

A Little Help with Capitals

This handout lists some guidelines for capitalization. If you have a question about whether a specific word should be capitalized that doesn't fit under one of these rules, try checking a dictionary to see if the word is capitalized there.

Use capital letters in the following ways:

1. The first words of a sentence

Ex. *When he tells a joke, he sometimes forgets the punch line.*

2. The pronoun "I"

Ex. *The last time I visited Atlanta was several years ago.*

3. Proper nouns (the names of specific people, places, organizations, and sometimes things)

Ex. *Worrill Fabrication Company
Golden Gate Bridge
Supreme Court
Livingston, Missouri
Atlantic Ocean
Mothers Against Drunk Driving*

4. Family relationships (when used as proper names)

Ex. *I sent a thank-you note to Aunt Abigail, but not to my other aunts.*

Here is a present I bought for Mother.

Did you buy a present for your mother?

5. The names of God, specific deities, religious figures, and holy books

Ex. *God the Father*
the Virgin Mary
the Bible
the Greek gods
Moses
Shiva
Buddha
Zeus

Exception: Do not capitalize the nonspecific use of the word "god."

Ex. *The word "polytheistic" means the worship of more than one god.*

6. Titles preceding names, but not titles that follow names

Ex. *She worked as the assistant to Mayor Hanolovi.*

I was able to interview Miriam Moss, mayor of Littonville.

7. Directions that are names (North, South, East, and West when used as sections of the country, but not as compass directions)

Ex. *The Patels have moved to the Southwest.*

Jim's house is two miles north of Otterbein.

8. The days of the week, the months of the year, and holidays (but not the seasons used generally)

Ex. *Halloween*
October
Friday
winter
spring
fall

Exception: Seasons are capitalized when used in a title.

The Fall 2011 semester

9. The names of countries, nationalities, and specific languages

Ex. *Costa Rica*
Spanish
French
English

10. The first word in a sentence that is a direct quote

Ex. *Emerson once said, "A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds."*

11. The major words in the titles of books, articles, and songs (but not short prepositions or the articles "the," "a," or "an," if they are not the first word of the title)

Ex. *One of Jerry's favorite books is The Catcher in the Rye.*

12. Members of national, political, racial, social, civic, and athletic groups

Ex. *Green Bay Packers*
African-Americans
Anti-Semitic
Democrats
Friends of the Wilderness
Chinese

13. Periods and events (but not century numbers)

Ex. *Victorian Era*
Great Depression
Constitutional Convention
Sixteenth century

14. Trademarks

Ex. *Pepsi*
Honda
IBM
Microsoft Word

15. Words and abbreviations of specific names (but not names of things that came from specific things but are now general types)

Ex. Freudian
NBC
pasteurize
UN
french fries
italics

Source Credits:

The above was prepared with much appreciation of the use of an original OWL document which can be found at the site noted below.

Welcome to the Purdue OWL

This page is brought to you by the OWL at Purdue (<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/>). When printing this page, you must include the entire legal notice at bottom.

Contributors:Chris Berry, Allen Brizee.

Summary:

This resource details standard capitalization rules.

Copyright ©1995-2011 by [The Writing Lab](#) & [The OWL at Purdue](#) and [Purdue University](#). All rights reserved. This material may not be published, reproduced, broadcast, rewritten, or redistributed without permission. Use of this site constitutes acceptance of [our terms and conditions of fair use](#).