

Word for Word

Title case vs. sentence case: A capital thing to master



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Many factors go into creating a good title for your article. However, authors often overlook style requirements regarding the type of capitalization to use.

Some journals' author instructions provide directions for title capitalization. For journals that don't specify the required capitalization style, look at sample published articles in the journal to see how the titles are capitalized.

Almost all journals use one of two capitalization styles: title case and sentence case.

Example:

This Is a Title in Title Case

This is a title in sentence case

In title case, also called the headline style of capitalization, the following elements are capitalized:

- The first word
- All major words (nouns, pronouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, a few conjunctions)
- Prepositions of four or more letters (e.g., Into, Through)
- Latin expressions used as adjectival or adverbial phrases (e.g., In Vivo)

The following elements are not capitalized in title case:

- Articles (e.g., a, the)
- Prepositions of three or fewer letters (e.g., in, via)
- Coordinating conjunctions (e.g., and, or)
- **To** when it is part of an infinitive (e.g., **to** Eradicate)
- Parts of a proper noun that are normally not capitalized (e.g., **von** Hippel-Landau disease)
- The second word in a species name (e.g., *Escherichia coli*)

Hyphenated words can cause additional confusion in this style of capitalization. The primary thing to remember is that if the first element in a hyphenated word is a prefix that doesn't make sense by itself (e.g., anti-, co-, pre-) then only that element should be capitalized (e.g., Co-author but not Low-Dose). A few other things to remember:

- Do not capitalize the second element if both elements constitute a single word according to the current editions of *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* or *Dorland's* or *Stedman's* medical dictionary (e.g., Follow-up, Long-term)
- Do not capitalize subsequent elements when they are articles, prepositions, or coordinating conjunctions (e.g., Ready-to-Wear)
- Capitalize the first word after a lowercase but not a capital Greek letter (e.g., β -Actin, Δ -9-tetrahydrocannabinol)
- Capitalize the first word after a numeral, symbol, stand-alone capital letter, or italicized organic chemistry prefix (e.g., *cis*)
- Capitalize both elements in spelled-out numbers (e.g., Forty-Two) and simple fractions (e.g., One-Fifth Dose)

Sentence case is much easier to use, as you simply capitalize all the words that you normally would in a sentence: the first word and any proper nouns. In addition, the first word in a subtitle is capitalized in sentence case. The title of this *Word for Word* entry is in sentence case.

In extremely rare cases, a journal may use titles written in all capital letters. Be sure to avoid writing in all capital letters unless you see this done in the target journal. Otherwise, the journal reviewers may think you're yelling the title at them.

Finally, keep these case rules in mind when creating your reference lists. Journals generally use either title or sentence case in article and book chapter titles in references, and they often state this in their author instructions. Avoid simply cutting and pasting titles from PubMed or depending on EndNote to get the capitalization right, as PubMed copies the capitalization style used in the source journals.

Bibliography

The Chicago Manual of Style, 17th ed. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press; 2017.

AMA Manual of Style, 11th ed. New York, NY: Oxford University Press; 2020.

—Don Norwood

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