



Palm Beach Atlantic University
Center for Writing Excellence

CAPITALIZATION

There are three main types of words that need to be capitalized: (1) the first word of a sentence, (2) titles of books and other works, and (3) proper nouns and adjectives.

(1)

Incorrect: writing is so much fun.

Correct: Writing is so much fun.

When joining two sentences using a semicolon (;), one does not need to capitalize the first word after the semicolon. The thoughts on both sides of the semicolon join to form one complete sentence.

Incorrect: It was raining when I took my cat for a walk; My cat got soaked.

Correct: It was raining when I took my cat for a walk; my cat got soaked.

(2)

Titles of books, movies, essays, journal articles, paintings, musical compositions, and other works are also capitalized. One should always capitalize the first word of the title and capitalize most of the remaining words in the title (with a few exceptions).

DO NOT capitalize:

- prepositions (*into, of, by, for, etc.*)
- articles (*a, an, the*)
- conjunctions (*and, but, or, etc.*)
- the word *to* if used with a verb in the **infinitive** (*to run, to think, to write*)

Incorrect: “on the Subjection of Women”

Correct: “On the Subjection of Women”

Always capitalize the first word of a title.

Incorrect: *The Catcher In The Rye*

Correct: *The Catcher in the Rye*

Do not capitalize prepositions, articles, conjunctions, or “to” as part of an infinitive verb.

Capitalize proper nouns and adjectives

Proper nouns name *specific* things, places, or people. When proper nouns are made into adjectives, they are also capitalized. For example, the adjective “Floridian” is derived from the proper noun “Florida,” so both the noun and adjective are capitalized. Major types of proper nouns and adjectives include:

- names (Katherine, George MacDonald, Susan Sontag)
- the pronoun “I”
- specific place names (Oklahoma, New York City, Mexico)
- brand names (Kleenex, Mountain Dew)
- names of institutions and businesses (Palm Beach Atlantic University, Publix, Metropolitan Museum of Art)
- names of specific ships, planes, trains, and spaceships (the *Titanic*, the Tri-Rail)
- names of monuments (the Washington Monument, the Eiffel Tower)
- names of religions and religious documents (Christians, the Bible, Islam, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Hinduism)
- languages and nationalities (English, Spanish, Arabic, French)
- names of specific academic courses (Introduction to Biology, Modern Literary Theory)
- historical periods, wars, and other events (World War II, the Victorian Era, the Boston Tea Party)
- titles, including official positions (Lieutenant Gregory, President Obama) as well as general titles (Mr. Patterson, Mrs. Wilson, Miss Jones)

The easiest way to remember if a word is a proper noun or adjective is to ask, “Is this word referring to a *specific* person, place, or thing?”

Incorrect: I am going to the Museum.

Correct: I am going to the museum.

The word “museum” does not refer to a *specific* person, place, or thing. It refers to a *type* of place. Therefore it should not be capitalized.

Incorrect: I am going to the norton museum of art.

Correct: I am going to the Norton Museum of Art.

“Norton Museum of Art” is the name of a *specific* museum. This is a proper noun and should be capitalized. “Of” is still not capitalized: follow the same capitalization rules that apply to titles of books and other works.

Incorrect: If you are sick, you should see a Doctor.

Correct: If you are sick, you should see a doctor.

Though “doctor” *can* be a specific title, it is not used as a title in this sentence. A career like “doctor” is only capitalized when it is used as a title, as in the following example.

Incorrect: If you are sick, you should visit doctor simons.

Correct: If you are sick, you should visit Doctor Simons.

In this sentence, the first “doctor” refers to a *type* of career (as in the last example) and should not be capitalized. The second “doctor,” however, is used as the title of a *specific* person: Doctor Simons.