Capital Cities or Common Nouns? Why Some Words Always Need a Capital Letter

In Year 2, children learn that certain words always start with a capital letter, not just names of people and places. Words like Monday, February, London and England are 'proper nouns' – they name one specific thing, so they always begin with a capital letter, wherever they appear in a sentence. This page explains what this means and how you can help your child notice and remember these capital letters at home.

What it is

A proper noun is a word that names one particular thing – not just any day or place, but a specific one. Days of the week (Monday, Tuesday), months (January, February), place names (London, Manchester, England), and people's names all belong to this group. Each one always starts with a capital letter, even if it appears in the middle of a sentence. This is different from 'common nouns' like 'dog' or 'school', which describe any member of a group and only start with a capital letter at the beginning of a sentence. Year 2 children are learning to spot the difference and apply the rule correctly in their writing.

What happens

During Year 2, your child will begin to practise writing proper nouns with capital letters in their daily work. They'll learn through examples – spotting that Wednesday always has a capital W, that their town or city name always starts with a capital letter, and that people's names do too. Teachers often use sorting activities or games where children group words into 'always capital' and 'sometimes capital' piles. Your child might write short sentences using days, months or place names, and their teacher will gently correct any that are missed. This builds on work from Reception and Year 1 where they already learned that names of people and the start of sentences need capitals – this extends that understanding.

What it means for your child

Learning this rule helps your child become a more accurate writer. You may notice that their writing becomes tidier and more consistent, with proper nouns correctly capitalised. Some children find this tricky at first – it's very common for young writers to write 'monday' or 'london' in lower case, even after they've mastered capitals for people's names. This isn't a sign of any problem; it just means the rule hasn't quite bedded in yet. With practice and gentle reminders, it becomes automatic. Getting this right now also prepares children for using more advanced punctuation and grammar rules later on.

How you can help at home

Spot proper nouns together in everyday life. When you write a shopping list, point out 'Tuesday' or the name of your local park. Ask your child, 'Does that need a big letter at the start?' Play simple games: take turns naming days of the week, then months, or places you know, and spot the capitals together. When your child writes – a card to a friend, a message, a short story – you can ask, 'Is that a special day or place? What letter should it start with?' Keep it light and playful; the goal is to make noticing capitals fun, not stressful. Praise them when you see them getting it right.

Questions parents often ask

Why does it matter if my child gets this wrong? Capital letters are a key part of being a secure writer. They also signal to readers which words are special or important. At Year 2, small errors are expected and normal – they'll improve with practice.

My child writes 'friday' but gets 'Sarah' right. Why? Children often find names easier because they see them more often and they are very personal. Days and months are more abstract, so they take longer to stick. Both will come with time.

Should I correct every mistake? Not every time – that can feel discouraging. Pick one or two to focus on gently. Let your child's teacher lead on corrections in school work.

Sources

- Department for Education, National Curriculum in England: English programmes of study (Key Stage 1, Year 2: Transcription and Composition)
- GOV.UK, Information on primary education and English teaching in England