but *math* does not come from *Mathland*.

Rule 14

Capitalize the names of specific course titles.

Example:

I must take history and Algebra 2.

Rule 15

After a sentence ending with a colon, do not capitalize the first word if it begins a list.

Example:

These are my favorite foods: chocolate cake, spaghetti, and artichokes.

Rule 16

Do not capitalize when only one sentence follows a sentence ending with a colon.

Example:

I love Jane Smiley's writing: her book, A Thousand Acres, was beautiful.

Rule 17

Capitalize when two or more sentences follow a sentence ending with a colon.

Example:

I love Jane Smiley's writing: Her book, A Thousand Acres, was beautiful. Also, Moo was clever.

Adapted from Straus, J. (2012). Capitalization Rules. *The Blue Book of Grammar and Punctuation*. <http://www.grammarbook.com/punctuation/capital.asp>

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