Capitalization

Student Name:

Instructor:

Date:

Course:

# About This DLA

## Important Note

All the activities (4) in the DLA must be completed in their entirety before receiving credit for completion. Students are welcome to meet with a tutor if they need help, but please be aware that students might need a second appointment for review and signature in that case. If your instructor wants evidence of this completed DLA, return this form to him or her with the tutor’s signature included.

## Learning Outcomes

Through computer and independent work, students will identify when a capital letter is necessary, identify when capital letters should not be used, and correct capitalization errors in written work.

## Activities (approximately 1 hour)

Read the information, complete the activities that follow, and be prepared to discuss your answers when you meet with a tutor.

# Understanding Capitalization

Capitalization means writing the first letter of a word in uppercase. The first word of a sentence and the pronoun *I* are always capitalized. The following sections discuss other items that are capitalized.

When in doubt, it’s best not to capitalize. Writers tend to err in using capitals too often rather than in not using them enough.

## Proper Nouns

A proper noun names a particular person, organization, place, or thing. Proper nouns and adjectives derived from proper nouns are capitalized.

* the **Empire State Building**.
* **Yosemite National Park**
* an **Italian** dish
* a **Machiavellian** plot
* a **Victorian** house

The article *the* is generally not capitalized before proper nouns.

* His wedding was announced in **the** *New York Times*.
* City authorities closed **the** Golden Gate Bridge.

Some proper nouns begin with lowercase letters: eBay, iPhone, bell hooks. Check the style guide you are using in order to determine whether these names should be capitalized at the beginning of a sentence. MLA and APA style guidelines say yes, whereas the Chicago Manual of Style says no. When possible, reword sentences so that they do not begin with these types of proper nouns.

## Titles and Names

Titles used before names are capitalized.

* Children at the local elementary school were excited to meet **Governor** Newsom.
* The journalists asked **President** Obama several questions.
* Last week’s meeting was led by **Chairman of the Board** Williams.
* Several students visited **Senator** Feinstein’s office.

If the title is followed by a comma or used instead of a name, it is not capitalized.

* California’s **governor**, Gavin Newsom, spoke at an elementary school.
* Several photographers took pictures of the **president** and his family.
* A book was just published by the **chairman of the board**, Jason Williams.
* Voters met with the **senator** in her office.

Jobs and occupations are not titles. Do not capitalize them when used with names.

* Legendary **coach** John Wooden led UCLA to many championships.
* Students love **professor** Robin Clark’s friendly personality.

Family names are capitalized when they are used in place of a name or together with a name.

* You need to ask **Grandma** about the party.
* I called **Mom** on her birthday.
* The local newspaper ran a story about **Uncle Larry**.

Don’t capitalize family names that are used with possessive adjectives (*my, our*) or possessive nouns (*Sarah’s, daughter’s*), that come after the person’s name, or that don’t refer to a specific person.

* My **dad** works at a hospital.
* I didn’t know that Helen’s **grandmother** was a famous playwright.
* The Coen **brothers** have made many great films.
* I don’t know of a **mother** who would do that.

## Geographical Regions & Locations

The words *north, south, east* and *west* are capitalized when they refer to cultures and regions. These words are not capitalized when referring to directions or points of the compass.

| Culture and Regions | Directions or Points of the Compass |
| --- | --- |
| Her childhood was spent on the West Coast. | Mt. SAC is **west** of Cal Poly Pomona. |
| Merton wrote about the Eastern tradition of Zen. | The **east** coast of Italy borders the Adriatic Sea. |
| My mother was born in the South. | The **southern** part of Orange County is lovely. |

Some areas are capitalized due to convention or because of their fame.

* Lincoln Center is located on the **Upper West Side**.
* Disneyland is located in **Southern California**.

Words such as *city, town,* or *county* are capitalized when they come after the proper noun. They are not capitalized when they come before the proper noun.

| After the Proper Noun | Before the Proper Noun |
| --- | --- |
| New York City | The **city** of New York |
| Dade County | The **county** of Dade |

## Academic Courses and Disciplines

The names of specific course titles are capitalized; the names of general academic subjects are not.

| Specific Course | Academic Subject |
| --- | --- |
| He enrolled in History 101 this semester. | He is majoring in **history.** |
| There is a new professor teaching Algebra 35. | I love taking **algebra** classes. |

## Quotations

A quotation that comes after a reporting verb is capitalized.

* In *Invisible Man*, Ralph Ellison writes, “**Life** is to be lived, not controlled; and humanity is won by continuing to play in face of certain defeat.”

If you change the capitalization of the first word, mark it with brackets.

* In *Invisible Man*, Ralph Ellison writes, “**[T]**hey see only my surroundings, themselves or figments of their imagination, indeed, everything and anything except me.”

If the quote is part of your sentence’s syntax, don’t capitalize the first word.

* The narrator in *Invisible Man* observes that “**the** mind that has conceived a plan of living must never lose sight of the chaos against which that pattern was conceived.”

## Titles of Works

When capitalizing titles, the first word and the last word are always capitalized, as well as the first word after a colon.

* First and last words: ***Of*** *Mice and* ***Men***
* After a colon: *Outliers:* ***The*** *Story of Success*

The following parts of speech are also capitalized.

* Nouns: *The* ***Grapes*** *of Wrath*
* Pronouns: *Go Tell* ***It*** *on the Mountain*
* Verbs: *Mr. Smith* ***Goes*** *to Washington*
* Adjectives: *The Heart Is a* ***Lonely*** *Hunter*
* Adverbs: *The Postman* ***Always*** *Rings Twice*
* Subordinating conjunctions: *Catch Me* ***If*** *You Can*

The following parts of speech are not capitalized when they fall in the middle of a title.

* Articles: *To Kill* ***a*** *Mockingbird*
* Prepositions: *North* ***by*** *Northwest*
* Coordinating conjunctions: *The Sound* ***and*** *the Fury*
* The *to* in infinitives: *How* ***to*** *Train Your Dragon*

Style guides differ on whether longer prepositions, such as *through*, or phrasal prepositions, such as *according to*, are capitalized in titles. APA requires all words of four letters or more to be capitalized, whereas MLA and Chicago Style do not. Follow the capitalization rules of the style guide you are using.

Also be aware that some prepositions can also be adverbs. A general rule for distinguishing prepositions from adverbs is that prepositions have an object, whereas adverbs do not.

* *One Flew* ***over*** *the Cuckoo’s Nest* (“Over” is a preposition with the object “the cuckoo’s nest.”)
* *If I Had to Do It All* ***Over*** *Again* (“Over” has no object and is being used as an adverb.)

# Reference Charts

In addition to the topics discussed above, the following types of words and phrases are also capitalized.

| Item | Examples |
| --- | --- |
| Days, months, & holidays | Monday, April, Thanksgiving |
| Episodes, eras, & art movements | the Civil War, the Middle Ages, Surrealism |
| Government | Department of Defense, the U.S. Constitution, Congress |
| Nicknames | Karl “the Mailman” Malone; Zachary Taylor, Old Rough and Ready |
| Planets | Mars, Venus, Jupiter |
| Races & nationalities | Cherokee, Caucasian, African American \*Note: *white* and *black* are not capitalized when referring to race |
| Religions & names of deities | Catholicism, Judaism, God, Horus |

The following items are not capitalized unless they contain a proper noun or proper adjective.

| Item | Lowercase | Capitalized |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Animals | spider monkey, grizzly bear | English setter, Asian elephant |
| Foods | hot sauce, cilantro dressing | Tabasco sauce, French dressing |
| Medical conditions | dementia, smallpox | Crohn’s disease, Bright’s disease |
| Plants, vegetables, and fruits | sunchoke, beefsteak tomato | Israeli couscous, Gala apples |

# Activities

Check off each box once you have completed the activity.

## 1. DLA Review

Write your answers to the questions below.

| Answer the questions |
| --- |
| 1. List three types of words that are capitalized, and give examples for each. |
| a. |
| b. |
| c. |
| 2. List three types of words that are not capitalized, and give examples for each. |
| a. |
| b. |
| c. |
| 3. Which words are **not** capitalized when writing the title of a work? |
|  |
|  |

## 2. Online Quiz

Go to http://tinyurl.com/CapitalizationDLA and take the [Capitalization DLA Quiz](http://tinyurl.com/CapitalizationDLA). You must score at least 80% on the exercises before seeing a tutor. After you complete the task, **PLEASE ASK A LAB TUTOR OR FRONT DESK ATTENDANT TO PRINT THE PAGE THAT HAS YOUR SCORE. DO NOT EXIT THE PROGRAM UNTIL THIS PAGE HAS BEEN PRINTED (FREE OF CHARGE).** If you have any other questions, do not hesitate to ask a lab tutor.

## 3. Capitalization Error Correction

Read the following paragraph and correct the capitalization errors. You will have to either add or remove capital letters, depending on the error.

**The Trappist Monk Who Influenced Apple’s Designs**

**[1]** Robert Palladino is not nearly as famous as Steve jobs, yet without Palladino’s influence, Jobs may never have had the success he did with apple computers. **[2]** Born and raised in new Mexico, Palladino became a Trappist monk at the age of 17. **[3]** He moved to Northwest Oregon, eventually left monastic life, and became the director of Reed college’s calligraphy program in 1969. **[4]** He taught the Calligraphy class that Jobs took in the early 1970s. **[5]** At the time, Jobs thought that a class on calligraphy would have no practical role in his life. **[6]** However, 10 years later, when Jobs was designing the first macintosh computer, all he had learned in that calligraphy class came back to him. **[7]** Mac was the first Computer to have beautiful typography, multiple typefaces, and proportionally spaced fonts. **[8]** Palladino found it ironic that he would be best remembered as Jobs calligraphy Professor, yet Palladino had never owned or even used a computer. **[9]** Palladino taught at Reed College until the calligraphy program ended in 1984. **[10]** in 1995, Palladino entered the priesthood, and he was known as father Palladino until his death in 2016. **[11]** Gregory MacNaughton, coordinator of Reed’s Calligraphy Initiative, commented that a handwritten letter from Palladino was “A transcendent example of what can be accomplished when the human mind and the human hand are united in the making of beautiful, ordinary things.”

*Adapted from “The Trappist monk whose calligraphy inspired Steve Jobs – and influenced Apple’s designs,” Washington Post, March 8, 2016*

## Choose 4a or 4b Below

## 4a. Work with Your Own Writing

Review past writing assignments and find ten capitalization errors. Correct the errors and show the corrections to a tutor when you meet. Be prepared to explain your corrections.

## 4b. Writing Practice

Read the following sentences. Some sentences are correct, and some have capitalization errors. Mark each sentences as C (correct) or I (incorrect). Correct any errors in the space provided.

| C or I | Sentence |
| --- | --- |
|  | 1. F. Scott Fitzgerald’s novel *The Great Gatsby* takes place during the jazz age. |
|  | Write your answer. |
|  | 1. The professor told us we are reading *The Catcher in the Rye* for our Psychology class. |
|  | Write your answer. |
|  | 1. *The Tortilla Curtain*, written by T.C. Boyle, is set in Southern California. |
|  | Write your answer. |
|  | 1. *Thomas Jefferson: The Art of Power* chronicles the life of America’s third President. |
|  | Write your answer. |
|  | 1. *The Truths We Hold: An American journey* was written by senator Kamala Harris. |
|  | Write your answer. |
|  | 1. Boththe *Guardian* and the *New York Times* gave good reviews for *Gone Girl* by Gillian |
|  | Flynn, now a classic Summer beach read. |
|  | Write your answer. |
|  | Write your answer. |
|  | 1. The classic story about br’er fox, br’er rabbit, and a baby made of tar is included in the |
|  | collection *The Complete Tales of Uncle Remus*. |
|  | Write your answer. |
|  | Write your answer. |
|  | 1. *The City of Falling Angels* tells the story of an Italian opera house destroyed by arson in |
|  | Venice, located in Northeast Italy. |
|  | Write your answer. |

## 5. Review the DLA

Go to https://mtsac2.mywconline.com and use the [Mt. SAC Writing Center Appointment System](https://mtsac2.mywconline.com/) to make a DLA appointment, or sign-up to see a tutor on the “**Walk-in**” list in the Writing Center. During your session with a tutor, refer to your own graded writing (or the completed activity) and explain your work to demonstrate your understanding of capitalization rules.

Student’s Signature:

Tutor’s Signature

Date:

Date:

If you are an individual with a disability and need a greater level of accessibility for any document in The Writing Center or on The Writing Center’s website, please contact the Mt. SAC Accessible Resource Centers for Students, [access@mtsac.edu](mailto:access@mtsac.edu), (909) 274-4290.

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