

Editorial Graphics and Publishing Services

In the Beginning: Words That Begin With a Capital Letter

The beginning of the year is as good a time as any to reflect on the capitalization of words. The rules of capitalization are largely subjective, in that different genres, fields, organizations, and subjects adopt their own special rules for capitalizing words. In general, each group tends to gravitate to capitalizing those words that are most important to its field. However, there are a few basic rules of capitalization that are universal. Here is a quick review of them.

Capitalize the following:

- Proper nouns: The official or specific name of a person (Hillary Thomas), place (Washington), or product/brand (a Xerox copy). Also, capitalize the adjectives formed by proper nouns (the Washingtonian way).
- The first word in a sentence: This sentence is a good example of the rule.
- The first word in a quotation: Mr. Pantry said, “Start writing your essay today.”
- The salutation and complimentary closing of a letter: Dear Mr. Pantry: , Sincerely, .
- All words in a title, except articles (the, a, an), prepositions consisting of three letters and less (in, on, at, by, of, off, out, to, as), and conjunctions (as, and, for, but, so, yet, or, nor).
- Special titles before a person’s name: President Obama, Captain Kirk, Bishop Jakes.

MCPS Capitalization Usage

The MCPS community has its own rules of capitalization. Here are some of them:

- The official names of courses: Media in Society, Environmental Science, Horticulture 3
- The word grade is capitalized when it is followed by a number: Grade 9.
- Languages: English, Russian, Spanish, French, Vietnamese
- Internet
- Special Education students
- The *Choice* process
- Honors and Advanced Placement
- The Class of 2012

For more on capitalization, see the [MCPS Editorial Style Book](#), p. 2, and *The Gregg Manual of Style*, p. 110. Or, contact the [Editorial Help Desk](#) for help with any “sticky” issues.