

chicago style for capitalization

Title: Mastering Chicago Style for Capitalization: A Comprehensive Guide

chicago style for capitalization, also known as the Chicago Manual of Style (CMOS), presents a nuanced approach to capitalizing words in titles, headings, and even within sentences. Navigating these rules is crucial for anyone aiming for clarity, professionalism, and adherence to established academic and publishing standards. This guide will delve deep into the intricacies of Chicago style capitalization, covering everything from the general principles to specific exceptions for various word types. We will explore how to capitalize titles of works, including books, articles, and songs, and examine the rules for proper nouns and their derivative adjectives. Furthermore, we will address common points of confusion, such as the capitalization of prepositions, conjunctions, and articles, and provide practical examples to illustrate these guidelines. Understanding these directives ensures that your writing maintains a consistent and polished appearance, adhering to the rigorous demands of Chicago style.

Table of Contents

Introduction to Chicago Style Capitalization
General Principles of Chicago Style Capitalization
Capitalizing Titles of Works (Books, Articles, and More)
Capitalizing Proper Nouns and Derivatives
Specific Word Categories in Chicago Style Capitalization
Common Challenges and Exceptions in Chicago Style
Practical Application and Examples

General Principles of Chicago Style Capitalization

The fundamental philosophy behind Chicago style capitalization leans towards minimizing capitalization to enhance readability. Unlike some other style guides that advocate for extensive capitalization in titles, Chicago style typically favors lowercasing most words unless they fall into specific categories. This approach aims to prevent titles from appearing overly shouty or cluttered, allowing the most significant words to stand out. The emphasis is on clarity and a clean aesthetic.

The core principle is to capitalize only the first word of a title or heading, the last word, and all other words that are not articles, prepositions, or coordinating conjunctions. This rule applies to the titles of books, articles, essays, poems, songs, plays, movies, television episodes, and other creative works. Understanding this baseline allows for a more straightforward application of the more detailed rules that follow. For instance, a title like "The Journey to the Center of the Earth" would be capitalized as "The Journey to the Center of the Earth" in Chicago style, with "to," "the," and "of" in lowercase.

Capitalizing Titles of Works (Books, Articles, and More)

When dealing with titles of creative works, Chicago style follows a specific set of rules that prioritize

clarity and visual appeal. The general rule, as mentioned, is to capitalize the first and last words, along with all major words in between. This means that nouns, pronouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs are typically capitalized. However, there are crucial exceptions for certain categories of words.

Articles, Prepositions, and Conjunctions

Chicago style mandates that articles (a, an, the), prepositions (regardless of length, such as in, on, at, to, for, with, by), and coordinating conjunctions (and, but, or, nor, for, so, yet) should generally be lowercased in titles and headings unless they are the first or last word of the title. This rule applies even to longer prepositions. For example, "A Tale of Two Cities" would be capitalized as "A Tale of Two Cities," with "of" and "two" in lowercase.

Subtitles

Subtitles in Chicago style are treated similarly to main titles. The first word of the subtitle is capitalized, and subsequent words follow the same rules regarding articles, prepositions, and conjunctions. The colon or semicolon separating the main title from the subtitle is followed by a space, and then the first word of the subtitle is capitalized. For instance, "Moby Dick: Or, The Whale" would be rendered as "Moby Dick: Or, the Whale," with "Or" capitalized because it is the first word of the subtitle, and "the" lowercased.

Short Works vs. Long Works

Chicago style differentiates between titles of short works and titles of long works when it comes to italicization or quotation marks. Titles of shorter works, such as articles, essays, poems, songs, and chapters, are typically enclosed in quotation marks. Titles of longer works, like books, journals, newspapers, magazines, and films, are italicized. The capitalization rules, however, remain consistent across both categories.

Capitalizing Proper Nouns and Derivatives

Proper nouns, which name specific people, places, organizations, and things, are almost always capitalized in Chicago style, as they are in most other styles. This includes names like "Abraham Lincoln," "Paris," "Google," and "World War II." The capitalization of proper nouns serves to distinguish them from common nouns and to identify them as unique entities.

Geographical Names

All geographical names are capitalized. This includes continents, countries, states, cities, rivers, mountains, oceans, and deserts. Examples include "Asia," "Canada," "California," "New York City," "Amazon River," "Mount Everest," "Pacific Ocean," and "Sahara Desert." Even parts of geographical names, like "East Asia" or "Southern California," are capitalized.

Organizations and Institutions

Names of organizations, companies, government agencies, schools, and religious institutions are capitalized. This encompasses names such as "The United Nations," "Microsoft Corporation," "The Library of Congress," "Harvard University," and "The Catholic Church." When referring to generic types of these entities, however, lowercase is used (e.g., "a university," "a church").

Historical Periods and Events

Specific historical periods and named events are capitalized. This includes eras like the "Renaissance," the "Middle Ages," and the "Victorian Era." Named events such as "the French Revolution," "the American Civil War," and "the Cold War" are also capitalized. However, general terms like "an ancient civilization" or "a medieval battle" are not capitalized.

Derivative Adjectives

Adjectives derived from proper nouns are generally capitalized. This includes nationalities, languages, and words referring to specific ethnic groups or religious affiliations. Examples include "American literature," "French cuisine," "Spanish language," "African American culture," and "Christian theology." However, if the derivative adjective has lost its direct connection to the proper noun and has become a common term, it may be lowercased. For instance, "china" (the dishware) is derived from "China" (the country) but is now a common noun and is lowercased.

Specific Word Categories in Chicago Style Capitalization

Beyond the general rules for titles and proper nouns, Chicago style offers specific guidance for various word categories that often cause confusion. These detailed rules ensure consistency across a wide range of writing contexts.

Common Nouns in Titles

Common nouns that are part of a title are capitalized unless they are articles, prepositions, or coordinating conjunctions. This is a straightforward application of the primary rule. For example, in

the title "The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes," "Adventures" and "Sherlock" are capitalized because they are a common noun and a proper noun, respectively. "of" remains lowercase.

Verbs in Titles

All verbs in titles are capitalized, regardless of their length or function, unless they fall into the category of articles, prepositions, or conjunctions. This applies to all forms of verbs, including auxiliary verbs. For instance, "To Be or Not to Be" would be capitalized as "To Be or Not to Be," with "Be" capitalized. If a title contained a verb like "is" or "was," it would be capitalized if it was not a preposition or conjunction (which is unlikely for "is" or "was").

Adverbs in Titles

Adverbs are capitalized in titles when they are not articles, prepositions, or coordinating conjunctions. This ensures that descriptive words contributing significantly to the title's meaning are highlighted. For example, in "How to Be More Effective," "How" and "More" are capitalized because they are an interrogative adverb and a comparative adverb, respectively.

Pronouns in Titles

Pronouns are capitalized in titles, as they are considered significant words. This includes personal pronouns (I, you, he, she, it, we, they), possessive pronouns (my, your, his, her, its, our, their), demonstrative pronouns (this, that, these, those), interrogative pronouns (who, whom, whose, which, what), and indefinite pronouns (everyone, someone, nobody, etc.). For instance, "I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings" would be capitalized with "I" and "Why" capitalized.

Subordinate Conjunctions

Unlike coordinating conjunctions, subordinate conjunctions (such as although, because, since, while, if, unless, when, where) are capitalized in titles and headings if they are not the first or last word. This is because they often function more like adverbs or introduce clauses that are essential to the title's meaning. For example, "Because I Said So" would be capitalized as "Because I Said So."

Common Challenges and Exceptions in Chicago Style

While the rules for Chicago style capitalization might seem extensive, certain situations frequently present challenges for writers. Understanding these nuances is key to achieving perfect adherence.

Prepositions in Titles: Length Doesn't Matter

A common misconception is that longer prepositions might be capitalized. Chicago style is explicit: prepositions are lowercased regardless of their length, unless they are the first or last word. This includes common short prepositions like "of," "to," "in," and "on," as well as longer ones like "through," "between," and "without." Consistency is paramount here.

Compound Predicate Nominatives and Compound Predicate Adjectives

When a title contains a compound predicate nominative or a compound predicate adjective connected by a conjunction, the Chicago Manual of Style generally advises capitalizing both parts. For example, "The Joy and Sorrow of Life" would be capitalized as "The Joy and Sorrow of Life." This rule aims to give equal weight to both components of the compound.

Hyphenated Words

In hyphenated words within titles, the capitalization depends on the nature of each component. If both parts are significant words (e.g., nouns, verbs, adjectives), both are capitalized. For example, "Twenty-First Century Innovations" would be capitalized as "Twenty-First Century Innovations." If the first part is a prefix that is not acting as a separate word, it is generally not capitalized unless it is the first word of the title (e.g., "Non-Stop Action").

Acronyms and Initialisms

Acronyms and initialisms are generally capitalized in full. For example, "NASA" and "FBI" retain their all-caps format. If an acronym or initialism appears within a title and is meant to be part of the stylistic presentation, it would typically be capitalized as is. For instance, "A Guide to NASA Missions."

Words That Can Be Both Prepositions and Adverbs

Some words can function as either prepositions or adverbs (e.g., "up," "down," "in," "out," "over," "under"). In titles, if such a word functions as an adverb, it should be capitalized. If it functions as a preposition, it should be lowercased (unless it's the first or last word). Context is key here. For example, "The Train Pulled In" (preposition) would be "The Train Pulled In," while "He Looked Up" (adverb) would be "He Looked Up."

Practical Application and Examples

To solidify your understanding of Chicago style capitalization, let's look at some practical examples and how the rules are applied in real-world scenarios.

Consider the title of a book: "The History of the Roman Empire."

- "The" is capitalized because it's the first word.
- "History" is capitalized because it's a noun.
- "of" is lowercased because it's a preposition.
- "the" is lowercased because it's an article.
- "Roman" is capitalized because it's a proper adjective derived from a proper noun.
- "Empire" is capitalized because it's a noun.

The title appears as: *The History of the Roman Empire*.

Now, let's examine an article title: "An Analysis of Recent Trends in Climate Science."

- "An" is capitalized as the first word.
- "Analysis" is capitalized as a noun.
- "of" is lowercased as a preposition.
- "Recent" is capitalized as an adjective.
- "Trends" is capitalized as a noun.
- "in" is lowercased as a preposition.
- "Climate" is capitalized as a proper adjective (in this context, referring to a specific scientific field).
- "Science" is capitalized as a noun.

The article title appears as: "An Analysis of Recent Trends in Climate Science."

Finally, a song title: "I Want to Hold Your Hand."

- "I" is capitalized as the first word and a pronoun.

- "Want" is capitalized as a verb.
- "to" is lowercased as a preposition.
- "Hold" is capitalized as a verb.
- "Your" is capitalized as a possessive pronoun.
- "Hand" is capitalized as a noun.

The song title appears as: "I Want to Hold Your Hand."

These examples demonstrate the consistent application of the rules. Even with complex titles, breaking them down word by word according to the Chicago style guidelines ensures accurate capitalization.

FAQ

Q: How do I capitalize prepositions in Chicago style titles?

A: In Chicago style, prepositions are generally lowercased in titles and headings unless they are the first or last word of the title or heading. This rule applies regardless of the preposition's length.

Q: Should I capitalize articles in Chicago style?

A: Articles (a, an, the) in Chicago style are treated the same as prepositions and coordinating conjunctions: they are lowercased unless they are the first or last word of a title or heading.

Q: What is the rule for capitalizing conjunctions in Chicago style?

A: Coordinating conjunctions (and, but, or, nor, for, so, yet) are lowercased in Chicago style titles and headings, unless they appear as the first or last word. Subordinate conjunctions, however, are typically capitalized if they are not the first or last word.

Q: How does Chicago style handle the capitalization of hyphenated words in titles?

A: For hyphenated words in titles, Chicago style generally capitalizes both parts if they are significant words (nouns, verbs, adjectives). If the first part is a prefix that isn't acting as a standalone word, it's usually not capitalized unless it's the first word of the title.

Q: Are there exceptions to the rule of capitalizing proper adjectives derived from proper nouns in Chicago style?

A: Yes, while generally capitalized, derivative adjectives are sometimes lowercased if they have become so common that they have lost their direct association with the original proper noun, like "china" (dishware) from "China" (country).

Q: How are subtitles capitalized in Chicago style?

A: Subtitles in Chicago style are capitalized following the same rules as main titles. The first word of the subtitle is capitalized, and subsequent words are capitalized based on their type (noun, verb, adjective, adverb, pronoun) or lowercased if they are articles, prepositions, or coordinating conjunctions.

Q: Does Chicago style require capitalization of all verbs in titles?

A: Yes, all verbs are capitalized in Chicago style titles and headings, as they are considered significant words. This includes auxiliary verbs.

Q: What is the difference in capitalization rules for short works versus long works in Chicago style?

A: The capitalization rules themselves do not differ between short and long works. However, Chicago style differentiates by using quotation marks for titles of short works (articles, poems) and italics for titles of long works (books, journals).

[Chicago Style For Capitalization](#)

Chicago Style For Capitalization

Related Articles

- [chicago style for experimental phonetics](#)
- [chicago style footnotes vs endnotes rules](#)
- [chicago style for new writers](#)

[Back to Home](#)