

Capitalisation

Knowing when to use capital letter may seem basic but, it can get tricky and confusing especially when writing formal academic piece. Capitalization is the use of uppercase of the first letter of a word while the rest of the letters are in lowercase. The main aim for capitalization is to draw attention to specific word, phrase or sentence. This resources though not exhaustive gives standard accepted rules on when to (/not to) capitalize in academic writing. In addition to capitalizing the first letter of the word at the beginning of a sentence and the first letter after a period, these rules apply in using capital letters.

#1. Proper noun and adjectives derived from proper noun

Capitalize proper nouns – names of people, specific places and things

Example: The name **Kenneth** is a proper noun

Capitalize proper noun derivatives – words derived from proper noun

Example: The word **English** should be capitalized because it is derived from England.

#2. Common nouns and adjectives when used as part of a specific name

Example: “road” as a common noun won’t be capitalized but “Anzio Road” will be capitalized because it is part of a specific road.

#3. Titles and profession

Capitalize titles when they are on the signature lines or when it is in direct address of a person.

Examples: Max Price, the **Vice-chancellor** University of Cape Town.

Director, you are welcome to the dinner party.

Capitalize titles when they come immediately before a name.

Example: **Mr.** John is kind.

Do not capitalize a title if it is not directly addressing a person or not followed by a comma, when used after a name or instead of a name

Example: we are expecting the **dean** this afternoon

Do not capitalize occupation before a full name, always note the difference between an occupation and a title.

Example: **Dr.** Mark Smith is a title, but the medical **doctor**, Mark Smith is a profession

NB: That out of respect some highest ranks in government, royalty or religion may be capitalised but it is not a generalised rule

Example: The **King** will issue a law today

#4. Quotes

Capitalize the first letter of the first word of a quote, so long as the quote is a complete sentences

Example: Carol Burnett said, “**Only** I can change my life, no one will do it for me.”

#5. Direction

Capitalize specific geographic location but not points of a compass

Example: Work towards the **west** and then take a turn (“west” is not capitalized because is a point on a compass)

In the **West** technology is quite advanced (“West” is capitalized because it refers to a specific location).



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#6. Long words of title phrase

Capitalize long words of title phrases of books, movies and publications but not short words

Example: Long Walk to **F**reedom, The **K**ing of the **J**ungle, Coming to America

#7. Sentences after a colon

Capitalize the first word of the phrases/sentences that come after a colon, if there are more than one of them after the colon.

Example: We are expected to do the following: **C**lean out the lab, **W**rite our assignments and **S**uggest potential reviewers

Do not capitalize when only list of words comes after a colon or just one sentence

Example: We realized that we are missing; **d**ate, **i**ntroduction and **a**bstract in the submission we made.

The list of departments are; physiotherapy, surgery, neuroscience and psychology

#8. First word of a salutation and closing word

Capitalize the first word of a salutation in a letter. Example: **D**ear Jane

And the closing word: Example: **Y**ours sincerely, Jane

#9. Relatives' family/kinship names

Capitalize a relatives' family name when they immediately precedes the personal names or directly replaces the personal name

Examples: It was great to see you again **U**ncle

Don't attach a lot of emotion to this **G**randpa

In addition to these specific standard rules above other generalized occasions where capitalization is necessary are as follows.

As a general rule these should also be capitalised; brand names, companies, days of the week and months of the year, Governmental matters (e.g. *Congress (but not congressional), the U.S. Constitution (but not constitutional)*), historical episodes and eras (*the American Revolutionary War, the Great Depression*), Holidays, Institutions (*Oxford College, the Juilliard School of Music*), man-made structures (*the Union Building, the Liberty status, the Titanic*), man-made territories (*Berlin, Montana, Cook County*), Natural and manmade landmarks (*Lake Victoria, Kainji Dam*), Nicknames and epithets (*James "Mentalist" Smith, Master of Ontario, the Sultan of Swat*), Organizations (*South African Institute of law and justice, Norwegian Ministry of the Environment*), Planets (*Mercury, Uranus, Neptune*), Whether to capitalize "earth" depends on whether it is the main focus in a sentence e.g. We learned that Earth travels through space at 66,700 miles per hour.

Also capitalise: Races, nationalities, and tribes (*Zulu, Swahili, East Indian, Caucasian, African American (Note: white and black with regards to race should be in lowercase)*), Religions and names of deities

Note: Capitalise the Bible (but not biblical). Do not capitalise heaven, hell, the devil, satanic.

Capitalise special occasions (*the Olympic Games, the Cannes Film Festival*), streets and roads.

References

<https://www.scribendi.com/advice/capitalization.en.html>

<http://www.grammarbook.com/punctuation/capital.asp>

Compiled by the FHS Writing Lab, 2024.



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