Thesis Capitalization Rules

Overcapitalization is a recurring issue in theses, student papers, and even some published literature. Simple nouns are often capitalized incorrectly in government sources, but we want them to be correct in theses, which are official NPS publications.

In general, we follow the *Chicago Manual of Style* and the *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms* as capitalization guidelines.

The bottom line: Know the rules, but, above all else, be consistent.

GENERAL RULES

**Modifiers are not capitalized.**
Words such as city, state, federal, and national, when used as modifiers, are not capitalized. Examples: “There are federal regulations about the relationship of city and state governments”; “The city of New York is in the state of New York.”

**Simple nouns are not capitalized**, even when used to define an acronym.

**Only proper nouns** are capitalized.

*Examples:* capitalize “President Obama,” but otherwise, use “the president” because there is more than one president in the world. Capitalize “U.S. Congress” because there is only one and it is a proper noun; however, “United States government” or “the government” is not capitalized because the government is not monolithic or a proper noun.

For acronyms: the term “improvised explosive device” should not be capitalized when spelled out, even though its accepted acronym (IED) will appear in capital letters.

*An exception:* based on strong tradition among U.S. military personnel, Thesis Processing turns a blind eye to capitalizing Sailor, Soldier, Marine, etc., when the terms are used in regard to the U.S. military. Lowercasing these terms is preferred; be consistent. For foreign militaries, do not capitalize.

**Titles are only capitalized when used before (or as part of) a name.**

*Examples:* “The president will address Congress”; “Senior Marketing Director Bill Smith compiles monthly reports”; and “Retired Vice Admiral Ronald A. Route is the current president of the Naval Postgraduate School.”
RULES BY TERM (ALPHABETICAL)

agency: capitalize only when it is part of an official agency name, or when it is referring to a specific official agency. ("The Environmental Protection Agency" can subsequently be referred to as “the Agency”; however, you would say, “Document formatting will be dependent on the agency writing it.”)

academic degrees: do not capitalize ("Jane Smith, who has a doctorate in social science, ..."; “Jane Smith earned a bachelor of arts degree”; “master's degree candidate Jane Smith”); however, capitalize degree abbreviations (“Jane Smith, Ph.D.”; Jane Smith, JD”).

Air Force: capitalize.

Appendix: (see Chapter).

Army: capitalize ("Army officer,” “U.S. Army,” “Army band”). Do not capitalize when plural ("the two armies were in position"; “See the glossary for a list of armies of the world”).

brigade: do not capitalize unless part of the official brigade name (”The 3rd Brigade Combat Team deployed to Afghanistan”; “Robinson’s brigade did not deploy”).

bureau: capitalize only when part of an official bureau name or when referring to a specific official bureau (“Bureau of the Census” can subsequently be referred to as “the Bureau”; however, you would say that “not all bureaus are created equal”).

Chapter (for theses only): capitalize C in Chapter, S in Section, F in Figure, T in Table, E in Equation, and A in Appendix when referring to specific chapters, sections, figures, tables, equations, or appendices in the text; use roman numbers for chapters.

coalition: do not capitalize.

Coast Guard personnel: capitalize C and G for reasons of tradition.

Coast Guardsmen: use gender-neutral “Coast Guard personnel”; only capitalize “C” and “G.”

committee: capitalize only when part of an official committee name or when referring to a specific official committee (“The House Committee of the Whole” can subsequently be referred to as “the Committee”; however, you would say that “all other congressional committees will be excluded from the meeting”).

Congress: capitalize (“the 106th Congress”; “Congress”; “the U.S. Congress”); however, lowercase the word “Congressional” unless it is part of a proper name.
degrees: (see academic degrees).

Democrat: capitalize only when used as a proper noun (“the Democratic Party”; “Barack Obama is a Democrat—he is head of the Democratic administration”) but lowercase “democratic” in the general sense (“We have a democratic government system”).

Department: capitalize only when part of an official agency name, or when referring to a specific official agency name (“The Department of Agriculture” can subsequently be referred to as “the Department”; however, you would say that “labor is divided among the legislative departments”).

Department of Defense: capitalize (for theses, use all capitals for the acronym DOD)

e-mail: do not capitalize; no hyphen.

embassy: capitalize only when used as a proper noun (“the Philippine Embassy”) and to refer to a specific embassy in shortened form (“the Embassy personnel…”).

Equation: (see Chapter).

federal court: do not capitalize.

federal government: do not capitalize unless part of an official agency name (“The Federal Bureau of Investigation”; “The U.S. federal government encompasses many agencies”).

Figure: (see Chapter).

headings: (see titles).

Ibid.: capitalize; do not put in italics; always follow with a period; put a comma and a space before the page number (Ibid., 10).

Internet: capitalize.

intranet: do not capitalize.

Marine(s): capitalize (“U.S. Marines”; “the Marine Corps”) (see sailor).

ministry: capitalize only when part of an official ministry name, or when referring to a specific official ministry name (“The French Ministry of Foreign Affairs” can subsequently be referred to as “the Ministry”; however, you would say that “foreign ministries are located in Washington, D.C.”).
Navy: capitalize when referring to the U.S. Navy (“the United States Navy”; “the Navy”). For foreign navies, capitalize only when part of an official name (“the Royal Navy”; “the British navy”). However, you would say that “the soup of the day is navy bean.”

Naval: capitalize only as part of an official name (“The naval officers will meet at the naval shipyard off of Potomac Street”; “I attend the Naval Postgraduate School”).

Regiment: do not capitalize unless part of the official brigade name (“187th Infantry Regiment deployed to Afghanistan,” but “Williams’ regiment did not deploy”).

Republican: capitalize when used as a proper noun (“the Republican Party”; “George W. Bush is a Republican—he was head of the Republican administration”) but not when used as a noun (“a republican form of government”; “modern representative democracies are by and large republican in nature”).

Sailor: based on strong tradition among U.S. military personnel, Thesis Processing turns a blind eye to capitalizing Sailor, Soldier, Marine, etc., when they are from the U.S. military. Lowercasing these terms is preferred; be consistent. For foreign militaries, these terms are not capitalized.

Section: (see Chapter).

Senate: capitalize in all references to government bodies. Lowercase plural uses (“the California and Nevada senates”).

Software product names: only capitalize when using a specific software name; do not capitalize “software” on its own.

Soldier: (see sailor).

State: capitalize only when it follows the name of a state or is part of an assumed name (“Washington State”; “the Empire State”; “the state of Iowa”).

Subtitles: (see titles).

Survey: capitalize only when part of an official name, or when referring to a specific official survey (“the Geological Survey” can be referred to as “the Survey”; however, you would say that “a survey will be conducted every four years”).

Table: (see Chapter).

Task force: capitalize only when part of an official name, or when referring to a specific official task force (“The study recommended assembling an interagency task force to resolve recurring issues”; but “The Monterey Interagency Task Force was very busy in its first year”).
titles (headings, titles, etc.): use title case—capitalize the first and last words and all nouns, pronouns, adjectives, and verbs; do not capitalize prepositions or articles (e.g., a, after, an, at, before, between, by, for, on, out, the, through).

treasury: capitalize only when it is part of an official name, or when it is referring to an official name (“Treasury of the United States”; or “New York’s sub-treasury”).

United States: abbreviate only when used as an adjective; spell out when used as a noun (“She is a U.S. citizen”; “She lives in the United States”).

website: do not capitalize.

QUESTIONS?

For questions, please contact thesisdraft@nps.edu or drop by the Thesis Processing Office in 111 Dudley Knox Library. Phone numbers are listed through an intranet link at the bottom of our website: http://www.nps.edu/research/research1.html.