

Capitalization

When a word is capitalized, it usually signifies importance. Below is a list of instances and examples of when words need to be capitalized.

When to Capitalize

The First Word of a Sentence

The first word of a sentence should always be capitalized.

It is easy to take care of turtles.

The house on the corner is for sale.

Proper Nouns

Proper nouns, which include the names of people and places, should always be capitalized.

I always find time to email ***Karen***.

Karen is the name of a person.

Last summer we went to ***Scotland*** for three weeks.

Scotland is the name of a place.

Given Titles as Part of Proper Names

Capitalize the title when it directly refers to the individual. In most instances, you do not capitalize the title if it is used after the name as a description.

I enjoy listening to ***Professor*** Hall's lectures.

"Professor" is capitalized because it is a part of Hall's title.

Professor, when is the paper due?

"Professor" is capitalized because the professor is being addressed directly.

Johnson, a ***professor*** at my school, gives interesting lectures.

"Professor" is not capitalized because it describes Johnson and is written after his name.

Titles

Capitalize the first and last words in a title. Also capitalize nouns and verbs within a title. Prepositions and articles are not capitalized unless they are the first or last word of the title.

To Kill a Mockingbird

“To” is the first word of the title. “Kill” is capitalized because it is a verb. The word “a” is not capitalized because it is an article. “Mockingbird” is capitalized because it is a noun.

The Catcher in the Rye

“The” is the first word of the title, so it is capitalized. “Catcher” is capitalized because it is a noun. The word “in” is not capitalized because it is a preposition. The word “the” is not capitalized because it is an article. “Rye” is capitalized because it is a noun.

When Not to Capitalize

Names of Seasons

Do not capitalize the names of seasons (winter, spring, summer, or fall).

My favorite season is **winter**.

In California, it is too hot in the **summer**.

I am enrolled in five classes for the **fall** 2013 semester.

Directions

Do not capitalize the names of directions (north, east, south, or west). An exception to this rule is if the direction is pertaining to a specific place.

Canada is **north** of the United States.

Here, “north” is used to tell the direction of Canada and is not capitalized.

Canada is in the **North**.

Here, “North” is the name of a specific place.

The First Word in a List of Common Nouns after a Colon

Do not capitalize the first word after a colon when introducing a list of common nouns.

Adam plays three instruments: **the piano**, the drums, and the guitar.

In this sentence, “the piano” is a common noun and is the first word of the list after the colon.

Activity 1

Directions: Capitalize words as necessary in the following sentences.

1. my mother is a beautiful singer.
2. my friend courtney goes to school in campbell.
3. the meeting with mayor wilson was a success.
4. wilson, the mayor of our city, gave an inspirational speech.
5. trevor always looks forward to summer when he will have time to practice with his band.
6. we drove west for two hours before reaching the ski lodge.
7. my grandparents live in the south on canyon lake.
8. after karate practice, steve had three things to do: stretch, take a shower, and go to bed.

Answer Key for Activity 1

1. **M**y mother is a beautiful singer.
2. **M**y friend **C**ourtney goes to school in **C**ampbell.
3. **T**he meeting with **M**ayor **W**ilson was a success.
4. **W**ilson, the mayor of our city, gave an inspirational speech.
5. **T**revor always looks forward to summer when he will have time to practice with his band.
6. **W**e drove west for two hours before reaching the ski lodge.
7. **M**y grandparents live in the **S**outh on **C**anyon **L**ake.
8. **A**fter karate practice, **S**teve had three things to do: stretch, take a shower, and go to bed.

Activity 2

Directions: In the following titles, capitalize words as needed.

1. *my name is memory*
2. *a company of swans*
3. *gone with the wind*
4. *the night thoreau spent in jail*

Answer Key for Activity 2

1. *My Name Is Memory*
2. *A Company of Swans*
3. *Gone with the Wind*
4. *The Night Thoreau Spent in Jail*