

What should be capitalized?

Academic Subjects

General names of academic subjects, such as “biology” or “history” should not be capitalized. (The only exceptions to this rule are language classes, such as “English” or “Spanish.”) However, the name of a specific department or major, such as the “Economics Department” or “Environmental Studies,” should be capitalized.

Places, including geographical regions

Minneapolis Twin Cities Vancouver Midwest

Peoples and their languages

Spanish Chinese Dutch Maya

Religions and their followers

Christian Judaism Hindu

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

Democrat Minnesota Vikings Bethel Student Association African American

Institutions and organizations

Supreme Court Jefferson Elementary School Humane Society

Historical Documents

Magna Carta The Declaration of Independence

Periods and events (but not century numbers)

Middle Ages Renaissance World War II twentieth century

Days, months, and holidays (but not seasons)

Monday Independence Day winter

Place words (like “street” or “river”) that are part of specific names

New York City Sem Hill Wall Street

Titles that precede people’s names (but not titles that follow names)

Aunt Becky President Bush Pastor Thompson

Becky, my aunt George Bush, the president Jim Thompson, my pastor

Words that indicate family relationships when used as a substitute for a specific name

I went out to eat with Dad. I went out to eat with my dad.

Titles of books, magazines, essays, movies, and other works, but not articles (“a,” “an,” “the”), short prepositions (“to,” “by,” “on”), or short joining words (“and,” “or”) unless they are the first or last word of the title. With hyphenated words, capitalize the first and other important words. **Note**** APA style has different rules for title capitalization.**

A Wind in the Door “My Brother-in-Law” *Father of the Bride*

The interjection “O” (but not the word “oh”)

He who thinks himself wise, O heavens, is a great fool.

Words placed after a prefix that are normally capitalized (words placed after a prefix that are not normally capitalized do not change either)

anti-Semitic un-American ex-girlfriend

Capitals in sentences, quotations, and lists

Capitalize the first word in a sentence.

When a sentence is in parentheses, capitalize the first word of the sentence *unless* the parenthetical sentence is within another sentence.

My brother Will began to cough after eating lima beans and had to excuse himself from the table. (He is allergic to lima beans.)

My brother Will began to cough after eating lima beans (he is allergic to them) and had to excuse himself from the table.

Do not capitalize the first word in a series of questions if the questions are not complete sentences.

Do you want to go for a walk? get coffee? watch a movie? anything?

Capitalize the first word of a sentence in quotations, but not the second section of an interrupted quote.

She said, “We have to go inside the haunted house.”
“We have to,” she said, “go inside the haunted house.”

Capitalize the first word in a list after a colon if each item listed is a complete sentence.

My curfew rules are as follows: (1) I must be home by 11:00 on school nights and 1:00 on weekend nights. (2) If I am going to be late, I must phone my parents before my curfew to let them know I will be late. (3) I must check in with my parents when I arrive home.