



# Punctuation: capital letters

Punctuation marks help the reader to clarify meaning and also to establish the tone of the text they are reading. They are therefore really important marks for you to learn how to use correctly in your writing. Capital letters were traditionally used to show 'respect' for particular words, and as a result, they have an important place in written English.

## 1. To begin the first word of a sentence

### Example:

The increasing use of the internet has led to enormous changes in the way businesses now communicate. **M**oreover, the implications of these changes are only just being recognized.

## 2. With a particular or proper name

### Examples:

- Specific titles when used together with a person's name, i.e. **Mr Michael Douglas**; **Miss Jessica Swann**; **Mrs Zainab Mkachu**; **Ms Denise Bradley**; **Sir Donald Bradman**; **Dr Bill Macdonald**; **Her Excellency, Marjorie Nelson-Jackson**, the **Governor of South Australia**; **President John F. Kennedy**.
- The names of countries, states, towns, streets, suburbs, rivers, mountains and so on, i.e. **Malaysia**; **South Australia**; **Hong Kong**; **Woodleigh Street**; **Aberfoyle Park**; the **River Murray**; **Mount Lofty**; the planet **Jupiter**.
- The special names for the days and months of a year, i.e. The baby was born on **Wednesday**, 27<sup>th</sup> **June**, 2001.
- The special names of festivals and historic periods, i.e. **Christmas**; **Easter**; **Ramadam**, **Yom Kippur**; the **Cold War**.
- The first letter of significant words in the title of a film, book, play poem, art work, monument, etc, i.e. '**Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon**'; '**English Essentials**' by M. Fox and L. Wilkinson; Dorothy Lange's photograph of the '**Migrant Mother**'; the **Pyramids of Giza**.
- When writing the names of organisations, firms, religious denominations, languages, nationalities, etc, i.e. the **University of South Australia**; **Mitsubishi Motors**; **English/Vietnamese**; **Christians**; **Buddhists**.
- Specific terms, i.e. the **Law of Gravity**; the **Theory of Relativity**; the **Olympic Games**.

## 3. For acronyms (words made from the first letters of other words) and some abbreviations

### Examples:

- **GST** = **Goods and Services Tax**
- **ESL** = **English as a Second Language**
- **UV** = **Ultraviolet**
- **TFN** = **Tax File Number**
- **QANTAS** = **Queensland and Northern Territory Air Service**

#### 4. When a describing word is used as a special, or proper name

**Examples:**

- Post-modernist writers
- Renaissance art
- Shakespearean plays

#### 5. When writing the personal pronoun 'I'

**Example:**

- Arrangements are going well and I expect to be open for business by January 2007.

#### 6. For the first word you use inside quotation marks for a direct quote

**Example:**

- Walker et al (2001, p 109) stated that, 'The most critical time to guard against UV exposures is from childhood to the mid-teens.'

### Problems to watch for

#### 1. Over use

**Examples:**

- Ali has decided to switch to **Economics** this year, and will be studying Economics II.
- Ali has decided to switch to **economics** this year, and will be studying Economics II.\*

\*The word 'economics' is a general, common name and therefore does not need a capital letter. Economics II, on the other hand, refers to a particular program, and is therefore a proper name. Consequently, it needs a capital letter.

#### 2. Mis-use with common nouns and adjectives

**Examples:**

- After **Summer** there is **Autumn**, then **Winter**, then **Spring**. I really look forward to the **Summer** evenings in December.
- After **summer** there is **autumn**, then **winter**, then **spring**. I really look forward to the **summer** evenings in December.

\*The seasons of the year are general, common names, and therefore do not need a capital letter. On the other hand, the specific month December, is a particular or proper name, and therefore it needs a capital letter.

## Activity

Decide where the capital letters need to be in the following paragraph.

good relationships among employees, and between managers and employees, produce bottom-line advantages (bentley 1999; peters 1988). hanson (1996) found, for example, that the presence of good interpersonal relationships between managers and employees was three times more powerful in predicting profitability than the four next most powerful variables. moreover, delivering outstanding customer service is almost impossible without supportive communication.

*See answers below*

## Answers

Good relationships among employees, and between managers and employees, produce bottom-line advantages (**B**entley 1999; **P**eters 1988). **H**anson (1996) found, for example, that the presence of good interpersonal relationships between managers and employees was three times more powerful in predicting profitability than the four next most powerful variables. **M**oreover, delivering outstanding customer service is almost impossible without supportive communication.

## Useful links *(all open in a new window)*

There may be resources that have been created with your lecturers, addressing assignment tasks and topics specific to your courses. Follow the links below to find out:

[Business](#)

[Education, Arts and  
Social Sciences](#)

[Health Sciences](#)

[IT, Engineering and the  
Environment](#)