

Capital Letters

A LITTLE HELP WITH CAPITALS

This handout lists some guidelines for capitalization. If you have a question about whether a specific word should be capitalized that doesn't fit under one of these rules, try checking a dictionary to see if the word is capitalized there.

Use capital letters in the following ways:

The first words of a sentence

When he tells a joke, he sometimes forgets the punch line.

The pronoun "I"

The last time I visited Atlanta was several years ago.

Proper nouns (the names of specific people, places, organizations, and sometimes things)

Worrill Fabrication Company

Golden Gate Bridge

Supreme Court

Livingston, Missouri

Atlantic Ocean

Mothers Against Drunk Driving

Family relationships (when used as proper names)

I sent a thank-you note to Aunt Abigail, but not to my other aunts.

Here is a present I bought for Mother.

Did you buy a present for your mother?

The names of God, specific deities, religious figures, and holy books

God the Father

the Virgin Mary

the Bible

the Greek gods

Moses

Shiva

Buddha

Zeus

Exception: Do not capitalize the non-specific use of the word "god."

The word "polytheistic" means the worship of more than one god.

Titles preceding names, but not titles that follow names

She worked as the assistant to Mayor Hanolovi.

I was able to interview Miriam Moss, mayor of Littonville.

Directions that are names (North, South, East, and West when used as sections of the country, but not as compass directions)

The Patels have moved to the Southwest.

Jim's house is two miles north of Otterbein.

The days of the week, the months of the year, and holidays (but not the seasons used generally)

Halloween
October
Friday
winter
spring
fall

Exception: Seasons are capitalized when used in a title.

The Fall 1999 semester

The names of countries, nationalities, and specific languages

Costa Rica
Spanish
French
English

The first word in a sentence that is a direct quote

Emerson once said, "A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds."

The major words in the titles of books, articles, and songs (but not short prepositions or the articles "the," "a," or "an," if they are not the first word of the title)

One of Jerry's favorite books is *The Catcher in the Rye*.

Members of national, political, racial, social, civic, and athletic groups

Green Bay Packers
African-Americans
Anti-Semitic
Democrats
Friends of the Wilderness
Chinese

Periods and events (but not century numbers)

Victorian Era
Great Depression
Constitutional Convention
sixteenth century

Trademarks

Pepsi
Honda
IBM
Microsoft Word

Words and abbreviations of specific names (but not names of things that came from specific things but are now general types)

Freudian
NBC
pasteurize
UN
french fries
italics