

# Capitalisation

There are clear rules for the use of upper case letters or “capitals” in English. Note the exclusion of **prepositions** (e.g. of, in, with, by), **articles** (e.g. the, a) and **conjunction** words (e.g. and, but, or, nor, so, yet) from the following rules in particular instances.

## Always put capitals on...

### Titles

The first letters of titles are always capitalised. This includes the titles of journals and books which are also printed in *italics*. However, prepositions, articles and conjunction words are *not* capitalised unless they follow a colon (:). For example:

- *Computer Crime: A Study of Security Systems and their Weaknesses*
- *Journal of Marketing*

### Qualifications

The first letters of qualifications are always capitalised (again, excluding prepositions and conjunction words). For example:

- Graduate Diploma of Education (or Grad Dip Ed)
- Master of Arts (or MA) [NB: An apostrophe is needed, but no capitals, are required when mentioning the degree in general: He received a master's degree but not when being specific: He was awarded a Master of Arts.] (See our helpsheet on Apostrophes)
- Doctor of Philosophy (or PhD, or Ph.D)

### Personal Titles

The first letters of individual titles are always capitalised. For example:

- Mr, Ms, Mrs, Dr, Professor, Rev, Prime Minister, President, Governor General

### Institutions

The first letters of institutions are always capitalised (again, prepositions, articles and conjunction words are excluded). For example:

- Monash University
- University of Western Australia
- Federation University Australia

### Sentences within Sentences

The first letter of a sentence within another sentence takes a capital. For example:

- She turned to him and said: “Go away!”

### Countries, States and Territories

The first letter of a country, state, province or territory is capitalised. For example:

- Victoria, South Australia, Northern Territory, the United States of America

### Companies and Organisations

The first letter of a company is capitalised. For example:

- Microsoft, the Ford Motor Company

### Directions and Places

The first letter of directions are capitalised. For example:

- South-East, North-West, Northern Queensland, the Far-East

### Proper Names

The first letter of proper names are always capitalised. For example:

- John Smith, Richard Harris, David Dickson.

Beware of prefixes in proper names which can vary, such as *van Gelder* or *Van Gelder*. This applies to other proper nouns like languages, English, French, Arabic.

### Periods of History/Time

When part of a proper name, the first letters of a period of history are also capitalised. This also applies to days of the week and months of the year. For example:

- The Age of Reason, the Baroque Period.
- Wednesday, December

## No capitals on...

Note that capitals are NOT used in sentences where a title, organisation or a company is not being identified as such:

- I am studying at university ... (here a particular university is not referred to)
- A professor of engineering said ... (a particular professor is not referred to)
- The archbishop argued that ... (a particular archbishop is not referred to)
- The company's headquarters are .... (a particular company is not referred to)
- The wind came from the south-west ... (a particular place in the south-west is not referred to).

Capitals are generally not necessary in the names of disciplines or job titles unless you are referring to a particular job title, e.g. nursing/nurse, medical profession, teacher, education.

## Other helpsheets available

- Apostrophes
- Articles
- Punctuation
- Sentence Structure
- Writing in an Academic Style

**Source:** Murray-Smith, S., (1990), *Right Words*. Ringwood: Penguin, pp. 66-67.