Capitalization

MASTER 16 RULES OF CAPITALIZATION

Rule 1: Capitalize the first word of a.

Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

CAUTION: Words after a semicolon are not usually capitalized.

Consider the lilies of the field; they toil not, neither do they spin.

Rule 2: Capitalize proper. A proper noun names a specific person, place, or thing.

Common noun: The city was dark and empty.
Proper noun: The city of Metropolis was dark and empty.

Rule 3: Capitalize proper. Proper adjectives are made from proper nouns.

French toast
Norway maple
Rocky Mountain spotted fever
Labrador retriever

Rule 4: Capitalize a title when used with a person’s name.

Professor Art Official BUT a professor
Dr. Serge E. Call BUT a doctor

Rule 5: Capitalize each letter in made from capitalized words.

IRS (Internal Revenue Service)
NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People)

NOTE: Some abbreviations are capitalized even though the words they stand for are not.

RBI (runs batted in) MS (manuscript)

Rule 6: Capitalize days of the week, months, and special days.

Tuesday January Independence Day

CAUTION: Do not capitalize the seasons.

Not: the Fall semester
But: the fall semester

Rule 7: Capitalize major words in a title.
Books: Gone with the Wind
Newspapers: The Christian Science Monitor
Poems: “Dover Beach”
Plays: Death of a Salesman
Short Stories: “The Lady, or the Tiger?”

NOTE: Articles (such as a, the), prepositions (such as of, with), and conjunctions (such as or) of fewer than five letters do not get capitalized unless they begin a title.

Rule 8: Always capitalize the pronoun I, even in contractions.

I’m not sure what I did to offend you, but I’ll surely make up for it.

Rule 9: Capitalize a region of the country or world; do not capitalize a direction.

The Confederacy is also referred to as the South.

BUT

Many retirees go south during the winter.

Rule 10: Capitalize the name of a place, organization, or business only if you give its actual title.

Oak Street Pharmacy the pharmacy on Oak Street

BUT a television network

Canadian Broadcasting Corporation

Rule 11: Capitalize words such as mother only if used as a title.

What big eyes you have, Grandmother!

BUT

My grandmother has big eyes.

Rule 12: Capitalize a rank or title only when used with a name.

I met General Colin Powell.

BUT
A general must consider the welfare of the troops.

**NOTE:** If you can put the word *any* in front of a noun, that noun should **NOT** be capitalized.

**Rule 13:** Capitalize the name of a specific institution, not of a type of institution.

*We attended Fullerton High School from 1991 to 1995.*

**BUT**

*I should have taken more math courses in high school.*

**Rule 14:** Capitalize the name of an official academic course, not a branch of learning.

*No one got higher than a B in Biology 101.*

**BUT**

*I have always had a hard time with biology.*

**Rule 15:** Capitalize a sacred name, not a secular word made from it.

*God* *a godlike figure*  
*the Koran* *a scriptural story*

**Rule 16:** Learn to deal with words with two meanings.

*George Bush is a Republican; Jimmy Carter is a republican.*

In the case of George Bush, *Republican* refers to an official political party and should be capitalized. In the case of Jimmy Carter, *republican* refers only to a type of government and should not be capitalized.

**Sample Quiz questions:**

1. Choose the sentence that contains no errors in capitalization.
   a. Traditionally held on the last Thursday in November, thanksgiving is a uniquely American holiday.
   b. Traditionally held on the last Thursday in November, Thanksgiving is a uniquely American holiday.
   c. Traditionally held on the last Thursday in November, Thanksgiving is a uniquely American holiday.
Answer: c. Traditionally held on the last Thursday in November, Thanksgiving is a uniquely American holiday.

2. Choose the sentence that contains no error in capitalization.
   a. One friend of mine has seen *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* almost a hundred times.
   b. One friend of mine has seen *The Rocky Horror picture show* almost a hundred times.
   c. One friend of mine has seen *the rocky horror picture show* almost a hundred times.

Answer: a. One friend of mine has seen *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* almost a hundred times.