

CHICAGO STYLE CAPITALIZATION RULES FOR WRITERS

UNDERSTANDING CHICAGO STYLE CAPITALIZATION RULES FOR WRITERS

CHICAGO STYLE CAPITALIZATION RULES FOR WRITERS ARE A CORNERSTONE OF CLEAR AND PROFESSIONAL COMMUNICATION IN NUMEROUS ACADEMIC AND PUBLISHING FIELDS. NAVIGATING THESE GUIDELINES CAN SEEM DAUNTING, BUT A FIRM GRASP OF THE PRINCIPLES ENSURES CONSISTENCY AND ADHERENCE TO ESTABLISHED EDITORIAL STANDARDS. THIS COMPREHENSIVE GUIDE WILL DELVE INTO THE NUANCES OF CHICAGO MANUAL OF STYLE (CMOS) CAPITALIZATION, COVERING EVERYTHING FROM GENERAL PRINCIPLES TO SPECIFIC EXCEPTIONS FOR TITLES, PROPER NOUNS, AND MORE. MASTERING THESE RULES IS ESSENTIAL FOR ANYONE AIMING TO PUBLISH WITH PRECISION AND AUTHORITY, ENSURING THEIR WORK MEETS THE HIGHEST EDITORIAL BENCHMARKS.

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INTRODUCTION TO CHICAGO STYLE CAPITALIZATION

UNDERSTANDING **CHICAGO STYLE CAPITALIZATION RULES FOR WRITERS** IS CRUCIAL FOR ENSURING CLARITY, CONSISTENCY, AND ADHERENCE TO WIDELY ACCEPTED EDITORIAL STANDARDS IN PUBLISHING. THE CHICAGO MANUAL OF STYLE (CMOS) OFFERS DETAILED GUIDANCE ON HOW TO CAPITALIZE WORDS, PARTICULARLY IN TITLES, PROPER NOUNS, AND OTHER SPECIFIC CONTEXTS. THIS ARTICLE AIMS TO DEMYSTIFY THESE RULES, PROVIDING A COMPREHENSIVE OVERVIEW FOR WRITERS AT ALL LEVELS. WE WILL EXPLORE THE FOUNDATIONAL PRINCIPLES, THE INTRICACIES OF TITLE CAPITALIZATION, THE PROPER TREATMENT OF NOUNS AND NAMES, AND ADDRESS COMMON POINTS OF CONFUSION TO EMPOWER YOU WITH THE KNOWLEDGE TO APPLY CHICAGO STYLE CAPITALIZATION ACCURATELY.

GENERAL PRINCIPLES OF CHICAGO CAPITALIZATION

THE OVERARCHING PRINCIPLE IN CHICAGO STYLE CAPITALIZATION IS TO LOWERCASE WORDS UNLESS THERE IS A SPECIFIC REASON TO CAPITALIZE THEM. THIS "SENTENCE CASE" APPROACH TO TITLES AND GENERAL TEXT MINIMIZES CAPITALIZATION AND EMPHASIZES CLARITY. UNLIKE SOME OTHER STYLE GUIDES, CHICAGO GENERALLY FAVORS A MORE RESTRAINED APPROACH, PRIORITIZING READABILITY AND NATURAL LANGUAGE FLOW. ADHERENCE TO THESE FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES FORMS THE BEDROCK FOR MASTERING MORE SPECIFIC RULES.

THE DEFAULT TO LOWERCASE

UNLESS A WORD IS A PROPER NOUN, THE FIRST WORD OF A SENTENCE, OR FALLS UNDER SPECIFIC TITLE CAPITALIZATION RULES, IT SHOULD BE IN LOWERCASE. THIS SIMPLE YET POWERFUL RULE GUIDES MOST OF YOUR CAPITALIZATION DECISIONS. IT'S A CONSTANT REMINDER TO QUESTION EVERY CAPITALIZATION CHOICE AND ENSURE IT'S JUSTIFIED BY A SPECIFIC STYLISTIC CONVENTION.

PROPER NOUNS AS THE PRIMARY EXCEPTION

THE MOST COMMON REASON FOR CAPITALIZATION IN CHICAGO STYLE IS THE USE OF PROPER NOUNS. THESE ARE NAMES OF SPECIFIC PEOPLE, PLACES, ORGANIZATIONS, AND UNIQUE ENTITIES. RECOGNIZING AND CORRECTLY CAPITALIZING PROPER NOUNS IS A FUNDAMENTAL SKILL FOR ANY WRITER USING CHICAGO STYLE.

CAPITALIZING TITLES IN CHICAGO STYLE

THE CHICAGO MANUAL OF STYLE PRESENTS TWO DISTINCT APPROACHES TO CAPITALIZING TITLES: TITLE CASE AND SENTENCE CASE. UNDERSTANDING WHEN TO APPLY EACH IS CRITICAL FOR ACADEMIC PAPERS, BOOK TITLES, ARTICLE HEADINGS, AND MORE. THE CHOICE OFTEN DEPENDS ON THE CONTEXT AND THE SPECIFIC PUBLICATION'S PREFERENCES.

TITLE CASE FOR TITLES OF WORKS

WHEN CAPITALIZING TITLES OF BOOKS, ARTICLES, ESSAYS, POEMS, PLAYS, AND OTHER CREATIVE WORKS, CHICAGO STYLE PRIMARILY EMPLOYS TITLE CASE. THIS MEANS CAPITALIZING THE FIRST WORD, THE LAST WORD, AND ALL PRINCIPAL WORDS IN BETWEEN. HOWEVER, THERE ARE SPECIFIC RULES FOR WHICH WORDS ARE CONSIDERED "PRINCIPAL."

WHAT CONSTITUTES A PRINCIPAL WORD

IN TITLE CASE, THE FOLLOWING WORDS ARE GENERALLY CAPITALIZED:

NOUNS

PRONOUNS

VERBS (INCLUDING LINKING VERBS LIKE "IS," "ARE," "WAS," "WERE")

ADJECTIVES

ADVERBS

THE FIRST AND LAST WORDS OF THE TITLE, REGARDLESS OF THEIR PART OF SPEECH

HOWEVER, CERTAIN SMALL WORDS ARE TYPICALLY NOT CAPITALIZED UNLESS THEY ARE THE FIRST OR LAST WORD OF THE TITLE. THESE INCLUDE:

ARTICLES (A, AN, THE)

CONJUNCTIONS (AND, BUT, OR, NOR, FOR, SO, YET)

PREPOSITIONS (OF, IN, ON, AT, TO, BY, WITH, FROM, THROUGH, ABOUT, ETC.) – WITH EXCEPTIONS FOR PREPOSITIONS THAT ARE PART OF A PHRASAL VERB OR FUNCTION AS AN ADVERB OR ADJECTIVE.

SENTENCE CASE FOR OTHER TITLES AND HEADINGS

SENTENCE CASE IS USED FOR THE TITLES OF BOOKS, ARTICLES, AND OTHER WORKS IN BIBLIOGRAPHIES AND REFERENCE LISTS. IN SENTENCE CASE, ONLY THE FIRST WORD OF THE TITLE AND ANY PROPER NOUNS WITHIN IT ARE CAPITALIZED. THIS METHOD MIRRORS STANDARD SENTENCE CAPITALIZATION AND IS OFTEN PREFERRED FOR ITS SIMPLICITY IN BIBLIOGRAPHIES. HEADINGS WITHIN A DOCUMENT MAY ALSO USE SENTENCE CASE, DEPENDING ON THE PUBLICATION.

APPLYING SENTENCE CASE IN BIBLIOGRAPHIES

WHEN LISTING SOURCES, TITLES OF BOOKS, ARTICLES, AND OTHER WORKS APPEAR IN SENTENCE CASE. FOR INSTANCE, A BOOK TITLED "THE GREAT GATSBY" WOULD BE LISTED AS "The Great Gatsby" IN A CHICAGO-STYLE BIBLIOGRAPHY, WITH ONLY THE "T" AND "G" (IF IT WERE A PROPER NOUN WITHIN THE TITLE) CAPITALIZED.

SPECIFICS OF PROPER NOUN CAPITALIZATION

PROPER NOUNS ARE NAMES THAT REFER TO UNIQUE INDIVIDUALS, PLACES, ORGANIZATIONS, AND THINGS. THEIR CAPITALIZATION IS A FUNDAMENTAL ASPECT OF CHICAGO STYLE, ENSURING CLARITY AND DISTINCTION.

CAPITALIZING NAMES OF PEOPLE AND PERSONAL TITLES

THE NAMES OF INDIVIDUALS ARE ALWAYS CAPITALIZED. PERSONAL TITLES USED BEFORE A NAME OR AS A DIRECT ADDRESS ARE ALSO CAPITALIZED. FOR EXAMPLE, "PRESIDENT LINCOLN" OR "DEAR DR. SMITH."

TITLES USED GENERICALLY

WHEN A TITLE IS USED GENERICALLY, IT IS TYPICALLY LOWERCASED. FOR INSTANCE, "THE PRESIDENT" WHEN REFERRING TO THE OFFICE IN GENERAL, OR "A DOCTOR" WHEN SPEAKING ABOUT THE PROFESSION.

CAPITALIZING BRAND NAMES AND PRODUCT NAMES

BRAND NAMES AND SPECIFIC PRODUCT NAMES ARE PROPER NOUNS AND SHOULD ALWAYS BE CAPITALIZED. THIS INCLUDES TERMS LIKE "COCA-COLA," "IPHONE," AND "MICROSOFT WORD."

GENERIC PRODUCT TERMS

TERMS REFERRING TO A PRODUCT TYPE RATHER THAN A SPECIFIC BRAND ARE USUALLY LOWERCASED, SUCH AS "SODA," "SMARTPHONE," OR "WORD PROCESSOR."

CAPITALIZING GOVERNMENT BODIES AND DEPARTMENTS

THE NAMES OF SPECIFIC GOVERNMENT BODIES, DEPARTMENTS, AGENCIES, AND THEIR SUBDIVISIONS ARE CAPITALIZED. FOR EXAMPLE, "THE DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE," "THE UNITED STATES SENATE," OR "THE SUPREME COURT."

GENERIC GOVERNMENT TERMS

GENERIC REFERENCES TO GOVERNMENTAL STRUCTURES ARE LOWERCASED. FOR EXAMPLE, "A GOVERNMENT AGENCY," "THE LEGISLATURE," OR "THE COURT SYSTEM."

CAPITALIZING RELIGIOUS TERMS AND FIGURES

NAMES OF DEITIES, SPECIFIC RELIGIOUS TEXTS, DENOMINATIONS, AND MAJOR RELIGIOUS HOLIDAYS ARE CAPITALIZED. FOR EXAMPLE, "GOD," "THE BIBLE," "CHRISTIANITY," AND "EASTER."

GENERAL RELIGIOUS CONCEPTS

GENERAL TERMS RELATED TO RELIGION OR SPIRITUALITY ARE TYPICALLY LOWERCASED UNLESS THEY ARE PART OF A SPECIFIC PROPER NAME. FOR EXAMPLE, "A GOD" (REFERRING TO A DEITY IN A POLYTHEISTIC SYSTEM), "RELIGIOUS BELIEFS," OR "SPIRITUAL PRACTICE."

WHEN TO CAPITALIZE COMMON NOUNS

WHILE THE DEFAULT IS LOWERCASE, COMMON NOUNS CAN BE CAPITALIZED IN SPECIFIC SITUATIONS, PRIMARILY WHEN THEY ARE PART OF A PROPER NAME OR WHEN USED IN CERTAIN SPECIALIZED CONTEXTS.

COMMON NOUNS AS PART OF PROPER NAMES

WHEN A COMMON NOUN FORMS AN INTEGRAL PART OF A PROPER NAME, IT IS CAPITALIZED. FOR EXAMPLE, IN "THE ROCKY MOUNTAINS," "MOUNTAINS" IS CAPITALIZED BECAUSE IT'S PART OF THE SPECIFIC MOUNTAIN RANGE'S NAME. SIMILARLY, "THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER" CAPITALIZES "RIVER."

CAPITALIZING COMMON NOUNS IN TITLES (TITLE CASE)

AS MENTIONED EARLIER, IN TITLE CASE, COMMON NOUNS ARE CAPITALIZED IF THEY ARE PRINCIPAL WORDS IN A TITLE. FOR EXAMPLE, IN "THE LORD OF THE RINGS," "LORD" AND "RINGS" ARE CAPITALIZED.

CAPITALIZING TITLES OF WORKS (BOOKS, ARTICLES, ETC.)

THIS IS A FREQUENTLY DISCUSSED AREA IN CHICAGO STYLE, WITH SPECIFIC RULES FOR DIFFERENT CONTEXTS. THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN TITLE CASE AND SENTENCE CASE IS PARAMOUNT HERE.

TITLES OF BOOKS, JOURNALS, AND LARGER WORKS

WHEN REFERRING TO THE TITLE OF A BOOK, JOURNAL, MAGAZINE, OR OTHER LARGER WORK, CHICAGO STYLE USES TITLE CASE WITHIN THE TEXT OF A DOCUMENT OR IN HEADINGS. FOR EXAMPLE, "I AM READING *THE ELEMENTS OF STYLE*."

TITLES OF ARTICLES, CHAPTERS, AND SHORTER WORKS

TITLES OF ARTICLES, CHAPTERS, ESSAYS, POEMS, AND SHORT STORIES ARE ALSO CAPITALIZED USING TITLE CASE WHEN THEY APPEAR IN THE TEXT. FOR EXAMPLE, "HER ESSAY, 'THE ART OF PERSUASION,' WAS WELL-RECEIVED."

CAPITALIZATION IN BIBLIOGRAPHIES AND REFERENCE LISTS

CRUCIALLY, WHEN THESE SAME TITLES APPEAR IN BIBLIOGRAPHIES OR REFERENCE LISTS, THEY REVERT TO SENTENCE CASE. THIS IS A KEY DISTINCTION TO REMEMBER FOR ACADEMIC AND RESEARCH WRITING.

CAPITALIZING ACADEMIC DEGREES AND FIELDS OF STUDY

THE CAPITALIZATION OF ACADEMIC DEGREES AND FIELDS OF STUDY CAN BE A POINT OF CONFUSION. CHICAGO STYLE HAS CLEAR GUIDELINES FOR THESE TERMS.

SPECIFIC DEGREES AND FIELDS

NAMES OF SPECIFIC DEGREES (E.G., BACHELOR OF ARTS, DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY) AND NAMES OF SPECIFIC ACADEMIC FIELDS OR DEPARTMENTS (E.G., DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH, HISTORY 101) ARE CAPITALIZED.

GENERIC FIELDS AND DEGREES

WHEN REFERRING TO DEGREES OR FIELDS OF STUDY IN A GENERAL SENSE, THEY ARE TYPICALLY LOWERCASED. FOR EXAMPLE, "SHE EARNED A BACHELOR'S DEGREE," OR "HE MAJORED IN HISTORY."

CAPITALIZING GEOGRAPHICAL TERMS AND PLACE NAMES

PROPER GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES ARE ALWAYS CAPITALIZED. THIS CATEGORY INCLUDES CONTINENTS, COUNTRIES, STATES, CITIES, STREETS, BODIES OF WATER, AND MOUNTAINS.

SPECIFIC GEOGRAPHICAL ENTITIES

EXAMPLES INCLUDE "NORTH AMERICA," "FRANCE," "CALIFORNIA," "NEW YORK CITY," "MAIN STREET," "THE PACIFIC OCEAN," AND "MOUNT EVEREST."

GENERIC GEOGRAPHICAL TERMS

GENERIC TERMS THAT ARE NOT PART OF A SPECIFIC NAME ARE LOWERCASED. FOR EXAMPLE, "THE CONTINENT," "A COUNTRY," "THE STATE," "THE CITY," "A STREET," "THE OCEAN," OR "A MOUNTAIN."

SPECIFIC EXCEPTIONS AND TRICKY CASES IN CHICAGO CAPITALIZATION

WHILE THE RULES PROVIDE A STRONG FRAMEWORK, CERTAIN WORDS AND PHRASES PRESENT UNIQUE CHALLENGES.

WORDS FOLLOWING A COLON

GENERALLY, THE WORD FOLLOWING A COLON IS NOT CAPITALIZED UNLESS IT IS A PROPER NOUN OR THE FIRST WORD OF A COMPLETE SENTENCE THAT FOLLOWS THE COLON. FOR EXAMPLE, "THE SITUATION WAS DIRE: THE SUPPLIES WERE GONE." HOWEVER, IF THE COLON INTRODUCES A LIST OF COMPLETE SENTENCES, EACH SENTENCE BEGINS WITH A CAPITAL.

BRAND NAMES AS VERBS OR ADJECTIVES

WHEN A BRAND NAME IS USED GENERICALLY AS A VERB OR ADJECTIVE, IT IS OFTEN LOWERCASED, THOUGH THIS IS CONTEXT-DEPENDENT AND SOMETIMES DEBATED. FOR INSTANCE, "HE GOOGLED THE INFORMATION" IS COMMON, BUT IN FORMAL WRITING, "HE SEARCHED ON GOOGLE" MIGHT BE PREFERRED.

TERMS RELATED TO SEASONS

SEASONS (SPRING, SUMMER, AUTUMN, WINTER) ARE ALMOST ALWAYS LOWERCASED UNLESS THEY BEGIN A SENTENCE OR ARE PART OF A PROPER NAME (E.G., "THE WINTER OLYMPICS").

RESOURCES FOR FURTHER CLARIFICATION ON CHICAGO STYLE CAPITALIZATION

FOR WRITERS SEEKING TO MASTER CHICAGO STYLE CAPITALIZATION, THE DEFINITIVE SOURCE IS THE CHICAGO MANUAL OF STYLE ITSELF. ONLINE RESOURCES AND STYLE GUIDES FROM REPUTABLE INSTITUTIONS CAN ALSO PROVIDE VALUABLE SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION. ALWAYS REFER TO THE LATEST EDITION OF THE MANUAL FOR THE MOST CURRENT GUIDELINES.

FAQ: CHICAGO STYLE CAPITALIZATION RULES FOR WRITERS

Q: WHAT IS THE MOST FUNDAMENTAL RULE FOR CHICAGO STYLE CAPITALIZATION?

A: THE MOST FUNDAMENTAL RULE FOR CHICAGO STYLE CAPITALIZATION IS TO DEFAULT TO LOWERCASE UNLESS THERE IS A SPECIFIC REASON TO CAPITALIZE A WORD. THIS PRINCIPLE APPLIES TO GENERAL TEXT AND MANY TITLES, EMPHASIZING READABILITY AND NATURAL LANGUAGE.

Q: WHEN SHOULD I USE TITLE CASE VERSUS SENTENCE CASE FOR TITLES IN CHICAGO STYLE?

A: TITLE CASE IS TYPICALLY USED FOR THE TITLES OF BOOKS, ARTICLES, AND OTHER WORKS WHEN THEY APPEAR WITHIN THE BODY OF YOUR TEXT OR IN HEADINGS. SENTENCE CASE IS USED FOR THESE SAME TITLES WHEN THEY APPEAR IN BIBLIOGRAPHIES AND REFERENCE LISTS, AS WELL AS FOR THE TITLES OF BOOKS, ARTICLES, AND OTHER WORKS IN BIBLIOGRAPHIES.

Q: ARE PREPOSITIONS CAPITALIZED IN CHICAGO STYLE TITLE CASE?

A: NO, PREPOSITIONS ARE GENERALLY NOT CAPITALIZED IN CHICAGO STYLE TITLE CASE UNLESS THEY ARE THE FIRST OR LAST WORD OF THE TITLE, OR IF THEY ARE LONGER PREPOSITIONS (USUALLY FOUR LETTERS OR MORE) THAT FUNCTION AS PART OF A PHRASAL VERB OR AN ADVERB/ADJECTIVE.

Q: HOW DO I CAPITALIZE ACADEMIC DEGREES AND FIELDS OF STUDY IN CHICAGO STYLE?

A: SPECIFIC ACADEMIC DEGREES (E.G., BACHELOR OF ARTS) AND SPECIFIC FIELDS OF STUDY OR COURSE NAMES (E.G., DEPARTMENT OF PHYSICS, HISTORY 201) ARE CAPITALIZED. HOWEVER, WHEN REFERRING TO DEGREES OR FIELDS OF STUDY IN A GENERAL SENSE (E.G., A BACHELOR'S DEGREE, SHE MAJORED IN PHYSICS), THEY ARE LOWERCASED.

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

A: SEASONS (SPRING, SUMMER, AUTUMN, WINTER) ARE ALMOST ALWAYS LOWERCASED IN CHICAGO STYLE. THEY ARE ONLY CAPITALIZED IF THEY BEGIN A SENTENCE OR ARE PART OF A PROPER NAME, SUCH AS "THE WINTER OLYMPICS."

Q: DO I CAPITALIZE COMMON NOUNS IN CHICAGO STYLE?

A: COMMON NOUNS ARE GENERALLY LOWERCASED, BUT THEY ARE CAPITALIZED WHEN THEY ARE PART OF A PROPER NAME (E.G., "MISSISSIPPI RIVER") OR WHEN FOLLOWING THE RULES FOR TITLE CASE IN TITLES OF WORKS.

Q: HOW ARE GOVERNMENT BODIES AND DEPARTMENTS CAPITALIZED IN CHICAGO STYLE?

A: THE NAMES OF SPECIFIC GOVERNMENT BODIES, DEPARTMENTS, AGENCIES, AND THEIR SUBDIVISIONS ARE CAPITALIZED (E.G., THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE, THE UNITED STATES CONGRESS). GENERIC REFERENCES TO GOVERNMENT STRUCTURES ARE TYPICALLY LOWERCASED (E.G., A GOVERNMENT AGENCY, THE LEGISLATURE).

Q: WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN CAPITALIZING BRAND NAMES AND GENERIC PRODUCT TERMS?

A: BRAND NAMES AND SPECIFIC PRODUCT NAMES (E.G., KLEENEX, IPHONE) ARE PROPER NOUNS AND ARE ALWAYS CAPITALIZED. GENERIC TERMS REFERRING TO A PRODUCT TYPE (E.G., FACIAL TISSUE, SMARTPHONE) ARE USUALLY LOWERCASED.

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