

CHICAGO STYLE CAPITALIZATION CONVENTIONS

MASTERING CHICAGO STYLE CAPITALIZATION CONVENTIONS: A COMPREHENSIVE GUIDE

CHICAGO STYLE CAPITALIZATION CONVENTIONS ARE A CORNERSTONE OF CLEAR AND CONSISTENT ACADEMIC AND PROFESSIONAL WRITING, PARTICULARLY IN FIELDS THAT ADHERE TO THE VENERABLE CHICAGO MANUAL OF STYLE (CMOS). UNDERSTANDING THESE RULES ENSURES THAT TITLES, HEADINGS, PROPER NOUNS, AND OTHER ELEMENTS ARE PRESENTED UNIFORMLY, ENHANCING READABILITY AND CREDIBILITY. THIS COMPREHENSIVE GUIDE DELVES INTO THE INTRICACIES OF CHICAGO'S APPROACH TO CAPITALIZATION, COVERING EVERYTHING FROM GENERAL PRINCIPLES TO SPECIFIC APPLICATIONS IN TITLES, PROPER NOUNS, AND EVEN THE NUANCES OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES AND ABBREVIATIONS. BY MASTERING THESE CONVENTIONS, WRITERS CAN ELEVATE THEIR WORK, ENSURING IT MEETS THE HIGH STANDARDS EXPECTED IN SCHOLARLY AND PUBLISHING CONTEXTS. THIS ARTICLE WILL EXPLORE THE FOUNDATIONAL PRINCIPLES, DELVE INTO SPECIFIC RULES FOR DIFFERENT CONTEXTS, AND PROVIDE PRACTICAL EXAMPLES TO SOLIDIFY YOUR UNDERSTANDING OF EFFECTIVE CHICAGO STYLE CAPITALIZATION.

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GENERAL PRINCIPLES OF CHICAGO CAPITALIZATION

THE CHICAGO MANUAL OF STYLE GENERALLY FOLLOWS A PRINCIPLE OF MINIMIZING CAPITALIZATION, ADVOCATING FOR LOWERCASE UNLESS A SPECIFIC REASON DICTATES OTHERWISE. THIS APPROACH CONTRASTS WITH SOME OTHER STYLE GUIDES THAT FAVOR MORE EXTENSIVE CAPITALIZATION. THE CORE IDEA IS TO CAPITALIZE ONLY WHEN NECESSARY FOR CLARITY, TO IDENTIFY A SPECIFIC ENTITY, OR TO CONFORM TO ESTABLISHED CONVENTIONS FOR CERTAIN TYPES OF WORDS. THIS PRINCIPLE EXTENDS TO COMMON NOUNS THAT MIGHT REFER TO A SPECIFIC ENTITY WHEN USED IN A PARTICULAR CONTEXT, SUCH AS "THE PRESIDENT" WHEN REFERRING TO THE CURRENT HOLDER OF THAT OFFICE. UNDERSTANDING THIS FOUNDATIONAL PRINCIPLE IS CRUCIAL FOR CORRECTLY APPLYING ALL OTHER CHICAGO CAPITALIZATION RULES.

THE PRINCIPLE OF MINIMIZATION

THE CHICAGO MANUAL OF STYLE'S APPROACH TO CAPITALIZATION IS ROOTED IN A DESIRE FOR SIMPLICITY AND READABILITY. GENERALLY, COMMON NOUNS ARE NOT CAPITALIZED UNLESS THEY BEGIN A SENTENCE OR ARE PART OF A PROPER NAME OR TITLE. THIS MEANS WORDS LIKE "UNIVERSITY," "COMPANY," OR "RIVER" REMAIN LOWERCASE UNLESS THEY ARE FUNCTIONING AS PART OF A SPECIFIC, NAMED ENTITY, SUCH AS "HARVARD UNIVERSITY" OR "THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER." THIS PRINCIPLE OF CAPITALIZATION REDUCTION IS A KEY CHARACTERISTIC THAT DISTINGUISHES CHICAGO STYLE.

WHEN TO CAPITALIZE: SPECIFIC EXCEPTIONS

WHILE THE GENERAL RULE IS TO LOWERCASE, CHICAGO STYLE PROVIDES CLEAR GUIDELINES FOR WHEN CAPITALIZATION IS MANDATORY. THESE EXCEPTIONS PRIMARILY INCLUDE:

THE FIRST WORD OF A SENTENCE.

PROPER NOUNS (NAMES OF SPECIFIC PEOPLE, PLACES, ORGANIZATIONS, ETC.).

WORDS THAT BEGIN TITLES AND HEADINGS, ACCORDING TO SPECIFIC RULES.

WORDS THAT ARE CAPITALIZED BY CONVENTION OR FOR EMPHASIS, SUCH AS CERTAIN RELIGIOUS TERMS.
THE FIRST WORD OF A DIRECT QUOTATION.

CAPITALIZATION IN TITLES AND HEADINGS

ONE OF THE MOST FREQUENTLY ENCOUNTERED AREAS WHERE CHICAGO STYLE CAPITALIZATION RULES ARE APPLIED IS IN THE TREATMENT OF TITLES AND HEADINGS, WHETHER IN FULL-LENGTH WORKS, ARTICLES, OR EVEN SUBTITLES. CHICAGO OFFERS TWO PRIMARY APPROACHES: "TITLE CASE" AND "SENTENCE CASE." THE CHOICE BETWEEN THESE OFTEN DEPENDS ON THE CONTEXT AND THE SPECIFIC PUBLICATION'S PREFERENCE, BUT UNDERSTANDING BOTH IS ESSENTIAL FOR ADHERING TO CHICAGO CONVENTIONS.

TITLE CASE: CAPITALIZING MAJOR WORDS

TITLE CASE, AS APPLIED BY CHICAGO, INVOLVES CAPITALIZING THE FIRST WORD, THE LAST WORD, AND ALL "PRINCIPAL" WORDS IN A TITLE OR HEADING. GENERALLY, THIS MEANS NOUNS, PRONOUNS, VERBS, ADJECTIVES, AND ADVERBS ARE CAPITALIZED. PREPOSITIONS, CONJUNCTIONS, AND ARTICLES (UNLESS THEY ARE THE FIRST OR LAST WORD) ARE TYPICALLY KEPT LOWERCASE. FOR INSTANCE, IN "THE IMPORTANCE OF UNDERSTANDING CHICAGO STYLE CAPITALIZATION," THE WORDS "THE," "IMPORTANCE," "UNDERSTANDING," "CHICAGO," AND "CAPITALIZATION" ARE CAPITALIZED AS PRINCIPAL WORDS, WHILE "OF" AND "STYLE" ARE LOWERCASE.

SENTENCE CASE: CAPITALIZING ONLY THE FIRST WORD

SENTENCE CASE CAPITALIZATION IS SIMPLER, TREATING THE TITLE AS IF IT WERE THE BEGINNING OF A SENTENCE. IN THIS STYLE, ONLY THE FIRST WORD OF THE TITLE AND ANY PROPER NOUNS OR OTHER WORDS THAT WOULD NORMALLY BE CAPITALIZED ARE CAPITALIZED. FOR EXAMPLE, A TITLE IN SENTENCE CASE MIGHT APPEAR AS: "THE IMPORTANCE OF UNDERSTANDING CHICAGO STYLE CAPITALIZATION." THIS APPROACH IS OFTEN PREFERRED FOR HEADINGS WITHIN A DOCUMENT OR FOR THE TITLES OF ARTICLES IN CERTAIN JOURNALS.

SUBTITLES AND THEIR CAPITALIZATION

WHEN A TITLE INCLUDES A SUBTITLE, CHICAGO STYLE DICTATES THAT THE FIRST WORD OF THE SUBTITLE SHOULD ALSO BE CAPITALIZED, REGARDLESS OF WHETHER TITLE CASE OR SENTENCE CASE IS USED FOR THE MAIN TITLE. THIS ENSURES A CLEAR VISUAL DISTINCTION BETWEEN THE MAIN TITLE AND ITS EXPLANATORY SUBTITLE. FOR EXAMPLE, IF THE MAIN TITLE USES SENTENCE CASE, A SUBTITLE WOULD BE CAPITALIZED LIKE THIS: "A GUIDE TO CHICAGO STYLE CAPITALIZATION: UNDERSTANDING THE CONVENTIONS."

CAPITALIZING PROPER NOUNS

PROPER NOUNS ARE A FUNDAMENTAL CATEGORY IN CAPITALIZATION, AND CHICAGO STYLE PROVIDES CLEAR GUIDELINES FOR THEIR IDENTIFICATION AND TREATMENT. A PROPER NOUN REFERS TO A UNIQUE ENTITY, DISTINGUISHING IT FROM A COMMON NOUN. THIS CATEGORY ENCOMPASSES A WIDE RANGE OF TERMS, FROM PERSONAL NAMES TO SPECIFIC GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATIONS AND BRAND NAMES.

IDENTIFYING PROPER NOUNS

THE KEY TO CAPITALIZING PROPER NOUNS IS RECOGNIZING WHEN A NOUN REFERS TO A SPECIFIC, INDIVIDUAL ENTITY RATHER THAN A GENERAL CLASS OF THINGS. FOR EXAMPLE, "DOCTOR" IS A COMMON NOUN, BUT "DR. EMILY CARTER" REFERS TO A SPECIFIC

PERSON AND THUS "DR." AND "CARTER" ARE CAPITALIZED. SIMILARLY, "RIVER" IS COMMON, BUT "THE NILE RIVER" IS PROPER.

NAMES OF PEOPLE, PLACES, AND ORGANIZATIONS

NAMES OF INDIVIDUALS, SPECIFIC CITIES, STATES, COUNTRIES, CONTINENTS, STREETS, BUILDINGS, AND ORGANIZATIONS ARE ALWAYS CAPITALIZED. THIS INCLUDES:

PERSONAL NAMES: ABRAHAM LINCOLN, MARIE CURIE

GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES: PARIS, FRANCE, MOUNT EVEREST, ATLANTIC OCEAN

ORGANIZATIONS: UNITED NATIONS, GOOGLE, THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART

BRAND NAMES AND TRADEMARKS

SPECIFIC BRAND NAMES AND TRADEMARKS ARE ALSO CAPITALIZED. THIS INCLUDES NAMES OF PRODUCTS, COMPANIES, AND SERVICES THAT ARE REGISTERED OR WIDELY RECOGNIZED AS DISTINCT ENTITIES. EXAMPLES INCLUDE:

COCA-COLA

IPHONE

MICROSOFT WINDOWS

SPECIFIC RULES FOR NAMES AND TITLES

CHICAGO STYLE OFFERS DETAILED RULES FOR CAPITALIZING THE NAMES AND TITLES OF PEOPLE, PARTICULARLY WHEN THEY APPEAR WITHIN TEXT OR AS PART OF A FORMAL ADDRESS. THE CONTEXT IN WHICH A NAME OR TITLE APPEARS SIGNIFICANTLY INFLUENCES CAPITALIZATION.

TITLES USED BEFORE NAMES

WHEN A TITLE IS USED IMMEDIATELY BEFORE A PERSON'S NAME, IT IS CAPITALIZED. THIS APPLIES TO FORMAL TITLES, HONORIFICS, AND PROFESSIONAL DESIGNATIONS.

PRESIDENT BIDEN

QUEEN ELIZABETH II

PROFESSOR ANYA SHARMA

DR. JAMES LEE

TITLES USED AFTER NAMES OR IN PLACE OF NAMES

WHEN A TITLE APPEARS AFTER A NAME OR IS USED ALONE IN PLACE OF A NAME, IT IS GENERALLY NOT CAPITALIZED UNLESS IT REFERS TO A SPECIFIC, HIGH-RANKING OFFICE HOLDER IN A FORMAL CONTEXT, OR IF IT IS PART OF A SPECIFIC IDIOM.

JOE BIDEN, THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES

ELIZABETH, THE QUEEN OF ENGLAND

HOWEVER, WHEN REFERRING TO A SPECIFIC, CURRENT LEADER IN A FORMAL CONTEXT, CAPITALIZATION MIGHT BE RETAINED FOR CLARITY: "THE PRESIDENT ANNOUNCED NEW POLICIES."

OFFICIAL TITLES OF GOVERNMENTS AND INSTITUTIONS

OFFICIAL TITLES OF GOVERNMENTS, DEPARTMENTS, AND INSTITUTIONS ARE CAPITALIZED WHEN REFERRING TO SPECIFIC ENTITIES.

THE DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE
THE UNITED STATES CONGRESS
THE PARLIAMENT OF CANADA

CAPITALIZATION IN TECHNICAL AND SCIENTIFIC WRITING

TECHNICAL AND SCIENTIFIC WRITING OFTEN HAS ITS OWN SET OF CONVENTIONS, BUT CHICAGO STYLE PROVIDES OVERARCHING PRINCIPLES THAT APPLY. THE PRIMARY GOAL IS CLARITY AND PRECISION, AND CAPITALIZATION CAN PLAY A ROLE IN ACHIEVING THIS.

SCIENTIFIC NAMES AND TERMS

IN BIOLOGICAL NOMENCLATURE, GENUS NAMES ARE CAPITALIZED, WHILE SPECIES NAMES ARE NOT. FOR EXAMPLE, *HOMO SAPIENS*. CHEMICAL ELEMENTS, COMPOUNDS, AND STANDARD UNITS OF MEASUREMENT ARE GENERALLY NOT CAPITALIZED UNLESS THEY ARE PART OF A PROPER NOUN.

TECHNICAL TERMINOLOGY

SPECIFIC TECHNICAL TERMS THAT HAVE BECOME STANDARDIZED WITHIN A PARTICULAR FIELD MAY SOMETIMES BE CAPITALIZED, THOUGH CHICAGO GENERALLY ADVISES AGAINST CAPITALIZING COMMON NOUNS THAT BECOME TECHNICAL TERMS UNLESS THEY ARE PART OF A SPECIFIC NAME OR PRODUCT. CONSISTENCY IS KEY, AND A STYLE SHEET FOR THE SPECIFIC PUBLICATION IS OFTEN THE BEST GUIDE.

HANDLING ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

THE CAPITALIZATION OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS FOLLOWS SPECIFIC CHICAGO STYLE RULES TO ENSURE CLARITY AND CONSISTENCY. THE INITIAL FORM OF THE ABBREVIATION OR ACRONYM AND ITS SUBSEQUENT USE CAN DICTATE CAPITALIZATION.

FIRST MENTION OF AN ABBREVIATION

WHEN AN ABBREVIATION OR ACRONYM IS FIRST INTRODUCED, IT IS OFTEN BEST PRACTICE TO SPELL OUT THE FULL TERM FOLLOWED BY THE ABBREVIATION IN PARENTHESES.

THE NATIONAL AERONAUTICS AND SPACE ADMINISTRATION (NASA)
THE WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION (WHO)

SUBSEQUENT USE OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ONCE INTRODUCED, ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS ARE TYPICALLY USED IN ALL CAPS.

NASA LAUNCHED A NEW MISSION.

WHO ISSUED NEW GUIDELINES.

ACRONYMS PRONOUNCED AS WORDS

ACRONYMS THAT ARE PRONOUNCED AS WORDS (E.G., NASA, NATO) ARE GENERALLY CAPITALIZED. ABBREVIATIONS THAT ARE NOT PRONOUNCED AS WORDS AND ARE SPELLED OUT LETTER BY LETTER (E.G., FBI, CIA) ARE ALSO CAPITALIZED.

CAPITALIZATION IN OTHER LANGUAGES

WHEN INCORPORATING WORDS OR PHRASES FROM OTHER LANGUAGES INTO ENGLISH TEXT, CHICAGO STYLE OFFERS GUIDANCE ON HOW TO HANDLE THEIR CAPITALIZATION. THE PRIMARY CONSIDERATION IS CONSISTENCY WITH THE SOURCE LANGUAGE'S CONVENTIONS AND THE CONTEXT OF ITS USE IN ENGLISH.

LOANWORDS AND FOREIGN TITLES

LOANWORDS ADOPTED INTO ENGLISH OFTEN FOLLOW ENGLISH CAPITALIZATION RULES, MEANING THEY ARE GENERALLY LOWERCASE UNLESS THEY BEGIN A SENTENCE OR ARE PROPER NOUNS. FOREIGN TITLES OF SPECIFIC WORKS (BOOKS, FILMS) SHOULD BE CAPITALIZED ACCORDING TO THE CONVENTIONS OF THE LANGUAGE IN WHICH THEY ARE WRITTEN, OR AS COMMONLY RENDERED IN ENGLISH IF THERE IS A STANDARD ANGLICIZED FORM.

PROPER NOUNS IN OTHER LANGUAGES

PROPER NOUNS FROM OTHER LANGUAGES ARE CAPITALIZED AS THEY ARE IN THEIR ORIGINAL LANGUAGE WHEN USED WITHIN AN ENGLISH TEXT. FOR EXAMPLE, NAMES OF PEOPLE OR PLACES IN FRENCH OR GERMAN WOULD RETAIN THEIR ORIGINAL CAPITALIZATION.

COMMON PITFALLS AND HOW TO AVOID THEM

NAVIGATING CHICAGO STYLE CAPITALIZATION CAN PRESENT CHALLENGES, AND CERTAIN COMMON ERRORS TEND TO ARISE. RECOGNIZING THESE PITFALLS IS THE FIRST STEP TOWARD AVOIDING THEM AND ENSURING ACCURATE ADHERENCE TO THE MANUAL.

OVER-CAPITALIZATION

ONE OF THE MOST FREQUENT MISTAKES IS OVER-CAPITALIZATION, WHERE COMMON NOUNS ARE CAPITALIZED UNNECESSARILY, OFTEN OUT OF A MISTAKEN BELIEF THAT THEY ARE PROPER NOUNS OR TITLES. ALWAYS QUESTION WHETHER A WORD REFERS TO A SPECIFIC, UNIQUE ENTITY.

INCONSISTENT APPLICATION

ANOTHER COMMON ISSUE IS INCONSISTENCY. A WRITER MIGHT CAPITALIZE A TERM CORRECTLY IN ONE INSTANCE BUT INCORRECTLY IN ANOTHER. MAINTAINING A CONSISTENT APPROACH THROUGHOUT A DOCUMENT IS CRUCIAL. USING A STYLE SHEET CAN HELP TRACK TERMS AND ENSURE UNIFORMITY.

CONFUSING TITLES AND ROLES

MISUNDERSTANDING THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN A FORMAL TITLE USED BEFORE A NAME AND A ROLE USED IN GENERAL CONTEXT CAN LEAD TO CAPITALIZATION ERRORS. FOR EXAMPLE, CAPITALIZING "PRESIDENT" WHEN REFERRING TO ANY PRESIDENT OF A CLUB VERSUS CAPITALIZING "PRESIDENT" WHEN REFERRING TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES IN A FORMAL CONTEXT.

INCORRECT HANDLING OF COMPOUND PROPER NOUNS

COMPOUND PROPER NOUNS, SUCH AS NAMES OF BUSINESSES OR GEOGRAPHICAL FEATURES, REQUIRE CAREFUL ATTENTION TO WHICH ELEMENTS SHOULD BE CAPITALIZED. FOR INSTANCE, "SOUTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY" VERSUS "NEW YORK CITY."

RESOURCES FOR FURTHER STUDY

FOR WRITERS SEEKING TO DEEPLY UNDERSTAND AND APPLY CHICAGO STYLE CAPITALIZATION CONVENTIONS, CONSULTING THE AUTHORITATIVE SOURCE IS PARAMOUNT. THE CHICAGO MANUAL OF STYLE ITSELF IS THE ULTIMATE RESOURCE.

THE CHICAGO MANUAL OF STYLE

THE MOST COMPREHENSIVE AND DEFINITIVE GUIDE IS THE CHICAGO MANUAL OF STYLE, PUBLISHED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO PRESS. IT OFFERS DETAILED EXPLANATIONS, EXAMPLES, AND ANSWERS TO A VAST ARRAY OF EDITORIAL QUESTIONS, INCLUDING EXTENSIVE SECTIONS ON CAPITALIZATION. REGULARLY CONSULTING THE LATEST EDITION ENSURES ADHERENCE TO CURRENT BEST PRACTICES.

ONLINE RESOURCES AND STYLE GUIDES

NUMEROUS REPUTABLE ONLINE RESOURCES AND UNIVERSITY WRITING CENTERS OFFER SUMMARIES AND QUICK GUIDES TO CHICAGO STYLE. WHILE THESE CAN BE HELPFUL FOR QUICK REFERENCE, THEY SHOULD NOT REPLACE THE COMPREHENSIVE GUIDANCE FOUND IN THE MANUAL ITSELF.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT CHICAGO STYLE CAPITALIZATION CONVENTIONS

Q: WHEN SHOULD I CAPITALIZE THE WORD "INTERNET" IN CHICAGO STYLE?

A: ACCORDING TO THE LATEST EDITIONS OF THE CHICAGO MANUAL OF STYLE, "INTERNET" IS NOW GENERALLY TREATED AS A COMMON NOUN AND SHOULD BE LOWERCASE UNLESS IT BEGINS A SENTENCE OR IS PART OF A PROPER NAME.

Q: HOW DO I CAPITALIZE TITLES OF BOOKS AND ARTICLES IN CHICAGO STYLE?

A: CHICAGO STYLE OFFERS TWO MAIN METHODS: TITLE CASE AND SENTENCE CASE. IN TITLE CASE, CAPITALIZE THE FIRST WORD, LAST WORD, AND ALL PRINCIPAL WORDS (NOUNS, PRONOUNS, VERBS, ADJECTIVES, ADVERBS). IN SENTENCE CASE, CAPITALIZE ONLY THE FIRST WORD AND ANY PROPER NOUNS. SUBTITLES ARE CAPITALIZED ON THEIR FIRST WORD IN BOTH CASES.

Q: IS IT "THE WHITE HOUSE" OR "THE WHITE HOUSE" IN CHICAGO STYLE?

A: WHEN REFERRING TO THE SPECIFIC, OFFICIAL RESIDENCE AND PRINCIPAL WORKPLACE OF THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES, IT IS CAPITALIZED AS "THE WHITE HOUSE." HOWEVER, IF REFERRING TO A HOUSE THAT IS WHITE IN COLOR, IT WOULD BE LOWERCASE.

Q: HOW DO I CAPITALIZE THE NAMES OF HISTORICAL PERIODS OR EVENTS IN CHICAGO STYLE?

A: MAJOR HISTORICAL PERIODS AND EVENTS THAT ARE NAMED ENTITIES ARE GENERALLY CAPITALIZED, SUCH AS THE RENAISSANCE, THE CIVIL WAR, WORLD WAR II, OR THE MIDDLE AGES.

Q: WHAT IS THE RULE FOR CAPITALIZING JOB TITLES IN CHICAGO STYLE?

A: JOB TITLES ARE TYPICALLY CAPITALIZED ONLY WHEN THEY APPEAR IMMEDIATELY BEFORE A PERSON'S NAME (E.G., CEO JANE DOE) OR WHEN THEY REFER TO A SPECIFIC, HIGH-RANKING OFFICE HOLDER IN A FORMAL CONTEXT (E.G., THE PRESIDENT SIGNED THE BILL). OTHERWISE, THEY ARE USUALLY LOWERCASE (E.G., JANE DOE, THE CEO).

Q: SHOULD I CAPITALIZE "WEBSITE" IN CHICAGO STYLE?

A: GENERALLY, "WEBSITE" IS TREATED AS A COMMON NOUN AND SHOULD BE LOWERCASE IN CHICAGO STYLE UNLESS IT BEGINS A SENTENCE OR IS PART OF A SPECIFIC PROPER NAME.

Q: HOW DO I HANDLE CAPITALIZATION OF CARDINAL DIRECTIONS (NORTH, SOUTH, EAST, WEST) IN CHICAGO STYLE?

A: CARDINAL DIRECTIONS ARE CAPITALIZED WHEN THEY REFER TO SPECIFIC REGIONS OR POLITICAL DIVISIONS (E.G., THE MIDWEST, THE SOUTH, NORTH KOREA) BUT ARE LOWERCASE WHEN THEY INDICATE DIRECTION OR LOCATION GENERALLY (E.G., DRIVE NORTH, THE NORTH SIDE OF TOWN).

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