

APA Style Helper: Capitalizing the Title of Your Paper and the Titles of References

By Jay Brandes, Global Campus Librarian, Troy University. Updated 9/17/2012.

There is **sentence case** and there is **title case**.

Sentence case: References (placed at the end of the paper) are written in sentence case. **Title case:** The title your paper, i.e., the thing that goes on page 1, is written in title case. If you are providing the title of a book, article, or chapter within the text of your paper, it is written in title case. On the occasions that you need to use the title of an information source in a citation (because there is not a named or corporate author), that title also is written in title case.

What is meant by *title case* is not one hundred percent universal, so the guidelines presented here should only be considered as applying to American Psychological Association (APA) style. The primary aspect of APA-style title case which writers may feel is at variance with tradition is the fact that APA prescribes that prepositions of four or more letters should be capitalized.

SENTENCE CASE

Write titles of books, articles, book chapters, Web sites, etc., within references (**at the end of your paper**), using sentence case. Writing in sentence case is this simple: Capitalize the first word of the title, the first word after a colon (the subtitle), and all proper nouns/proper adjectives. Everything else in the title is lower case. Note: Writing in sentence case applies to the titles of the book, article, or Web site, not to the title of the publisher or journal.

EXAMPLES OF REFERENCES:

Baguley, T. (2009). Standardized or simple effect size: What should be reported? *British Journal of Psychology*, *100*, 603–617. doi:10.1348/000712608X377117

Becker, L. A. (2000). Effect size calculators. Retrieved from http://www.uccs.edu/_faculty/lbecker/

Ellis, P. D. (2010). *The essential guide to effect sizes: Statistical power, meta-analysis, and the interpretation of research results*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Lindsey, K. A., Manis, F. R., & Bailey, C. E. (2003). Prediction of first-grade reading in Spanish-speaking English-language learners. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, *95*, 482–494. doi: 10.1037/0022-0663.95.3.482

Sentence case is simple: Don't capitalize a word unless it A) starts a sentence, B) comes after a colon, or C) is a proper noun. Here is where you need to be careful: In a reference, some titles are italicized (titles of books and other stand-alone works), while other titles are not italicized (journal articles, book chapters), but titles of journals (the things that contain the articles) are capitalized. When to use italics is one of the many issues related to the broader topic of creating references; a topic that is beyond the scope of this guide.

TITLE CASE

Title case: The title your paper, i.e., the thing that goes on page 1, is written in title case. If you are providing the title of a book, article, or chapter within the text of your paper, it is written in title case. On the rare occasion that you need to use the title of an information source in a citation, that also is written in title case. The *APA Manual* (on page 23) states that the title of your paper “should be typed in uppercase and lowercase letters.” They dON’t mean llkE tHIS; they mean using title case as detailed in section 4.15 of the *APA Manual* and on the APA Style Blog.

Capitalize all words (including the second part of hyphenated words, e.g., Self-Reported), except these parts of speech: A) articles, B) coordinating conjunctions, and C) prepositions of three words or less. Additionally, when writing a genus and species, do not capitalize the species, e.g., *Felis catus* (the domestic cat)—*Felis* is the genus, *catus* is the species. Leave lowercase the parts of an individual’s name that are traditionally lower case, e.g., *de* or *von*.

Articles are these words: a, an, the

Articles are a type of adjective (a word that describes) they you know that you are about to see a noun and they help to limit or define its meaning, e.g., a president, the Pope, an apple, the Constitution.

Coordinating conjunctions include these words: for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so

To help you remember these, think FANBOYS . . . For And Nor But Or Yet So.
Conjunctions are words that join (think *junction*, as in the act of joining).

Prepositions of three letters or less include: as, at, by, but, for, in, of, off, on, per, to, up, via

When you think *preposition*, think *position* (as in location or time). The movie ticket is **in** my wallet. The movie starts **at** midnight.

EXAMPLES OF TITLES IN TITLE CASE:

- It Takes Two to Fight: A Test of Relational Factors and a Method for Assessing Dyads.
- Short-Term Musical Intervention: A Tale of Ludwig von Beethoven.
- Boys Who Fight at Home and School: The Conditions of Cross-Setting Consistency
- Learning How to “Make a Deal”: Human (*Homo sapiens*) and Monkey (*Macaca mulatta*) Performance When Repeatedly Faced With the Monty Hall Dilemma.

If you are not sure if a word gets capitalized or not, check with your instructor or with the Troy Writing Center wcenter@troy.edu 334-670-3305. Ask yourself, “Is the word in question the same type of word as the words I know not to capitalize?” Chances are that your questionable word is a verb (am, are, be, do, go, has), pronoun (it, me, you, us, who), or possessive adjective (my, our, any, its). Suggestion: Learn from your experience. Each time you check on whether or not to capitalize a word, teach yourself why it was capitalized or why it was not capitalized.

Sources for this document:

The Chicago Manual of Style, 16th edition. (A print book.)

Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, 6th edition. (A print book.)

Title Case and Sentence Case Capitalization in APA Style. <http://blog.apastyle.org/apastyle/2012/03/title-case-and-sentence-case-capitalization-in-apa-style.html>