

5. CAPITALIZATION

What is wrong with the following sentence?

on monday i bought ms. caruso a book about the american civil war.

It probably didn't take you long to notice that the sentence is missing its capital letters. Here is how it should look:

On Monday I bought Ms. Caruso a book about the American Civil War.

Definition

In general, **capitalization** is used to signal or set off "beginnings" and proper nouns.

For instance, always capitalize the first word of a sentence, the first word of a direct quotation, and the first word of a line of traditional poetry. Unless you are e. e. cummings,* always capitalize the pronoun *I*, too:

1. The car ran into a tree.
2. John Donne once said, "No man is an island."
3. I love to rise in a summer morn
When the birds sing on every tree;
4. Why didn't I ever learn to sing?

PROPER NOUNS

In addition to "beginnings," always capitalize proper nouns. As you probably remember from the noun section, proper nouns are nouns that refer to a specific person, place, or thing. Proper nouns include such categories as people's names and titles (if the title goes with the name):

Theodore Roosevelt President Truman Senator Kennedy

the names of days, months, and holidays:

Wednesday February Yom Kippur

the names of historical events, periods, and documents:

Great Depression Progressive Era Magna Carta

*e. e. cummings (1894–1962) was an American poet who did not use capital letters.

the names of cities, states, and countries:

Minneapolis Montana Australia

the names of deities, religions, and religious organizations:

Jehovah Hinduism National Council of Churches

the names of political parties, governing bodies, and governmental departments:

Republican party Provisional Government
U.S. Justice Department

the names of races, peoples, and languages:

Hispanic Chinese Italian

TITLES AND LETTERS

Titles must always be capitalized. This rule applies to books (*Pride and Prejudice*), poems ("The Road Not Taken"), plays (*Romeo and Juliet*), articles ("Travels through Georgia"), stories ("To Build a Fire"), magazines (*The New Yorker*), newspapers (*Washington Post*), essays ("Shooting an Elephant"), movies (*Star Wars*), songs ("Blue Suede Shoes"), works of art (*Mona Lisa*), and television programs (*Friends*). In titles, capitalize the first and last words and all other words except prepositions, conjunctions, and articles (*a, an, the*): (*Diary of a Madman and Other Stories*).

Finally, when you are writing a letter, capitalize the first word and all nouns in the salutation or greeting. On the other hand, only capitalize the first word in the closing:

Dear President Lincoln: Yours truly,
Dear Tim and Cindy, Best wishes,

CAPITALIZATION EXERCISES

A. *Directions:* In the following sentences, circle the letters that should be capitalized.

EXAMPLE: ms. gomez said that mt. washington is located in new hampshire.

1. my uncle jack lives on elm street in denver.
2. the empire state building was once the tallest building in new york.
3. the boston red sox play baseball in fenway park.

4. *swallows and amazons* is bill's favorite book.
5. nadine's family usually goes to maine in may or september.
6. the beatles had a hit song called "help."
7. winston churchill was prime minister of england during world war II.
8. dr. chavez grew up in managua, nicaragua.
9. "my papa's waltz" is a poem by theodore roethke.
10. hilary paddled the canoe along the mississippi river from minneapolis to new orleans.

B. *Directions:* Rewrite each word or group of words, properly capitalized, in the space to the right. If the word or group of words is already capitalized properly, just write C in the space.

EXAMPLE: los angeles Los Angeles

1. mister billingsgate _____
2. *The Name Of The Rose* _____
3. Orthodontist _____
4. mt. mckinley _____
5. *New York Times* _____
6. prime minister Thatcher _____
7. Smallpox _____
8. *The Sword in the Stone* _____
9. Salmon _____
10. lake superior _____
11. Romeo and Juliet _____
12. easter Sunday _____
13. Chicago cubs _____
14. the wind in the willows _____
15. secretary of State _____

C. *Directions:* In the space to the right of each common noun, write a proper noun that is an example of that common noun. Be sure to capitalize the proper noun correctly.

EXAMPLE: pirate Long John Silver

1. country _____
2. novel _____
3. river _____

4. singer _____
5. president _____
6. ocean _____
7. month _____
8. poet _____
9. city _____
10. actress _____