

## Why We Capitalize Letters: Significance

When letters are in their uppercase, most basically, they draw attention, or reveal *significance* to the reader. As a rule, names are always capitalized-- including names of people, places, and things.

*Examples:*

- Allie ← a person's name
- Student Learning Center ← an establishment's specific name
- Chico State ← a university's name
- Bidwell Park ← a specific location's name
- California ← a state's name

This rule seems straightforward, but there are some common mistakes that students make. When addressing a person by their profession/position, we must be careful about whether or not this "name" is capitalized.

*Example:*

*"I just called my mom." vs. "I just called Mom."*

Mom in the second quote is the name of the character, even if in reality her name is Melanie or something. As far as the audience is concerned, "Mom" is this character's name.

*Example:*

*"She was told to rest by the doctor." vs. "She was told to rest by Doctor Helena."*

While "the doctor" could be any person with a PhD, Doctor Helena is a very specific person that gave instructions to the character to rest.

Acronyms are also structures on importance used as a shorthand for longer proper nouns. For example, instead of saying "The United States of America" all the time, we say "USA." All of the letters within the acronym are capitalized, and only the capitalized letters within the long version are included in the acronym.

As English readers are likely to have figured out early on in their writing careers, sentences always begin with a capital letter. But where else do we find words capitalized within a sentence? In this section we will investigate where capital letters reside in a sentence with variations on the usual punctuation and sentences with quotations.

### Looking closer at capitalization within quotations:

Grammarly states “When quotations form complete sentences, they must be capitalized no matter where they appear in the main sentence.”

#### *Example:*

- *Robert said, “You look ugly in that dress.”*
- *Robert told me I was “ugly in that dress.”*

---

#### References

“Capitalization.” *Plagiarism Checker Grammarly*, Grammarly, 7 Apr. 2017, [www.grammarly.com/blog/capitalization-rules/](http://www.grammarly.com/blog/capitalization-rules/).

“Capitalization in Quotes.” *Grammarly*, Grammarly, 22 Sept. 2017, [www.grammarly.com/blog/capitalization-in-quotes/](http://www.grammarly.com/blog/capitalization-in-quotes/).

Hill, Adams Sherman. *General Rules for Punctuation and for the Use of Capital Letters*. C.W. Sever, 1875.  
<https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=hvd.32044038434627;view=1up;seq=7;size=150>

Purdue Writing Lab. “Capitals: Help with Capitals // Purdue Writing Lab.” *Purdue Writing Lab*, Purdue Owl, [owl.purdue.edu/owl/general\\_writing/mechanics/help\\_with\\_capitals.html](http://owl.purdue.edu/owl/general_writing/mechanics/help_with_capitals.html).