

**APSU Writing Center**  
Capitalization

**General Capitalization Rules**

- Capitalize proper nouns (specific people, places, and things).
- Do not capitalize common nouns (*general* people, places, and things).
- Always capitalize the first word in every sentence.
  - **Example:** The dog ran across the garden.

**Abbreviations**

- Capitalize abbreviations and acronyms for organizations, agencies, associations, countries, states, provinces, academic degrees, and professional designations.
  - **Examples:** FBI, NBA

**Geographic Locations**

- Capitalize continents, countries, regions, cities, and towns.
  - **Examples:** The United States, the South
- Capitalize directional words only when referring to a specific region, not direction.
  - Examples: The South, go south, West, go west

**Computers**

- Capitalize the names of computer programs, keys, and menu items.
  - **Examples:** Microsoft Word, Google Chrome

**Degrees**

- Capitalize abbreviations of academic degrees and professional designations.
  - **Examples:** Jane Doe, PhD; David Smith, M.D.
- Do not capitalize when spelled out.
  - **Examples:** master's degree, doctor of dental surgery

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**Directions**

- Capitalize when indicating a region.
  - **Example:** The Western Hemisphere
- Do not capitalize when giving directions.
  - **Examples:** go south, head east

**Family Titles**

- Capitalize when used as a name or direct address.
  - **Examples:** Mom, Uncle Bill, Cousin Ellie
- Do not capitalize when paired with a possessive pronoun.
  - **Examples:** my niece, your aunt, your uncle

**Historical Periods and Events**

- Capitalize names of historical eras, movements, and events.
  - **Examples:** The Roaring Twenties, The Great Awakening

**Geographical Features**

- Capitalize names of specific natural landmarks.
  - **Examples:** The Rocky Mountains, Death Valley

**Landmarks**

- Capitalize names of buildings, monuments, parks, schools, and other notable places.
  - **Examples:** Austin Peay State University, Golden Gate Bridge

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**Government and Military**

- Capitalize when referring to specific entities.
  - **Examples:** The United States Government, Central Intelligence Agency
- Capitalize **Administration**, **Cabinet**, and **Federal** when referring to specific bodies.
  - **Examples:** The Bush Administration, the President's Cabinet
- Capitalize **Nation** or **Republic** when substituting for a country's name.
  - **Examples:** The Nation stands united.
- Capitalize names of official courts.
  - **Examples:** The Supreme Court, Court of Appeals
- Do not capitalize generic systems of government or lower courts.
  - **Examples:** democratic republic, city court

**Names of Persons**

- Capitalize names of individuals and nicknames.
  - **Examples:** John Jacob Doe, Richard the Lionhearted
- Capitalize words derived from personal names.
  - **Examples:** Marxism, Keynesian economics
- Capitalize prepositions and articles in names only when not preceded by a first name or title.
  - **Examples:** Van Leeuwen, Thomas van Leeuwen

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**Personal Titles**

- Capitalize academic, religious, government, and honorary titles when used before a name or as a direct address.
  - **Examples:** Professor Smith, Reverend Johnson, “Hello, Officer”
- Do not capitalize when used generically.
  - **Examples:** “The doctor is in” or “I hope to be president”.
- Do not capitalize former, ex-, or -elect.
  - **Example:** former President George Bush

**Planets**

- Capitalize names of planets, stars, and celestial bodies.
  - **Examples:** Mercury, Venus, Earth

**Race, Ethnicity, Nationality, and Language**

- Capitalize all names of races, ethnicities, nationalities, and related languages.
  - **Examples:** Canadian, Asian, Spanish

**Religion**

- Capitalize names of religions, sects, and derived terms.
  - **Examples:** Islam, Buddhism, Christianization
- Capitalize sacred books, versions, and sections.
  - **Examples:** Holy Bible, Koran
- Capitalize names of religious creeds, traditions, and deities.
  - **Examples:** The Lord’s Supper, the Four Noble Truths, God, Buddha

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**Thoroughfares**

- Capitalize names of streets, highways, and interstates.
  - **Examples:** Madison Street, Interstate 40

**Time and Date**

- Capitalize days, months, and holidays.
  - **Examples:** Monday, September, Christmas Day
- Do not capitalize: seasons, a.m., p.m., noon, or midnight.
  - **Examples:** spring, winter, noon

**Titles of Works**

- Capitalize main words in titles of books, films, songs, and artworks.
  - **Examples:** *The Scarlet Letter*, *The Wedding March*
- Do not capitalize short articles, prepositions, or conjunctions unless first or last in the title.
  - **Examples:** *The Woman in Black*, *The Lion*, *the Witch*, and *the Wardrobe*

**Organizations**

- Capitalize names of official groups, associations, and institutions.
  - **Examples:** The American Cancer Society, Student Government Association