

LEARNING ABOUT CAPITAL LETTERS

1

What are capital letters?

They are the big letters, sometimes called 'upper case' letters.

A B C D E etc

as opposed to the small or 'lower case' letters...

a b c d e etc

But why do we need them?

Pic of Billy looking confused, big question mark in thought balloon

2

Let's take a trip in time.

Pic: Ancient Greek (in toga type dress) meeting Plato

Back when the ancient Greeks invented the alphabet, there were **only** capital letters. What's more, there weren't even spaces between the letters. They wrote this way:

**COMINGTOTHACROPOLISTHISMORNINGIMETPLATOTHEGR
EATPHILOSOPHERHEASKEDMETHEMEANINGOFLIFENOIDEAI
SAIDITHINKTHEREOFIAMHEREPLIED**

Can you work out what this means?

NOTE: It was even worse than this. They also wrote left to right, and then the next line right to left. But you have to forgive them. The alphabet was still in its test phase.

3

**COMING TO THE ACROPOLIS THIS MORNING I MET PLATO
THE GREAT PHILOSOPHER HE ASKED ME THE MEANING OF
LIFE NO IDEA I SAID I THINK THEREFORE I AM HE REPLIED**

Spaces are a great idea, aren't they?

But so are the use of upper and lower case (capitals and small letters) – another much later invention (more than 1000 years after the alphabet). Check this out:

Coming to the **A**cropolis this morning **I** met **P**lato the great philosopher.

He asked me the meaning of life.

No idea **I** said.

I think therefore **I** am he replied.

Pic of Plato with think balloon and "I think" in it

Hint: There are examples of **three rules** (regarding capitals) in this example. Do you know what they are?

4

The rules about capitalisation

There are three classic rules. **They are all unbreakable!**

RULE 1 The first letter of every sentence *must* be a capital.

When Billy fell off the roof, his mother took him to hospital.

The doctor came in and said, 'Hello, what have you done?'

'I slipped,' said Billy.

The doctor set the fracture and Billy went home.

After the first day, he thought that breaking his arm was a good thing.

He couldn't do any homework, and he could hit people with his plaster.

Besides, some people thought he was a hero for going on the roof in the first place.

Pic of Billy with arm in plaster and a sad and sorry look

Hint: When there is quoted speech **inside** a sentence (eg The doctor came in and said, 'Hello, what have you done?') we treat the quote *as its own sentence* (and thus put another capital letter on its first letter).

5

RULE 2 Proper nouns (a person or place or organisation's name) *must* have a capital.

Here is an example:

Billy's mother, **M**rs **S**park, took **B**illy to **S**t **J**ohn of **G**od **H**ospital in **G**eelong.

Pic of Billy with arm in plaster

HINT: It does not matter how many capitals you use in a sentence (here 9 capitals in 14 words). **Every name must have its own capital.**

What proper nouns need capitals?

People's names	Mary-Jane, Billy, Aunty Beth, the Prime Minister
Names of organisations	NSW Police, the Red Cross
Names of countries and peoples	Australia, Australians, France, the French
Names of companies and departments	BHP, the National Bank, the Education Department
Names of school subjects	English, Maths, Colgate toothpaste, a Mars Bar
Brand names	Coca Cola, Nike, Colgate toothpaste, a Mars Bar
Book, film and TV titles	The Da Vinci Code, Friends, E-Wal, Ratatouille
Addresses	10 Riverside Drive, 13/a Sturt St
Days and months	Monday, Sunday, April, August
Special festivals	Christmas, New Year's Eve
Religions	Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Christian, Muslim
Historical events	the First World War, the Depression

Pic of men in World War I uniform fighting

HINT: When the title has minor words like *of* and *the* and *and* these tend to be left in lower case. It is usually the nouns that are capitalised.

RULE 3 The pronoun 'I' must always have a capital

When you refer to yourself using the pronoun 'I', you are in effect naming yourself.

Pic of Billy arguing. He is saying "I didn't do it!"

So 'I' is a proper noun (eg here I = Billy).

Therefore, every 'I' must have a capital letter.

Incorrect capitalisation

Once we get the hang of the main cases, it is easy to use capitals. But some people overdo it. Here are some cases of incorrect use of capital letters.

Julie's was a wonderful Wedding.

Wrong! The word 'wedding' is a common noun, not a proper noun (no one's name).

Right: It was a wonderful wedding.

After the accident, I was helped by a very nice Constable.

Wrong! The word 'constable' is a common noun, not a proper noun (not his name).

Right: After the accident, I was helped by a very nice constable.

Next Summer, I will be going on Holiday with my cousin Anne to Hawaii.

Wrong! The words 'summer' and 'holiday' are common nouns.

Right: Next summer, I will be going on holiday with my cousin Anne to Hawaii.

Pic of two girls on beach

HINT: If you can think of other things which have the same name (eg weddings other than Julie's), it is a common noun. Only names that are one offs are proper nouns.