Capitalizing Names, Nicknames, and Animal Names (and more)
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A great deal of confusion comes from the concept of capitalization, especially with the various types of names. Let's get this sorted out, shall we?

Capitalizing nicknames *vs.* capitalizing terms of endearment

Nicknames and terms of endearment are not the same thing.

A *nickname* actually replaces a person's name.
- Tom and Ray (of the NPR show called *Car Talk*) are also called Click and Clack.
- One of them is Click, the other is Clack. The names are interchangeable with their real names.
- **A nickname functions as an alternative to the actual name of the person.**
- Therefore, a nickname functions as a proper noun when you use it. Proper nouns are always capitalized.
- A nickname identifies a *specific* person.

Let's imagine I have a nickname for Trish. The nickname is Princess. This can only be a nickname if it is interchangeable with her actual name. Once the nickname is established, and other people know that it is indeed a nickname, then I can write, "I need to talk to Princess about next weekend," and people will know I'm talking about Trish. The word has to be capitalized, otherwise people will think I'm talking about an actual princess.

States also have nicknames, and these are capitalized: "Missouri is known as the Show-me State."

A *term of endearment* is NOT a direct replacement for someone's name.
- A term of endearment is a "**descriptive term that provides context to the relationship between two individuals.**"
- Therefore, terms of endearment do not function as proper nouns when you use them, so they are usually NOT capitalized.
- Example: I'm home, honey!
- The word honey does not identify a specific person. I would not say, "I will ask honey about that."
- Other examples: baby, sweetheart, dude, mate, buddy, sugar, son, love, munchkin, kiddo (and then, of course, you have ones like idiot, dummy, and fartface)

Let's consider the Princess nickname again. Oddly, this word can also be a term of endearment. For example: "This is for you, princess." In this case, it is a *descriptive term that provides context to the relationship between two individuals*. In other words, a term of endearment, and it should not be capitalized.

Capitalizing names of pets

Pet names, like Rover, Sport, Daisy, Blue, and Snowball function as proper nouns and should be capitalized.

Capitalizing "Mom" and "Dad"

Sometimes you do, sometimes you don't. It depends on whether they are being used as proper nouns or common nouns.
Proper noun: "Can I borrow your car, Dad?"
Common noun: "My dad said I couldn't borrow his car."
Proper noun: "Maybe I can borrow Mom's car."
Common noun: "I can't go to the movies because my mom and dad won't let me use either car."

The same rules apply to other kinship titles like *grandma*, *grandpa*, *aunt*, and *uncle.*
Proper noun: "Are we going to Grandpa Stan's house."
Common noun: "Stan is my grandpa."
Proper noun: "Thanks for the gift, Grandma!"
Common noun: "Was it your aunt who saw the UFO last week?"

Son and *daughter* are rarely capitalized because they are rarely used as proper nouns.

Capitalizing animal names

Generally, animal names or breeds are NOT capitalized
Examples: human, zebra, chinchilla, great white shark, flamingo, poodle, collie

Unless a portion of the name is a proper noun:
Examples: Neanderthal (named after the Neander Valley in Germany), German shepherd, Labrador retriever, Scottish terrier

Scientific names have specific rules. The genus is always capitalized, the *species* is always lowercase
 Homo sapiens (human)
 Homo neanderthalensis (Neanderthal)
 Panthera tigris (tiger)
 Canis lupus familiaris (domestic dog)

The key to mastering capitalization—proper nouns vs. common nouns

Remember, understanding proper and common nouns will help you master this!

Basically, *common nouns* refer to the general name of a person, place, or thing. It can be anything: a cat, dog, zebra, boy, male, car, etc.
Whereas *proper nouns* are unique to a person, place, or thing for example Nile, Italy, Sarah, Jupiter.

Proper noun: "The rocket left Earth at 9:00 AM."
Common noun: "The earth revolves around the sun."
Proper nouns: The four planets closest to the sun—Mercury, Venus, Earth, and Mars—compose the inner solar system.

Here are a few sites that might help:
Are Nicknames Capitalized? (from Grammar Girl)
https://www.quickanddirtytips.com/education/grammar/are-nicknames-capitalized
Capitalizing Proper Nouns
https://www.quickanddirtytips.com/education/grammar/capitalizing-proper-nouns
Do you capitalize animal names?
https://capitalizemytitle.com/ufaqs/do-you-capitalize-animal-names
Capitalizing Proper Nouns
https://www.quickanddirtytips.com/education/grammar/capitalizing-proper-nouns