

Grammar Capitalization

Capital letters help readers recognize the beginnings of complete sentences and distinguish between proper and common nouns.

PROPER VS. COMMON NOUNS

Most often, a word is capitalized based on whether it is a **common** or **proper noun**. Proper nouns are the names of specific people, places, organizations, things, etc. They should always be capitalized. On the other hand, common nouns name general people, places, things, ideas, etc. and are not capitalized. The following table lists proper nouns and related common nouns:

PROPER NOUNS	COMMON NOUNS
God (as a name)	a god
Book of Job	a sacred book
Salt Lake Tribune	a newspaper
Renaissance	the sixteenth century
Aunt Claire	my aunt
Mother	my mother
Utah Valley State College	a college
History 1010	history
Central Intelligence Agency	a federal agency
John F. Kennedy	a former president
Microsoft Access	a database

Note the following additional guidelines for identifying proper nouns:

TITLES

People's names and titles are proper nouns and should be capitalized; however, when used as common nouns, titles should not be capitalized.

EXAMPLES: **Professor Jenny Smith** (proper) a professor (common)
 General Colin Powell (proper) a general (common)

REGIONAL NAMES

Most geographic names, including those of specific regions or sections of a country, are proper nouns and should be capitalized. Cardinal directions, however, are common nouns and are not capitalized.

EXAMPLES: I visited the **Middle East** last spring for vacation.
 Drive south on **Highway 15** for 10 miles; then go east on **University Street**.

BRAND NAMES

Because brand names are proper nouns, they should be capitalized. However, general product names should not be capitalized.

EXAMPLES: **Kleenex** tissues, **Xerox** machine, **Coke**, **Jeep**

UNITS OF TIME

Capitalize days of the week, months, and holidays.

EXAMPLES: **Monday**, **January**, **Christmas**

Do not capitalize seasons, school terms, academic years, or centuries.

EXAMPLES: summer, fall, winter semester
 senior year, the twentieth century

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COMPUTER TERMS

Electronic sources are considered proper nouns. Other computer terms follow general rules of capitalization: capitalize brand names but not general product names.

EXAMPLES: Internet, World Wide Web, Microsoft Word, word processor

ACADEMIC SUBJECTS

Academic subjects are considered common nouns, but languages and course titles are proper nouns.

EXAMPLES: chemistry, philosophy (common)
German, English, Philosophy 1010 (proper)

OTHER GUIDELINES

Some situations require capitalization even if the word in question is not necessarily a proper noun.

ACRONYMS

Capitalize acronyms created from capitalized words.

EXAMPLES: AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome)
FBI (Federal Bureau of Investigation)
UVSC (Utah Valley State College)

BEGINNING OF A SENTENCE

Capitalize the first word of a complete sentence.

EXAMPLE: My dog likes to go for walks in the park. He chases ducks near the river.

LETTER CLOSINGS

Capitalize only the first word in the closing of a letter.

EXAMPLE: Sincerely,
All my best wishes,

PERSONAL PRONOUN I

Capitalize the pronoun *I*, even when it is used in a contraction.

EXAMPLES: I'll buy pizza for dinner because I do not have anything else to eat.

PROPER ADJECTIVES

Adjectives formed from proper nouns should be capitalized.

EXAMPLES: Italian dressing, Swedish meatballs, Sprite bottle

QUOTES

Capitalize the first word in a direct quote that is a complete sentence.

EXAMPLE: Jamie said, "When I read the newspaper everyday, I learn new information."

Do not capitalize the first word of a quote when it is part of the sentence that introduces it.

EXAMPLE: According to my friend Jamie, people that read the newspaper every day "learn new information."

TITLES OF WORKS

Capitalize all main words in titles of works, including books, magazine articles, films, and songs.

EXAMPLES: I am reading "Laugh of the Day" in *Reader's Digest*.

NOTE: When you are uncertain whether a word should be capitalized or not, consult a dictionary, grammar handbook, or other text.