

The background is split into two main sections. The left section is a solid purple color with a faint, light-colored dotted grid pattern. The right section is white with a dense, overlapping layer of 3D letter cutouts in various colors (purple, white, and light blue). The word "Capitalization" is written in white, sans-serif font across the purple section.

Capitalization

General Capitalization

Should you write "The king is here" or "The King is here"? This is a very tough question for lots of people. The real question is "When should you capitalize letters?" Although this may seem like a difficult question for lots of writers, the answer is quite simple when you know the rules. Below, you will find a list of capitalization rules that will help you in most writing situations.

1. The first letter of every new sentence is capitalized. Example: **M**y mother is from Seoul. **M**y father grew up in Taegu.
2. The pronoun I is always capitalized. Example: Robert and **I** are going to discuss the political situation.
3. Titles of people are only capitalized when they are followed by someone's name. Example: That is the president of the United States. That is **P**resident Bush.
4. Proper names of places, specific buildings, rivers, mountains, and other geographic locations are capitalized.
Example:
A: That is a long river.
B: Yes, it is. That is the **N**ile **R**iver, which runs through Africa.
C: I go to church every week. I go to the **F**irst **B**aptist **C**hurch of **N**ew **Y**ork.
5. Proper names of people. Example: This is my friend. Her name is **J**ennifer.
6. All proper names of things, companies, religions, deities, and languages. Intel wants to hire people who speak **S**panish and **F**rench.
7. Capitalize the days of the week, months, and holidays. **V**alentine's **D**ay is on **M**onday, **F**ebruary 14th.
8. Capitalize names of documents, organizations, clubs, and historical events. Example: The **D**eclaration of **I**ndependence made the king of England very angry. This eventually started the **U**nited **S**tates **R**evolutionary **W**ar.
9. Direction words (north, south, east, and west) should only be capitalized when they refer to a region or section of a country. Example:
A: The **W**est offers lots of job opportunities.
B: How do I get to the Moonlight Restaurant? Go west 3 blocks. It is on the right.

Capitalization Rules

The first word in sentences.

This seems like such a basic rule that you may wonder why I include it, but it is the source of many writing errors. Since e-mail became popular, it seems that many people think it is acceptable (or even cute) to not capitalize properly. Even in informal messages, it is important to communicate clearly. That means capitalizing properly.

The names of people and nicknames.

When should the word mom be capitalized? This is a question many students cannot answer correctly, and many spell-check programs don't seem to know either because they force you to capitalize mom, dad, aunt, uncle, and other words that indicate one's place in the family. Such words are capitalized only when they refer to a specific person and are used in place of that person's name.

The pronoun I.

This is another rule that seemed simple until e-mail came along. Also, I've noticed that some students like to decorate a lower-case I by turning the dot into a smiley face or heart. How adorable! But don't do it!

Days, months, and holidays.

The names of specific streets and roads.

The key word here is *specific*. If the street is named (e.g., Elm Street) you capitalize both the name and the word street. If it's just a street (or avenue, road, court, drive, or lane), the word does not need to be capitalized.

Cities, states, townships, localities, burgs, hamlets, fiefdoms, and countries (i.e., proper nouns that name places).

Other specific places and structures.

Again, *specific* is important. They have to be proper nouns that name specific places or structures.

This is a sentence.

So is this.

Notice how I capitalize the first letter in each sentence.

You've known this rule since first grade.

Don't break it.

The girl went by the name **C**atie even though her mother called her **C**atherine. His mom went to the store. (not a proper noun)

I asked **M**om to help me. (proper noun)

My uncle is a funny guy. (not part of a name)

I wrote **U**ncle **S**teve a letter. (part of a name)

My friends and **I** are ready to leave now. If **I** were you, **I** would capitalize correctly even in informal e-mail messages.

I can't believe that **W**ednesday, **D**ecember 25, is **C**hristmas **D**ay. We went to Bob's house on **E**aster in **A**pril. Let's have lunch next **F**riday.

Our school is on **F**airfield **R**oad. Jerry lives on **C**reekside **A**venue. The house is located on a street called **E**we **T**urn.

I was born in **L**ayton, **U**tah, in the **U**nited **S**tates of **A**merica. (no capitalization of prepositions or articles: a, an, the, of, in, on, etc.) My sister lives in **R**iverdale, which is a part of **S**outh **O**gden.

We visited a monument. (not specific)

We visited the **W**ashington **M**onument. (specific) I live near a lake. (not specific)

I live near the **G**reat **S**alt **L**ake. (specific)

Capitalization Rules Cont.

The first word in a quoted sentence.

The teacher said, "You must capitalize the first word in a direct quote." The students asked, "Even if it's a fragment?"
The teacher replied, "Yes!"

Titles.

This could mean titles of books, magazines, articles, CDs, songs, poems, writing assignments, works of art, names of ships, you get the idea. Capitalize titles. Note: Do not capitalize articles (a, an, the) or prepositions of less than four letters in titles unless they are the first word in the title; always capitalize the first word.

We read *Nothing but the Truth* and *The Pigman*.
(Books, movies, television shows, and albums should be in italics or underlined.) My research paper was entitled "Thomas Jefferson: The Voice of an Age."
The new CD is called *Rock and Roll Forever*.

Abbreviations that refer to proper nouns.

Some abbreviations do not need to be capitalized. Those little Latin abbreviations like etc., i.e., e.g., and et. al. don't require capitalization. (A note about etc: Et cetera is Latin for "and so on." Writers who use this abbreviation a lot are lazy; it shows that they just didn't care enough to write out the rest of an example or list. Worse than that, however, is the writer who misspells the abbreviation like this: ect., which is not an abbreviation of anything. It's just really annoying! So be careful with etc. please.)

I saw Dr. Smith at the movies. We gave the gift to Mr. and Mrs. Jones.
The satellite went over at 11:23 P.M.
The ancient tribe roamed the earth in 430 B.C.
The guy at the gate was St. Peter.
You should capitalize titles, cities, states, etc.

Titles of persons and organizations.

The American Cancer Society helps many people. A true humanitarian is President Carter.

Races, nationalities, and languages.

Bill Cosby is an African-American comedian. Marco speaks Spanish. My grandmother was Irish.

Religions.

I am Catholic, but all my friends are Methodists.

Words pertaining to deity and sacred writings.

He prayed to God and asked for His help.
(Pronouns that refer to deity are also capitalized.) She reads the Bible every night.

Historical periods, events, and documents.

The Battle of Shiloh was a bloody fight. Read the Declaration of Independence.

The salutation and closing of a letter.

Science flourished during the Age of Reason.

The names of classes in school.

Dear Aunt Edna, Sincerely,

Don't capitalize the words (except languages, which are always capitalized) when they do not refer to specific classes.

I am taking English 8, Algebra, Health, and Music.
I studied algebra and history in college. (not names of specific classes)

Rules to Remember

1. Don't capitalize letters anytime you want. There are definite rules that answer most capitalization questions.
2. Don't capitalize "mom" and "dad" unless you are referring to them as names.
3. Don't capitalize winter, spring, summer, and fall.
4. Only the first letters of words in titles of books and essays should be capitalized. It is common to NOT capitalize small words in titles such as:

" of, a, an, and the."

However, these words should be capitalized if they are the first word in the title.

