Capitalization

It can be tricky to figure out when to capitalize a noun: Typically, proper nouns are capitalized, but what are proper nouns? *Merriam-Webster* defines a proper noun as one “that is the name of a particular person, place, or thing and usually begins with a capital letter (2014).”

For quick reference, below are the most common questions about capitalization. These rules and examples follow the APA style guidelines, and can be found in the *APA Publications Manual: 6th Edition*. For more information, please refer to the manual or schedule a coaching session with the WRMC.

*Do I Capitalize a Noun...*

If it is the beginning of a sentence?  
Yes! Always capitalize the first letter of a sentence.  
*Correct:* The cup of tea is hot.  
*Incorrect:* the cup of tea is hot.

If it is a major word in a title?  
Yes! Major words in titles and headings are capitalized.  
*Correct:* In her book, *History of Pathology*...  
*Incorrect:* In her book, *history of pathology*...

If it is the name of a specific, geographic area?  
Yes! Names of Geographic areas are capitalized, but general geographic names are not capitalized.  
*Correct:* Yellowstone Park, Yangtze River, New York City  
*Incorrect:* the Park, the River, the City

If it is the title of a test?  
Yes! *Specific* tests get capitalized. Usually these are standardized, brand-named tests. General exams are not capitalized.  
*Correct:* MCAT, SAT, LSAT, TOEFL  
*Incorrect:* Medical Test, Language Test, Math Test

If it is a general course?  
No, unless it is a language course.  
*Correct:* I am taking geography this semester.  
*Incorrect:* I am taking Geography this semester.