

# Capitalization

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Capitalizing words correctly builds your credibility as a writer and increases the clarity of your work. This handout will explain some guidelines for capitalization, but if you are in doubt about whether or not to capitalize a word, look it up in a dictionary or a credible reference book for your field.

## Proper Nouns

Capitalize proper nouns. These are words that refer to specific persons, places, or things.

**Example:** As **Ann Lee** drove her car down **Center Street**, the people of **Provo** laughed.

Capitalize an adjective created from a proper noun.

**Example:** The drama was very **Shakespearian**.

## Titles

Capitalize **titles** when used as part of a person's name.

**Example:** Judge Roberts introduced **Mrs. Bell** to **Mayor Jones**.

Titles are **not** capitalized when they are **used in place of a name** or as a descriptive tag.

**Example:** George Washington, the **president**, enjoyed riding horses.

**Example:** The **judge** made an unexpected ruling on the robbery case.

## Specific Institutions

Capitalize the entire name of a specific institution.

**Example:** Most students who attend **Brigham Young University** study at the **Harold B. Lee Library** rather than at the city library.

## Language Courses and Specific Courses

Capitalize a specific course but do not capitalize general subjects.

**Note:** Names of languages are always capitalized whether they are part of a course title or are simply general subjects.

**Example:** Even though my major is chemistry, I will take **Biology 100**, **Philosophy 105**, and two history courses to fulfill general education requirements. I will also take a **Spanish** class next semester.

## Calendar Events or Time Periods

Capitalize days of the week and months, as well as days with specific titles, but do not capitalize seasons (winter, spring, summer, fall).

**Example:** Christmas is on **Monday** this year.

**Example:** My favorite season is **summer** because it's warm.

## Brand Names

Capitalize the names of specific brands but not products.

**Example:** I use my **Dell** laptop to study while eating a **McDonald's** cheeseburger.

## Familial Titles

Capitalize names such as mother, father, and uncle when used directly before a proper name or when they replace someone's name. Do not capitalize family relationships when they do not refer to a specific relative or when they are preceded by a pronoun.

**Example:** At the picnic, **Grandma** gave some of the bread to **Uncle John** as well as to **Aunt Anna**, but none of my mother's uncles or aunts ate bread.

## Parts of the World

Capitalize the names of cities, states, and countries, as well as all other locations with a proper name. Directions (north, south, east, west) are not capitalized, but regions are capitalized when they refer to a specific topographical place.

**Example:** The captain directed his ship up the **Mississippi River** towards **Columbus, Ohio**, hoping eventually to reach the **Great Lakes** region of the **United States**. He observed the beautiful riverbanks of the **Midwest** as he traveled north.

## Nationalities

Capitalize the names of ethnic groups and adjectives created from those names.

**Example:** **Americans** like **American** cuisine

**Example:** **New Zealanders** like **New Zealand** fashion

**Note:** In names such as American Indians, African Americans, Italian Americans, etc., both words in the name are capitalized. The 17th edition of *The Chicago Manual of Style* recommends that hyphens not be used in two-word ethnic titles like those above (8.39). References to race, ethnicity, or culture that are based on color (black, white, etc.) are not capitalized.

## Quotes

Do not capitalize quoted material that is part of the sentence structure.

**Example:** William Shakespeare suggested that “a rose by any other name would smell as sweet.”

Capitalize the first letter of the first word when the quote is separated by punctuation and is part of its own independent clause.

**Example:** William Shakespeare said, “A rose by any other name would smell as sweet.”

**Note:** These guidelines should be used for block quotations as well.