

Capitalisation

There are clear rules for the use of upper case letters or “capitals” in English. Note the exclusion of **prepositions** (e.g. of, in, with, by), **articles** (e.g. the, a) and **conjunction** words (e.g. and, but, or, nor, so, yet) from the following rules in particular instances.

Always put capitals on...

Titles

The first letters of titles are always capitalised. This includes the titles of journals and books which are also printed in *italics*. However, prepositions, articles and conjunction words are *not* capitalised unless they follow a colon (:). For example:

- *Computer Crime: A Study of Security Systems and their Weaknesses*
- *Journal of Marketing*

Qualifications

The first letters of qualifications are always capitalised (again, excluding prepositions and conjunction words). For example:

- Graduate Diploma of Education (or Grad Dip Ed)
- Master of Arts (or MA) [NB: An apostrophe is needed, but no capitals, are required when mentioning the degree in general: He received a master's degree but not when being specific: He was awarded a Master of Arts.] (See our helpsheet on Apostrophes)
- Doctor of Philosophy (or PhD, or Ph.D)

Personal Titles

The first letters of individual titles are always capitalised. For example:

- Mr, Ms, Mrs, Dr, Professor, Rev, Prime Minister, President, Governor General

Institutions

The first letters of institutions are always capitalised (again, prepositions, articles and conjunction words are excluded). For example:

- Monash University
- University of Western Australia
- Federation University Australia

Sentences within Sentences

The first letter of a sentence within another sentence takes a capital. For example:

- She turned to him and said: “Go away!”

Countries, States and Territories

The first letter of a country, state, province or territory is capitalised. For example:

- Victoria, South Australia, Northern Territory, the United States of America

Companies and Organisations

The first letter of a company is capitalised. For example:

- Microsoft, the Ford Motor Company

Directions and Places

The first letter of directions are capitalised. For example:

- South-East, North-West, Northern Queensland, the Far-East

Proper Names

The first letter of proper names are always capitalised. For example:

- John Smith, Richard Harris, David Dickson.

Beware of prefixes in proper names which can vary, such as *van Gelder* or *Van Gelder*. This applies to other proper nouns like languages, English, French, Arabic.

Periods of History/Time

When part of a proper name, the first letters of a period of history are also capitalised. This also applies to days of the week and months of the year. For example:

- The Age of Reason, the Baroque Period.
- Wednesday, December

No capitals on...

Note that capitals are NOT used in sentences where a title, organisation or a company is not being identified as such:

- I am studying at university ... (here a particular university is not referred to)
- A professor of engineering said ... (a particular professor is not referred to)
- The archbishop argued that ... (a particular archbishop is not referred to)
- The company's headquarters are (a particular company is not referred to)
- The wind came from the south-west ... (a particular place in the south-west is not referred to).

Capitals are generally not necessary in the names of disciplines or job titles unless you are referring to a particular job title, e.g. nursing/nurse, medical profession, teacher, education.

Other helpsheets available

- Apostrophes
- Articles
- Punctuation
- Sentence Structure
- Writing in an Academic Style

Source: Murray-Smith, S., (1990), *Right Words*. Ringwood: Penguin, pp. 66-67.