

# Scribendi's Ultimate Guide to Capitalization Rules





# Table of Contents

<b>Capitalization Rules: A Note on Style Guides</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>People, Places, and Things</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Seasons, Months, and Directions</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Job Titles</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Letters and Emails: Salutations and Sign-offs</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Academic Subjects and Course Titles</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>The Titles of Works in English</b>	<b>7</b>
English Titles with Hyphenated Compounds	7
English Titles with Spelled-out Numbers and Fractions	7
English Titles with the Scientific Name of a Species	8
<b>Capitalization after a Colon</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Capitalization after a Semicolon</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Quotations</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Appendix</b>	<b>10</b>

# Capitalization



Knowing what to capitalize and what not to capitalize can be very confusing. There are many rules and, to make matters worse, they often seem to contradict each other.

To help you master this tricky topic, we've lovingly crafted Scribendi's Ultimate Guide to Capitalization Rules. Inside, you'll find the most common capitalization rules supported by helpful examples.

## Capitalization Rules: A Note on Style Guides

In part, capitalization is confusing because each major style guide—Chicago, MLA, and APA, to name a few—may prefer a slightly different set of capitalization rules. This is especially true when it comes to references, works cited lists, bibliographies, and the like.

If you've been assigned a particular style guide, make sure that you adhere to it. If you haven't been assigned a particular style guide, Scribendi's Ultimate Guide to Capitalization Rules will help you ensure that your capitalization is both consistent and correct.





## People, Places, and Things

To begin, you should capitalize all proper nouns. Proper nouns include people's names, the names of specific places (e.g., "the Brooklyn Bridge" vs. "the bridge"), and the names of specific things or events (e.g., "the Toronto International Film Festival" vs. "the festival").

### Example

- The Burj Khalifa is the tallest tower in the world.
- In China, the Dragon Boat Festival is celebrated in late June.

## Seasons, Months, and Directions

When they're referred to solely as seasons, do not capitalize the names of seasons. However, do capitalize the names of seasons if they function as part of a person's name or as part of the name of a specific place or thing (e.g., "the winter" vs. "the London Winter Games").

- My favorite season is autumn.
- I love the Summer Olympic Games.

Always capitalize the names of months.

- I'm going on vacation in April.
- The conference is scheduled for September.

Don't capitalize directions—unless they refer to a definite region, are a proper noun, or are part of a proper name.

- The café is five minutes south of the station.
- The landscape in Northern Ontario is stunning.



## Job Titles

Capitalize a person's job title in the following situations: immediately before a name, as part of a person's name to directly address them, or instead of a person's name to directly address them.

### Example

- Hi, Professor Clarke. How are you?
- This is Quality Assurance Manager John Smith.

Do not capitalize a job title if it appears after a person's name. Additionally, do not capitalize a job title if it is used instead of a person's name but not to directly address that person.

- My professor drinks a concerning amount of coffee.
- The man at the desk is John Smith, our quality assurance manager.

Capitalize job titles in cover letters and other associated materials when they refer to a specific job. However, do not capitalize job titles when they refer to a general kind of job.

- I am writing to apply for the Content Marketing position.
- I am passionate about content marketing jobs.

Finally, always capitalize a job title if it appears on the signature line of a letter.

Sincerely,

Anna Garcia, Human Resources Manager



## Letters and Emails: Salutations and Sign-offs

When you write a letter or email, always capitalize the first word of your salutation and any other major words that it contains.

That being said, capitalize only the first word in your sign-off (e.g., "Sincerely yours").

### Example

Dear Hiring Manager,

I am writing to apply for the Research Assistant position.

Best regards,

Jessica Turner

## Academic Subjects and Course Titles

Regarding academic subjects, capitalize only the names of subjects derived from proper nouns, such as those that can also be used to refer to a specific language, country, or culture (e.g., "English," "French," and "Spanish" vs. "biology," "chemistry," and "physics").

- I like my Spanish literature class, but biology is where I truly shine.
- This semester, I'm studying sociology, psychology, English, and French.

Capitalize the names of specific courses and departments. However, don't capitalize the name of a general field of study unless, as noted above, it's derived from a proper noun. When you capitalize the names of specific courses or departments, don't capitalize articles, conjunctions, or prepositions, such as "the," "an," or "of," unless they are the first word in the title.

- Let's grab some coffee together after our East Asian Studies lecture.
- Next semester, I really want to take the Introduction to Scandinavian Languages course.



# The Titles of Works in English

Regarding the titles of works in English, such as books, articles, and movies, begin by capitalizing the first word.

Then, capitalize all other major words that appear in the title. Do not capitalize any minor words in the title unless that word is the first or last word in the title.

## Example

- I'm reading *The Old Man and the Sea*.
- My presentation on *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* is due tomorrow!

## English Titles with Hyphenated Compounds

A hyphenated compound occurs when two or more words, including prefixes and suffixes, have been joined together with a hyphen. If a title contains a hyphenated compound, always capitalize its first element. Capitalize the remaining elements only if they are "major" words.

- I preordered *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*.
- Can I borrow your copy of *The Encyclopedia of Over-the-Counter Medicines*?

## English Titles with Spelled-out Numbers and Fractions

Capitalize all elements of spelled-out numbers and fractions.

- Where's my copy of *Twenty-First-Century Design Trends*?
- I'm writing my next book, *Only Three-Quarters Left: A History of Office Lunch Thieves*.

# The Titles of Works in English



## English Titles with the Scientific Name of a Species

This rule is particularly useful for medical or science writers. If you mention the scientific name of a species, which is often a Latin term, capitalize only the first word of that scientific name.

### Example

- My assigned reading today is *Antilocapra americana: Its Habitat and Lifestyle*.
- I've added "*Meep Meep*": *The Habits of Geococcyx californianus* to my reading list.

## Capitalization after a Colon

Only capitalize the first word after a colon if two or more complete sentences appear after that colon. However, always capitalize the first word after a colon if that word is a proper noun.

- Garlic is my roommate's favorite ingredient: She uses it in almost everything. I think she uses it a bit too much.

If the sentence that follows the colon is incomplete (meaning it does not contain both a subject and a predicate), do not capitalize the first word after the colon. If that first word happens to be a proper noun, do capitalize it.

- I add a secret ingredient to my meatballs: cinnamon.

If a colon is being used to begin a list of items, do not capitalize the first word after that colon unless it is a proper noun.

- First aid kits should always contain a few basics: bandages, disinfectant, and sterile gloves.





# Capitalization after a Semicolon

Only capitalize the first word after a semicolon if that word is a proper noun.

## Example

- I love the rain; my cat clearly hates it.
- Jeff starts every morning with a cup of coffee; Colombian brews are his favorite.

# Quotations

Capitalize the first word in a quotation if that quotation is a complete sentence and only if that complete sentence also functions as an independent clause.

- Einstein said, "Love is a better teacher than duty."
- As my Great-Aunt Ethel used to say, "You should always pack an extra pair of socks."

If the quotation is not a complete sentence, do not capitalize its first word.

- The BBC article reported that Queen Elizabeth "adores her pet corgis."
- Multiple students complained about the new chairs, calling them "an affront to humanity."

# Appendix



## Complete Sentence

A complete sentence contains both a **subject** and a **predicate**.

## Independent and Dependent Clauses

An independent clause contains a **subject** and a **predicate**, and it expresses a complete thought. This means that an independent clause does not need any additional information to make grammatical and logical sense. It can stand on its own. In contrast, clauses that contain dependent marker words, such as "after," "that," and "because," are called dependent clauses. Dependent clauses don't make sense on their own. They need to be combined with an independent clause to express a complete thought. To understand independent and dependent clauses, it's best to consider some examples.

In the following examples, "Mr. Martin wrote" is an independent clause. "Mr. Martin" is the subject, and "wrote" is the predicate. It's an acceptable answer to the question, "What did Mr. Martin do?" "Mr. Martin wrote."

Meanwhile, the phrase "that the test subjects were delighted" is a dependent clause. It has a subject and predicate, but it also contains a dependent marker word. It doesn't make sense until it is connected to an independent clause.

- Mr. Martin wrote that "the test subjects were delighted"

## Major Words

The term "major words" refers to words that are **nouns** ("man," "sea," "prince"), **pronouns** ("I," "he," "she"), **verbs** ("be," "is," "are"), **adjectives** ("young," "old," "tall"), and **adverbs** ("quickly," "softly," "loudly").

## Minor Words

The term "minor words" refers to words that are **articles** ("an," "a," "the"), **conjunctions** ("and," "but," "so"), and **prepositions** ("above," "after," "during").

## Predicate

A predicate is what the subject is, does, or believes (e.g., "... love coffee"), as well as any additional words that describe that action or state of being.

## Subject

A subject is who or what the sentence is about (e.g., "I ..."), as well as any additional words that clarify the subject.