



NPS Thesis Style Capitalization Guidelines

Overcapitalization is a recurring issue in theses, student papers, and even some published literature. Common 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](#) (CAC required) as capitalization guidelines.

The bottom line: Know the rules, but, above all else, *use capitalization consistently throughout your thesis.*

GENERAL RULES

Modifiers are not capitalized.

Words such as city, state, federal, naval, 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”; and “The new naval program begins tomorrow.”

Common nouns are not capitalized.

Words such as government and vehicle are not capitalized, even when used to define an acronym. Seasons of the year and points on a compass are not capitalized.

Examples: “The U.S. government (USG) promotes healthy eating for all children ages 12 and younger”; “Even though it is July, the cool weather makes it feel like spring”; and “She headed east after graduation.”

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, U.S. government, or “the federal government,” is not capitalized because the government is not monolithic or a proper noun.

Examples 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. The same holds true for terms such as unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV).



Examples of a few exceptions: 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. For foreign militaries, these terms are not capitalized.

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 “Former Secretary of the Navy Ray Mabus served under President Obama from 2009 to 2017.”

RULES BY TERM (ALPHABETICAL)

agency: capitalize only when it is part of an official agency name (“the Environmental Protection Agency” can subsequently be referred to as “the agency.” Furthermore, you would say that “each agency has its own style for documentation”).

academic degrees: do not capitalize unless used before or after a person’s name, as part of a title (“Jane Smith, Doctor of Social Science”; “Jane Smith earned bachelor’s and master’s degrees from the university”). (Also note the apostrophe in bachelor’s degree and master’s degree.)

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 encyclopedia 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 (“Bureau of the Census” can subsequently be referred to as “the bureau.” Furthermore, you would say that “not all bureaus are created equal”).

century: do not capitalize unless part of a name (“Rococo art is associated with the 18th century”; “Her auto coverage is through 20th Century Insurance”).

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 with numerals. For example, “The history of the controversy is described in Chapter II, Section A.” Note the use of roman numerals and capital letters to match the template.

coalition: capitalize only when part of an official coalition name or when referring to a specific official coalition (“the Coalition Provisional Authority” can subsequently be referred to as “the coalition.”

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 U.S. House Committee Energy and Commerce” can subsequently be referred to as “the committee.” Furthermore, you would say that “all other congressional committees will be excluded from the meeting”).

Congress: capitalize (“the 106th Congress”; “Congress”; “the U.S. Congress”).

degrees: (see *Academic degrees*).

Democrat: capitalize only when used as a proper noun (“the Democratic Party”; “Barack Obama is a Democrat”) but not when it is in the adjective form “democratic” (“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.” Furthermore, you would say that “labor is divided among the legislative departments”).

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

Department of the Navy: capitalize all letters (for theses, use the acronym DON).

email: do not capitalize; no hyphen.

embassy: capitalize when used as a proper noun (“the Philippine Embassy”) but not when referring to it in an abbreviated form (“embassy personnel”).

Equation: (see *Chapter*).

federal court: capitalize only when part of an official court name or when referring to a specific official court (“the U.S. Federal Court of Appeals” can subsequently be referred to as “the court” or “the federal court.”

federal government: do not capitalize **either word** 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*).

internet: do not capitalize.

intranet: do not capitalize.

Marine(s): capitalize (“U.S. Marines”; “the Marine Corps”) (see *Sailor*). Do not capitalize as an adjective referring to the ocean (“The sea otter is the only marine mammal that does not have an extra layer of fat.”)



ministry: capitalize only when part of an official ministry name (“the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs” can subsequently be referred to as “the ministry.” Furthermore, you would say that “foreign ministries are located in Washington, DC”). Note that there are no periods in DC.

Morse code: capitalize the name of the code’s co-founder but lowercase the common noun, code.

Navy: capitalize only as part of an official name (“the U.S. Navy” or “the Navy”; however, you would say “the soup of the day is navy bean”; and “The island citizens plan to raise a navy”).

naval: capitalize only as part of an official name (“The naval officers will meet at the naval shipyard off 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. For foreign militaries, these terms are not capitalized.

Section: (see *Chapter*).

Senate: capitalize when referring to the U.S. Senate.

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 (“the Empire State”; “the state of Iowa”); do not capitalize when used as a modifier (“some of the domestic threats that state governments face”).

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” in subsequent references. Furthermore, 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, coordinating conjunctions, or articles (e.g., a, after, an, at, before, between, by, for, on, the, through).

Treasury: capitalize when it is part of an official name (“Treasury of the United States”; or “New York’s Sub-Treasury”).

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

warfighter: do not capitalize.

website: do not capitalize.

QUESTIONS?

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