# **Capitalization**

In English, capitalization is used to signal (1) new sentences, (2) some abbreviations, acronyms and initializations, and (3) names of people and the things people have named.

1. **New Sentences**

The first word in a sentence is, with almost no exception, always capitalized.

1. **Abbreviations, Acronyms, and Initialization**

*Not every abbreviation should be capitalized, but many of them are.*

**Abbreviations that are connected to someone or something’s name**

*I know* ***Dr.*** *Suresh Canagarajah, and he knows Sam Lee* ***Jr****. very well.*

*I think* ***Doctor Canagarajah*** *and* ***Sam Lee Junior, PhD*** *are friends.*

**Acronyms and Initializations**

*Our* ***GPAs*** *are a matter of our* ***DNA.***

*Our grade point averages are a matter of our deoxyribonucleic acid.*

1. **Names (Proper nouns)**

The easier general rule to remember is to ***capitalize specific things and people, but don’t capitalize general descriptions.***

**Names, nicknames of people, and positions used like names:**

*Only capitalize a position if it’s used in place of a name, like a nickname, or as part of a name.*

*Specific:*

I asked **Jenny** and **Pinky** about **Mom**’s meeting with **Principal Larson** and **Teacher.**

*General:*

My sisters, my mom, my principal, and my teacher all had a conversation about me.

**Specific places that people have named:**

*Includes specific stores, countries, regions, and planet names.*

*Specific:*

I would drive up to **Round Rock** to go visit **Pippi’s Kitchen** and eat **Swedish** meatballs. You would drive from **Jupiter**to **Earth.** It’s the best place for **Scandinavian** food in the **South.**

*General:*

I had to walk south around the big, round rock to get to the kitchen for meatballs. It’s the best place on earth.

**Specific things people have named:**

*Includes specific publications, brands, and works of art (including TV shows, buildings, paintings, etc.).*

*Specific:*

I read in the ***New York Times*** that there will be a reading of “**The Lady of Shallot**” sponsored by **Avon** at the **Chrysler Building**.

*General:*

I read in the newspaper that a famous poem will be read downtown thanks to a cosmetics company.

**Specific groups people have named:**

*Includes specific clubs, organizations, religions, and programs*

*Specific:*

In **American Political History** we learned how the **Democrats** organized the **Bureau of Land Management.**

*General:*

I’m a political science major because I love democracy and want to work in a government bureau.

**Specific times people have named:**

*Includes specific days, months, events, holidays, wars, and contests.*

*Specific:*

The third **Friday** in **March** –during **Spring Break** and **March Madness**—we’ll host the **Third Annual Basketball X-travaganza.**

*General:*

This spring we’ll have our annual basketball extravaganza during the spring break.

**Special Cases:**

*Not all capitalization rules are pinned down. Check a style guide or with your professor on these special cases. Whatever you do,* ***be consistent!*** *Don’t switch back and forth within one project.*

**Tech terms:** Is it email or Email? Or web site or Website? Many i/Internet terms are in transition. Also, tech initializations, like CD and TV are transitioning to cd and tv in some style guides.

**In-house & legal reference:** Some legal and official documents capitalize names of responsible parties, so the University of Texas might have documents that say *The University will...* and the city of Austin may have *The City can…* just like some contracts say *The Buyer must…* Similarly, *Fall 2008* as a semester is a specific time for a university, like *Spring Show* or *Annual Review* for some companies, but generally seasons are not capitalized.

**Religious terms:** Is the Judeo-Christian deity a *he* or a *He*? Is it *the bible* or *the Bible*? Is Mohammed or Joseph Smith *the prophet* or *the Prophet*? Many religions have a preference on capitalization. Be considerate of your audience, and be consistent.

**Lower-case sentence starters:** *Van Dyke was here* or *van Dyke* *was here*? Some people recommend keeping lower-case names, terms like rH and brands like iPhone lower-case even when they start a sentence.