

Grammar 24—Capitalization

English speakers must take care not to over-capitalize when writing Russian. If you follow the rules below, your capitalization will be correct enough that it will not be a distraction. Be aware though that Russian style guides cover additional exceptions.

What is the Same

In both Russian and English we capitalize the first word of each sentence. We also capitalize proper names, but there are differences in what is considered a proper name and how multi-word proper names are capitalized.

Words Considered Common Names in Russian

In English we capitalize these as proper names, but in Russian we do not:

- Names of months: январь, февраль, март...
- Days of the week: понедельник, вторник, среда...
- Seasons of the year: весна, лето, осень, зима
- Names of languages: английский, русский, немецкий...

Capitalization of Multi-Word Proper Names

When the proper name of an organization, object, or publication consists of more than one word, only the first is automatically capitalized. Words after the first are capitalized only if they are themselves proper names. Note the differences between Russian and English capitalization in the examples below:

Сторожевая башня	Watch Tower
Зал Царства Свидетелей Иеговы	Kingdom Hall of Jehovah's Witnesses
Береговая охрана Соединённых Штатов	United States Coast Guard

Official Names of Countries

However, the full official names of political states and unions of states are generally capitalized throughout, much as in English:

Соединённые Штаты Америки	The United States of America
Союз Советских Социалистических республик	The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
Соединённое Королевство Великобритании и Северной Ирландии	The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

Tradition

Some proper names are capitalized in a manner dictated by tradition. For example, the Red Cross is “Общество Красного Креста” even though we would expect it to be “Общество красного креста”.

Adjectives from Proper Nouns

Adjectives such as “библейский” (“Biblical”) are not capitalized unless they are the first word of the sentence or of a proper name such as “Красная площадь” (“Red Square”). This is true even if the adjective is derived from a proper noun.

Russian Does Not Have Title Case

In English we capitalize all important words within newspaper article titles, titles of a books, chapter titles, and subheadings. There is not done in Russian. The first word is capitalized, but after that only proper nouns are capitalized.

Capitalization of Pronouns

Do not capitalize я unless it is the first word in a sentence. Some choose to capitalize the pronoun “вы” (including its declined and possessive forms) when it is used as a respectful form of address to one person.