Capitalization

Knowing which words to capitalize is often common sense (e.g. First words of sentences, names of people, cities, etc.), but even the best of us have trouble keeping track of all the situations where we need capital letters. This brief but handy guide lists most of the situations you will encounter where you will need to capitalize words.

**Titles of books, films, articles, short stories, major publications, etc.**

*Robinson Crusoe*
*The Grand Budapest Hotel*
*The New York Times*

**NOTE**
Conjunctions, articles, prepositions, and other connector words should be decapitalized unless they are the first word of the title.

*The Catcher in the Rye*
*The Bedford Glossary of Critical and Literary Terms*

**Capitalize geographic names and regions.**

*Aurora, Illinois* is located in the *Midwest* region of the *United States of America.*
The *Rocky Mountains* can be found in the western states of the *U.S.*

**NOTE**
Capitalize cardinal directions only if they start a sentence or refer to a specific region.

*North* is where we need to go, not *south.*

*After living in the South for many years, she moved to the East Coast.*

**Names of political parties**

Jenna is a member of the *Republican Party.*
Steve identifies as a *Democrat.*

**NOTE**
Decapitalize political ideologies and philosophies that don’t refer to a specific organization or institution

*America is a democracy.*

The class ranks *freshman, sophomore, junior, and senior* only if they begin a sentence or if they are part of a proper noun.

*Freshman* year is an adjustment period; by *sophomore* year, you’ll have the hang of it.
*Junior Placement Exam*

**School subjects if they are languages, followed by a number, or begin a sentence.**

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<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Biology 101</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>Spanish</td>
<td>French</td>
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<td>Chemistry</td>
<td>Algebra II</td>
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*Zoology* is a tough subject, but it’s not as hard as *physics.*
Names of roads, streets, avenues, boulevards, cul de sacs, highways, interstates, and parkways.

Dale Road  
Montana Street  
Fifth Avenue  
Le Grande Boulevard Interstate

NOTE
In a street name with a hyphenated number, capitalize only the first word.
The bakery is located on Forty-second Street.

Names of races and nationalities as well as groups of people.

Black  
Caucasian  
African-American  
Mexican  
White  
Italian  
Aborigines

Names of religions as well as their followers, sacred writings, specific deities, and holy days and celebrations.

Christianity  
Judaism  
Hindu  
Ash Wednesday  
Hanukkah  
Bible  
Qur’an  
God  
Krishna

NOTE
Decapitalize the words god and goddess when they refer to mythological deities. However, capitalize the names of specific mythological deities.
The Greek goddess of beauty was Venus.

Historical periods and events

the Stone Age  
the Dark Ages  
the Great Depression

NOTE
The names of centuries need not be capitalized.
American Transcendentalism began in the nineteenth century.

Names of government bodies, institutions, organizations, and teams.

Aurora City Council  
Department of Defense  
Latin American Student Organization  
Kane County Cougars  
Chicago Bears

Names of businesses and brand names of products.

Prairie Cleaners  
Prisco’s Family Foods  
Apple Macintosh

Names of buildings and other structures.

Paramount Theatre  
Holy Name Cathedral
Names of monuments, memorials, and awards.
Washington Monument
Lincoln Memorial
Nobel Prize

Names of ships, trains, aircraft, and spacecraft.
The Queen Mary
The Orient Express Spirit of St. Louis
The Starship Enterprise

Names of the makes and models of vehicles.
Jeep Grand Cherokee
Chris Craft

Names of planets, stars, constellations, and other heavenly bodies.
Jupiter
Pinwheel Galaxy
Sirius
Ursa Major

NOTE
Earth, Sun, and Moon are capitalized when referring to our planet, star, and satellite, respectively.
The Earth is about 93,000,000 miles from the Sun.
The Moon was last visited by humans in 1972.

Otherwise, they are decapitalized.
The earth was soggy following the rain shower.
Each solar system has its own sun.
Jupiter has 53 moons.