

## Not Sure When to Use Capitalization?

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### 1. Quotations

Capitalize the first word in quotations, provided the quoted material is a complete sentence.

For example:

Ralph Waldo Emerson said, "*The* only way to have a friend is to be one."

### 2. Proper nouns

Use capitals for proper [nouns](#). In other words, capitalize the names of people, specific places, and things.

For example:

We don't capitalize the word "bridge" unless it starts a sentence, but we must capitalize *Brooklyn Bridge* because it is the name of a specific bridge.

OR

The word "country" would not normally be capitalized, but we would have to write *China* with a capital "C" because it is the name of a specific country.

OR

The word "state", while not normally capitalized, would be written with a capital if it is in the name of an organization, such as *The State Board of Education*.

### 3. Titles

Capitalize titles when they are on the signature line of a letter, when the title comes immediately before a name, or when the title replaces the use of a name (i.e., a title used as a direct address).

Here are some examples:

Sincerely,

Vicky Marquez, *President*

OR

Ms. Vicky Marquez

OR

Hello, *Senator*. It's nice to see you again.

Do not capitalize titles when they are not used as a direct address to a person. For example:

The *senator* will be in town today to inspect the building of the railway.

#### 4. Directions

Capitalize directions only when they refer to specific regions.

For example:

My favorite place in the world is *Northern Ontario*.

Do not capitalize "north," "south," "east," and "west" when giving directions:

Drive six blocks *north*, and then turn right.

#### 5. Titles of publications

All large words in the titles of movies, books, and other publications should be capitalized, while all small words (a, an, the, but, and, if, as, or, nor, to name a few) should not be capitalized unless they are the first or last words in the title:

*A Life Less Ordinary* (The word "A" would not normally be capitalized, but because it is the first word in the title, we must capitalize it.)

OR

*War of the Worlds* (The words "of" and "the" are not capitalized because they are small and are not at the beginning or end of the title.<sup>1</sup>)

#### 6. Salutations

The first word of a salutation should be capitalized, as well as the first word of a closing. For example:

*Dear Billy,*

OR

*Regards,*

John Smith

## 7. Word derived from proper nouns

Capitalize words derived from proper nouns. For example:

I like *English*, but math is my favorite subject. (English is capitalized because it is derived from the proper noun England, while math is not capitalized because it is not derived from a proper noun.)

Specific course titles should, however, be capitalized. For example:

I don't know what I'm going to do. I have to take *Math 101* next year and it looks hard!

## 8. Colons

Capitalize when two or more sentences follow a [colon](#).

For example:

We have set this restriction: Do your chores before watching television. That includes washing the dishes.

Do not capitalize after a colon if you are writing a list, or if there is only one sentence following the colon:

There are many metals hidden away within the earth's crust: *gold*, zinc, and lead are just a few examples.

OR

There is a way to remember test information: *study* a lot the night before your big midterm!