

INPUT GUIDE

CAPITALIZATION: The Rules

by Jean Sexton, Director of Proofreading

As the Enemy closed in, the Fast Frigate shuddered under heavy Disruptor fire. Wanekla looked around the corner, her Phaser drawn and ready as she prepared to sprint down the Corridor. She Scanned for Lifesigns with her Tricorder.

If the above paragraph appears to you to be correct, then you may have a case of “Creeping Capitalization Syndrome”. Luckily, it is reversible and completely preventable by following these ten simple rules.

Rule #1, Proper Personal Names: Capitalize proper names, such as Steve Cole or Targis Ketrick. Nicknames such as “The Beast of New Orleans” (Civil War Major General Benjamin Butler) are capitalized as literary titles. See Rule #5.

Rule #2, Other Proper Names: Country names (e.g., England, Romulus) and proper geographic names (e.g., Klingon Empire, Amarillo, Alpha Sector); “race” names (e.g., Kzinti, Seltorian), and species names (e.g., Hilidarian); military organizations (e.g., Deep Space Fleet, Empire Security Service, Star Fleet Marines), political structures (e.g., Romulan Senate), specific military units (e.g., Third Squadron, Fourth Battalion, Sixth Fleet); and starship “code names” or “reporting names” (e.g., SparrowHawk, Dominator, Siberian Tiger) are capitalized as proper names. See Rule #1.

Rule #3, Special Proper Names: Product names (e.g., *SFB Module R11*) and ship names (e.g., *Constellation*) are capitalized AND shown in *italics*. This courtesy also extends to the titles of magazines, books, and newspapers; see Rule #5, below.

Rule #4, Ranks and Titles: Military ranks (e.g., Major, General, Corporal) and political titles (e.g., Senator, Count) are capitalized only when part of a name (e.g., Major Kenyil, Senator Hart, Count Chocula) or when used as a name substitute (e.g., “I tell you what, Major, you’re not going on the mission, and that’s that!”) but not in a generic sense (e.g., “that job requires a qualified captain of the combat engineers.”). Military duty positions (e.g., navigator) are capitalized when used as a name substitute (e.g., “...the Navigator said”) but not when used in a generic sense (e.g., “Get one of the navigators up to the Bridge”). As a general rule, if you can swap the rank/title/job with the name of the person, then it gets capitalized, e.g., “I tell you what, Fred, you’re not going on the mission, and that’s that!” but not “Get one of the Freds up to the Bridge.” Although, come to think of it, it would be entirely proper to say “One of the Steves will have to make that decision” when speaking of ADB, Inc., but in that case, it would be wrong to capitalize corporate officers in the sentence “One of the Corporate Officers will have to make that decision” and that just confuses everybody.

Rule #5, Literary Titles: In a literary title (i.e., the title of a magazine article, as opposed to a title of nobility), where it is not in all caps, capitalize the first word, the last word, any word that would normally rate a capital, and any “big” or “important” word. Small words such as “to”, “and”, or “the” are not “big” or “important” words but might rate a capital by one of the other rules. (In proper English grammar: articles, conjunctions, and prepositions — and you all know what those are, *right?* — don’t get caps.

Words such as “is” and “be” *do* get them. Certain small words such as “a”, “an”, or “the” get capitalized if they are the first word of a title of a specific thing (e.g., *The New York Times*), such as “Steve Cole Refutes *The New York Times*” or “Leanna Cole Lands Leading Role in *The Lion and the Lamb*”.

Rule #6, Major Historical Events: Named historical events (e.g., War of Return, General War, Four Powers War, Day of the Eagle, Day One, Battle of the Firewall, the Long Retreat) are capitalized under the rules for literary titles. See Rule #5.

Rule #7, Certain Game Terms: Only some game terms get capitalized. Steps and phases of the turn (e.g., Economic Phase and the Tractor Beam Step), are capitalized under the rules for literary titles; see Rule #5. These need to be checked individually on the capitalization list on the website, because some items logically included in this category do not rate capital letters.

Rule #8, Acronyms and Certain Abbreviations: These are always in all caps, such as *SFB*, CW, ESG, and so forth. Klingon ship classes are alphanumeric (e.g., D7, F4, C8) and capitalized as shown. Note that we have listed a few of these in the alphabetic list of examples (on the website) but by no means all of them. The fact that we listed DW but not DWG does not mean you have to spell out that ship class. Note that AUX (short for auxiliary) and BATS (short for battlestation) are sort of abbreviations and sort of acronyms, and in either case are treated under this rule, as are all “box identifying labels” on a Ship Card/SSD.

Rule #9, Technology and Certain Other Items: These terms (e.g., Light Cruiser, Web Breaker, Asteroid) are capitalized in (and only in) the specific rule defining them, or closely-related rules (e.g., “The Web Caster can cast a Strand of Web from a Corner Anchor to another Anchor.”) and then only for emphasis and identification (in effect, to say “Hey, gamer! THIS is the thing we were talking about!”). Even this use is optional, as long as the text of a given numbered rule is consistent.

Rule #10, RPGs and Other “Licensed Properties”: Our role-playing games have their own special rules. In *GURPS*, all “skills,” “attributes,” “advantages,” “disadvantages,” and certain other game terms are capitalized for recognition purposes. For *d20*, specific stats, skills, and feats are capitalized for recognition purposes. These are often required by contract and are done to make our products what the players of the licensed game systems expect to see.

Creeping Capitalization Syndrome: There is an annoying tendency of “When in doubt, capitalize” which results in “Creeping Capitalization” and that tends to cause Various Bad Things™, such as English teachers shaking their heads, nitpickers becoming even more annoying, and well-meaning proofreaders to mark over 100 words per page of *Captain’s Log* as something to capitalize because “you capitalized it before”.

Germano-Military Capitalization: There is a tendency among military people (and people who read a lot of military stuff and imagine themselves to be experts) to follow German rules (capitalize every noun) when dealing with military subjects (capitalize every weapon or other military term). This is something to resist as it turns into Creeping Capitalization Syndrome.

Situational Capitalization: There is a tendency by some technical writers to capitalize things “because they look like they deserve it” which tends to create Confusion and Doubt about What to Capitalize, Resulting in Creeping Capitalization.

Why Bother? It may not matter when researching a key rule in mid-battle if Tractor Beam is capitalized or not, but producing products which adhere to the standards of the English language improves readability and respectability. It adds credibility to the company and to the product lines.

Just do it, or I will send you to the Agonizer Booth.