How to teach capital letters: 5 rules, in the order kids need them

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The five capital letter rules children need first, in teaching order, with sentences to fix, the mistakes to expect at each age and free practice.

Teach five capital letter rules in this order: the first word of a sentence, the word I, the names of people and pets, the days and months, and the names of places. That order matches what children write about first, and it follows the Common Core Language standards from kindergarten to 2nd grade. Peabody's grammar pages for capital letters and for proper nouns give a definition, examples and three questions to fix, free through the end of 2026, with no sign-up and no ads.

The rules are short. The hard part is the habit, so this post also covers ten sentences to fix, what does not get a capital, and the mistakes you can expect at each age.

The five rules, in order

- Rule: 1. The first word of a sentence · Grade it is usually taught: Kindergarten (L.K.2a) · Example: The bus is here.
- Rule: 2. The word I · Grade it is usually taught: Kindergarten (L.K.2a) · Example: Can I have a pear?
- Rule: 3. Names of people and pets · Grade it is usually taught: 1st grade (L.1.2a) · Example: My friend Ben has a dog named Biscuit.
- Rule: 4. Days, months and dates · Grade it is usually taught: 1st grade (L.1.2a) · Example: We swim on Friday in June.
- Rule: 5. Names of places, and product names · Grade it is usually taught: 2nd grade (L.2.2a) · Example: We drove to Ohio.
- Rule: Next: titles of books · Grade it is usually taught: 3rd grade (L.3.2a) · Example: The Little Red Hen

Skip ahead only when a child has the one before it. A child who forgets I in the middle of a sentence is not ready to be asked about place names.

Ten sentences to fix

Read each one aloud, ask the child to find what needs a capital, and then check the right column. The sentences go from easiest to hardest.

- Fix this: the cat is asleep. · Fixed: The cat is asleep.
- Fix this: today i ate a pear. · Fixed: Today I ate a pear.

- Fix this: can i play outside? · Fixed: Can I play outside?
- Fix this: my dog is named max. · Fixed: My dog is named Max.
- Fix this: ana and tom made soup. · Fixed: Ana and Tom made soup.
- Fix this: school is closed on monday. · Fixed: School is closed on Monday.
- Fix this: we go swimming in july. · Fixed: We go swimming in July.
- Fix this: my friend ben lives in texas. · Fixed: My friend Ben lives in Texas.
- Fix this: on friday i saw lena at the park. · Fixed: On Friday I saw Lena at the park.
- Fix this: i think lake tahoe is bigger than my pond in june. · Fixed: I think Lake Tahoe is bigger than my pond in June.

Do two or three at a time. Ten in a row is a chore, and the point is to build a quick check in the child's head.

What does not get a capital

Children who have just learned the rules often add capitals everywhere. These are the common ones to leave small.

- Word: summer, winter · Capital or not: Not · Why: Seasons are not names.
- Word: math, science, art · Capital or not: Not · Why: School subjects are not names, but English and other languages are.
- Word: my mom, my dad · Capital or not: Not · Why: After the word my, they are common nouns.
- Word: Mom (as in "Mom, look!") · Capital or not: Capital · Why: It is used as a name.
- Word: dog, cat, horse · Capital or not: Not · Why: Animals as a kind are common nouns.
- Word: Biscuit (a dog's name) · Capital or not: Capital · Why: It is the name of one pet.

The test for names is the question: is this the special name of one person, place or thing? The common and proper nouns page has the idea with three questions.

Mistakes to expect by age

- Ages 5 and 6: capitals in the middle of words. A child writes "bEd" or "my Dog". This is usually a handwriting habit, because capitals are easier to form, and not a grammar mistake. Praise the letters and ask them to look for the one capital at the front.
- Ages 6 and 7: forgetting names. The child capitalizes the first word and I, then writes "ben" and "texas" small. Ask "Is that somebody's own name?" and let them fix it.
- Ages 7 and 8: capitals for every important-looking word. "We saw a Rainbow at the Park." Go back to the test for names and point out that a rainbow is any rainbow, while Lake Tahoe is one lake.

A five-minute routine

1. Have your child write one sentence a day with no capitals at all. They are the editor, and your job is to ask "What can you fix?"
2. Three ready examples are on the capital letters page, with the answers one tap away.
3. Practise names with the common and proper nouns page.
4. Open a page of a story from the library and spot every capital. Ask why each one is there.

Peabody does not have a capitalization game. What it has is a page for each skill, flashcards linked from the page, and the wider grammar hub.

Questions grown-ups ask

When should a child learn capital letters?

Children learn the capital form of each letter in preschool and kindergarten, and the first two rules, the first word of a sentence and the word I, in kindergarten. Names, days and months follow in 1st grade.

Why does my child write capitals in the middle of words?

Usually because the capital shape is easier to write than the small one, and the child is thinking about the letter, not the word. It fades with handwriting practice. Do not call it wrong, just ask them to look at where the capitals belong.

Do the days of the week need a capital?

Yes. Days and months are names, so Monday and June both take a capital. The seasons do not, so summer stays small.

Is capitalization the same as capitalisation?

Yes. Capitalization is the American spelling and capitalisation is the British spelling of one word, and both mean using capital letters in the right places.

Free at peabody.kids/blog/how-to-teach-capital-letters