

Whether or not the first letter in a word should be capitalized depends on what kind of word it is as well as the context in which it is used. Read the following sections and complete the practice questions to ensure you understand when and when not to capitalize a word.

First Words in a Sentence

- The first word in a sentence should always be capitalized.
Ex. You probably noticed that the “y” in this sentence is capital and not lowercase.

The Pronoun “I”

- The pronoun “I” should always be capitalized.
Ex. I like to drench my fries in ketchup, but I don’t like the taste of tomatoes by themselves.

Titles

- Important words in books, movies, articles, songs, should be capitalized.
- Capitalize nouns, adjectives, verbs, adverbs, pronouns, and subordinating conjunctions.
- Do not capitalize: a, an, the, and, but, or, for, nor, on, at, to from, by.
Ex. Star Wars; The Grapes of Wrath; The Lord of the Rings.

Proper Nouns

- Always capitalize a proper noun—a name used for a specific person, place, or thing.
- Capitalize the first, last, and middle names of people.
Ex. Heather Nguyen had pancakes for breakfast with Will Garrison at IHOP the other day.
- Capitalize companies or the names of restaurants.
Ex. The guys plan on eating lunch at Red Robin tomorrow evening.
Ex. He just recently signed his first big contract with Disney.
- Capitalize the names of individual institutions or locations.
Ex. Virginia Commonwealth University is my dream school.
Ex. When we vacation in Paris next year, we want to visit the Effel Tower.
- Also capitalize adjectives derived from proper nouns (America:American / France:French).
Ex. Barry is American with Scottish, Ashkenazi, and French heritage.
Ex. She is a Shakespearean scholar—she specializes in his poetry.
- Capitalize the months of the year and days of the week.
Ex. I started studying the language on my own in October, but I don’t begin Spanish class until January.
Ex. Friday is hands down the best day of the week.
- Capitalize the names of specific course titles in school.
Ex. Algebra I, Biology, Earth Science, American History

When Not to Capitalize

- Do not capitalize common nouns, or nouns used as generic terms for people, places, or things.
Ex. I can’t wait to go to college.
Ex. My mom is driving me to the city tomorrow night.
Ex. Have you ever read The Book Thief by Markus Zusak? It’s an amazing book.
- Do not capitalize the names of seasons of the year—winter, spring, summer, and fall.
Ex. I love winter and fall because they have all the best holidays. I cannot stand summer and spring.

- **Do not** capitalize the names of subjects in school (subjects are not the same as course names).

Ex. My favorite subject is math, but my sister enjoys history.

- **Do not** capitalize the names of diseases or medical conditions except for the part of the name that is an adjective derived from a proper noun (Ex. someone's name).

Ex. Holden Caulfield was sick in the hospital with tuberculosis.

Ex. I wrote my essay about Crohn's disease.

Correct the punctuation errors in the following sentences:

1. Since He'd spent all of his money on the train ticket to chicago, he didn't have enough to stay at a fancy Hotel.
2. I've spent most of My life in new york City, but I was born in richmond, Virginia.
3. the trees in the blue ridge mountains look absolutely beautiful in the Fall, but they have no leaves in the Winter.
4. Peter pan is my favorite Disney character, but I don't like His second movie.
5. I got an A+ on my american revolution test because I love studying history.
6. Paul and tim went to the Virginia museum of fine arts to see a Painting by picasso.
7. James watson and Francis Crick would never have discovered the Structure Of DNA without the help of rosalind franklin.
8. rick went to Game stop to buy a copy of Halo 4.
9. Did you know Jim Carrey is a canadian who was born in ontario?
10. Derek earned an english degree from Virginia tech in Blacksburg.
11. i can't wait to be finished with my essay on Romeo and juliet so I can watch the new Season of Orange is the new Black on netflix.
12. There's this new Diner down in Carytown that my Family wants to try out for Lunch.
13. Zeke cohen and his family don't celebrate christmas because they're jewish.
14. Barry Allen, also known as the flash, could definitely outrun superman in any Footrace.
15. Nathan and i are almost twins; he was born april 30 and my birthday is the First Day of may.

Answer Key:

1. Since he'd spent all of his money on the train ticket to Chicago, he didn't have enough to stay at a fancy hotel.
2. I've spent most of my life in New York City, but I was born in Richmond, Virginia.
3. The trees in the Blue Ridge Mountains look absolutely beautiful in the fall, but they have no leaves in the winter.
4. Peter Pan is my favorite Disney character, but I don't like His second movie.
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14. Barry Allen, also known as the Flash, could definitely outrun Superman in any footrace.
15. Nathan and I are almost twins; he was born on April 30 and my birthday is the first day of May.