

The Writer's House

Using Capitals Correctly



Bad writing costs. Good writing pays.



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Sometimes as writers we can fall into the trap of using the capital letter for everything that feels important to us. When we do this we confuse and distract our readers.

On the other hand failing to capitalise can appear disrespectful to our readers.

So when should we use capitals?

1. To begin every sentence

This means that, after a full stop, you always use a capital letter. Remember that the exclamation mark and the question mark act in the same way as a full stop, they mark the end of a sentence.

Do I really have to begin a new sentence if I use an exclamation mark? Yes you do.

After every exclamation mark you must use a capital letter! I never knew that.

2. With every proper noun

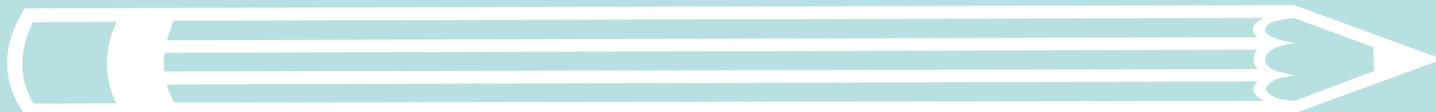
Question: So what is a proper noun?

Answer: Proper nouns are nouns that refer to a SPECIFIC person, place object or period of time.

- Names of people/characters: Mr Smith, Fiona, Wiremu, Bugs Bunny
- Names of cities; towns, suburbs and streets: Dunedin, Centennial Avenue, Macandrew Bay
- Names of countries: Taiwan, France, Switzerland
- Names of the days of the week: Monday Tuesday, Wednesday...
- Names of the months of the year: January, February, March...
- Names of Organisations: The Dunedin City Council, National Heart Foundation
- Names of Titles: Dame Kiri, Governor General, Professor Jacinta Ruru
- Names of important days: Waitangi Day, Otago Anniversary Day

Some examples

- I went to the University of Auckland today.
This is correct.
- I went to Auckland today and had a look at the university.
This is also correct; *university* is a general noun in this sentence, it is not being used as a specific name therefore we do not need to capitalise it.





3. When using the word 'I'

Yes it's a pronoun but in English 'I' is always capitalised.

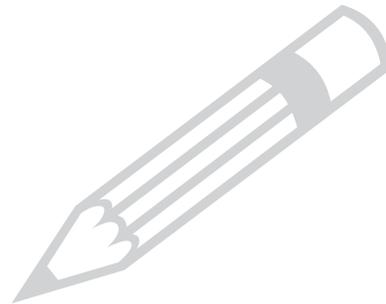
4. When writing salutations

The first word of a salutation should be capitalized, as well as the first word of a closing. For example:

Dear Wiremu,

OR

Kind regards,
Marama Collins

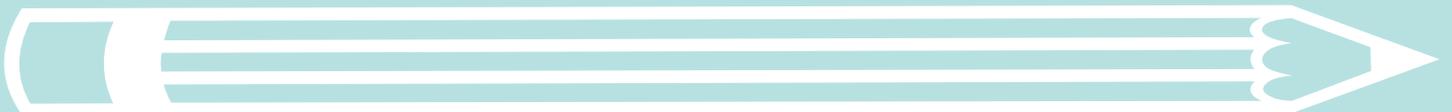


5. When writing titles

In general

All large words in the titles of movies, books, and other publications should be capitalized, while all small words (a, an, the, but, and, if, as, or, nor, to name a few) should not be capitalized unless they are the first or last words in the title.

The Lord of the Rings - The word *the* would not normally be capitalized, but because it is the first word in the title, we must capitalize it. The words *of* and *the* are not capitalized because they are small and are not at the beginning or end of the title.





Take a look at the following examples

INCORRECT	CORRECT
<p>Please specify that Door type, closers and latching comply with 3.15.1.</p> <p><i>Door is not a specific name; no capital is needed.</i></p>	<p>Please specify that door type, closers and latching comply with 3.15.1.</p>
<p>Please have your Engineer confirm how this building is suitable for the site.</p> <p><i>The engineer in this sentence is not anyone's specific name but a general professional term like teacher, policewoman or nurse. No capital is needed.</i></p>	<p>Please have your engineer confirm how this building is suitable for the site.</p>
<p>Please meet at the bullring carpark.</p> <p><i>Bullring is the name of this carpark; it needs a capital.</i></p>	<p>Please meet at the Bullring carpark.</p>
<p>Do you like italian food?</p> <p><i>italian is incorrect. Countries, nationalities, and languages are always capitalised.</i></p>	<p>Do you like Italian food?</p>
<p>We visited the Sky tower in Auckland City.</p> <p><i>Sky Tower is the full, specific name for this building, use capitals for both words. Auckland is known only as Auckland, not Auckland City, only capitalise Auckland.</i></p>	<p>We visited the Sky Tower in Auckland city.</p>
<p>We combine the very best in Economic and Asset management.</p> <p>Neither <i>economic</i> nor <i>asset</i> is anybody's name, no capital is needed.</p>	<p>We combine the very best in economic and asset management.</p>

