Capitalization

Note: This document should only be used as a reference and should not replace assignment guidelines.

Capital letters help readers recognize the beginnings of complete sentences and distinguish between proper and common nouns.

**Proper and Common Nouns**

Most often, a word is capitalized based on whether it is a **common** or **proper noun**. Proper nouns are the names of specific people, places, organizations, things, and ideas, and should always be capitalized. Common nouns name general people, places, things, ideas, etc. and are not capitalized. The following table lists proper nouns and related common nouns.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proper Nouns</th>
<th>Common Nouns</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>God (as a name)</td>
<td>a god</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Book of Job</td>
<td>a sacred book</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salt Lake Tribune</td>
<td>a newspaper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the Renaissance</td>
<td>the sixteenth century</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aunt Claire</td>
<td>my aunt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>my mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utah Valley University</td>
<td>a university</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History 1010</td>
<td>history</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central Intelligence Agency</td>
<td>a federal agency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John F. Kennedy</td>
<td>a former president</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Microsoft Access</td>
<td>a database</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Titles**

People’s names and titles are proper nouns and should be capitalized; however, when used as common nouns, titles should not be capitalized.

    PROPER: Professor Jenny Smith, General Colin Powell
    COMMON: a professor, a general

**Regional Names**

Most geographic names, including those of specific regions or sections of a country, are proper nouns and should be capitalized. Compass directions, however, are common nouns and are not capitalized.

    I visited the Middle East last spring for vacation.
    Drive south on Highway 15 for 10 miles; then go east on University Street.
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Brand Names
Because brand names are proper names, they should be capitalized. However, general product names should not be capitalized.

PROPER: Kleenex, Xerox machine, Coke, Jeep
COMMON: tissues, copy machine, soda, car

Units of Time
Capitalize days of the week, months, and holidays. Do not capitalize seasons, school terms, academic years, or centuries.

PROPER: Monday, January, Christmas
COMMON: summer, fall, winter, spring, senior year, the twentieth century

Academic Subjects
Academic subjects are considered common nouns, but languages and course titles are proper nouns.

PROPER: German, English, Philosophy 1010
COMMON: chemistry, philosophy, language arts

Acronyms
Capitalize acronyms created from capitalized words.

AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome)
FBI (Federal Bureau of Investigation)
UVU (Utah Valley University)

Proper Adjectives
Adjectives formed from proper nouns should be capitalized.

Italian dressing, Swedish meatballs, Sprite bottle

Quote
In a direct quote, capitalize the first word if it begins a complete sentence in the original text.

Chan writes, “Potatoes can be part of a healthy diet when eaten in moderation” (11).

Do not capitalize the first word of a direct quote when it begins mid-sentence.

Chan argues that potatoes complement a nutritious meal plan “when eaten in moderation” (11).

Titles of Works
Capitalize the first words and all other words in titles of books, articles, films, and songs except for articles, conjunctions (“and,” “or,” etc.) and prepositions under five letters (“in,” “on,” “of,” etc.) in MLA.

The Princess Bride  Not Without Laughter
A Tree Grows in Brooklyn  The Remains of the Day