



# St. Mary's Secondary School, Style Guide

## Capital Letters

The correct use of capital letters is important in writing.

When to Use Capital Letters

### Rule 1:

To Start a Sentence

There are no exceptions to this rule.

This means that, after a full stop, you always use a capital letter.

If the previous sentence ends with a question mark or exclamation mark, you should also use a capital letter, ? and !, like full stops, indicate the end of a sentence.

Is it always necessary to use capitals to start a sentence? The answer is definitely yes.

### Rule 2:

Titles

In titles, capitalise only the important words, not minor words such as 'and' and 'but'.

### Rule 3:

For Proper Nouns

Proper nouns name something specific, for example, Jane, John, Dublin University, Limerick, Aer Lingus, Microsoft, Everest, Sahara.

The word 'I' is not a proper noun, it's a pronoun. In English 'I' is always capitalised. In many other languages the equivalent word is not capitalised.



#### Rule 4:

##### Acronyms

Radio Telefís Éireann     RTE

Department of Education and Skills     DES

Manchester United Football Club     MUFC

United Arab Emirates     UAE

#### Rule 5:

##### Contractions

For contractions, capitalise the initial letters of words, but not subsequent letters within the same word.

Contractions are like acronyms, but also include one or more letters from within the same word. Examples of this include HiFi, which is short for 'High Fidelity', and SciFi, short for science fiction.

The way to deal with these is to write out the phrase and have a look. Although the words that are abbreviated may not be capitalised, as in 'science fiction', the abbreviation always contains capitals for the start of each new word to make the word boundaries and pronunciation clear.

#### Rule 6:

##### Overusing Capitals is Rude

WRITING ENTIRELY IN BLOCK CAPITALS IS SHOUTING, and it's rude.

We've all done it: left the Caps Lock on while typing. But in email etiquette, online chats and/or forum posts, writing in capitals is the online equivalent of shouting. It's rude, so best not to do it unless you really do want to shout at someone. Even then, consider whether you'd really do it if that person was in front of you, and also whether it will get you anywhere.

Although it's usually best to avoid writing in capitals, it can be useful to write odd words in capitals to give them emphasis. HELP! You're going to LOVE the surprise.

It's also much harder to read block capitals as all the letters are the same height, so you will make your point much more easily if you use lower case.



Sometimes, especially when completing a handwritten form, BLOCK CAPITALS are preferred since this can make data entry or automatic computer recognition of handwriting easier and more accurate.

## Some Computer Specifics

Email addresses (hello@skillsyouneed.com) and domain names (skillsyouneed.com) never include capital letters. Most computer applications will correct capital letters in email address or domain names to lower-case.

Web addresses, URLs, can however be case sensitive - although usual convention is to use only lower case letters.

### Passwords

It is usually a good idea to use both upper and lower case characters in computer passwords as this makes them more secure. Passwords are usually case sensitive so they need to be exactly right, hence paSSword is different to pAsswoRd. It is a good idea to use numbers and special characters in passwords to make them even more secure, for example - p@55wOr|].

## The Comma (,)

The comma is useful in a sentence when the writer wishes to:

- pause before proceeding
- add a phrase that does not contain any new subject
- separate items on a list
- use more than one adjective (a describing word, like beautiful)

For example, in the following sentence the phrase or clause between the commas gives us more information behind the actions of the boy, the subject of the sentence:

*The boy, who knew that his mother was about to arrive, ran quickly towards the opening door.*

Note that if the phrase or clause were to be removed, the sentence would still make sense although there would be a loss of information. Alternatively, two sentences could be used:

*The boy ran quickly towards the opening door. He knew that his mother was about to arrive.*



Commas are also used to separate items in a list.

For example:

*The shopping trolley was loaded high with bottles of beer, fruit, vegetables, toilet rolls, cereals and cartons of milk.*

Note that in a list, the final two items are linked by the word 'and' rather than by a comma.

Commas are used to separate adjectives.

For example:

*The boy was happy, eager and full of anticipation at the start of his summer holiday.*

As commas represent a pause, it is good practice to read your writing out loud and listen to where you make natural pauses as you read it. More often than not, you will indicate where a comma should be placed by a natural pause. Although, the 'rules' of where a comma needs to be placed should also be followed.

For example:

*However, it has been suggested that some bees prefer tree pollen.*

## **Full Stop (.)**

A full stop should always be used to end a sentence. The full stop indicates that a point has been made and that you are about to move on to further explanations or a related point.

Less frequently, a series of three full stops (an ellipsis) can be used to indicate where a section of a quotation has been omitted when it is not relevant to the text, for example:

*"The boy was happy... at the start of his summer holiday."*

A single full stop may also be used to indicate the abbreviation of commonly used words as in the following examples:

*Telephone Number = Tel. No.*

*September = Sept.*

*Pages = pp.*



## Apostrophe (')

The apostrophe, sometimes called an inverted comma has two main uses.

1. The apostrophe indicates possession or ownership.

For example:

*The girl's hat was green, (girl is in the singular).*

This shows the reader that the hat belongs to the girl.

*The girls' hats were green, (girls in this instance are plural, i.e. more than one girl, more than one hat).*

This indicates that the hats belong to the girls.

2. Another use of the apostrophe is to indicate where a letter is omitted:

For example:

*We're going to do this course. (We are going to do this course.)*

*Isn't this a fine example of punctuation? (Is not this a fine example of punctuation?)*

*The time is now 7 o' clock. (The time is now 7 of the clock)*

\*Note that a common mistake is to confuse its with it's.

It's indicates to the reader that a letter has been omitted.

For example:

*It's a lovely day is an abbreviated way of saying: It is a lovely day.*

Note that in most formal writing, the practice of using abbreviated words is inappropriate.