CAPITALIZATION

Capitalization is when the first letter in a word, or a series of words, is written in capital letters. A good way to remember the general rules of capitalization is that *proper nouns* are capitalized, and *common nouns* are not capitalized. *Proper nouns* are the names of specific people, places, and things. *Common nouns* name all items that are not proper nouns.

**The Main Uses of Capital Letters**

**Capitalize the first word in a sentence or a direct quote.**

Janis bought a cake for her students.

“I’m sleepy,” whined Billy.

**Capitalize names and the word I.**

The house that Sarah bought burned down two years ago.

Carol wants fish for dinner; I would prefer chicken.

**Capitalize specific place names.**

We took a stroll down Sunset Boulevard.

Steve went to Kennedy High School.

Pat visited New York last year.

**Capitalize days of the week, months, and holidays.**

My class meets on Wednesdays.

Carol’s birthday is in July.

I am going to Aspen for Christmas.
Capitalize the names of commercial products.

- My father uses Tide to wash his laundry.
- Kellogg’s Corn Flakes is my favorite kind of cereal.
- I prefer shopping at Ralph’s.

Capitalize the names of organizations.

- The Internal Revenue Service audited Priscilla.
- Jerry attended the bake sale held by the Catholic Church.
- Marcia joined the Debate Team.

Capitalize the titles of books, magazines, articles, stories, poems, films, television shows, songs, and papers. Always capitalize the first letter of every title.

- Do not capitalize prepositions.
  - Ernest Hemingway wrote A Farewell to Arms.
  - Peter watches Friends every night.

**Other Uses of Capital Letters**

*Capitalize names that show family relationships or titles when they can be replaced with a proper noun.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Original Sentence:</th>
<th>Replaced With:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am going to visit my Grandma Pam.</td>
<td>I am going to visit Pam.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“You don’t have to wash those dishes, Mom,” he said.</td>
<td>“You don’t have to wash those dishes, Nicole,” he said.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Your car is ready, Senator.”</td>
<td>“Your car is ready, Madeline.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am going to see the Pope.</td>
<td>I am going to see John Paul.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Do not capitalize family relationships or titles when they cannot be replaced with a proper noun.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Original Sentence:</th>
<th>Cannot Be Replaced with:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Everyone has two grandmothers.</td>
<td>Everyone has two Judys.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You should go visit your mother.</td>
<td>You should go visit your Frances.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I did not vote for our current president.</td>
<td>I did not vote for our current George.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The newest partner in the law firm won his case today.</td>
<td>The newest Carter with the law firm won his case today.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Capitalize the name of specific courses.**

This semester, Josh is taking three **Women’s Studies** courses.

Pilar is in my **Political Science** 1 class.

**Capitalize the names of languages.**

Hilda speaks **English**, **French**, and **German**.

Norman writes poetry in **Japanese**.

**Capitalize the names of geographic locations.**

Steve plans to visit **Africa** this summer.

Estela was born in the **Yucatan**.

**Capitalized the names of historical periods and events.**

My ancestor fought in the **Revolutionary War**.

Oliver Cromwell governed England during the **Interregnum**.

**Capitalize the names of races, nations, and nationalities.**

Though Maki’s family is **Korean**, she was born in **Japan**.

Martin Luther King, Jr. was an **African-American** leader who fought for Civil Rights.

**Capitalize the openings and closings of letters.**

**Exercise 1:**
The following sentences have words that need capitalization.
Underline the words and write them with capitalization on the line.
1. Cordelia moved to Los Angeles. ________________
2. Mary converted to the Methodist faith. ________________
3. Over the summer, I read Waiting for Godot. ________________
4. Pablo likes Coca-cola; I prefer Pepsi. ___________ ___________
5. Pamela traveled from Oklahoma to Hollywood. ___________ __________
6. I take my little brother trick-or-treating every Halloween. ____________
7. Blue wallpaper looks better in this room than green. _____________
8. During his birthday party, Phillip ordered lobster. ____________
9. Erica plans to join the Federal Bureau of Investigation when she graduates. ____________
10. Last night, we watched “Beauty and the Beast.” ____________

Exercise 2:
Rewrite the following sentences with capital letters.
1. Lucy and Ricky drove across the United States.
   ____________________________________________________
   __________
2. Claude Monet painted in the Impressionist period.
   ____________________________________________________
   __________
3. F. Scott Fitzgerald wrote The Great Gatsby.
   ____________________________________________________
   __________
4. I plan to take English 101 this semester.
   ____________________________________________________
   __________
5. My friend from Switzerland can speak five languages: English, French, German, Dutch, and Italian.
This Handout is based on the following texts:

Please visit our website at www.lavc.edu/WCweb/index.html for additional resources and services. Revised 07/05/18