

Capital Letters for Names: Why Jack Needs a Capital but Jumping Doesn't

This guide helps parents understand why some words need capital letters and others do not. It explains the difference between general words and specific names, using everyday examples like your child's name, their school, and the days of the week. We offer simple, playful ways to support this learning at home without pressure.

What it is

In Year 1, children begin to learn that capital letters are not just for the start of a sentence. They also use them for 'proper nouns', which is the school term for specific names of people, places, and things. For example, 'dog' is a general word, but 'Rex' is a specific name and needs a capital letter. This guide clarifies that distinction. It helps you support your child as they notice that names in their reading books always start with a big letter. We focus on common examples like family names, street names, and days of the week to make the rule feel familiar and manageable.

What happens in class

Teachers introduce this concept by sorting words into two groups: general words and specific names. Children might look at a list of words like 'city', 'London', 'teacher', and 'Mrs Smith'. They discuss which ones name a specific thing and therefore need a capital letter. This often happens during phonics or writing lessons when children start writing independent sentences. You may see worksheets where children circle the words that need a capital letter. The goal is to build a habit of noticing names. Teachers encourage children to check their own writing for these specific names, helping them become more accurate and confident in their spelling and punctuation.

What it means for your child

Understanding this rule helps your child write more clearly and accurately. When they know that 'Jack' needs a capital but 'jumping' does not, they can focus on other parts of their writing, like spelling and sentence structure. It reduces confusion when they see names in their reading books. Some children might initially over-apply the rule, putting capitals on every noun, or under-apply it, missing names entirely. This is a normal part of learning. By mastering this simple rule, your child gains a tool that makes their writing look more professional and easier for others to read. It supports their growing independence in literacy.

How you can help at home

Keep it playful and brief. You do not need to drill worksheets. Instead, point out names in daily life. When you read a story, ask your child to spot the character's name and the place name. Ask why they think those words have big letters. You can play a simple sorting game with household items: 'Is this a chair or a specific brand name?' Use their own name, your street, and the days of the week as easy starting points. If your child is learning English as an additional language, focus on the visual pattern of the capital letter. Praise their effort to notice names, rather than correcting every mistake. Short, positive interactions work best.

Questions parents often ask

Parents often ask if they should correct every mistake. It is usually better to highlight one or two examples at a time to avoid overwhelming your child. Another common question is about titles like 'Mr' or 'Mrs'. These are proper nouns and always need capitals. If your child asks about words like 'internet' or 'school', explain that 'school' is general, but 'Greenwood Primary' is specific. Rules can vary slightly for brand names, so if you are unsure, ask your child's teacher for the school's preferred style. Remember, this is a Year 1 and 2 focus. If your child struggles, it is often just a matter of time and practice. Talk to their teacher if you have concerns about their progress.

Sources

- Department for Education: English programmes of study: key stages 1 and 2
- GOV.UK: National Curriculum: English