We all know that the first letter of the first word of a sentence must be capitalized, but there are many other rules of capitalization that can sometimes be confusing. For example, you will find:

- I swam in the river AND It was in the Mississippi River
- I am an English major AND His major is physics
- The president addressed Congress AND We met President Smatresk yesterday
- He comes from the East AND He lives east of Maryland Parkway
- My mom gave me this book AND Did you see Mom today?

Confusing?

Here are some of the most common rules of capitalization.

You should capitalize:

- **Proper nouns** (names of specific persons, places, things, institutions, historical events, religions, brand names, names of courses…): Napoleon, Mickey Mouse, the Pacific Ocean, Lied Library, Area 51, the Student Union, the Writing Center, the Renaissance, the Middle Ages, the Gulf War, the Torah, Islam, the Bible, Kleenex, English 231.

- **Names of relationships** (when they are a part of or a substitute for a person’s name): My mother’s car was totaled when Dad backed up without looking.

- **Days of the week, holidays, and months of the year. Do not** capitalize seasons, except when used in a title: spring semester 2010 and UNLV’s Spring Festival 2010.

- **Points of the compass** (when they are part of the name): the Near East, the American West, North Field. However, **do not** capitalize if they indicate a direction, as in Turn east on Flamingo. Remember: She was born in South Africa and now works in south Texas.

- **Planets, except** sometimes the planet earth. Generally, it is not capitalized, as in The earth rotates on its axis. It is capitalized when the word is used without the definite article and in connection with other planets: Mercury is the planet closest to the sun, followed by Venus and Earth. **Do not** capitalize the words sun and moon.

- **Countries, languages, and nationalities** (adjective form of a specific country): the United Kingdom, South Korea, the English language, French history, German measles, and African violets.

- **Titles that come before names, but not** titles that follow names or stand alone: I had an appointment with Dr. Foster yesterday. I waited forty minutes for the doctor to see me.
• **School courses followed by a number, but not** general areas of study, **unless** they are based on nationalities or races: *I am taking English and math this semester, and I still need to take biology, Spanish, and Calculus II.*

**Different rules for capitalization of titles**

• **MLA** – Capitalize **the major words**, but not short (under four letters) prepositions or the articles "the," "a," or "an" (if they are not the first word of the title):

  *A Literary History of Rome: From the Origins to the Close of the Golden Age*

• **APA** – Capitalize **the first word of the title and the first word of the subtitle**, and all proper nouns:

  *A literary history of Rome: From the origins to the close of the Golden Age*

• **Chicago Manual of Style** (with two styles):
  
  ✓ The **headline-style** is similar to the MLA style:

  *A Literary History of Rome: From the Origins to the Close of the Golden Age*

  ✓ The **sentence-style** is more like the APA style:

  *A literary history of Rome: From the origins to the close of the Golden Age*

**Be consistent throughout your paper!**