

Handbook of Style

Capitalization

Capitals are used for two broad purposes in English: they mark a beginning (as of a sentence) and they signal a proper noun, pronoun, or adjective. The following principles, each with bracketed examples, describe the most common uses of capital letters.

Beginnings

1. The first word of a sentence or sentence fragment is capitalized.

< The play lasted nearly three hours. >

< How are you feeling? >

< Bravo! >

< ``Have you hand grenades?"

``Plenty."

``How many rounds per rifle?"

``Plenty."

``How many?"

``One hundred fifty. More maybe."

– Ernest Hemingway >

2. The first word of a sentence contained within parentheses is capitalized if it does not occur within another sentence; however, a parenthetical sentence occurring in the midst of another sentence does not begin with a capital.

< The discussion was held in the boardroom. (The results are still confidential.) >

< Although we liked the restaurant (their Italian food was the best), we seldom ate there. >

< After waiting in line for an hour (why do we do these things?), we finally left. >

3. The first word of a direct quotation is capitalized; however, if the quotation is interrupted in the middle of a sentence, the second part does not begin with a capital.

< The President said, ``We have rejected this report entirely." >

< ``We have rejected this report entirely," the President said, ``and we will not comment on it further." >

NOTE: When a quotation, whether a sentence fragment or a complete sentence, is syntactically dependent on the sentence in which it occurs, the quotation does not begin with a capital.

< The President made it clear ``that there is no room for compromise." >

4. The first word of a direct question within a sentence is capitalized.

< That question is: Is man an ape or an angel?

– Benjamin Disrael >

< My first thought was, How can I avoid this assignment? >

5. The first word of a line of poetry is capitalized.

< The best lack all conviction,
while the worst
Are full of passionate
intensity.
– W. B. Yeats >

6. The first word following a colon may be lowercased or capitalized if it introduces a complete sentence; while the former is the more usual styling, the latter is common when the sentence introduced by the colon is fairly lengthy and distinctly separate from the preceding clause.

< The advantage of this particular system is clear: it's inexpensive. >

< The situation is critical: This company cannot hope to recoup the fourth-quarter losses that were sustained in five operating divisions. >

7. The first words of run-in enumerations that form complete sentences are capitalized, as are the first words of phrasal lists and enumerations blocked beneath running texts; however, phrasal enumerations run in with the introductory text are lowercased.

< Do the following tasks at the end of the day: 1. Clean your typewriter. 2. Clear your desktop of papers. 3. Cover office machines. 4. Straighten the contents of your desk drawers, cabinets, and bookcases. >

< This is the agenda:
Call to order
Roll call
Minutes of the previous
meeting
Treasurer's report >

< On the agenda will be (1) call to order, (2) roll call, (3) minutes of the previous meeting, (4) treasurer's report. ... >

8. The first word in an outline heading is capitalized.

< I. Editorial tasks
II. Production responsibilities
A. Cost estimates
B. Bids >

9. The first word of the salutation of a letter and the first word of a complimentary close are capitalized.

< Dear Mary, >
< Gentlemen: >
< Sincerely yours, >
< Yours sincerely, >

Proper Nouns, Pronouns, and Adjectives

The essential distinction in the use of capitals and lowercase letters beginning words lies in the particularizing or individualizing significance of capitals as against the generic or generalizing significance of lowercase. A capital is used with proper nouns, that is, nouns that distinguish some individual person, place, or thing from others of the same class, and with proper adjectives, that is, adjectives that take their descriptive meaning from what is named by the noun.

Armed Forces

1. Branches and units of the armed forces are capitalized, as are easily recognized short forms of full branch and unit designations; however, the words *army*, *navy*, etc., are lowercased when standing alone, when used collectively in the plural, or when they are not part of an official title.

- < United States Army >
- < a contract with the Army >
- < Corps of Engineers >
- < a bridge built by the Engineers >
- < allied armies >

Awards

2. The names of awards and prizes are capitalized.

- < the Nobel Prize in medicine >
- < Distinguished Service Cross >
- < Academy Award >

Derivatives of Proper Names

3. Derivatives of proper names are capitalized when used in their primary sense.

- < Roman customs >
- < Shakespearean comedies >
- < Edwardian era >
- but*
- < manila envelope >
- < quixotic >< herculean >
- < bohemian tastes >

Geographical References

4. Divisions of the earth's surface and names of distinct areas, regions, places, or districts are capitalized, as are derivative adjectives and some derivative nouns and verbs.

- < The Eastern Hemisphere >
- < Midwest >< Tropic of Cancer >
- < Springfield, Massachusetts >
- < the Middle Eastern situation >
- < an Americanism >
- but*
- < a japan finish >
- < sovietize >

5. Popular names of localities are capitalized.

- < the Corn Belt >< the Loop >
- < The Big Apple >
- < the Gold Coast >
- < the Eastern Shore >

6. Words designating global, national, regional, or local political divisions are capitalized when they are essential elements of specific names; however, they are usually lowercased when they precede a proper name or stand alone.

- < the British Empire >
- < Washington State >
- < Bedford County >
- < New York City >
- < Ward 1 >

but

- < the fall of the empire >
- < the state of Washington >
- < the county of Bedford >
- < the city of New York >
- < fires in three wards >

NOTE: In legal documents, these words are often capitalized regardless of position.

- < The State of New York >
- < the County of Bedford >
- < the City of New York >

7. Generic geographical terms (as *lake, mountain, river, valley*) are capitalized if they are part of a specific proper name.

- < Hudson Bay >< Long Island >
- < Niagara Falls >< Crater Lake >

8. Generic terms preceding names are usually capitalized.

- < Lakes Michigan and Superior >
- < Mounts Whitney and Rainier >

9. Generic terms following names are usually lowercased, as are singular or plural generic terms that are used descriptively or alone.

- < the Himalaya and Andes mountains >
- < the Missouri and Platte rivers >
- < the Atlantic coast of Labrador >
- < the Hudson valley >
- < the Arizona desert >
- < the river valley >< the valley >

10. Compass points are capitalized when they refer to a geographical region or when they are part of a street name, but they are lowercased when they refer to simple

direction.

< up North >< back East >

< the Northwest >

< West Columbus Avenue >

but

< west of the Rockies >

< the west coast of Florida >

11. Adjectives derived from compass points and nouns designating the inhabitants of some geographical regions are capitalized; when in doubt consult the main vocabulary portion of this dictionary.

< a Southern accent >

< Northerners >

12. Terms designating public places are capitalized if they are part of a proper name.

< Brooklyn Bridge >< Lincoln Park >

< the Dorset Hotel >

< Independence Hall >

but

< Fifth and Park avenues >

< the Dorset and Drake hotels >

Governmental and Judicial Bodies

13. Full names of legislative, deliberative, executive, and administrative bodies are capitalized, as are easily recognized short forms of these names; however, nonspecific noun and adjective references to them are usually lowercased.

< the U.S. House of Representatives >

< the House >

< the Federal Bureau of Investigation >

but

< both houses of Congress >

< a federal agency >

14. Names of international courts, the U.S. Supreme Court, and other higher courts are capitalized; however, names of city and county courts are usually lowercased.

< The International Court of Arbitration >

< the Supreme Court of the United States >< the Supreme Court >

< the United States Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit >

< the Michigan Court of Appeals >

< Lawton municipal court >

< Newark night court >

Historical Periods and Events

15. The names of congresses, councils, and expositions are capitalized.

< the Yalta Conference >

< the Republican National Convention >

16. The names of historical events, some historical periods, and some cultural periods and movements are capitalized; when in doubt, consult the main vocabulary portion of this dictionary.

< the Boston Tea Party >

< Renaissance >

< Prohibition >

< Augustan Age >

< the Enlightenment >

but

< space age >< cold war >

< neoclassicism >

17. Numerical designations of historical time periods are capitalized when they are part of a proper name; otherwise they are lowercased.

< the Third Reich >

< Roaring Twenties >

but

< eighteenth century >

< the eighties >

18. Names of treaties, laws, and acts are capitalized.

< Treaty of Versailles >

< The Controlled Substances Act of 1970 >

Organizations

19. Names of firms, corporations, schools, and organizations and their members are capitalized; however, common nouns used descriptively and occurring after the names of two or more organizations are lowercased.

< Merriam-Webster Inc. >

< University of Wisconsin >

< European Economic Community >

< Rotary International >

< Kiwanians >

< American and United airlines >

NOTE: The word *the* at the beginning of such names is only capitalized when the legal name is referred to.

20. Words such as *group*, *division*, *department*, *office*, or *agency* that designate corporate and organizational units are capitalized when used with a specific name.

< while working for the Editorial Department of this company >

but

< a notice to all department heads >

People

21. The names of persons are capitalized. **NOTE:** The capitalization of particles (as

de, della, der, du, l', la, ten, van) varies widely especially in names of people in English-speaking countries.

- < Noah Webster >
- < Sir Arthur Thomas Quiller-Couch >
- < Thomas De Quincey >
- < Werner Von Braun >
- < Gerald ter Hoerst >

22. Titles preceding the name of a person and epithets used instead of a name are capitalized; however, titles following a name or used alone are usually lowercased.

- < President Roosevelt >
- < Professor Harris >
- < Queen Elizabeth >
- < Old Hickory >< the Iron Chancellor >
- but*
- < Henry VIII, king of England >

23. Corporate titles are capitalized when referring to specific individuals; when used in general or plural contexts, they are lowercased.

- < Laura Jones, Vice President >
- < The sales manager called me. >

24. Words of family relationship preceding or used in place of a person's name are capitalized; however, these words are lowercased if they are part of a noun phrase that is being used in place of a name.

- < Cousin Julia >
- < Grandfather Jones >
- < I know when Mother's birthday is. >
- but*
- < I know when my mother's birthday is. >

25. Words designating peoples, tribes, races, and languages are capitalized. *NOTE:* Designations based on color or local usage are variously capitalized or lowercased by different writers; however, style manuals usually recommend lowercasing such words.

- < Canadians >< Iroquois >
- < Ibo >< Afro-American >
- < Latin >< Indo-European >
- < black >< white >
- < highlander >< bushman >

Personifications

26. Personifications are capitalized.

- < She dwells with Beauty – Beauty, that must die;
And Joy, whose hand is ever at his lips
Bidding adieu.
– John Keats >
- < obey the commands of Nature >

Pronouns

27. The pronoun I is capitalized. For pronouns referring to the Deity, see rule 29 below.
< ... no one but I myself had yet printed any of my work – Paul Bowles >

Religious Terms

28. Words designating the Deity are capitalized.
< An anthropomorphic, vengeful Jehovah became a spiritual, benevolent Supreme Being. – A. R. Katz >

29. Pronouns and pronominal adjectives referring to the Deity are capitalized by some authors only when such words are not closely preceded by their antecedents; other writers capitalize these words regardless of their distance from their antecedents.

< The principal group that disagreed with them ... did so only in an even greater faith – that when God chose to save the heathen He could do it by Himself. – Elmer Davis >
< Allah will not subject any believer to eternal punishment because of His readiness to yield to the Prophet's intercession. – G. E. Grunebaum >
< The Almighty has his own purposes. – Abraham Lincoln >
< so lonely'twas, that God himself scarce seemed there to be. – S.T. Coleridge >
< all Thy works, O Lord, shall bless Thee. – *Oxford Amer. Hymnal* >
< God's in His heaven – all's right with the world! – Robert Browning >

30. Traditional designations of revered persons, as prophets, apostles, and saints are often capitalized.
< our Lady >
< the Prophet >
< the Lawgiver >

31. Names of creeds and confessions, religious denominations, and monastic orders are capitalized, as is the word *Church* when used to designate a specific body or edifice.

< Apostles' Creed >
< the Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England >
< Society of Jesus >
< Hunt Memorial Church >
but
< the Baptist church >

32. Names for the Bible or parts, versions, or editions of it and names of other sacred books are capitalized. *NOTE:* Adjectives derived from the names of sacred books are irregularly capitalized or lowercased; when in doubt, consult the main vocabulary portion of this dictionary.

< Authorized Version >< New English Bible >< Old Testament >
< Pentateuch >< Apocrypha >
< Gospel of Saint Mark >< Talmud >
< Koran >

Scientific Terms

33. Names of planets and their satellites, asteroids, stars, constellations, and groups of stars and other unique celestial objects are capitalized; however, the words *sun*, *earth*, and *moon* are usually lowercased unless they occur with other astronomical names.

- < Venus >
- < Ganymede >
- < Sirius >
- < Pleiades >
- < the Milky Way >
- < probes heading for the Moon and Mars >+XW

34. Genera in binomial scientific names in zoology and botany are capitalized; names of species are not.

- < a cabbage butterfly (*Pieris rapae*) >
- < a common buttercup (*Ranunculus acris*) >
- < a robin (*Turdus migratorius*) >

35. New Latin names of classes, families, and all groups above genera in zoology and botany are capitalized; however, their derivative adjectives and nouns are not.

- < Gastropoda >*but* < gastropod >
- < Thallophyta >*but*
- < thallophyte >

36. Geological eras, periods, epochs, strata, and names of prehistoric divisions are capitalized.

- < Silurian period >
- < Pleistocene epoch >
- < Age of Reptiles >
- < Neolithic age >

Time Periods and Zones

37. The names of days of the week, months of the year, and holidays and holy days are capitalized.

- < Tuesday >
- < June >
- < Thanksgiving >
- < Independence Day >< Easter >
- < Yom Kippur >

38. The names of time zones are capitalized when abbreviated but usually lowercased when spelled out except for words that are proper names.

See also rules 16 and 17 above.

- < CST >
- < central standard time >

< Pacific standard time >

Titles of Printed Matter

39. Words in titles are capitalized with the exception of internal conjunctions, prepositions, and articles. *NOTE:* In some publications, prepositions of five or more letters (as *about*, *toward*) are capitalized also.

< *The Lives of a Cell* >

< *Of Mice and Men* >

< "The Man Who Would Be King" >

< "To His Coy Mistress" >

< "Acquainted with the Night" >

40. Major sections (as a preface, introduction, or index) of books, long articles, or reports are capitalized when they are specifically referred to within the same material; however, the word *chapter* is lowercased and spelled out in text.

< See the Appendix for further information. >

< The Introduction explains the scope of this book. >

< discussed later in chapter 4 >

Capitalization of the titles of movies, plays, and musical compositions follows similar conventions. For more details, see the Italicization section above.

Trademarks

41. Registered trademarks and service marks are capitalized.

< Dubonnet > < Orlon > < Air Express >

< Laundromat >

Vehicles

42. The names of ships, aircraft, and spacecraft are capitalized.

< M.V. *West Star* >

< Lindbergh's *Spirit of St. Louis* >

< *Apollo 13* >