

Capitalization

APSU Writing Center Handout

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

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

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

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

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