

# Capitalization

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

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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.

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

## 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 Degrees

Academic degrees should not be capitalized.

bachelor's degree, master's degree

## 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.

<i>The Princess Bride</i>	<i>Not Without Laughter</i>
<i>A Tree Grows in Brooklyn</i>	<i>The Remains of the Day</i>

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