

# How to Capitalize Titles in MLA Style

These titles should appear in a research paper as follows:

Modernism and Negritude

Bernard Berenson: The Making of a Connoisseur

Turner's Early Sketchbooks

The rules for capitalizing titles are strict. In a title or a subtitle, capitalize the first word, the last word, and all principal words, including those that follow hyphens in compound terms. Therefore, capitalize the following parts of speech:

- Nouns (e.g., **flowers** and **Europe**, as in *The Flowers of Europe*)
- Pronouns (e.g., **our**, as in *Save Our Children*; **that**, as in *The Mouse That Roared*)
- Verbs (e.g., **watches**, as in *America Watches Television*; **is**, as in *What Is Literature?*)
- Adjectives (e.g., **ugly**, as in *The Ugly Duckling*; **that**, as in *Who Said That Phrase?*)
- Adverbs (e.g., **slightly**, as in *Only Slightly Corrupt*; **down**, as in *Go Down, Moses*)
- Subordinating conjunctions (e.g., **after, although, as if, as soon as, because, before, if, that, unless, until, when, where, while**, as in *One If by Land and Anywhere That Chance Leads*)

Do not capitalize the following parts of speech when they fall in the middle of a title:

- Articles (a, an, the, as in *Under the Bamboo Tree*)
- Prepositions (e.g., **against, between, in, of, to**, as in *The Merchant of Venice* and *A Dialogue between the Soul and Body*)
- Coordinating conjunctions (**and, but, for, nor, or, so, yet**, as in *Romeo and Juliet*)
- The **to** in infinitives (as in *How to Play Chess*)

Use a colon and a space to separate a title from a subtitle, unless the title ends in a question mark, an exclamation point, or a dash. Include other punctuation only if it is part of the title.

The following examples illustrate how to capitalize and punctuate a variety of titles.

Death of a Salesman

The Teaching of Spanish in English-Speaking Countries

Storytelling and Mythmaking: Images from Film and Literature

Life As I Find It

The Artist as Critic

What Are You Doing in My Universe?

Whose Music? A Sociology of Musical Language

The Importance of Being Earnest

It's a Wonderful Life

From: Gibaldi, Joseph. MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers. 6<sup>th</sup> ed. New York: Modern Language Assoc. of America, 2004. (page 103)

- In MLA format, *all* titles capitalize the following:
  1. The *first word* of the title [and of the subtitle if one is included]
    - The Future Fair: A Fair for Everybody**
    - America Eats Its Young: Eavedropping on the Life and Strange Times of George Clinton**
  2. All *nouns* and *pronouns*
    - The Future Fair: A Fair for Everybody**
    - Our Man in Havana**
    - The Way We Were**
  3. All *verbs*
    - America Eats Its Young: Eavedropping on the Life and Strange Times of George Clinton**
    - The Way We Were**
    - Understanding Media**
  4. All *adjectives* and *adverbs*
    - The Future Fair: A Fair for Everybody**
    - The Very Quiet Caterpillar**
    - I've Been Up So Long It Looks Like Down to Me**
  5. All *subordinating conjunctions* — for example, **after**, **although**, **as if**, **as soon as**, **because**, **before**, [etc.] as in
    - Look As If You're Busy: The Psychology of the Modern Workplace**
    - To Sleep Until the Day Breaks: The Life of the Single Parent**
  6. In contrast, *do not capitalize* any of the following [unless the first word of a title or subtitle]
    1. *Articles* [a, an, the]
      - Look As If You're Busy: The Psychology of the Modern Workplace**
      - To Build a Fire**
      - When You Meet an Aardvark: The Riddles of Working Class Pretoria**
    2. *Prepositions* — for example, **by**, **for**, **on**, **to**, [etc.] as in
      - The Future Fair: A Fair for Everybody**
      - Our Man in Havana**
      - America Eats Its Young: Eavedropping on the Life and Strange Times of George Clinton**
      - When We Went down to the Water: A Short History of Early American Coast Guard Units**
    3. *Coordinating conjunctions* [and, but, for, nor, or, so, yet] as in
      - Young and Angry: The Rise of Punk Culture**
      - Neither Fish nor Fowl: The Taxonomy of Australian Marsupials**
    4. The word *to* when used as part of an infinitive verb phrase [**to** run, **to** find, **to** investigate]
      - Mister, Want to Buy a Bunny?: The Life and Fast Times of Spike Jones and His Orchestra**
      - Kierkegaard or Seven Ways to Understand Modern Existentialism**
- If in doubt as to what part of speech (noun, verb, etc.) a given word actually is, consult a standard English dictionary or handbook of grammar.

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