

The Writing Center

DLA: Capitalization



This DLA is a writable PDF form. You can enter your answers directly into this document.

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Do not complete this form in a web browser. You will not be able to save your work.

Student Name:

Important Note

To get completion credit for this DLA, make sure you complete all the required activities. If you'd like help while working on a specific DLA, you can meet with a specialist at the Writing Center. Keep in mind that you might need to schedule a second appointment to review your work, check your understanding, and get your completion credit. You can only review **ONE** DLA per appointment. (Check the last section of this DLA for information on making your appointment and receiving completion credit for your 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, “**L**ife 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 “**t**he 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: <i>white</i> and <i>black</i> 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.

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 Capitalization quiz. You must score at least 75% on the quiz before meeting with a specialist. After you complete the task, please take a screenshot of the page that has your score and show it to your specialist. Do not exit the quiz until you take the screenshot.

□ 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 sentence as C (correct) or I (incorrect). Correct any errors in the space provided.

1. F. Scott Fitzgerald's novel *The Great Gatsby* takes place during the jazz age.
2. The professor told us we are reading *The Catcher in the Rye* for our Psychology class.
3. *The Tortilla Curtain*, written by T.C. Boyle, is set in Southern California.
4. *Thomas Jefferson: The Art of Power* chronicles the life of America's third President.
5. *The Truths We Hold: An American journey* was written by senator Kamala Harris.
6. Both the *Guardian* and the *New York Times* gave good reviews for *Gone Girl* by Gillian Fly, now a classic Summer beach read.
7. 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*.
8. *The City of Falling Angels* tells the story of an Italian opera house destroyed by arson in Venice, located in Northeast Italy.

□ 5. Review the DLA/Receive Completion Credit

1. Go to [EAB Navigate](#) and make an appointment (online or in-person).
2. Attend your session and be prepared to explain your understanding of the information you've learned in the DLA. Consider the main concept you learned and how you might use this in your future assignments/classes.
3. If your professor asks you to provide proof, you can review the "appointment summary report" through EAB Navigate (app or desktop). You will find all Writing Center appointments under "appointment summary reports" (app or desktop). Look for the summary report for your DLA appointment. This is where your writing specialist will indicate the title of your DLA and state whether it is "completed" or "not completed." If it is marked as "not completed," book a follow up appointment to complete.

Note: Appointment summary reports are also sent weekly to your instructor on record. If there is an issue, please contact us at writingcenter@mtsac.edu or (909) 274-5325.

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, (909) 274-4290.

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