Capitalization

Capitalization rules are numerous, and so are the exceptions. Consult a dictionary if you are not sure.

*Sentences and phrases*

**Rule #1:**

Capitalize the first word of every sentence, the first word of every line of poetry, and the beginning of every line in an outline.

**Rule #2:**

Capitalize the first word after a colon when it (1) begins a complete sentence, (2) begins with a proper noun, or (3) begins a list.

**Examples of Rule #2:**

Follow this instruction: Turn off the lights when you leave the
Advertise the following: American Express and VISA accepted.

Please order the following supplies:
1. Scissors

**Rule #3:**

Capitalize the first word of a direct quotation within a sentence but not the second part of an interrupted direct quotation, unless another capitalization rule applies.

**Examples of Rule #3:**

Genia asked, "Why can't you go to the movie on Friday?"
"Not everyone," she said, "will agree with your decision."
"I'll take my vacation," he remarked, "Christmas Day."

**Rule #4:**

Capitalize the first word of a comment in parentheses if the comment is a full sentence.

**Example of Rule #4:**

The Midtown Arbor Society (which receives no government funding)

*Pronouns and nouns*

**Rule #5:**

Capitalize the pronoun I, proper nouns (the names of specific people, places, and things), and proper adjectives (words formed from proper nouns). DO NOT capitalize the articles a, an, or the that precede proper nouns or proper adjectives.
Examples of Rule #5:

Aunt Joan
Shakespearean
EBC Company
the Statue of Liberty

Rule #6:

Capitalize common nouns when they are followed by numbers or are part of a proper name.

Examples of Rule #6:

We took Flight 687 to Louisiana.
Kennedy High School

Rule #7:

Capitalize the names of ships, trains, planes, and spacecraft.

Examples of Rule #7:

Endeavor Royal Princess U.S.S. Enterprise

Rule #8:

Capitalize the names of all nations, languages, and ethnic groups. DO NOT capitalize economic or social groups.

Examples of Rule #8:

Spanish Native Americans upper class

Rule #9:

Capitalize the names of religions and words referring to a deity, sacred items, and personification of personal qualities.

the Lord Allah with Honor as our guide

Companies, schools, and government agencies

Rule #10:

Capitalize the specific names of departments within companies or educational institutions and the names of all government agencies. DO NOT capitalize degrees issued by educational institutions.
Examples of Rule #10:

She works in the Antitrust Division at the Department of
I spoke with Karen from the Finance Department.
I earned my bachelor of arts degree from the University of

Rule #11:

Capitalize a person's title when the title precedes the name. DO NOT capitalize the title when it follows the name. DO NOT capitalize the names of jobs or professions.

Examples of Rule #11:

Professor Cole Dr. Cole, professor of mathematics
Jodi is an accountant with the firm.

Dates, time periods, and geographic terms

Rule #12:

Capitalize historical events and eras. If the word day, era, or period appears in the name of the event or era, capitalize it only if confusion might result without capitalization. DO NOT capitalize century numbers.

Examples of Rule #12:

Neolithic era Civil War nineteenth century

Rule #13:

Capitalize days of the week, months of the year, holidays, and festival or feast days. Capitalize seasons only when they are used with the year.

Examples of Rule #13:

Tuesday, the 3rd of March
Fourth of July
I plan to register for Spring 2000 classes.
I plan to register for spring classes.

Rule #14:

Capitalize specific regions, geographic terms, and nicknames used in place of proper nouns. DO NOT capitalize descriptive geographic terms.

Examples of Rule #14:

the Pacific Northwest
the Southwest
the Sierra Nevada Mountains
the delta of the Mississippi River
the city of New York
New York City
west of the Rockies

**Business letters**

**Rule #15:**

Capitalize the first word and all nouns in the salutation and complimentary close of a letter. Capitalize all words in a salutation when the receiver is unknown.

**Examples of Rule #15:**

Dear Jerry:
Sincerely,
To Whom It May Concern:

**Titles and headlines**

**Rule #16:**

Capitalize the first and last words, main words, and hyphenated words in titles and headlines. DO NOT capitalize a, an, and the; the word to; conjunctions; or prepositions of fewer than four letters. Capitalize both words in a hyphenated word, unless it is considered one word or a compound numeral.

**Examples of Rule #16:**

New Mall to Open Soon Twenty–third Annual Event

**Rule #17:**

Capitalize book chapters, rooms in buildings, and buildings when they are identified by a number. DO NOT capitalize smaller divisions within a book or within a room or a building.

**Examples of Rule #17:**

Chapter 7  Room 5 South Building
page 2 closet 3  seat 6