

Capitalization Rules

WHEN ARE CAPITALS APPROPRIATE, and when are they not appropriate? If you haven't noticed, capitalization varies somewhat from publication to publication. But there are some universal rules about capitalization which almost every publication, whether it be a newspaper or magazine or novel, generally follow without exception. The following list will attempt to point out these generally accepted capitalization rules:

1. Always **capitalize** the first word of every sentence.
2. **Capitalize** the first word of every direct quotation.
 - John said, "The first thing I want to do is eat."
 - "William is my friend," he said, "but John is not." ("but" is **not capitalized** because it doesn't start a new sentence.)
 - "We eat at six," he said. "Late comers will not be fed." ("Late" is **capitalized** because it starts a new sentence.)
3. Always **capitalize** the first word and the last word of every title. The words in between are also **capitalized** unless they are prepositions (of, from, to, for, etc.), short connecting words, the *to* in front of a verb, or the articles: *a, an, the*.
4. Always **capitalize** the names of people (except names like e.e. cummings), places, and languages/races/nationalities.
 - John, Uncle Roger, Aunt Martha, Marsha, Dr. Bob, etc.
 - Taft, Los Angeles, Lake Isabella, Russia, South America, etc.
 - English, Spanish, German, French, Italian, etc.
5. Always **capitalize** the names of the months, the days of the week, and special days such as holidays, but not the seasons of the year (fall, winter, spring, summer).
 - January, February, March, April, May, etc.
 - Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, etc.
 - Valentines Day, Fourth of July, Christmas, Columbus Day, etc.
6. Always **capitalize** a "title of relationship" if it takes the place of the person's name or is used as part of the person's name. If a pronoun such as "my" is in front of the word, a **capital** is **not** used.
 - I had dinner with Uncle Bill. But...I had dinner with my uncle.
 - I went with Mother to the store. But...I went with my mother to the store.
 - I spoke with Dad last night. But...I spoke with my dad last night and her mother last night.
7. Always **capitalize** the names of particular people or things, but never general ones.
 - I had dinner with Doctor Smith. But...I had dinner with the doctor.
 - I swam in the Kern River. But...I swam in the river and fished in the lake.
 - I signed up for Science 14A and History 17B. But...I signed up for science and history.
 - I am taking history and math along with English and Spanish. (notice that English and Spanish are **capitalized** because while they are not the names of specific courses, they are the formal names of languages.)
 - I graduated from Hart High School. But...I graduated from high school.
 - I went to the University of the Pacific. But...I went to the university.
 - He goes to Taft College. But...He goes to college.
8. Always **capitalize** East, West, South, and/or North if they are locations, but **never capitalize** them if they are directions.
 - I used to live in the East. But...I live east of Los Angeles.
 - Go west, young man, go west. But...I live in the Western part of the United States.
 - He went in a westerly direction; I used to live in Eastern Montana.